Disillusions of Perpetuity

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Summary

The Dominion War has ended. Three years later, Voyager returns home to find the Alpha Quadrant still rebuilding from their losses. The mood of its inhabitants are cautious, optimism for the future is overwhelmed by feelings of distrust. Something has a vested interest in perpetuating those feelings. A new organization arises to put an end to it before another war begins.

The story has been updated with an optional alternate ending.

Notes

This story is now complete. I want to thank everyone for their constructive feedback. It is very much appreciated. This is also the first Voyager Fan Fic I've written in over twenty years. So here goes...

My stories and ideas may not appeal to everyone, being that every contributor has different points of view, and that's what makes all of us so unique in the stories we tell. I promised myself that if I ever came back to the fandom and wrote another J/C fanfiction I wanted it to be part of an epic adventure. I feel as though I've accomplished that and told the story I wanted to tell. I do of course hope that anyone who takes the time to read it will enjoy the story as well. Thank you for stopping by
and checking it out.
“Wars, factions, and fighting have no other origin than this same body and its lusts. We must set
the soul free from it; we must behold things as they are. And having thus got rid of the foolishness
of the body, we shall be pure and hold converse with the pure; and shall in our own selves have
complete knowledge of the incorruptible which is, I take it, no other than the very truth.” -Socrates

Voyager had returned home after seven long years in the Delta Quadrant. It was a time of
celebration for the crew and their friends and families. Two of the crew had just become three with
the birth of Tom and B’Elanna’s baby Miral. The crew was in good spirits, they had done the
impossible and lived to see it through, paying a cost they felt was not unreasonable given their
chances.

Beyond the fleet of ships that loomed before them, the bridge crew saw the big blue marble that
had been the prize of their sojourn; Earth. Captain Kathryn Janeway – in times of doubt –
wondered if she would ever reach it. Now it was close enough if, given the power, she would reach
out her hand and pluck it out of orbit, thereby putting the contents in her pocket where she would
never lose them again. However, in the excitement of this moment, the fantasy would have to do.

Her eyes turned to meet the faces of her crew. Ensign Harry Kim’s smile was infectious. Every
mundane push of a button was now being taken with great care. On the surface, Lt. Commander
Tuvok’s expression betrayed nothing of his deeper more profound feelings on the matter.
Commander Chakotay’s expression could not be shared considering he was manning the conn,
waiting for further instructions.

A familiar voice called out to them. His voice smooth and even. “This is Fleet Admiral Paris of the
United Federation of Planets. Please transmit your security code to the USS Falcon and wait for
further instructions.” Undeterred, Janeway signaled Tuvok with a nod to transmit the response
code. After several moments, The Falcon hailed again. “I’m sorry Captain, we had to be sure it
was you.”

“Understood Admiral,” Janeway replied.

“Change your heading to the following coordinates. The fleet will escort you there. Welcome
home.”

Within seconds, an array of emotions filled her throat, the words which were spoken so simply, had
the power to invoke several complex feelings all at once. She could barely utter the words of
response. “Thank you, sir. It’s good to be back.”

Looking to Chakotay, she waited for him to give her some sign they had received them. When he
at last confirmed, she gave the order to follow.
Minutes passed as slowly as hours. Each waiting for the formality to conclude so the crew could
begin the process of reclaiming what was left of their lives; knowing at the same time that it would
be a herculean effort. So much had changed over the last few years, including themselves.

Carefully, Voyager slid into its docking birth and was locked down. For the first time, Chakotay
turned toward the rest of the bridge crew. Janeway had expected to see the same level of relief and
mirth that was being shared amongst its current occupants; however, his face was complaisant,
unmoved, amenable. She was at once confused by the expression. Hadn’t this moment been the
culmination of all their hard work?
Kim’s voice interrupted her thoughts. “Captain, it’s Fleet Admiral Paris. He’s hailing.”

Janeway forced herself to look away. “Put it on screen.”

His face was stoic, worn, forming new lines she couldn’t remember having noticed before. “Captain Janeway, I’m sorry for the poor reception at your arrival. It’s not what you were expecting, I know.” He paused to regather his thoughts. “The Federation has been through a lot of changes in the last few years. It will take time to acclimate your crew back into society, but we are dedicated to making the transition as smooth as possible. We are requesting an updated copy of Voyager’s current crew roster so we can start the process of beaming you down to Starfleet Command for a debriefing.”

Giving a quick look at Harry, he understood her effortlessly. “We’re sending it to you now sir.”

“Very good Captain. Once we have reviewed the information, we will begin the deboarding process. Have each of your crewmen start packing a travel bag. We will, of course, make further arrangements for your crew’s belongings to be transported to their new quarters once they have been arranged. Someone will contact you soon with further instructions. Paris out.”

Then he was gone. Severing the link as though he were conducting routine business. Janeway found his behavior more than odd, it was cold, distant. She was having trouble grasping the reason for his conduct. Seeing the Borg would be enough to elicit fear and anxiety in anyone, but to speak to her as though Voyager’s sudden arrival didn’t teeter on the extraordinary was more than surprising, it was worrying.

Turning to the bridge crew, she instructed Tuvok to activate the internal com. “Channel open.” He advised smoothly. Once she passed on the Admirals instructions, she didn’t want to dampen their mood by concluding with business. She wanted them to hang on to the elation of their arrival. “All of you have served this ship, me, and each other, with distinction and valor. I could not be prouder of your accomplishments and sacrifice. Celebrate this moment, remember it with affection and pride, for you have achieved the impossible. Janeway out.” Looking around, she tried to sear the image into her memory, knowing that this might well be the last time they serve together. “It’s unlikely Fleet Admiral Paris will have anyone contacting us soon, in fact, I wouldn’t be surprised if we didn’t hear from anyone until the morning. Voyager is locked down so there will be nothing for us to do until then. Tuvok, reroute the com system to my com badge. When they contact us, I’ll let you know. Dismissed.”

She turned toward Chakotay’s position at the con, wanting to speak with him for many reasons, but he was gone, only catching a glimpse of his face as the turbo lift doors closed. Crossing the bridge, she decided that perhaps it was for the best, there would be plenty of time to talk later. Entering her ready room, she sat down at the desk and requested an update to the Federation Data Base; thinking that perhaps she could glean some insight on the Federation’s current state of affairs.
Once More, With Feeling

Chakotay wasn’t having any trouble deciding what to put in his travel bag, nothing. The moment he heard Fleet Admiral Paris’ voice he knew every hope he had about resuming life was in serious question. There was no need to inform anyone of his suspicions, why upset his former comrades in arms needlessly. He’d been wrong before, about a lot of things if he was being completely honest with himself, but somehow, he didn’t think he was wrong, not about this.

The door chime sounded, disrupting his thoughts. “Enter.” He called; it was Seven-of-Nine.

Her eyes swept the room, as was her custom, before settling on his face. “I came to see how you were faring. I had concluded that you would contact me soon after the Captain had dismissed the crew. Is there something wrong?”

“It’s hard to explain, even to myself.” He replied with a sigh.

“Clarify.” She started taking a step toward him.

When he started this relationship with Seven, he was hesitant but intrigued by its possibilities. No one could deny her beauty, grace, logic, whether the amalgamation of these components was natural or by design he couldn’t know. What he did know, however, was her almost child-like qualities. Her ability to almost always misread a social or emotional situation was endearing, even heartwarming. When she truly applied herself to comprehending these idiosyncrasies, the process was oftentimes painful. It would usually end with her realizing that she was frequently the butt of the joke. That alone would make a person want to quit trying, not Seven, she would confront the next situation with even greater veracity, he admired that.

He wasn’t sure how much longer he would have to explore this relationship, or even if he really wanted to. It wasn’t that he didn’t care for her deeply, that was not the issue. What he didn’t have was the time to wait for her to emotionally catch up to him. When they were still in the Delta Quadrant, time wasn’t an issue. Time was all he had.

Smiling, he stepped forward and placed his hands on her shoulders. “Just revisiting some old demons.”

Her eyebrow raised. “Explain.”

Laughing softly, he took a moment to consider a response she could relate to. “It’s like when a situation arises that reminds you of a painful memory you experienced when you were still a drone.”

Puzzled she asked, “Why would you voluntarily want to revisit those memories?”

“Sometimes Seven, we don’t have a choice.” He replied before pulling her into his arms, ending the inquiry with a kiss.

Without warning, his com badge chirped, followed by a familiar voice. “Janeway to Chakotay. Please report to my ready room.”

Separating gently, he replied, “Acknowledged.” Looking at Seven he said. “I promise we’ll spend some time together before the debriefing. Okay?” She nodded her consent before allowing him to pass.
Upon entering the ready room, Chakotay could see she was upset but hiding it well. It was something not many people would pick up on unless they knew her. “Chakotay, I must say I was surprised by your expression on the bridge earlier.” She began as she stood up, gesturing for him to join her on the sofa. Sitting, she stared at him, patiently waiting for an answer. When none came, she deployed a different tactic. “I just finished going through the updates to the Federation Database. There was quite a bit there to be concerned about, however, that is not why I asked you here. I would like to know why.”

“Kathryn?” He replied, confused by the statement.

“Why didn’t you tell me the Maquis had been wiped out five years ago?”

“I didn’t think it was important.”

She was stunned. “Not important? They were important to you, B’Elanna, and all the other former Maquis on this ship. If nothing else, I would have thought since we are friends you would at least want to share your feelings, have someone to at least act as a sounding board.”

Letting out a long breath, he attempted to put his thoughts in order as he shifted his position to face her. Meeting her gaze, it was unmistakable for him to notice the hurt in her eyes; not only because he never mentioned it, but that he didn’t feel or believe that he could as far as she was concerned. “I don’t want you to feel as though I couldn’t come to you. You’ve been a true friend, one of the best I’ve ever known, but with this…” He trailed off, unsure of how to phrase what he was trying to express. “Kathryn, there are some things we just don’t see the same way, this is one of them. I never mentioned it because it’s not that I didn’t think you wouldn’t understand on some level how deeply this affected me, it’s because you couldn’t.”

“Chakotay I-“

Putting his hand up he cut her off. “Don’t. Just…don't.”

She had pushed him as far as she was going to. If he really didn’t want to talk about it, she certainly wasn’t going to force him. “Okay. I understand.”

“You really don’t, and that’s the problem.” He sighed.

“Then explain it to me.” She offered, knowing he would decline.

His posture changed, becoming stiff. With a deliberate look, he answered. “If I had the words, I would have already explained it.” There were many things he was willing to share with her, everything if necessary, but this was beyond difficult. He was an intensely private man, explaining how it felt to have your family killed by Cardassians and then to have a Federation that didn’t support its citizens because it was a political move to provide territory that belonged to his tribe for many years, then give it to a race that would use that same land to terrorize and sabotage its neighbors so they would abandon it willingly. He fought to stop this injustice, not just for himself, but for all who had been affected by this poorly thought out decision. Those feelings were his alone, and the last thing he wanted was to get into a battle of ethics with a woman he loved.

She was smart enough to know what she didn’t know. However, it was a subject that was still a tender spot for him and would be for many years to come.

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At Starfleet Headquarters there is a room, in this room is a table made from one piece of solid oak. To the average person, the table was just a table. Although the chairs were new, the three men: Fleet Admiral Owen Paris, Admiral David Clayton, Admiral William Jessup, and two women: Admiral Geneva Shepard, Admiral Lena Clarke who surrounded it remembered what it signified, the origin of a new alliance in which Earth bequeathed its entire foundation: the Federation.

“Voyager’s roster has just finished the review. Final Maquis crew count is thirty-two.” Jessup advised.

“Well, this is awkward,” Clayton stated. “What would you say Owen if I asked what you would be if you were attached to another object by an inclined plane wrapped helically around an axis?”

Paris chuckled. “If you’re saying we’re screwed, I’m not ready to concede that just yet.”

“Let’s get serious gentleman,” Shepard suggested.

“Agreed,” Clarke replied.

“It’s been five years since the Maquis were wiped out, and those that were left are still facing another fifteen years on their sentence. However, we don’t have to imprison them in order to determine where their loyalties truly lie.” The other Admirals didn’t appear to see the solution, and this irritated her. “Oh, come now, are you all honestly trying to tell me the thought hadn’t crossed your minds?”

“Perhaps I’m being a little slow this afternoon, so why don’t you enlighten us with the answer,” Paris replied.

Smiling, she released a small chuckle. “Section 31.” Waiting a moment for the realization to dawn in their eyes, she continued. “We’ve done it before with other groups which have been released into the wild. Why not the Maquis?”

“You’re playing a very dangerous game there Geneva. Inviting Section 31 into any situation is like releasing a poisonous snake into a mouse den. It never ends well for the mice or the snake.” Clayton pointed out.

“Even though we are entirely aware of Section 31’s role in creating and maintaining this little utopia here on Earth, it doesn’t mean we should consider deploying them in regard to every undesirable situation, despite how inconvenient,” Paris said. “No, we’ll have to deal with this ourselves.”

“Captain Janeway isn’t going to take anything lying down. She’ll certainly make trouble.” Clayton reminded him. “And what of your son, daughter-in-law, and grand-daughter? Will you be able to separate your feelings from their fate?”

The thought had crossed his mind many times over the last several hours. He was proud of his son’s progress, for the first time in years, he finally accepted his potential and became an upstanding member of society. It pained him as a father what he was going to have to do, but it was necessary. Nodding Paris answered. “Maintaining peace in the Federation has to be our priority, so yes, I will support it.”

“Then the matter is settled. I will have Rear Admiral Pangborne begin arrangements for the resettlement.” Clayton advised. “It will take more time to get our pieces into position, however. Since Voyager’s crew are already confined to the ship, I see no point in moving them until we’re ready. Unless anyone here has an objection?” Silence. “Good, I’ll see it done.”
Entering his quarters, Chakotay was surprised to see his travel bag packed and waiting for him on the table. What was more surprising was Seven’s lovely frame sitting on his sofa. “Seven?”

“I noticed you had yet to comply with the Admiral’s instructions, so I took the liberty of packing a bag for you.” She answered without looking at him, which was not like her.

Sensing something was wrong, he moved to her side. “Why do I get the impression that something is bothering you.” He took her hand. “Do you want to talk about it?”

The hesititation lasted for nearly a minute, far shorter a time than what it felt. “Do you love me Chakotay?” She asked as her eyes touched his face.

He was stunned. Love wasn’t something they discussed, or even hinted at. Their relationship was only a few months old, not nearly long enough to determine those levels of feelings. “I don’t want to be dishonest with you in any way, you need to understand, but I think it’s too soon to know yet.” Placing her hand to his chest he continued. “My feelings for you run very deep but could develop into love in time. Feelings can be very complicated; I know you understand that.” She nodded. “Do you feel that you love me?”

“There are no comparative emotions I have previously experienced that definitively reveal the answer. What I do know, is that I feel closer to you in a way I do not feel for anyone else on this vessel.” He smiled at her awkwardness. “I am deeply concerned about our future beyond Voyager, I am afraid that I may not be suited for life beyond this environment.”

His smile widened. “You’re going to be just fine sweetheart. You’re stronger than you know.”

Placing her hand on his cheek, she kissed him deeply, needing to feel his warmth. Letting go of her hand, he slid his arms around her, drawing her close. He understood that she was feeling insecure and needed reassurance. Parting lips, she began trailing kisses down his neck, one hand slid up to cradle the back of his neck while the other ran its way up into his hair. It was at that moment, both bittersweet and delicious, he knew what she wanted. Sex with Seven was for lack of a better word, interesting. Once he introduced her to the orgasm, she was insatiable, and for a while, their dates always ended with this punctuation.

Afterword, holding her in his arms, he stared up at the plain gray ceiling not only wondering what was next for him but for her. Life on Voyager was simple, his duties routine, but above all that, he knew where he belonged in the natural order of things. From this point on, life was about to get a lot more complicated.
Startled awake, Kathryn Janeway pushed herself up, disoriented and confused by a persistent chirping. It took a moment to realize the source of the offensive sound, her com badge. With a tap she announced herself. “This is Captain Janeway.”

“Captain, this is Rear Admiral Jason Pangbourne. I’ve been instructed by Starfleet Command to pass on further instructions.”

Looking around the room, it took a moment to comprehend where she was. Her quarters, on the floor, surrounded by data padd’s. “I’m listening, Admiral.”

“Please instruct your crew to be ready for transport to Starfleet Headquarters at zero-eight hundred hours. We will be bringing you down in small groups to make the process easier for our administrators. At that time, they will be debriefed, then offered either travel documents to take them home to their families or assigning them temporary quarters until more permanent arrangements can be made.”

“Understood.” She replied, the fog of sleep slowly evaporating.

“On behalf of the people of the Federation, welcome home Captain.”

“Thank you, Admiral.”

“Pangbourne out.”

Tapping her com badge again, she reached out to Lt. Commander Tuvok and relayed Starfleet’s instructions, knowing he would see it done. Shortly, there was a ship-wide announcement informing the crew as she picked up the scattered data padd’s and asked the computer the time. Replying in its usual candor, it was zero-six hundred. Stacking the padd’s neatly on the coffee table, she pushed herself to her feet. There would be just enough time for her to grab a shower, breakfast, and a cup of coffee before leaving.

At that moment, it struck her as entirely possible that she might never step aboard Voyager again. This familiar place, over time, had become extremely special in ways it hadn’t occurred to her before. Voyager was no longer just a ship, it was home.

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Janeway had waited until the entire crew of Voyager were beamed down to Starfleet Headquarters before joining them by shuttle. Hailing them she stated, “this is the Delta Flyer requesting landing instructions.”

A technician replied. “Acknowledged. You are cleared for landing at shuttle port two.”

“Understood, Delta Flyer out.”

Bringing the shuttle down for a soft landing. She couldn’t help but notice a man accompanied by two security personnel waiting by the shuttle pad. Locking down the Flyer, she picked up her bag and exited.

The man stepped forward to greet her, extending his hand. “Captain Janeway, I’m Rear Admiral Pangbourne, it’s a pleasure to finally be meeting you face to face.”
“Likewise.” She said shaking his hand.

He lifted his other arm, silently indicating the direction they would be going. “I’m sure you were expecting a larger reception, I apologize if we did not meet your expectations.”

She was expecting something larger, but not for vanities sake, wasn’t it natural to assume that Starfleet would want to make a big deal of the situation? It wasn’t every day that a ship is transported to the other side of the galaxy and manages to return seven years later without substantial modifications to its propulsion system. “It’s fine Admiral, really.”

“You are most forgiving Captain.” He said with a smile. “Fleet Admiral Paris is in his office; he wants to debrief you personally.”

She nodded her understanding, but inside, her intuition was sending phaser blasts to her gut. Whatever Admiral Paris was going to say, she had a feeling she wasn’t going to like it.

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The only thing about Fleet Admiral Paris’ office that had changed in the last seven years was his title on the placard outside the door, otherwise, his office was a preserved moment in time. Outside the window, she could see the lone rosebush, white flowers stretching toward the sun; it’s truth of the universe simple: soil, water, light if only everything could be so facile.

“Captain Janeway.” Paris greeted smiling while extending his hand.

Stepping up to his desk she reached across and took it. “Thank you, Admiral.”

“Please, have a seat. I’m sure you have many questions.”

Sitting across from each other, Janeway couldn’t help but notice the difference in his demeanor. This was not the same man she knew, time had changed him, for good or ill she wasn’t certain. “I do.” She replied Paris gazed at her expectantly. “It seems I’ve missed a lot of history over the last seven years. The Dominion War for instance; from what I’ve read, many regions within the quadrant have been severely weakened or destabilized. The Cardassians for example, appear to have been hit the hardest.”

“Correct, their homeworld was nearly destroyed.”

“What of the Romulans and Klingon’s? I assume they had endured severe losses along with the Federation?” She asked, watching his reaction closely.

His head dipped slightly while releasing a sigh. “The Klingon’s suffered far greater losses than the Romulans or the Federation, but,” he paused, thinking before speaking again. “No one seems to have a tactical advantage. For the moment, all sides are focusing more on recovery efforts rather than superiority.”

Being who she was, she knew he wasn’t going to tell her anything unless she’d asked him, and perhaps, not even then. “Permission to speak freely sir?”

“Granted.”

“I know what happened to the Maquis and that those who survived are currently in prison.”

He nodded. “And you’re wondering what’s going to happen to the Maquis on your ship?”
“Wouldn’t you if you were me?” She questioned. “I think they have more than proved themselves over the years.”

Leaning back in his chair, he pressed his hands together as if in prayer and rested the tips of his fingers against his lips in thought. The passage of time moved slowly, awaiting a response. Lowering his hands, he stared intently into her eyes. “I’m going, to be honest with you Captain, only because of our history, you should know the truth. Starfleet Command is not convinced. In fact, they believe that the only reason for their cooperation is due in part to the fact there was no advantage to be gained by staging an insurrection they had no hope of winning.” She could feel the blood rushing to her face. “I know you could show us many instances where their involvement made a significant difference to Voyager and her crew, and the point could be made that they only risked their lives in order to save themselves. Personally, I believe none of that matters. What concerns this council is the crimes they did commit outside of your purview.”

He stood up, walked around the desk and took the chair next to her. Her eyes were hard, he could see she was seething behind the mask she was attempting to wear. “You may have spent seven years with them Kathryn, but can you say with all certainty that you really know any of them? Commander Chakotay for instance, your first officer, while part of the Maquis, led an attack on a Cardassian civilian population, his decisions decimated the lives of over four thousand men, women, and children. I wish I could tell you that was the worst thing he’d ever done, but I promised to be honest with you.” Lowering his voice, he leaned forward slightly and asked. “When you sat next to him on the bridge, didn’t you ever wonder what was missing from his file you weren’t privy to?”

Staring straight ahead, she stared at the rosebush, trying hard to bottle the rising anger with each word he spoke. Paris didn’t know Chakotay or the others. He couldn’t see them in the same light she did. Was he trying to hurt her? Shake her faith in the people she had grown to care about? Not probably, definitely. “So, what happens to them now?”

“Lucky for them we don’t execute criminals for their crimes anymore. However, we do put them in prison.”

Her head snapped toward him; all anger instantly defused. Instead, it was replaced by anxiety and genuine fear for them. B’Elanna just had a baby with Tom, who would care for her if both her parents were gone? “You would put your own family in prison?” She asked incredulously.

“Not all, Tom has served his time while on Voyager, he will raise his daughter.”

“What of the others?”

“As for the rest, the Federation Council feels that seven years of a twenty-year sentence has already been served. They will only be held accountable for the last thirteen.” He stood up and returned to the seat behind his desk. “They will be treated fairly and humanely.”

She couldn’t believe what she was hearing. Was this happening? Her senses were too heightened to believe otherwise. “When would the sentence begin?”

“It already has, the moment they beamed down to Headquarters, they were separated from the rest of the Starfleet personnel and loaded onto a passenger liner headed for the prison colony on Europa Station.”

It didn’t take long for the anger to return, only this time she didn’t attempt to hide it. “What you’re doing here Admiral is wrong! Don’t you see that? All of them deserve the chance to start over. Isn’t that what the Federation is all about, giving second chances to those who deserve it?”
“That, I’m afraid Captain, is a luxury the Federation can no longer afford. We are vulnerable, and right now, the only thing our citizens care about is safety and security. It’s a different world out there Kathryn, I’m sorry you haven’t had the chance to see it yet. But you and your fellow officers still have a place here. With the capture of the rest of the Maquis and a Captain whose arrival from the Delta Quadrant is the stuff of legends, you could still do a lot of good out there.”

“What I can’t believe is that I held on to Federation principles when I was alone in the Delta Quadrant, even though I could have chosen to leave them behind many times over the years. If I had known that adhering to those tenets would lead my crew back to a world that would rather punish those who have proven they are capable of being upstanding citizens and members of the fleet, I would have stayed in the Delta Quadrant.”

He sighed. “You don’t mean that Kathryn. You’ve always done what you thought was the right thing, and that’s why I recommended you for Captain. It was those qualities that have seen you through most situations that would have made even the most hardened Captain run and hide. Being Starfleet is in your blood, it’s what gets under your skin. Therefore, the council has decided to promote you to the rank of Admiral.”

She felt blindsided by the offer. “I’m afraid I’ll have to respectfully decline.”

“Then do what? Abandon everything you care about? Think hard before you dismiss it out of hand. Besides, as an Admiral, you will be in a unique position to help reform policies which make people’s lives better, not worse. Despite how you feel right now, you can make an effective change.”

Everything inside was telling her to walk away, to resign her commission altogether and start a new life, and that’s where she stopped. This was her whole life, and she was too old to start anew. Perhaps there was something she could do to change things for the better, if nothing else, she could use her new-found power to help free the Maquis, and perhaps, lead the Federation back to its founding principles. “All right Admiral, you win. I’ll accept the promotion.”
Memory is Not What the Heart Desires

Captain Janeway returned to Voyager as soon as her meeting with Fleet Admiral Paris was over. As Captain, she knew how to get into her own ship without raising any alarms. Thankfully, Starfleet Command hadn’t organized any teams yet to rummage through Voyager’s systems, but that would change soon. She only needed to retrieve a few pieces of information from the databanks and then be on her way. She had just gotten her first lesson on the Federation’s current state of affairs, and the last thing they could be trusted with was the enhanced phaser, Ablative Hull Armor, and Stealth technology.

Reaching the main computer core, she downloaded the schematics and protocols before erasing them entirely. There wasn’t anything she could do about the modifications already made, but she could modify their configuration and command protocols, making it nearly impossible for Starfleet Command to access. She was going to make those systems one large paperweight.

Once she had completed her mission, she flew the Delta Flyer to Indiana to see her mother and sister after filing a flight plan with Starfleet Command. They wanted to keep tabs on her, which was not unexpected considering her reaction in Fleet Admiral Paris’ office. She had made her feelings clear that she wasn’t exactly going to be a team player and would have done the same in their place.

After nearly two days, Rear Admiral Pangborne made contact at her mother’s home. “Ahh Admiral Kathryn Janeway, I’m glad I was able to catch you.”

“What can I do for you?”

“Voyager’s return celebration is scheduled at Starfleet Academy in one week’s time. It certainly wouldn’t be the same without your presence.”

She nodded. “Yes, I suppose it won’t. Please send the details to my personal database. I’ll review them as soon as possible.”

“Yes Admiral, transmitting them to you now. Please forgive this intrusion and enjoy the rest of the time with your family.”

“One more thing before you go. Please send along my request to fly to the Europa Prison Colony once the ceremony has ended. I have made the request several times but have yet to hear back from Command. Perhaps you can speed up the process.”

“I will see what I can do. Pangbourne out.”

Gretchen Janeway stood leaning on the door frame with a cup of coffee in her hands. “You’re so much like your father.”

“What gives you that impression?” She asked standing up, clasping her own fingers around her coffee mug before leaning back against the desk and took a sip.

“I know you can’t tell me what you’re planning dear, but whatever it is, it will be dangerous.” She laughed. “If I had known when you were born, I would have changed your middle name to danger.”

“Mother, don’t be so crude.” She said with a slight smile, then took another sip of her coffee.
Gretchen’s face grew solemn. “Whatever happens, I want you to know that I love you Kathryn and I hope you’ll return to me.”

Taking the few steps between them, she wrapped her arms around her and gave a gentle hug. “You can’t get rid of me so easy. I’m like a plague. I’ll just keep coming back.”

Gretchen smiled, hoping she was right.

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On the grounds at Starfleet Academy, thousands of people gathered to officially welcome home the crew of Voyager. For Lieutenant Harry Kim, the ceremony held little joy. Most of his friends were not present, not just the Maquis, but Starfleet as well. He was still having trouble accepting the truth of the situation. His best friend Tom Paris left the fleet when his wife was imprisoned, and why shouldn’t he? He still didn’t understand why he was still here. The situation felt terribly wrong and extremely unfair.

Feeling a touch on his shoulder, his head jerked toward it, only to see his father’s face. “Are you all right son?” Harry relaxed a little. It’s wasn’t hard to see the concern in his eyes.

“I’m fine dad. I just wish…things could be different.”

His father nodded in understanding. “I know. Me too.”

Fleet Admiral Paris continued to venerate the crew, point out their accomplishments along with their unwavering faith in finding their way back home. He spoke of dedication, courage, and sacrifice as if any of that mattered anymore. Harry had expected that Earth would be different when he returned, he just didn’t think it would turn into something he no longer recognized.

Looking up, he watched Admiral Janeway’s eyes as she focused on Paris, the look on her face was unmistakable because he recognized those feelings within himself. This was a system they thought was incorruptible, well, so much for that.

“Allow me to bring up a woman who needs no introduction. Admiral Kathryn Janeway.”

Applause erupted from the crowd. Harry noticed her carefully crafted mask fall back into place, almost happening within a blink of an eye as she shook the Admiral’s hand before engaging the podium. She appeared to be waiting for the crowd to settle before speaking, but even after they did, she remained silent for a time. “It’s been a long road, and we’ve lost many good people along the way.” She began softly. “But as a member of Starfleet, you learn to mourn them and move on in the best possible way to honor their memory. I see so many fresh young faces here, young men and women who have chosen to serve for various reasons. I was like you once, waiting for my chance to sail among the stars, needing to prove that I was worthy of the uniform entrusted to me.

“When you do find yourselves out there, you’ll come to the realization rather quickly that you really don’t understand anything and begin to doubt not only your training but yourself. This is normal, and it will pass. What you are not warned of beforehand is the bonds you will form with your fellow crewmates, and the lengths you will go in order to protect them. Enjoy every moment, for it will not come again. On behalf of Voyager’s crew, we want to thank you for not only supporting each other but keeping hope alive.”

As she moved away from the podium, the crowd cheered again but left Harry feeling hollow. Too many pieces were missing for him to feel whole again.

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To reach this region of space, you would first need a sturdy ship. Beyond that, you would also have to pass near the Badlands and the Cardassian demilitarized zone, all the way into Bajoran space to reach an outpost called Deep Space Nine. Near the station is an astronomical phenomenon that was once only theorized as a passage creating a shortcut through time and space: a wormhole. Once inside, it would only take minutes to travel thousands of light-years to another region known as the Gamma Quadrant, and it is here that an unknown ship made of pure energy was traveling out of phase, existing between two universes but part of neither.

The Dominion feared it, the Vorta, the Founders, the Hur’q, the Paradan, along with all the other races in this quadrant. It was spoken of in whispers, it’s appearance over the last one-hundred-thousand years was first documented by drawings in caves, then by language, the written word, until all official records were lost, but the stories remained.

Flying into the wormhole, it appeared on the other side in a blinding flash of light. The occupants of the station turning away from the windows to shield their eyes. When they looked back, the ship appeared to be a glowing phantom. It’s dimensions constantly changing shape, tentacles of pure light lashing out at the darkness, phasing in and out of normal space.

“Colonel Nerys.” Lieutenant Morrissey called. “You’re going to want to see this.”

Exiting her office, she stepped down to the command center and headed straight for him. “What have we got?”

Perplexed he replied. “I don’t know, sensors can’t make sense of it. Every reading I’m getting is telling me it’s not there.”

“Open a channel,” Nerys ordered.

“That won’t be necessary Colonel.” Turning toward the voice she saw Benjamin Sisko. “The ship is with me.”

***

Europa Station appeared even more menacing than Janeway remembered. It was designed to house the Federation’s most dangerous criminals. Its outer armor was designed to withstand a warp core explosion, and this is the place her former comrades lie. She would have visited before now if it wasn’t for its exclusive guest list. “Admiral Kathryn Janeway to Europa Station.”

“What is your business here Admiral?”

“I have been given special dispensation to visit the Maquis prisoners. My name should appear on your visitor’s list.”

“Stand by.” The prison guard stated. “Confirm command code.”

“Janeway-Zulu-omega-sierra-alpha.”

“Confirmed Admiral. Please follow flight pattern, x-ray-tango-charlie.”

“Acknowledged. Janeway out.”

Before coming here, she had tried for weeks to find support, reaching out to old colleagues, friends, the media, any group that might help her free her former friends and crew. They would make excuses, ask her to let things go. They had already suffered enough so why can’t she let it alone. The one thing she understood more than any other is they were afraid. It was a climate of fear.
she’d never known on this scale before. Justice was just a word; it’s meaning obscured and rationalized by feelings of safety and security. Forcing her to accept that this fight would have to be hers alone.

Once she’d locked down the Flyer, she exited to find the prison Commander and two armed guards waiting for her. “Welcome to Europa Station Admiral Janeway. I’m Captain Stevens if you will follow me, I will take you to the visiting area.” They began to walk together. “I must advise you, Admiral of the rules, while you’re here. You will be able to visit one of the Maquis prisoners, however, you will need to advise the guard as to their identity. Once they are brought to the visiting area there will be no touching; this is for both the safety of the prisoner and the visitor. No items will be passed to the prisoner, no matter how innocuous. Three meters from the prisoner must always be maintained, with no exceptions. No recording or listening devices will be tolerated. No classified or sensitive information will be disclosed to the prisoner. If these rules are not strictly observed, the visit will be terminated, and you will be escorted to a holding cell. A report will be immediately dispatched to the office of Starfleet Security which may or may not lead to a formal hearing which could also lead to a sentence of five years imprisonment and or dismissal from the fleet. Do you understand the rules and consequences as they were explained to you?” The spiel lasted until they reached the door to the visiting area. At which point, he turned toward her.

“Perfectly Captain.” She replied, trying to keep a smile on her face. Though she had been assured by Rear Admiral Pangborne that her visit would not be limited to one person, she wasn’t going to aggravate the situation. It was all about picking your battles, and this one wasn’t it. She also didn’t appreciate him throwing the word prisoner around, if they weren’t incarcerated, they wouldn’t be a prisoner, would they?

He returned the smile and bowed slightly. “Please enjoy your visit.” With that he was gone, leaving one guard at her side. She cared for all the Maquis; how could she pick just one? She wanted to try and bring some comfort to B’Elanna, tell Ayala how well his daughters were doing at school and how much they’ve grown. She wanted to tell crewman Jackson that his youngest brother just graduated from Harvard and is planning to pursue his doctorate in the fall. There was so much news she wanted to pass on to all of them, she felt they had a right to know. However, as selfish as it was, there was always one person who kept coming up to the top of her list. Even though she had never disclosed any feelings beyond friendship, he was the one person she felt the closest to, Chakotay.

One day she promised herself, she would tell him how she really felt, but time had decided for her. He moved on with his life, he had chosen to be with Seven and as his friend she would not stand in the way of his happiness despite her personal feelings. Even though Seven had been taken away from him due to these unforeseen circumstances, his feelings for her would still be close to the surface.

“Name?” The guard asked, interrupting her thoughts.

“Chakotay.” She replied.

There was a loud buzz before the door slid open and she was escorted into the room. Taking a seat at the end of the table – which she noted was about three meters across – and waited. The guard took his place behind her near the door. Within moments, the door at the other end of the room opened and Chakotay entered looking haggard, defeated, broken. Instantly her heart went out to him.

When he looked up, he seemed surprised to see her. “Kathryn?”

“I wanted to visit months ago but getting an invitation to such a top-notch establishment took some
arm twisting.” She joked lightly.

His face remained neutral as if it were beyond his comprehension. “What are you doing here?”

Instantly she was taken aback by his behavior. This was a man who had been forced to adapt to his new environment, and it wasn’t as if she weren’t expecting a change, but reality is so much harsher than what you sometimes see in your head, or maybe she just didn’t want to see it. “I spoke to your sister a couple of weeks ago, lovely woman. She wanted me to tell you that she loves and misses you and that there will always be a place for you at her home should you ever need it.” He nodded. “I wanted to tell B’Elanna that Tom and Miral are doing well. I check on them as often as I can. Could you tell her that when you see her?” Again, he nodded. “No one has seen Seven, Icheb, or the Doctor since the debriefing.”

“The kidnapping you mean.” He corrected. It was the first real emotion he expressed upon entering the room.

“Are they here with you and the others?” She asked hopefully. When he shook his head slightly, it made the hairs on the back of her neck stand up. She felt something was wrong but was never able to uncover anything but more questions to her inquiries. She would have to renew her investigation with more vigor upon her return to Starfleet Headquarters, but the one thing she wanted right now – more than any other – was to reach out and comfort him in his pain.

“Chakotay, I- “

“You what?” He interrupted. “Feel sorry for me? Worry about me? Guilt perhaps? Well don’t worry, I hereby absolve Kathryn Janeway of any guilt she may have about her past transgressions.”

She was perplexed. “I know this is one of the hardest things you’ve ever had to endure, but I don’t understand why you’re giving up?”

He stood up aggressively, kicking the chair behind him with his foot and sent it sliding hard into the wall. “Because I’m in fucking prison!” Both guards aimed their weapons at him, waiting to see if he would give them a reason. Lowering his voice, he stared intently into her eyes. “There isn’t going to be a last-minute rescue, not this time. This is my life now, I’ve accepted it. You need to do the same. Forget about us. For the sake of our friendship I want you to leave here and never look back.”

For the first time, in as long as she could remember, she was speechless. No words would come. She just stared back at him gobsmacked.

“Please don’t take this the wrong way Kathryn, but I wish I’d never met you.” With that, he was escorted out the door while she was left to sit a moment longer to absorb the full impact of his words.
There was a cry of desperation, fear, and pain, sending shockwaves out into the universe. It wasn’t difficult to feel or understand, in fact, it was his bread and butter. It slid among the races of the Alpha Quadrant, spreading fear, pain, paranoia, anguish. It convinced many of the races to embrace these feelings as though they were liberating and self-protecting.

The entire quadrant had been feeling the strain long before the Dominion War, like any Ferengi worth his salt, he capitalized on it, helped it along, feeding their fear of another war. “I hear the Klingon’s are ready to launch an attack on the Cardassians, and this time they’re going to finish what the Dominion started.” One would whisper.

“I hear the Federation is preparing to unveil a new weapon Voyager brought back with them from the Delta Quadrant. From what I understand, it can destroy an entire planet.” Whispered another.

Lies were so much more entertaining than the truth. But this was more than just a bit of fun, there was a purpose to his doom-harboring. He was laying the foundation for another war, and this time, there would be no one left alive.

***

His apartment in San Francisco became a place to rest, eat, sleep, and store his stuff. All though he didn’t miss being in the Delta Quadrant, he missed the family he had on Voyager, that was his home. The late nights, extra shifts, playing Captain Proton on the holodeck with Tom Paris. Tom, that brought back a lot of good, but painful memories. He didn’t realize what had happened after they beamed down to Starfleet Command for the debriefing until he heard Tom shouting and B’Elanna screaming, putting up one hell of a fight as she always did.

Pushing through the group, Samantha Wildman was holding baby Miral while Tom attempted to calm his wife before things got out of hand. B’Elanna was embroiled in the fight of her life, taking down one security officer after another, all the while screaming in a mixture of English and Klingon, “Get away from me tlhoch, reH puqloD motherless targh!” As Tom continued to try and make his wife see reason. Another punch was thrown by Ensign Tabor, hitting the unfortunate security officer in the back of the head and knocking him off balance set up B’Elanna for a perfect knee to his face.

It was at that moment all hell broke loose. More of the crew joined in the fight, forcing Tom to take a step back and spread his arms out to protect Miral, along with Samantha and Naomi Wildman against the growing backlash. More security personnel arrived in riot gear and overpowered B’Elanna and the other crew swiftly. Harry was left speechless. He’d never seen any situation go so wrong so quickly. He continued to watch as all the participants were led away. And of all the faces, it was B’Elanna’s he remembered most of all. There was a mixture of fear, anguish, and desperation as she struggled against her oppressors. Reaching for Tom and Miral, she was completely unaware as to what would happen next.

Walking to the kitchenette in the darkness, pale moonlight filtered in from the windows, giving him just enough light to see the glass and bottle of whiskey sitting on the counter. Pouring himself a drink, he sat down the bottle, then thinking better of it, he picked it up again and took them both back into the living area. Sitting the bottle down on the coffee table he flopped down into the chair with the glass and drained it. Drinking had become his new best friend, and while it was around, he felt completely comforted.
“Perhaps you should just have it shot directly into your liver. At least it would be faster.” A soft female voice spoke from his left.

Startled, Harry jumped up, dropping his glass. There was a brief shatter before he commanded. “Computer lights, full.” It complied with a couple of chirps. Staring in the direction he had heard the voice, there was no one. He did a three-sixty looking for anyone but didn’t see them. Dropping back down into the chair with a sigh, he rested his face in his hands. “Maybe I am drinking too much.”

Unexpectedly, there was a sharp pain on the left side of his neck. Reaching for it, it pulled out what appeared to be a tiny dart. Intense drowsiness overtook him, he passed out with no chance to make a sound.

***

Harry had no idea how he got here, but he was floating in space with no vac suit or oxygen supply. He should have instantly felt consternation, but in some unknown way, he knew there wasn’t any danger. If he thought about it, he could move in any direction he wanted. Slowly he passed Earth, the moon, flying over the Luna Colony and the Sea of Tranquility. On to Mars and over the tallest Mountain Range in the solar system, Olympus Mons, Jupiter was next, of its seventy-nine moons there was only one that held life: Europa. On this moon, there exists a colony that feeds and supplies the massive prison in orbit: Europa Station.

Moving closer, he could see a ship made of pure energy flying toward it. Tendrils of light emanating from it appeared to be moving in no discernible pattern as the ship itself changed configurations almost every second, as if unable to make up its mind as to what shape it wanted to be. Slowing to a stop, the tendrils stretched and curved forward toward the bow of the ship, blocking the view of its body altogether. A bright beam of light hit the station, vaporizing a small portion of its hull. One of the tentacles on top separated from the others, dipping down out of view before returning, holding something.

He moved closer to get a better look. It appeared to be humanoid, dressed in what looked to be a white and gold metallic armor, its face was hidden underneath a hood. In their hand was a glowing gold sword, on their back a fan of the same glowing tentacles that resembled what he could only describe was wings. As the tentacle touched the hull, the figure moved inside, and so did he.

Following it, prison guards in full riot gear began shooting. The creature's wings stretched and formed a shell around its host, absorbing the energy that was hitting it before reflecting it back at its assailants, rendering them unconscious. Using its sword, it cut through the doors, as if it knew exactly where it was going, meeting nothing in the way of resistance the creature couldn’t handle and made its way unimpeded to the prison cell blocks.

Once there, it passed through several force fields until it came to the cells housing the Maquis. From its shoulders, two balls of white light emerged. Moving quickly, they overloaded the power distribution matrix and disrupted the force fields. With a wave of the creature's hand, the balls of light returned to their host. Slowly, as if entranced, the Maquis stepped out of their cells and formed a line, following their rescuer without doubt or hesitation back to the entrance.

Its ship was waiting, at this time having docked with the station, allowing the Maquis to enter while the creature watched for reinforcements. Once the last person entered, it stepped onto the vessel and within moments, moved toward him at an impossible rate of speed.

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“He’s panicking,” Green said to Red.

“Attempting to compensate,” Red replied.

Several seconds passed, a smile spread across Green’s face. “Serotonin, dopamine, norepinephrine, and gamma-aminobutyric acid all returning to normal levels. I think it’s time to get him out of the Hyperbolic Time Chamber.”

“Agreed.” Carefully, Red decreased the time dilation until it was in balance with normal space-time. Harry appeared to be no worse for wear.

“Okay,” Black said. “Leave us, I will speak with him alone.”

“Just don’t be too hard on him,” Green said concerned.

Putting a hand on his shoulder to assure him she replied. “We didn’t spend all this time recruiting and training him just to abandon him. Now go on, your talents are needed elsewhere.” Giving a nod, he followed Red out. Making her way into the chamber, she stared at him for a moment, hoping that Red, Green, and Yellow’s recommendation and assessment of Harry Kim were correct. “Lieutenant Kim, time to wake up.”

Harry’s eyes opened slowly; the room was dim. Surrounding him was a thick substance, suspending him, making him feel weightless. “Harry, Kim, Lieutenant, service number 349871208-“

“Relax Harry, I’m not here to interrogate you.” She assured, her delivery bordering on the sarcastic. “I feel as though we’ve danced this dance a thousand times.” She said with a sigh.

There was no mistaking the frustration filtering into her voice. Yet there was something about it that did seem familiar. “Wait.” Harry paused, trying to place the voice, then it came to him. “It was you; you were the one in my apartment.”

She raised an eyebrow, surprised by the answer as she moved to stand over him. “Do you know how many times we’ve had this conversation?”

“I’m almost afraid to ask.” And a part of him was.

“Including this one, forty-two.”

His eyes widened slightly in surprise, but he was still skeptical. “I can only think of two reasons off-hand, one you enjoy my company, or two you’re trying to confuse me.”

“Or three, I could be trying to drive you insane.” She replied, only half-joking.

“Touché.” He replied, slightly amused. “So, I assume you’re the one in charge here.”

“After a fashion.” She replied.

“What does that mean?”

“What do you think it means? Come on Harry, we’re not going to do this again, are we? I thought after all this time you were finally making progress.”

“I wish I knew what you were talking about, believe me.” They fell silent for a time; he heard her walking away as his thoughts obsessively went over the vision that was still very vivid in his mind. “Black? Are you still there?” He called softly.
“Yes.”

“When you mentioned before how we’ve had this conversation before, did we ever discuss anything that might be considered unusual?”

With that, her interest was piqued. “Unusual? Not especially. Why?”

Carefully he proceeded, not wanting to sound crazy, but at the same time knowing that it would. “Have I ever mentioned seeing anything that might…never mind.”

She walked toward him. “What were you going to say?”

“Nothing. Forget it.”

“Did you have a vision of a woman made of light?”

He was flabbergasted. “How? How did you know that?”

She leaned over him, “As I said, we’ve had this conversation before.”

***

“Emissary.” Kira breathed, rushing over to embrace him in a hug, the action trumping thought.

He hugged her in return, his booming laugh echoing through the room. “I’m afraid I’m just the Interpreter now. It’s good to see you too Colonel.”

Withdrawing, slightly embarrassed she asked. “What do you mean?”

“The Prophets have deemed me a new task.” Noticing all the faces staring at them he suggested. “Perhaps we should speak privately.”

“Of course.” She answered then turned to Morrissey. “The Command Center is yours. I’ll be in my office.”

Once they stepped inside, Kira couldn’t help but notice they were not alone. A creature of white light dressed in white and gold armor stood next to the desk. The sight both frightened and intimidated her at once, tendrils in the shapes of wings hovered from its back but were pulled in close to the body. “Emissary, who is this?”

With a smile, he replied, “She is the one with whom I’ll be Interpreting for.” As he crossed the room toward her.

Filled with trepidation, Kira said. “I’m Colonel Kira Nerys of Deep Space Nine. If there is anything, I can do to help just let me know.” The alien didn’t appear to have a mouth, so she wasn’t sure how he would be interpreting for her at all.

Sisko smiled at her awkwardness. “I’m afraid she won’t be speaking in any way that you or I would consider language.”

Confused Kira asked. “Then I’m unsure how the prophets will expect you to fulfill your task.”

“It’s actually simpler than one might think. Her race communicates in a way unseen in any other sentient being.”

Confused she replied. “I’m not sure I follow.”
“Consider a civilization that has no use for words or verbal communication.” Sisko began. “Instead, only relying on intuition and perception. They take one look at you and can tell the true nature of your being. There is no deception, no lies, they only see what is.” He explained. “In order for her to communicate with our species, she imprints those impressions on to me so I can explain it. It was a little tricky at first, but I think I’m getting the hang of it.” He said giving her a smile.

Kira didn’t know what to make of this, or how to process any of it, but the Prophets do work in ways that usually reveal answers in time. “So how can I help?”

“I need you to contact Admiral Kathryn Janeway and advise her to come to Deep Space Nine for a meeting.”

“Shouldn’t be a problem, anything else?”

“Now that you mention it.” He said, crossing the room to face her. “I’m going to need some quarters arranged for about thirty-two guests. Is the station empty enough to arrange that?”

She wasn’t sure she was liking where this was going. “Yes, I believe we could accommodate them for a short time.”

“That’s fine, we can make other arrangements later. If it comes to it, perhaps Bajor would be willing to give them long term sanctuary if necessary.”

“I can certainly ask the new Kai, but Emissary- Interpreter,” She corrected. “What is this about?”

A smile spread across his face. “Preparing for war before it starts.”

She cocked her head to the side, not understanding, but not questioning. He had always made odd requests of her in the past with no questions asked, why should now be any different.

***

The one thing Janeway fundamentally realized over the last few months was one inalienable fact: she was on her own. For the first time, she felt her life no longer mattered to anyone outside of her own family. The seven years she spent in the Delta Quadrant changed her in ways no one could foresee. Old friends had slipped away, the passage of time moving on for them but in her mind, the status of those relationships didn’t waver until she was forced to confront them. As for her family on Voyager, they were either imprisoned, left the fleet, or accepted their promotions and quietly faded into the background, unable to feel pride with anything associated with the name Voyager, fearing being ostracized along with the Maquis. And everywhere she looked, there were no allies to be found.

The reports coming across her desk were endless. New conflicts were breaking out in areas that hadn’t seen fighting in generations. It was as if the entire quadrant had changed into a place that was just as strange, just as foreign as the one she returned from. The only difference between now and then is that she felt as if her life served a purpose. Now there was a noose being tightened around her neck by her fellow Admiral’s, slowly choking out of her the last human quality she felt was left: hope.

A series of soft musical beeps redirected her focus to the door. “Enter.” It was her assistant, a male Vulcan named Azan.

“Admiral Janeway, a package has arrived for you from Deep Space Nine from its current Commander Colonel Kira Nerys. I was instructed by the courier to deliver it to you personally.” When Janeway raised an eyebrow, Azan asked. “I assume you are not familiar with this
individual?” He reminded her of Tuvok in so many ways, but even he had become unreachable. “Either way, they appear to be aware of you.” He said handing her the secure package.

When she realized she would be getting an assistant along with the promotion, the one thing she insisted having was total control over who that would be, Fleet Admiral Paris wasn’t particularly pleased with this, but also seemed to know when to pick his battles. She’d always had a good rapport with Vulcan’s, and it made complete sense to go in that direction. There was always a strong sense of intuition when it came to picking the officers, she surrounded herself with, along with an unusual amount of perception over the years, she’d learned to trust them. “Thank you, Azan, that will be all.” Giving a slight nod he left, the door closing behind him.

Looking over the small package, it was sealed with a level fourteen security clearance, along with voice recognition, mitochondrial, and facial scan. Whomever this Colonel Nerys was, she certainly didn’t want just anyone being able to see its contents. “Computer.” There was a series of beeps. “Erect a level ten privacy field around this room. No entrance without my authorization.” “Acknowledged.” Another series of beeps followed. “Level ten privacy field now engaged.”

Returning her attention to the package, she complied with the security measures to unlock its contents. The only item inside was a data chip. Placing the chip into the console, she was confronted with a final voice and facial recognition before the information could be accessed. What was unlocked was a video recording. The face of the man who appeared was not someone she recognized but did remember reading about upon hearing his name.

“Admiral Janeway, my name is Benjamin Sisko, former Commander of Deep Space Nine. I know the circumstances surrounding my disappearance have been in question over the last four years, but what’s more important is what I’m about to tell you.

“I’m sure you have been seeing reports of low to mid-level conflicts popping up all over the Alpha Quadrant, and what you’re probably wondering is not only why this is happening, but why Starfleet nor the Federation seem particularly concerned. I have been asked by a very reliable source to not only reach out to you but to invite you to Deep Space Nine to hear what they have to say. I realize Admiral that you neither know nor owe me any allegiance. I do, however, hope you will consider the invitation with an open mind.”

With that, the video ended. Within seconds of removing the data chip from her console, it began to melt, destroying its contents. Adjusting the privacy field and entrance protocols to allow Azan entrance, she summoned him. Within moments he stepped into her office. “How can I assist you, Admiral?”

“Discretely arrange the Delta Flyer for launch with enough provisions for a two-week journey. No one can know that I am leaving.”

This time it was he who raised an eyebrow. “Of course, I will handle it personally. If anyone inquires as to your whereabouts, what response would you prefer?”

She didn’t like being deceptive, even when it was necessary. “Tell them I have decided to take the advice of my assigned counselor and take some time off. I certainly have seven years’ worth.” She said the last sentence as an afterthought.

Tapping a few notes into the padd he asked. “And where will you really be should I need to reach out to you?”

If she didn’t already know he could be trusted she would have just left without saying anything, so
there was no point in withholding the information from him. “Deep Space Nine.”

***

She had never been aboard Deep Space Nine but had always wanted to visit. With its origins for being a Cardassian outpost, along with its proximity to the wormhole and the Badlands would make for some interesting research. As she was preparing to hail the station, it was they who hailed first.

“Admiral Janeway, you are expected. Please adjust heading to the following coordinates, you will be docking at the Commander’s private shuttle bay. She will meet you there.”

Surprised, she replied. “Acknowledged, Janeway out.”

Allowing the stations auto dock to do the work for her. Once the Flyer was down, she locked down the shuttle and retrieved her travel bag from the storage section. Unexpectedly, she felt the same old phasor blasts to her gut. It wasn’t as if something were exactly wrong, but it didn’t feel right either. Besides, she didn’t come all this way to not hear what Captain Sisko had to say. He appeared to be the only other person who saw the same patterns she did, and for the first time in many months, rekindled something she thought was almost gone hope.

During the trip here, she didn’t have the luxury of ignoring the pain she was feeling. It was just her, space, and time. Three things she enjoyed separately, but when combined had a detrimental effect on her psyche. It would lead to an inordinate amount of time questioning herself, and then re-questioning, and endless cycle. It was a weakness she was fully aware of, so why couldn’t she stop herself from doing it?

She had to have replayed that last conversation she’d had with Chakotay a thousand times, but it was the last thing he said that wounded her deeply. “Please don’t take this the wrong way Kathryn, but I wish I’d never met you.” It wasn’t said out of malice, she knew that, so why did it have so much power over her? It did because she loved him. She had pushed those feelings so far down that they may as well never have existed, but they were there, dormant until his words brought them rushing back to the forefront of her consciousness.

Exiting the Flyer, a Bajoran female was standing before her, extending her hand. Taking it, the woman said. “Welcome to Deep Space Nine Admiral. I’m Colonel Kira Nerys.”

Giving her hand a couple of pumps she replied. “Thank you, Colonel.”

“The Interpreter would like to see you once you’ve settled in.”

Janeway was confused. “Interpreter?”

She mentally kicked herself, knowing the Admiral would have no idea who she was referring to. “Benjamin Sisko.” They walked together, exiting the shuttle bay. “I will escort you to your quarters personally. I’m sure you would like to rest before the meeting.”

“Actually, I’m as ready as I’ll ever be, just let me put down my bag first.”

“Of course, Admiral.”

They walked in silence for a few moments. “I understand that you have known Captain Sisko a long time.”

“Yes, I was the Bajoran liaison officer assigned to the station once it was reclaimed by Bajor after
the occupation. The Bajoran government felt that we needed the Federation’s assistance to ensure the protection of its citizens.” Janeway nodded. “Permission to speak freely?”

“Please do.”

“I can’t say I’ve known too many Starfleet officers, and anyone who knows me will tell you that I don’t trust others easily. Captain Sisko is one of the finest people I’ve ever known. We didn’t always see eye to eye, but he always listened.”

Hearing her say that reminded her of someone she knew too, however she didn’t always listen when she should have. Giving her a smile, she replied. “Thank you, Colonel, I appreciate your honesty.”

After dropping off her items they headed to Sisko’s quarters. That sense of something unusual was very strong here, so much so Kira couldn’t help but notice the change. “Are you all right Admiral Janeway?”

Holding up a hand she replied with a smile. “Just a little anxious, I’ll be fine.”

The door opened before either of them attempted to press the chime. Benjamin Sisko stood facing them, with a smile he extended his hand to Janeway. Stepping into the room, she took it. “Admiral Kathryn Janeway, it’s a pleasure to finally meet you in person.” Releasing her hand, he offered her a seat in the chair which was accepted. Sitting across from her he resumed. “I want to thank you for making the trip out here.”

“I must admit I was both surprised and curious that you reached out to me. Considering we’ve never met.” It was at this moment she realized that Kira had not entered the room.

He nodded. “I understand your trepidation, and you’re right, we don’t know each other. I’ve been living a very unusual experience for the last four years, and often I forget that other people aren’t used to seeing the end before the beginning.”

The phasor blast in her gut was telling her to be cautious. Trying to get things back on track she said. “In your message, you mentioned that someone asked you to reach out to me. That they were a reliable source who had information about why we’re seeing so many random acts of violence.”

“I did, yes, and I want you to meet them. All though their appearance and way of communicating will be strange for you. As I mentioned in my message, please keep an open mind, and I will be here to interpret on her behalf.”

Part of her wanted to leave, now, but she couldn’t bring herself to do it. On some level, she knew this was her last chance to effect any change for good, perhaps her last one. “Is this individual here?” She asked slowly.

He nodded and stood up. Facing the bedroom door, it opened, and what entered was a creature, unlike anything she’d ever seen. She had to raise a hand to shield her eyes, the light it produced was blinding. “Admiral Janeway, this species doesn’t use any form of language we’re currently familiar with.” He explained.

Somehow, she knew that the moment it entered the room. Standing up, she began to approach her. Sisko was surprised that Janeway was able to make a connection with her without his assistance, which certainly made his job a lot easier. Their exchange lasted for less than a minute until something happened that Sisko did not expect. Both women lifted their arms, fingers extended, they drew closer until those points touched. Once that happened, the woman became a ball of
white light, then appeared to be absorbed through the Admiral’s hand and into the rest of her body. Once that happened, Janeway dropped like a stone. Sisko managed to grasp her arm, pulling her toward him to lessen the impact. Laying her down gently, he firmly called her name several times. He wasn’t sure how much time had passed, but he did remember the Prophet's instructions of non-interference.

This entity, he was instructed, was billions of years old and would know the best way to proceed to accomplish its mission. He did not doubt the Prophet's wisdom, they themselves were as old as the entity, however, he was still fundamentally a human being with all the baggage that lies within.

Without warning, Janeway's eyes snapped open. Immediately, Sisko noticed the color of her bright blue eyes had changed to vibrant gold. “Are you all right Admiral?” He asked helping her to her feet, by the time she reached them and turned to face Sisko, she appeared younger, by ten years at least, and her eyes were glowing.

She stared at him intently, as if she were trying to relay some kind of message. After several moments, her mouth began to move slowly and with great effort. “IIIIII…” Seemingly unable to break past the first syllable. He encouraged her to focus on the words one at a time. “I’m…fine… the Sisko.”

“Am I speaking to Janeway?” She shook her head. “Perhaps it would be better to let her do the talking.”

Nodding, she gave a slight shudder and closed her eyes, when they reopened, her eyes had returned to the vibrant gold. “Captain Sisko. What’s happening to me?” Janeway asked, truly frightened.

Taking her gently by the shoulders he replied. “You have been chosen to be the vessel of justice. Do not be frightened, the entity will not harm you, she only needs you to complete her mission. In time, she will reveal that to you. It is because of your unique sense of intuition and perception that you are here.”

She didn’t like the idea of something living inside her, but the entity had been slowly easing her fears. Without words, Janeway began to see a glimpse of what she was chosen to do, and it was at that moment, her hope was very much alive.
On the world of Cait, there is a peaceful race known as the Caitians, they are a felinoid species. Their world has been part of the Federation for many years, some members of their race serve in Starfleet and on the Federation council. They are known throughout the quadrant for their intelligence, curiosity, loyalty, and their love of beauty. However, their personal and clan relationships can create large family groups that can number in the hundreds. Their cousins the Ferasan’s split from their race eight-hundred years ago. Like the Klingon’s, they prefer to prove their superiority in combat, but like the Caitians, they are fiercely loyal.

Looking to the sky a ship descended, its owners unknown, its desires unknown. The ship resembled the blackness of space, the hull appeared to be a swirling liquid rather than metal. It possessed a unique aversion to light, reflecting rather than absorbing. Its shape was sleek in design, unusually smooth with no harsh edges. As it landed in front of the capitol building, it practically poured part of itself onto the ground.

The Caitians prepared themselves for the worst, preparing the best defense they could muster on such short notice. Had their sensors been able to detect the object they would have had more time to prepare. A figure emerged wearing a brown cloak, it’s face hidden. Black liquid swirled, lowering it to the ground. The Caitians waited, were they friend or foe? The solitary figure walked unchallenged and stopped just short of the capitol steps. Lowering its hood, it revealed an identity none expected, a Vulcan with vibrant silver eyes.

“I am Ambassador Tuvok of Vulcan, I come with council for the Vestulian known as Tomek.”

The doors opened, revealing a heavily armored set of guards and a representative. “Ambassador Tuvok, I am Kartizan Petma, please come with me.”

Following Petma into the building, he was taken to the Vestulian. Upon seeing the Vulcan, he stood to greet him. “We were not alerted that you were coming Ambassador.” He said somewhat surprised.

“The Federation regrets their decision not to inform you of my arrival. However, it was necessary to ensure the safety of your world.”

Alarmed, Tomek gestured him forward. “Please, tell me what has happened?”

“I’m afraid that your cousins the Ferasan are planning a strike against your colony in the Clovotis Sector. It is the Federation’s hope that we could arrange a peaceful resolution before there is violence.”

“Yes, Yes, of course. What is the Federation’s recommendation?” He asked as smoothly as possible under the circumstances.

“That you would consider accompanying me to Vulcan, in order to provide a neutral ground for both your races. With determination and skill, I believe we can make the Ferasan see reason.”

“Has the Ferasan Brocode Melkin agreed to these talks?”

“He has and is awaiting your presence on Vulcan,” Tuvok assured.

With courage Tomek replied. “Then I will accompany you.”
Black reached down and offered Harry her hand. After a moment he took it, allowing her to help him out of the gooey substance. Once he was on his feet, shivering he said. “You told me that I’d never said anything unusual.”

“Harry, if I had revealed that piece of information earlier you would have crashed again. It took everything Red and Green had to pull you back this time.” She said trying to calm him.

“I don’t understand any of this.” He was agitated, confused. “You say we’ve met over forty times, why can’t I remember it? You mention colors as if they’re supposed to have special meaning for me? I just want answers, real answers.”

Black stood staring at him, watching him shiver, his anxiety level rising again. The plan wasn’t working, so she would have to implement a new one. “Okay Harry, you want to know what’s going on, I get that, I would too in your situation. But I must be sure of everyone who comes through my door. You’re so close Harry, you’re almost there, but you’re letting your emotions guide you too much.” Stepping over to a locker she took out a robe and tossed it to him. As he slipped it on, she continued. “I could have left you there that night, it would have been easy to walk away and let you drink yourself to death. Get yourself get kicked out of the fleet, maybe even killing someone in the process.” She laughed ironically to herself. “You’re so concerned with the past and the future that you fail to see the present. Hell, you can’t even see what’s right in front of you. I’ve known you for years, and in every conversation we have you’ve never truly recognized my voice.”

In the dim light, it was hard to see anything. In fact, he could barely see her at all. Taking a few steps closer, he wanted to try and get the best view he could. That’s when it finally hit him. All the memories from the previous conversations, all the hours spent in the hyperbolic time chamber, the training, the lessons. Remembering it all he fell on all fours. “Libby?”

She smiled. “Yes, it’s me Life Pod.” He sat back on his knees, reaching out to her. She wanted to resist the feeling to go to him, but the part of her that never stopped loving him went willingly. Helping him up, she took him in her arms and held him closer than she ever thought she could or had. “I’ve missed you.” She said, a tear escaping.

“I’ve missed you too.” He replied, holding her just as tightly. “I understand what I’m here to do now.”

“What’s that?” She asked.

“Help stop a war.”

Pulling back, she investigated his dirty face. “That’s right love. And you should know one more thing.”

“What’s that?”

“The woman of light you saw, she’s already here.”

Surprised he exclaimed. “How do you know that?”

“She was seen an hour ago at the Europa Prison Station. It appears she rescued your Maquis friends from Voyager, they never stood a chance of stopping her based on all accounts. What’s she’s planning to do with them is anyone’s guess, but we’re going to find out who she is and where she took them. Everyone is working on it; we’ll have answers soon.”
He nodded. “There are some things about this place I don’t remember.”

“Such as?”

“What we are? Are we a division of Section 31?”

“If we were, who would watch the watchers?” She asked with a smile. He gave her a strange look. “We are Wraiths.” Putting her fingers over his lips she continued. “You’ll remember more in time.”

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Chakotay jerked awake, a cry escaping his lips. “It’s okay, you’re safe.” Came a calm but firm voice. His head turned toward the sound. “My name is Lieutenant Ezri Dax, I’m one of the station counselors.” The last thing he remembered was being in his cell, there was shouting, phasor fire, then a white light.

“Where am I?”

“You’re on Deep Space Nine. I’m sure you’re very confused and disoriented, which is perfectly normal under the circumstances.” She assured.

“I’m not sure I want to know how I got here.” He said rubbing his forehead.

“I’m assuming you don’t remember.” She asked slowly.

He shook his head, unsure of what he thought he knew was true. “Am I the only one?”

“No, all the Maquis from the prison were brought here.”

“Who brought us here?” He asked, trying to keep the uncertainty out of his voice.

“There are answers coming Chakotay, you just have to be patient.” She replied placing a hand on his arm, a reassuring gesture. “You were the last one to wake up. One of your shipmates had to be subdued, she appeared to be half-Human half-Klingon.”

Chakotay laughed despite himself. “B’Elanna, always fight or flight with her.”

Ezri smiled. “I think she broke one of our station security’s nose.”

Hearing that only made him start laughing that much harder, and it felt good to laugh for a change. Looking at the attractive young Trill, she was trying hard to keep a straight face. “Don’t hold back on my account.”

“Well, it was pretty funny.” She said and then started laughing with him.

“Colonel Nerys to Dax.”

Reigning it in she replied. “Dax here.”

“What’s the status of the Maquis? Captain Sisko would like to meet with them as soon as they’re awake.”

“Actually Colonel, the last one just awoke a few moments ago.”

“Good, the Captain will be happy to hear it. Please make sure all of them have had a chance to
clean up and get something to eat before the briefing in the large conference room.”

“Understood. Dax out.” She looked at Chakotay. “It appears you’ll be getting some answers soon. However, there is a bigger decision you’ll have to make.” He gave her a puzzled look. “Would you like a soothing hot shower or a delicious meal first?” He exchanged his previous expression for a wide smile.

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Finding a seat, this was the first time in almost a year that Chakotay had seen his friends faces other than just a passing glance. They were always kept separated while at the prison, eating in their cells. Getting only one hour of exercise a day with other prisoners he didn’t know. Having a chance to speak with them now was a boost to his morale, as it was to many of them as well. He saw a man enter the room followed by a Bajoran woman.

“My name is Benjamin Sisko.” Gesturing to his left he continued. “This is Colonel Kira Nerys, Commander of Deep Space Nine. I know all of you must be wondering how you arrived here, but the question you should be asking is why you were brought here, to begin with. All of you at one time thought the Cardassians were the enemy and why shouldn’t you, they had destroyed or attempted to destroy everything you hold sacred; the last thing any of you wanted was to see more people suffer. So, you banded together, combined your assets, skills, and knowledge to defeat a common enemy. Now you are being asked to do so again.

“However, there is a new war beginning, and it will take all of us to stop it. Across the quadrant, there are conflicts breaking out among species that have been at peace with each other for generations. Now you may ask yourself, what could cause that? Or even what it has to do with you? Once every one-hundred thousand years, an ancient race, billions of years old, are so insidious in its nature that it rises to extinguish all life within the universe.

“It heard the call of death during the Dominion war and has been working its way into our collective psyche ever since. It’s been an oppression on this quadrant, whispering its misdirection to the highest levels of the Federation to the lowest levels of the Romulan Empire. Its sphere of influence isn’t limited to just our governments, but also its citizens. They rely on our fear of the unknown and of any change it brings.

“All of you bring a unique perspective to this conflict. You have been kept away from the war due to happenstance, or fate, bad luck, or even perhaps divine intervention. Whatever the reason, you have not been tainted by what happened here four years ago, you are being given a chance to see it from your own enlightened perspective. That is what we need to win, your assets, resources, and knowledge to bring fear to a species who has not known it themselves.

“There are others, like you, who have seen the danger and have been preparing for the inevitable. We are asking you to join us. If our worlds should end let it be due to our own failures as a species and not due to the influence of another’s agenda who would always continue to fan the flames of war. Our races have created worlds of great beauty, ideas, wonders, innovations, compassion, and hope. We cannot allow it to be lost and corrupted unchallenged.

“If you wish to join us, we will welcome you. For those of you who choose not to participate, we will not hold you against your will, you will be free to leave if that is what you choose. You will be given time to consider your choices, and we encourage you to do so. Please reach out to Colonel Nerys or me with your decision by the end of the week. All of you have been given com badges and are free to explore the station. Temporary quarters have been assigned to each of you, please see Colonel Nerys before you leave to get your entry codes and room number. I know all of you served under Admiral Janeway and Commander Chakotay for seven years and know what it means
Sisko spoke to Kira briefly before exiting the room. Chakotay couldn’t help but watch him. He didn’t know what to think of this. And who were the others that would be involved in this conflict? If he wanted to know he’d have to agree to stay to find out. Getting his room number and code, he exited onto the large promenade. Unsure where to go, he stood looking around. At the end of the walkway, he saw Benjamin Sisko talking to someone he would have recognized anywhere: Kathryn Janeway.

Immediately he was drawn toward them. There were so many things he had to say to her, apologize for, felt, and this might be his only chance. They had just finished when he reached them. Sisko turned toward a set of doors and entered while Janeway turned his way, unbeknownst to her that he was there, she began walking past him clearly distracted. “Kathryn.” He called. Pulled from thought, she stopped to see the one person she was hoping to avoid for a while. She wanted to speak to him in a day or two when she had more time to gather her thoughts and he had time to gather his. “I’m sorry Chakotay. I have another meeting to attend.”

“Ouch. That didn’t take long.” He thought. She continued to look down as he spoke. “I know our last meeting didn’t go so well, and I have nothing but regret for how I ended it. I’ve spent every day since going over it in my mind, seeing the hurt in your eyes, it haunts me. I never thought I would get a chance to apologize.”

“I understand, you were upset, angry with the prospect that you would be spending the next thirteen years in that place. You don’t have anything to apologize for.” She replied, keeping her head down, as she attempted to move past him.

Grabbing her gently by the arm he said. “I know you don’t want to talk about this right now, but I just had to see you, to say at least that much. Please meet me later for dinner in my quarters, eighteen-hundred hours.” She didn’t move, just stood there for several moments, as if she were really having to think about it, and this bothered him a great deal. Just as he thought she was simply going to walk away without giving an answer, she nodded and said. “All right. Your quarters, eighteen hundred hours.” He smiled, letting go of her arm. Watching her walk away, he was reminded of a woman who was strong, wise, beautiful, and filled with purpose, just as he always remembered.

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The replicators were only limited to necessities, clothing, and food, which was fine by him. He made one of Kathryn’s favorite meals, pork roast with baby carrots, new red potatoes, onion, and celery. When she arrived, he would take it from the replicator and be ready to serve them both a hot meal.

He was nervous, what he told her before was only the tip of the iceberg. He’d had so much time to think about everything. All the things that really mattered to him. As much as he deeply cared for Seven, she was never the one he truly wanted but needed at the time. In fact, loneliness and unrequited love will open doors you might not have considered going through if circumstances were different for both. Now he didn’t know where Seven was, and even though he was worried about her safety, it didn’t keep him up at night. No, that was Kathryn’s territory, because he loved her deeply, but always from afar.

The door chime sounded at nearly nineteen-hundred hours. “Enter.” He said, standing up to greet her. “I was beginning to think you weren’t coming.”

Looking down at the floor she replied. “I thought so too, but I couldn’t do that to you. Not after
Approaching, he reached out and grasped her gently by the hand and led her inside. She stepped forward just enough to let the door close behind her. He frowned. “Am I that hideous that you can’t bear to look at me anymore?” He asked, trying to use humor, but failing. “Kathryn, please.” He said gently reaching up to lift her chin with his finger. She began to back away but stopped herself to allow it. Slowly her eyes met his, causing a gasp to escape his lips. He was having trouble reconciling what he was seeing. She looked to be a woman in her mid-thirties, but the most striking feature was her vibrant gold eyes. “You’ve changed since I saw you at the Europa Prison Station.”

She nodded. “A lot has changed since then.”

“I hope our friendship hasn’t.” He asked, concerned.

Shaking her head slightly. “No, nothing could change that.”

A wide smile spread across his lips, the kind of smile she always loved. “Good. Shall we eat? I made your favorite, pork pot roast.” Before he was aware of what was happening, she closed the distance and gently placed her hands on his cheeks before tilting her head back and bringing his face to hers. Drawing him down, she kissed him slowly, thoroughly. At first, he was stunned, not having considered this to be a possibility. Slowly, his hands came to rest on her hips before sliding their way up her back. Pulling her closer, the kiss became more passionate. Each carefully exploring the mouth of the other.

As much as he didn’t want to pull away, he was being swept up in the fantasy when he should have been asking what had caused not only her physical change but her emotional one. Gently pulling back, he let his arms slip down to her waist to keep her from moving away. “I don’t want to stop, trust me, but I feel I would be remiss if I didn’t at least question these changes.”

Her forehead fell forward, gently bumping his chest with a sigh. “I know, we need to address the elephant in the room.” Then she lifted her head, tilting it back slightly to meet his eyes.

“I have so many questions, I’m not sure where to begin.” He said anxiously.

“Pick one, and we’ll start from there.” Reaching behind her, she took his hands and put them in hers before leading him over to the sofa so they could speak more comfortably.

“Every time I’ve attempted to have this conversation with you in the past about my feelings, you become uncomfortable and either change the subject or find a way to leave the room.”

“I don’t think you have to worry about that today.” She said with a smile, seeming more confident than ever.

He nodded slowly. “I need you to understand something about Seven and me.” She focused her full attention on him. “I care deeply for Seven, but I’m not in love with her, and I don’t believe she was ever really in love with me. I think we were two lonely people who just needed to be comforted.” He stopped, looking into her vibrant gold eyes. “You had to have known, at least on some level, that I was in love with you. Don’t get me wrong, I understood perfectly why you felt you had to avoid getting involved with anyone while we were on Voyager.” He let out another sigh. “I guess I just felt that you would at least tell me at some point how you felt, even if we did nothing about it.”

“Oh, Chakotay.” She breathed, her hand reaching up and stroking his cheek. “There were many times I wanted to tell you, but in the end, it would have been selfish of me to do so, and even more painful for you in the long run. We could have been stuck in the Delta Quadrant for many more
years, and I had to remain focused on our mission. Having a relationship with you would have put me in a very precarious position where I would have had to choose between the man I loved or doing what was in the best interest of the crew. I had to deny myself that luxury. I couldn’t be free to give you all the things you needed. You may have wanted to have children, a wife you came home to and didn’t have to worry about how many hours she’s putting in at the office. I had to be on call day or night, ready to face any challenge the Delta Quadrant threw at us. So, I chose to suppress those feelings, bury them so far down that I couldn’t be tempted by them. I let you go because I loved you enough to see you happy, even if that meant you found someone else, like Seven.”

He knew everything she’s said was right, and that she had thought it completely through, but it didn’t make the ache in his heart he’d been carrying around the past few years feel any better. Sometimes the heart wants what it wants, and logic plays no part in it. Feelings were good about being irrational like that. He nodded his understanding. “I agree with everything you just said, and you were right to not indulge those feelings, but what about now?”

She smiled. “I agreed to help stop a war before it starts, but it doesn’t mean I have to suppress my feelings any longer. Our original mission has ended, we got our crew home. Now when we end the threat, and if we’re both still standing at the end of it, I will be free to give you any life you want.” Laughing she said. “Even if that means living in a log cabin next to a lake for the rest of my life.”

“Oh having the children I may have wanted?” He chided.

“That was just an example.” She explained.

“So, you’re trying to tell me right here, right now, that you don’t want to have a child with me?” He challenged.

She couldn’t tell if he was being serious or just trying to wind her up. “I’m not saying anything. I didn’t say anything then and I’m not saying anything now.”

“Relax Kathryn,” he said with a chuckle, “you can cancel red alert, but if I’m being honest, I would like to have a child someday.”

“Give me a little time to think about that one okay?” She said and gave him a soft kiss on the lips.

“Now, what other questions do you have?”

“All right, what happened to you?” His eyes redirecting her focus to the physical changes.

She explained what happened in Benjamin Sisko’s quarters, about how she had been chosen by the entity to complete its mission. How her race was just as old as the race trying to end all life in the quadrant. She further explained how the entity communicated, which Chakotay found fascinating. The entity – through her – had been the one who rescued all the Maquis from prison. Why she decided to do it she didn’t know, perhaps it was tactical, strategic, or maybe it was as simple as reinstating justice. The longer she and the entity shared her mind and body, the more she was beginning to understand her code of morality. Perhaps she involved herself in rescuing them because it was a combination of all those things.

But there were traits she was exhibiting due to their connection as well. If it were just her, she never would have had the confidence to tell Chakotay that she loved him or explain why a relationship on Voyager wouldn’t have worked. She certainly wouldn’t have just kissed him unexpectedly like that, even though it was something that had crossed her mind every now and then. It had made her braver, confident, surer of herself, and feel almost completely uninhibited as if she had been given permission to finally live her life.
“I’m not sure I’d be too comfortable with sharing my mind and body like that,” Chakotay said.

She nodded. “Believe me, I wasn’t too thrilled about it either, but she assures me that once this is over, my body will be mine again.”

“And you think you can trust her?”

Kathryn thought about it for a moment, really considered it. “Yes, the more I get to know her the more I trust her. As I said, her species communicates through intuition and perception. Captain Sisko explained that her race can just look at you and know what your intentions are, deception is something that others aren’t able to hide from them. That’s how they’ve been able to track the ones who wish to do us harm. From what she has “communicated” with me for lack of a better word, this has been going on between them for billions of years.”

Chakotay was finding the concept hard to comprehend. A conflict that continues unabated for billions of years. Where no one truly wins, only survives to begin the cycle anew. “So, from what you’re telling me, for them it’s a war without end.”

“Essentially, yes. However, I don’t know why. She has either chosen not to reveal that information to me, or she doesn’t know. I’m certain I’ll be made aware of that knowledge in time.”

He nodded in thought. Kathryn smiled and placed her hand on his chest. Capturing it with his own, he kissed it and held it close for a moment. Looking to her he asked. “Are you ready to finally have dinner?” She shook her head gently, letting her shoulder-length hair, brush across the top of her back. “Then what did you have in mind?” Without a word, she stood up and led him behind her by the hand he was still holding, right into his bedroom.

Afterword, holding her in his arms, he felt content, his heart’s desire fulfilled. His dreams for the moment had come to fruition. The love of his life was laying with her head resting on his chest, sleeping peacefully. He never wanted this moment to end, but as with all good things, reality appears to remind you that the good things don’t go on in perpetuity.
A War Without End

Admiral Clayton stepped into Fleet Admiral Paris’ office unannounced, almost throwing the padd onto his desk. “David, what the hell is wrong with you?” Paris asked annoyed as he looked up at him.

“Have you seen this?” Paris picked up the padd and began scrolling through the information. “The Ferasan Empire has declared war on the Caitians! I thought you were going to make this all go away Owen.”

Paris looked perplexed as he scrolled over the information. “This doesn’t make any sense. They’ve been at peace for generations.”

“The Caitians Ambassador Kartizan Petma claims that Brocode Melkin of the Ferasan killed their leader while attending peace talks on Vulcan.”

“Vulcan?” Paris questioned looking up at him. “I wasn’t made aware of any of this. Who has been working the latest conflict resolution reports?”

“Admiral Janeway’s office,” David answered with barely controlled anger. “If you remember, I was the one who recommended that she not be promoted to full Admiral, that it would be a mistake, and clearly I was right.”

Giving him a warning glare, he replied. “Steady Clayton. We may be friends, but I still out-rank you. Janeway was a boost to the Federations morale when we sorely needed it. To promote her to Rear or Vice Admiral would have created a media backlash.” Tossing the padd onto his desk, he stood up to join Clayton on the other side, all business. “Who do you think Starfleet answers to David? We’re not an island unto ourselves. We answer to a civilian government fondly referred to as the United Federation of Planets, or have you forgotten?”

The anger he was feeling withdrew into a slow burn. “No, I haven’t.”

Before he could utter another syllable, Paris continued. “Even though the Federation has no say who Starfleet promotes within its ranks, it can, however, apply its considerable political pressure onto the President, who in turn, applies that pressure onto us. I can see by the smug look on your face that even you can see where I’m going with this.” Clayton nodded.

“It was they who recommended Janeway be promoted to Admiral because she is a commodity. A commodity that could be displayed and packaged to that same Federation we answer to so the citizens can point and wave their little flags, all so they could feel good about themselves, and we desperately needed it since our little war with the Dominion. If you want to point your finger at Janeway and say she dropped the ball you go ahead but remember this; she was put in charge of that division at your recommendation because you didn’t think it was important enough to handle yourself.” Stepping toe to toe with him he asked. “So, what are you going to do to fix this?”

Admiral Clayton had no words to offer that would change the outcome of dressing down he’d just received. It had been summarily pointed out to him in exquisitely painful detail that the fault was indeed his own. “I will handle it, sir.”

“You do that Admiral. Dismissed.” Paris replied watching him walk out the door.

“Masterfully done Admiral. I was impressed.” Came a voice from behind him.
He didn’t need to turn around to know who it was. “Computer seal the doors to this room. No access without my authorization.”

“Acknowledged.” The computer replied.

“I thought so, but soon, they’ll begin to start asking more questions. I can’t play the ignorant party forever.” He said with a sigh and turned toward the voice. There, next to the window, stood a man dressed in a brown hooded robe. “The Caitians and the Ferasan of all races? They hold no real power within the Federation.”

“I believe it is your own magicians who have unlocked the real power of misdirection. I am simply using a page from their book.”

“To what end?” He asked, unable to see the connection.

“And you were doing so well.” He replied before turning to stand in front of the window. “There is a great evil rising within the universe. Your Admiral Janeway saw it, and without so much as a word, she leaves unnoticed. I would consider that an extremely lax breach of protocol.”

“She did have her assistant file the appropriate paperwork for an extended vacation.”

“And in this paperwork, did she disclose any flight plan?” He queried.

“Not to my knowledge.”

“Ahh, and now more of your regulations are ignored. I had better hopes for you Admiral.”

Paris was getting fed up with this inquisition. “You came to us offering an alliance that could work to both of our advantages. So far, I have yet to see your side contribute any assistance or technology you’ve offered to accomplish that task.”

“And if you were providing the help, we requested then you would be getting it.”

He sighed. “What grievance are you attempting to point out?”

The figure turned toward him. “It was a simple request; one I assumed the mighty Starfleet would be able to easily fulfill. One that didn’t take any real effort to accomplish.” The man’s voice rose harshly. “That you could keep Janeway locked down until our pieces were in place, she is the key, and now you have lost her.” He stopped, appearing to be considering other alternatives. “I’m afraid that my brethren find you lacking and have sent me to renegotiate other terms.”

“And what would that entail?” He queried further, growing exponentially tired of this game.

The man extended his hand.” I’m afraid that the partners have found a new representative who they believe will continue our interests with great vigor.”

“Who? David?” He questioned pointing over the back of his shoulder with this thumb.

“He has been considered as a possible replacement, but I’m afraid your association with us had come to an end.” He said before black smoldering tendrils shot from his fingertips, enveloping Paris almost instantly. As the flesh burned from his bones, his eyes focused on the white rose bush which grew outside his window. Its leaves had become brown, along with the flowers that were also withered. Within a few seconds, Fleet Admiral Paris was no more.

***
Night had come, and Harry wasn’t sure how many more of his memories would return to him. He had been happy and surprised to see that many of his old shipmates had found their way to the Wraiths. He should have recognized Seven and the Doctor’s voices earlier, but other matters were occupying his thoughts at the time.

Icheb, along with another former Borg named Hugh were present, including about twenty liberated Borg from various species, many of whom he didn’t recognize.

Tom was here with baby Miral. It was hard to believe she was almost a year old now. He would watch as Tom would talk to his daughter, showing her the holo-photos of her mother B’Elanna. Though he tried hard to hide it, he didn’t seem whole without her.

Of all the familiar faces, he was surprised to see both Tal Celes and William Telfer, they were now married. As hard as Celes had been on herself on Voyager, it turned out she did have a true talent for something, combat, especially hand to hand.

Surrounding him were rows upon rows of grapevines, their sweet fragrance enveloping the air. It turned out their headquarters and training facilities were underneath a massive vineyard. Sitting on the porch, he heard a dog barking somewhere close by, then behind him came a commanding tone. “Pequod, come!” Seconds later, a large Alsatian burst through the vines, running past Harry on the steps to sit at the feet of a man who he recognized immediately: Jean-Luc Picard.

Surprised, Harry jumped up. “Admiral Picard, I didn’t see you there.”

Waving him to sit back down he replied. “Nor did I expect you to.” Then took a seat in the rocking chair. “I see Black hasn’t explained how we do things around here Lieutenant Kim.”

His eyes grew wide, suddenly remembering what Libby had said. “We don’t use our real names, ever. From now on you will only be referred to by a color. That is not only one of the ways we keep each other safe, but our operations here as well. From now on you will only be known as Purple.”

“I’m sorry.” He stammered. “I’m still trying to wrap my mind around all this.”

He nodded. “Spending several weeks in a hyperbolic time chamber will do that to a person. So, shall we begin the proper introductions? I am known as White.”

***

Seven, known as Red, didn’t seem to feel truly connected to anyone or anything since leaving Voyager. The dermal regeneration suit she’d worn for those last four years had long served its purpose but had kept it anyway, like a security blanket. It was out of a sense of emotional comfort she was unable to let go of it, even after she’d switched to more suitable attire. At times, as she did now, she would take it out of her footlocker and stroke the cool smooth fabric. In less than ten minutes she had lost every familial connection she had. Her mentor, her friends, and her lover.

Chakotay was not a topic she was prepared to discuss with anyone, ever. It was a private intimate knowledge that was meant for her alone. Theirs was a relationship of firsts for her. She didn’t know how to be a woman in any sense of what it truly meant. Yes, she had begun to associate by each encounter with her male shipmates that there was something about her that was different. It wasn’t just the clothes, but her natural assets that possessed their attention.

In the beginning, when fear and anger dominated her thought processes, she could not fathom or reconcile the reasons for their interest in her appearance. It was an irrelevant pastime which served
no useful purpose. It took a great deal of introspection before she began to comprehend that the sexual interest one invests in another person is only the first step in several building blocks that forms an intimate relationship. When this arcane knowledge revealed itself to her, she began another phase in her journey to becoming more human.

At times she would go to the mess hall just to watch the interactions between people, to see if she could determine the line where friendship ended and romantic love began, and she had several subjects to choose from. Tom and B'Elanna’s romance bordered more along the lines of perpetual insanity rather than a loving relationship. She had studied the other couples such as Ensign Brooks and Crewman Fitzpatrick, who were very sweet and kind to each other. However, Crewman’s Larson and Porter appeared to have a very formal and professional relationship. Appearing to enjoy the others company with no physical signs of affection, only suggestive looks now and then.

When it came to Captain Janeway and Commander Chakotay she was perplexed. There was closeness, laughter, a touch, an intimate joke, but nothing beyond that. It was more of a challenge to determine if they were a couple and trying to keep it well hidden or were just extremely close friends.

It was during that same time she created a holo-program of Chakotay where she could attempt to utilize and explore all the data she’d collected and put it into practice without the danger of having to enter a real relationship. She had chosen him because she envied their level of closeness. Over the years, Janeway had become the mother she’d never really known, and if Chakotay was someone she considered worthy enough to invest her own feelings into, then there had to be more to him than she’d considered, making the prospect of exploring a new side to her humanity using him as a model even more appealing.

Unaware she was putting herself in any danger, she continued to pursue this experiment with vigor, exploring a depth of feelings and emotions she’d never considered accessing before, but not deep enough to allow herself to become vulnerable. Then, it happened, without realizing it, she began to feel something that couldn’t be explained or analyzed…love. In a moment of extreme vulnerability, she felt she had been dropped into the middle of an ocean, rapidly descending into the depths of the unknowable, her whole body reaching up toward the light of the familiar and being summarily denied the comfort of its existence. Falling until the light had completely faded from view.

It was in those briefest of moments she realized that the essence of love was fear. To completely expose the core of who you are without deception or defense was terrifying. In allowing someone to really see who you are was like standing naked in front of a crowd, the visual display inviting them to look while your anxiety continued to rise to levels which made one wish for death. Her implant had detected those heightened levels and implemented its only function, which is where she had found herself hours later in sickbay under the Doctor’s concerned gaze. Exposed, embarrassed, her secret discovered, the Doctor displayed a reaction she did not expect, compassion; along with the option of removing the device so she would be free to explore those emotions safely.

Now, as she held the garment in her hand, remembering the once frightened and angry woman she had once been, she smiled despite herself. Some would argue that Axum was her first love, and in many ways, he was, but Chakotay had exposed her to a depth of love she’d never fathomed could exist. He had been gone for nearly a year now, and occasionally, her heart ached for the possibility for what might have been.

Her desire for that level of closeness had blinded her from what she really needed to be happy. The more she looked back on their relationship she realized that it wasn’t him she really wanted but what he represented. Deep down, she had always known their relationship was doomed to fail, they
wanted different things out of life, and eventually love alone would not be enough to save them.

Having come to this realization she let him go peacefully, quietly, wishing that wherever he was now after being freed from prison, he could find his heart’s desire. Perhaps, his new journey would lead him into the arms of the woman he’d always loved if the universe was kind.

Seven had been many things in her short human existence but being completely oblivious was not one of them. When Janeway had learned that she and Chakotay were a couple she kept a respectful distance. Like a mother, she behaved as though this new relationship was a wonderful and wondrous next step to her development. She encouraged it, nurtured it, offered to listen and only provided advice when asked. But in the depths of her eyes, well hidden, lay a pain that was almost too much of a burden to bear.

Looking back, she remembered pretending, even convincing herself that it was just an illusion. To do otherwise would mean she was not only hurting someone she deeply cared for but having to let go of something she wasn’t emotionally prepared to lose. So, she played the oblivious card, reconciling that she needed him more, allowing the selfishness of her desires to manifest beyond what was right, despite who she was hurting.

Now both were gone. Without guidance or encouragement, she was forced to put away those childish feelings and learn to stand on her own for the very first time. Those first few weeks she was terrified beyond reckoning, but she wasn’t completely alone, she had Icheb and the Doctor to help her forge a new path, leading her on a journey she hadn’t foreseen or expected. A new home, and a new purpose.

“Red, it’s time.” Hugh, known as Orange, announced upon entering the room.

Shoving the suit back into her footlocker she closed and locked it. Offering a silent goodbye, she thanked the two people who had changed her for the better. Standing, she turned to greet him. “I am ready.”
The familiar chime sounded in Kathryn Janeway’s quarters. Looking up from her terminal she uttered the words of entry. Benjamin Sisko stepped forward. “What can I do for you, Captain?” She questioned with an easy smile.

“Admiral Janeway, I apologize for the intrusion.” She waved her hand through the air, silently assuring him that it was indeed no bother. “We received a package by personal courier addressed to you. It is from Fleet Admiral Paris.”

That name used to bring anticipation of warmth, now it filled her with dread. “How did he know I was here?”

“No one is certain. However, it has become clear recently that members of all the major governments, including our own, can no longer be trusted. Which by association, would encompass Starfleet as well.” She nodded in agreement. “If this package reveals any information that would put our operations here at risk, I hope you will provide it.”

“Captain,” she began with a slight frown, “I know we don’t know each other well, and that is my fault, so if there is anything that can either help or hurt the progress we’ve made here I will certainly make you aware of it.”

“Somehow I knew you were going to say that.” He said with a smile. “While I’m here, let me remind you that we have a meeting in the battle room at fifteen-hundred hours.” She had forgotten but didn’t let on. “No need to be embarrassed Admiral, we all forget things from time to time.” He said offering her the package.

Giving a slightly surprised reaction, she crossed the room and took it. “What are you a mind reader now?”

His smile widened. “We all have our talents. See you at fifteen-hundred.” Turning he left.

Holding the small package, she stared at it for a moment, as if the contents would suddenly reveal themselves. In truth, she was afraid to open it. Here, she had found a purpose, something she could do to stop the coming war, and this put a damper on things. Slowly making her way back to the terminal, she sat down with a nervous sigh. She followed all security instructions to open the package, only to find another data chip inside. Briefly, she wondered what Paris would have to say, but there would be only one way to find out. Placing the chip in the terminal, it was another video message. However, it was from someone she did not expect, Azan.

“I apologize for the deception Admiral. It was the only logical conclusion that would not bring attention to your continued presence there. I, however, must inform you that Fleet Admiral Paris is dead, his remains were eventually discovered in his office. I understand it took several hours to override the computer lockout protocol to reclaim them. In a few days, Admiral David Clayton will be announced as the new Fleet Admiral.” He paused. “This was not the only reason for sending this message to you. On this data chip, you will find another message from Ambassador Tuvok’s wife T’Pel. She has been attempting to reach out to you nearly every week since your arrival at Deep Space Nine. I wish to warn you, Admiral, what she has to say may be unsettling. I, however, will continue to update you with any new information as it arrives.” Raising his hand, he spread the middle two fingers apart to form a V. “Live long and Prosper.” Then he was gone, leaving her feeling anxious. Paris was dead, and now someone who seemed to take great pleasure in her misery was now being promoted. Then there was T’Pel. What could have happened that she felt I was the
only person she could turn to.

Beginning the next video, she sees a woman whom she’s met several times. “Admiral Janeway, I would not presume to contact you if I believed there were other avenues to explore. I have not seen my husband, Ambassador Tuvok in three months, four weeks, three days. When he arrived home to Vulcan several months ago, he began to assist the Vulcan Science Academy with an ancient artifact that predates our civilization by thousands of years. Within that time, he began to show odd compulsions for the artifact. He was so fascinated by the object’s properties, that he seldom let it out of his possession. Late in the evenings, I could hear him speaking to it as if it were able to sustain a conversation.

“I grew concerned as to the effects and its ability to hold sway over my husband. I suggested he return the artifact back to the Academy and requested that he speak to a Vulcan master in order to further understand the effects of any prolonged exposure. The man who answered me was not my husband. Something has changed him Admiral Janeway, and as his friend, I believe you may be the only qualified individual who could attempt to reason with him. I await your response.” She too gives the Vulcan salute before saying. Live long and prosper.”

Her confidant, sage, mentor, and friend were lost. She had always held the belief that in many ways, Tuvok was beyond the rigors of mortal life. He possessed a depth of wisdom few understood. He had now become entranced by something foreign, dangerous, and his wife had turned to her for help. He was part of her family, as so many of the Voyager crew were, and she would not abandon him.

Tapping her com badge, she said. “Janeway to Sisko.”

“Sisko here.”

“We need to talk.”

“On my way.”

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Chakotay wasn’t sure what he was walking into when he entered Kathryn’s quarters. As soon as the door opened all conversation stopped. As he appraised the current mood, both had seen better days. Staying calm and focused he asked cautiously. “Is there a problem?” Sisko and Janeway stared at each other. Chakotay could see the steel in her eyes, it was a look he knew well, and it always meant trouble. “I can tell that this conversation isn’t going the way either of you hoped.”

“How much do you really want him to know Admiral?” Sisko asked finally.

This question piqued his interest. Since he decided to take on this fight, it was important he knows as much as possible. “Kathryn? What’s going on?” He asked slowly.

Janeway stared at Sisko, the anger in her eyes becoming more prominent as he practically told him there was a problem, but even more so for putting her in such an awkward position. “I trust Chakotay implicitly.”

Sisko knew many things, even possible futures that could occur based on the decisions that were being made and unmade as he and Janeway stood staring each other down, all of them precarious. If they strayed just a little from their path, the result would be catastrophic. “Then do you wish to tell him or should I?”

“Tell me what?” And just like that, Chakotay had moved beyond slight interest. “If something
“I take it Admiral Janeway doesn’t agree.” He replied, looking to Kathryn who had her back turned to them.

He nodded. “The entity that resides within the Admiral is a powerful being and could certainly be persuaded to assist her if she chose to go after him. However, that would put herself and the rest of us at great risk. They are already aware of the entity's presence when she chose to help release your self and the other former Maquis from prison. If we act before, we’re ready, our chances of either stopping or winning this war are greatly diminished.”

Chakotay understood what Sisko was saying perfectly, he could remember saying similar words to his own crew many years ago. He knew this was going to be an impossible selling point for Kathryn to accept, and one of the reasons why he never told her that the Maquis had been wiped out in the first place. Her philosophy on life was straight-forward, and any deviation to this belief was unthinkable. She was a woman who believed in self-sacrifice, it was practically her mantra. It was a strength as well as a weakness, one that made her appear superhuman in the eyes of many. He had his flaws, and his way of thinking wasn’t always perfect, but it reminded him that he was simply human.

The lines on Sisko’s face were visibly deeper as he tried to reconcile his own ethics, and either in spite or despite what he had become, at the core he was just a human being like the rest of them. Making the hard decisions was part of the job, one he himself didn’t always relish. He had found himself coming full circle, and once again it had fallen to him to face the monumental task of trying to explain to Kathryn the unexplainable. Leaning forward slightly, he rested his forearms on his thighs while clasping his hands together, mirroring Sisko’s current posture. He understood what must be done, but making Kathryn understand that however was a job he wished he could pass on to someone else.

The two men looked up at each other, exchanging brief looks that intrinsically conveyed what Chakotay had to do. “Thank you, Captain Sisko, for bringing this to my attention.” With a nod, Sisko stood up and exited Janeway’s quarters. Once he was gone, he let out a long stream of breath as he leaned back, resting his head against the back of the sofa, his hands reaching up to briefly scrub his face. At some point during the conversation, Janeway had entered the bedroom, unable to bring herself to listen any longer.

Finding the will and strength to get up, he crossed the room and investigated the doorway. She was sitting on the edge of the bed, her back to the door, the last thing she wanted was for anyone to see her cry. That display of emotion was something she’d always tried to keep private but didn’t always succeed at. Stepping into the room, he approached, silently taking the seat next to her. Without looking at her face, he turned slightly and took her into his arms. She stiffened, putting forth one last effort to appear strong. Smoothing her hair and back with his hands, he held her close. Against that level of comfort, she could not last. Her defenses were being overwhelmed as she tried
desperately to prevent the tears from returning, knowing that if she let go, she might not be able to stop.

Pushing against him, she tried to free herself. His arms were strong, his manner patient. “Let me go!” She demanded; silence was his response. “I have to stop this.” She reasoned. “I have to save him, please Chakotay.” She begged, all the while holding her firmly, calmly. The acceptance was coming, teaching her more thoroughly than mere words ever could. It was a painful lesson, one she had to learn on her own. He continued to hold her, weathering the storm of her heart, providing the support she needed. It was just a matter of time now, soon it would all make sense. She had been fighting the inevitable, the truth was making its appearance, rising above the chaos, and it would be apparent when she reached the threshold.

Massive sobs wracked her body, a tidal wave of emotion had been released that could only be ridden out to its logical end. She had resisted, denied, reasoned, and attempted to beg her way past a truth that could not be ignored forever. He continued to hold her, words were not desired or necessary, and would accomplish this task without expectation. Time slowed to its most infinitesimal state. At this moment, they were the only two people in the universe.

Soon the flood of emotions ebbed, leaving her mentally and physically drained. Helping her to lay down on the bed to rest, she refused to let go of his hand. Indicating that she wasn’t ready to be alone just yet. Laying down, he pressed himself against her back, wrapping his arms around her, waiting for the ragged labored breaths to slow and right itself. Eventually, the breath evened out, indicating the presence of sleep.

Getting up, he removed her com badge and set it on the nightstand before quietly exiting the room, sliding the door closed behind him. He still didn’t quite understand why Tuvok was in danger or how, but it wouldn’t hurt to find out. Leaving a note in case she awoke before he returned, he headed out of her quarters and decided to take a walk.

***

Colonel Kira Nerys was expecting a quiet night on the promenade. Zero-three hundred was a magical time. All the ambassadors and dignitaries were all snug in their little beds. From the window, she could see the lights of Bajor lighting up from orbit, it was at this time she would think of Odo, recalling all the times they would sit here and stargaze without a word for hours. Now he had returned to the Great Link and hoped that if she never saw him again, he was happy. There wasn’t usually any foot traffic this time of night, so when she noticed someone move into her peripheral vision, she couldn’t help but look over at them.

It was a man sitting on the window ledge, staring out into the starts. She didn’t remember his name but knew he was a member of the former Maquis by the old jumpsuits they were assigned. Normally, she would keep to herself, but the look on his face told her that he was struggling with a problem. Walking over to him, he didn’t seem to notice until she was almost right on top of him. Ripped from thought, he looked up at her startled. “I’m sorry, I didn’t see you there. Am I somewhere I’m not supposed to be Colonel?” He asked.

He seemed to know who she was, but his identity was still a mystery. Putting out her hand she said, “I’m Kira Nerys.”

“Oh.” He said, standing up and taking it. “Chakotay.”

She nodded. “Well Chakotay, are you interested in stargazing as well?”

He smiled, his eyes roaming from star to star. “I have an interest in astronomy, but it’s my girlfriend however who has more insight on the subject, she’s a scientist, one of the best I’ve ever
known. However, I don’t think she’s much for stargazing tonight.”

“I see, is she joining you at the station?”

“She’s already here, its Admiral Janeway.”

Now it all made sense after hearing both names together. “So, you must be former Commander Chakotay of the USS Voyager.”

He looked down, slightly uncomfortable. “Used to be, yes.”

“I apologize, I don’t know why it hadn’t occurred to me that that might be a touchy subject. Please forgive my indiscretion.”

He gave a wave of his hand, indicating that it was no secret. “That part of my life seems so long ago now.”

She gave a nod and smiled. Leaning toward him she said quietly. “Personally, I thought it was a miracle that any of you made it back at all.”

“Pessimist?” He asked.

“Realist. I’m not a prophet, so I don’t pretend to know the reasons why things happen the way they do, but I believe in this case, Voyager returned precisely when it was meant to.” He gave her a strange look; it wasn’t something she hadn’t see many times before. “We are all here for a purpose. Some of us don’t see it right away, and others can’t stop bumping into it. Whichever way, I’m sure you’ll find it.”

He nodded slightly, looking pensive. “I hope you don’t take this personally, but I did some checking into your background. Well,” he stopped, considering, “not just yours if I’m being completely honest.”

She leaned against the bulkhead; arms crossed. “Understandable, you want to know who you’re dealing with.”

“You were part of the resistance during the Cardassian occupation.”

“That’s right.” She confirmed, not completely sure where he was going with this, but felt it had something to do with the conversation Sisko had told her about with the Admiral earlier.

“I’d like to ask you a question about something if that’s all right?” Giving him a nod, he continued. “When Captain Sisko took command of the station, he is coming from a Starfleet background, how difficult was it for you to attempt to explain that Starfleet principles don’t always work when it comes to war.” She looked down, thinking about all the arguments she and Sisko had had about that over the years, and before she realized it, a smile had spread across her lips. “I take it by your reaction that you’ve had the same level of success I’ve had.”

Her smile widened as she looked up into his face, but he wasn’t smiling, he looked worn down, frustrated, sad. Her smile vanished, understanding at this moment the question was more of a cry for help. Reaching out, she placed a hand on his shoulder, the only gesture of physical comfort she could provide to an acquaintance, but her heart did go out to him. “I don’t pretend to know Admiral Janeway well, but like most Starfleet officers I’ve met, there seems to be one common trait they share other than a pension for stubbornness.” He smiled at that. “An exaggerated, almost saintly exoneration of hope. People like you and I have come to see that concept a little differently, it comes in layers.” He looked up at her astonished, the answer for him had been an overly
complicated riddle, and yet she had been able to explain it so succinctly. It didn’t completely solve his problem, but it had given him a level of insight into the woman who was Kathryn Janeway.

From the corner of their eyes, they noticed a bright flash erupting from the wormhole, neither knowing if something was going in or coming out. From his vantage point, there was a ball of white light. As he stood up to try and get a closer look, he realized it was on a direct collision course with him. Before he could attempt to move out of its path it passed through the bulkhead and into him, knocking him to the ground. Kira rushed to his aid as her com badge chirped.

“Morrissey to Colonel Kira.”

“Kira go.” She damn near shouted the command.

“Admiral Janeway has just left the station and entered the wormhole in the alien ship. She’s gone.”

“Kheet’agh.” She cursed.

“Colonel?”

“Send a medical team to level two section thirty-nine and inform Captain Sisko. Kira out.”

Distracted, something happened during those last few seconds before she looked down at Chakotay again. Stunned, she noticed he looked younger.
Quietus in Repose

Section 31 had moved into Caitian space, their objective clear, their purpose assured. Based on their own reconnaissance and the information obtained by Fleet Admiral David Clayton, the spark that would ignite the firebox started here. Only a handful of ships were necessary to complete this task.

High in orbit, they waited out of sensor range until they were ready to proceed. Readying their refractive shielding and sensor dispersion technology, they made their way to the planet’s surface. Flying over the jungles leading to deserts, they approached the valley that would take them to their prize.

Almost kissing the ground with their ships, they would have to traverse a narrow tunnel, just large enough for them to fit one ship at a time. Any miscalculation in navigation would be unforgiving. Death lingered close, waiting to claim any of the pilots. Surviving the arduous ordeal, they were able to land in a small clearing that was already deep underground. From here, they would have to go on foot.

Climbing nearly three-hundred meters down the shaft in their adrenal powered exoskeletons they had finally reached the chamber. Pulling out their heavily modified tricorders, they began to search for the energy signature the artifact produced. It had been drilled into their consciousness not to touch the artifact directly.

One of them had finally got a signal which led to a wall six meters thick, made of a solidly incompressible blue-white material known as osmium. Due to its hexagonal atomic structure, it shrinks under pressure, taking far too much time to cut their way through, more than any of them wanted to spend. Day turned to night, the cycle repeating for nearly four days until they had reached the source.

Each of them didn’t have to know what the item’s description was in order to recognize it, that was self-evident. An object, no larger than the size of a golf ball, seemed to be battling a war within itself. Part of it swirled with a massive pure white light, while the other a black inky mass that was darker than the blackness of space, reflecting all light away from itself. The object appeared to exist in many states of matter, making it appear to the observer that it could both pour out its contents and illuminate a planet all at once.

Carefully, they placed the object in the container provided and began their journey back to the surface. Retracing their steps, one of their number was diminished in the tunnel before reaching the exit. Breaking away from the surface, they rose up, back into high orbit. Their commander placed the container inside a large focusing lens provided for this mission. Redirecting the lens toward the planet, it was activated. A light, like the beam of a warship searchlight, swept the capital. The night became day as the Caitians awoke, either going outside or looking out their windows to get a glimpse as to where the light could be coming from, not knowing what was to follow.

The black oozed around the trail of light. Touching the surface, every plant, tree, and bush had instantly turned to fire. The Caitians were to follow. Black clouds of billowing death spread quickly across the planet’s surface. They cried, they screamed, they prayed. Children cried for their mothers; fathers rushed to save their families. The cloud was relentless and insidious in its nature as it touched their living flesh and burned it from their bones.

Watching from orbit, it took less than an hour for the cloud to encompass the entire planet. What was left behind when the cloud dissipated was a barren wasteland. Leaving no trace that life had
ever existed on the planet, or the Caitians.

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B’Elanna had been angry about so many things, but time on her own had calmed her somewhat. She wanted to see her daughter, her husband, she wanted to see what Miral had learned since she’s been away, how much she had possibly grown. However, those same thoughts had the power to bring her down into such a deep depression. Would Miral even recognize her? She would, of course, want to hold her, but since she would be considered a stranger, she could only guess how that played out.

Hitting the bulkhead of the shuttle she was repairing with her fist, she broke two of her knuckles and induced a large cut across the back of her hand, but she didn’t care. What difference did life make anymore? Everything she’s ever loved has always been ripped away from her. Her half-Klingon side always getting her into trouble. She couldn’t even stop Starfleet from dragging her away and putting her on a prison liner for Europa Station. During her depression, she had stopped taking care of herself. Not eating well or at all, barely sleeping. Over the last few months, she weighed almost a hundred pounds, much smaller than her normal body weight.

Leaving the shuttle bay; she made her way back to her quarters for a shower. However, when she arrived the door was open. Taking a long heavy tool from her belt, she pressed herself next to the door, listening.

“You have to be quiet baby girl. It’s a surprise.” Was that Tom’s voice?

“Da Da Da Da Da Da.” She repeated over and over.

“Mommy will be so happy to see you.” He said with a slight groan, picking her up. “You’ve gotten heavy little one. What’s auntie Red been feeding you?” He heard a clang from just outside the door, then the sound of weeping. Putting Miral down, he whispered. “Go hide.” She giggled softly and put a finger to her lips, before running off into the bedroom. Now it was Brown’s turn to see what was happening. Grabbing a small statue from the coffee table, he made his way to the door. It was getting louder now. Peeking to look just outside the frame, he saw a woman sitting on the floor next to the door crying. “Are you okay?” He asked, starting to bend down.

She shook her head, face in her hands unable to speak. “What’s your name?” He asked kindly. Putting down her hands, she turned her head to look at him. When she did, a gasp escaped his lips. “B’Elanna? What happened to you?” Then reached for her, pulling her into an embrace.

“Oh my God Tom!” She cried. “I thought I’d never see you again.”

He helped her to her feet. “It’s okay now, I’ve got you.” Leading her to the sofa they sat down, he holds her again, the tears only slowed but didn’t stop.

“Where’s Miral?” She asked finally.

Calling their daughter, he smiled as Miral slowly slipped out of the bedroom.

Waving her over he called. “Come here, sweetheart. I want you to meet someone.” Frightened of the stranger, she didn’t want to, but it only took a little more coaxing before she was next to him. Taking her by the hand, he said. “Miral, this is your mother.”

“No! No!” She cried and ran back into the bedroom, inviting a fresh wave of tears. A moment later she came back waving one of the holo-pictures Tom and been showing her. “Ma Ma Ma Ma Ma.” She said, pointing at it.
“This is her.” He tried again. “She doesn’t look the same because she’s sick. Big hugs from you might help.”

Miral wasn’t too sure at first, but since daddy was there it should be all right. She approached carefully before opening her arms to give the woman a hug.

Now that she was holding her, it felt real, even though she was a newborn when she saw her last. There was so much she’d missed but was determined to get it back. Crying, the tears slipped down her cheeks when she heard Miral say, “Ma? Ma?”

“That’s right baby. I’ve missed you so much.” She replied kissing and cuddling her.

Tom smiled; tears had already escaped his eyes as he encompassed both in his arms. For the first time in a year, they were a family again.

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“Admiral Jean-Luc Picard,” Sisko said with a smile, extending his hand. He had already made peace with his past aboard the USS Saratoga a long time ago. It had never been Picard he was angry with, all though it took him a long time to realize it.

“Captain Sisko.” He replied taking it. “I wish we were meeting under happier circumstances.”

“As do I. However, I do appreciate your acceptance of my invitation.”

Picard nodded. “I must say, I was surprised to receive your message. Tell me, how were you able to locate us?”

“Would you believe me if I said I saw it in the stars?” He answered, his smile widening briefly. Picard did not seem amused. “Your operation and its location are quite safe. I came to learn of it at my time in the celestial temple, located within the wormhole.”

“The celestial aliens, I have been made aware of them.”

“Yes, and they are very interested in preventing war, even more, colossal than the war with the Dominion.”

Picard was puzzled. There were certainly a lot of conflicts occurring, but another war seemed improbable. “Our reconnaissance hasn’t indicated anything that would escalate to that level.”

Sisko nodded. “I understand this is hard to believe, it even sounds preposterous – ludicrous. However, I’m sure your information has revealed a disturbing development in the conflict between the Ferasans and the Caitians.”

“We received a report that tensions were high between them after the death of their leaders on Vulcan. The Ferasans have declared war on their cousins, but nothing has come to fruition.”

Sisko stood up looking pensive. He wasn’t pleased about what he would have to reveal next. “We saw this act as a sign of what was to come. In orbit of both worlds, we placed several small stealth surveillance cameras with sensors in order to document any disturbances. If anything entered orbit other than local traffic it would begin recording and send us a notification. However, the stealth technology the ships entered with was enough to fool its sensors, but it could not fool what came after.” Walking over to the large view screen, Sisko tapped in a few commands to bring up a video. “What I’m about to show you, Admiral, you may find extremely disturbing.”
Picard watched as he saw the small ship emitting a bright white light onto the planet, bright enough to blind anyone looking directly into it. The camera angle changes, several seconds later a black substance oozes around the trail of light onto the surface. At first, he’s not sure what he’s seeing, but after several minutes the answers begin to reveal themselves. A black cloud rolled across the surface, leaving behind an infecund desolate rock.

Ending the video, Sisko turns back to Picard. “Less than an hour later, everything was gone before the cloud dissipated, leaving the planet completely sterile with no building blocks for life of any kind.”

Picard fell further back into his seat, the only physical admission that what he had just witnessed disturbed him greatly. Not just that, but what this level of destruction would mean for all life within the universe. For a moment, he felt minuscule, insignificant, useless. How could anyone hope to stop something so nefarious? Was it even possible? “I hope Captain, you have a plan.” He asked hopefully.

“I do, but if anyone is going to survive, we will need the support of the Wraiths.”

His organization could do a lot of things, but against this type of threat, even he would need allies. “You have it. What do you believe is our first level of recourse?”

“We need to find out who those ships belong to. As for the weapon, I’ll need to consult with the celestial temple. With Admiral Janeway’s departure, one of our greatest assets has been lost.”

“I have not met her personally. However, as monumental a feat she accomplished in getting her ship back from the Delta Quadrant, she’s not omnipotent.”

Sisko laughed softly. “That’s true, but the entity living inside her is as close to the divine as we can possibly hope to get.” Picard gave him a confused look. “I’ll have to bring you up to speed Admiral, this might take some time.”

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The Wraiths were better than their word when it came to finding out about the ships that destroyed Cait. They were Section 31, a new design along with a new technology that had been unknown to the Federation until a few months ago. The Wraiths had been hearing about a new type of stealth ship in their reconnaissance but at the time it wasn’t at the top of their priority list. For the last couple of months, their combined efforts were being used to locate the artifact that had murdered an entire planet. So far, it hadn’t been used again, but even that was only a matter of time. That type of power would be irresistible to every race in the universe. All he was concerned with now was his own quadrant.

The year was reaching its end, and neither Janeway nor Sisko had returned from the wormhole. Chakotay was a patient man, his time in prison had only taught him how to be better at it. However, he wasn’t sure if he would ever see Kathryn Janeway again. She was deeply troubled when she left, as much as he tried to comfort her in her pain, she was in no condition to wage a war. Perhaps it was better this way, at least the entity would keep her out of danger. Still, her absence affected him on a level he hadn’t quite come to terms with.

To say he missed her would be a gross understatement, he was shattered by the loss. It was different in the past, no promises had been made, there was never any indication that a life together would have ever been possible. That is, until that one otherworldly and miraculous night. He couldn’t bear to remember, much less linger on the memory. No, he would have to bury it deep down into the depths of his psyche and pretend it never happened. It was the only way he could
Passing the time, he worked to the point of exhaustion, finding new ways to occupy his mind. On occasion, he would visit with Tom and B’Elanna, play with Miral then grab a quick bite to eat and some sleep before getting up to do it all over again. This had become his life now, an endless cycle. He didn’t dare feel lonely, it was a perfidious pastime. His newfound gift of juvenescence did nothing but draw unwanted attention to himself by those he both knew and didn’t.

Then there was the topic of Seven or Red as she is now called. They hadn’t spoken since her arrival at the station, only seen each other in passing. In many ways, the avoidance had become nonsensical. Why did it feel as though he had to avoid her? Logically it made little sense. They would have to work together, and when that time came it would be prudent to have gotten any reserved feelings out in the open before they could become a problem. So, he decided he would visit her just before she returned to her ship to regenerate.

Standing by the docking bay door, he waited anxiously. Unsure of what he was going to say, he couldn’t stop looking at his data padd, having written down a few things earlier in the day. As he looked up briefly, his body went partially numb when he noticed her walking his direction. She looked so different now, her hair much longer and pulled back into a ponytail. The dermal regeneration suit was turned in for a nondescript jumpsuit. Combat boots replaced her heels. If it wasn’t for a few obvious implants you would never have known she was Borg.

“Red.” He called. Her head moved like it was on a turret, her eyes locking in and flashing from face to face until she reached his, then she stopped in her tracks, waiting. A sudden heaviness pulled down on his legs, making it hard to push himself forward. She waited, patient. There was an easiness to her stance as if she were completely relaxed.

“What can I do for you Chakotay?” She asked, teetering on the curious.

It took some effort to get his mouth moving. “It’s been a year since we talked. I thought maybe we could catch up.”

She gave an easy nod as if the entire encounter wasn’t bothering her in the slightest. Crossing her arms, she leaned back with her hip slightly protruding to the side, it was certainly an odd stance for her. “I would invite you for a drink but…I know.” She said with a smile.

He smiled in return, knowing that booze and Borg don’t mix well. The heaviness he was feeling began to quickly ebb. “You seem different. More…human.”

“I guess that depends on who you ask.” She joked. “But yes, I do. We both have.” He nodded, feeling a slight sliver of unease. Picking up on it, she took him by the hand without warning and led him away to a less crowded area. He followed without resistance. “Look Chakotay,” she began, “there’s no need to be apprehensive. I made peace with all the feelings I had for you a long time ago. Don’t worry, we’re fine. I know you and Admiral Janeway found each other and that you’re both very happy together. There’s no reason I would ever try to ruin that. I will always care for you deeply, but that time has passed for us. However, if you’re still interested in being friends, I would welcome it.”

He was more than surprised by what she said, he was in disbelief. He thought this was going to be much harder, but in just a few words, she had put him at ease. “I would like that too.” He said finally.

“It was good to see you Chakotay. Don’t be a stranger as they say.” Then she walked back toward the docking bay.
“I won’t.” He said too softly, too stunned to even turn around. It appeared he was worried about nothing after all.

When she entered the ship, she released her fist, blood accrued under her nails as the punctures oozed fresh blood, gravity pulling it down her long slim fingers. She wished him love and happiness with all her heart but seeing him brought it all back for her. For the first time in her life, she felt a new emotion, jealousy. It was not to be, she knew, but why did it have to hurt so much?
A Search for Answers

Janeway felt herself floating in the dim cool cloud of thought. The entity had decided it was time to depart the station, return to a place that held the comfort of cavernous moods of understanding, of what was, is, and the will be. If anyone was going to survive, all life had to return to its most singular truth, and this is what the entity knew Janeway needed. She had become too distracted by what was being shown in the smaller context that she couldn’t see the larger more perilous picture.

Their lives were intertwined in ways the entity had no frame of reference to center them. She hadn’t lived life, in the same way, most of her younger siblings had, that being all the species that came after hers. Living by a code of conflict that yielded a few moments of peace or reflection. It was always in the past, the present, where Janeway’s thoughts clung, never often to the future; these worlds which were all too briefly analyzed then dismissed or forgotten.

She needed her to understand what was at stake, what has already been lost, and what the future could be. How this would be accomplished was unclear, but action needed to be taken. The process was moving too slow, the exchange of understanding ineffective. The youngest of all her siblings spent too much time in doubt, trying to reach the pinnacle of truth and coming up short and ultimately leaving most unfulfilled. The gap of uncertainty growing far too wide as day became night, repeating itself in an existential loop, never being able to truly break free from it.

Perhaps, if she brought Janeway to the beginning, it would focus her, allow her to see the path without distraction. If perception and intuition were not the vessels of understanding alone, she would have to use images to convey part of the story. In a world of light, it was easy to get lost, one needed a little darkness to temper their conclusions.

Janeway was lifted from the comfort of the cloud, down into a place of wonder. Many hands grasped her, carrying her down into the pit of remembrance. The entity continued to urge Janeway to focus on the images of what she knew to be life and death. How each comes in the forms of small building blocks, sharing these lessons one second or moment at a time. People, places, things, in general, mattered not to their twin brothers. The death of diversity and change was a blight among their philosophies of the status quo. They were enraged by uncertainty and the unknown.

She showed Janeway a world unlike anything possible in her own species. She was the key, the bridge of understanding that could reunite them with their brothers of destruction and chaos. She had to be the vessel of both light and dark, a balance that had once sustained them billions of years ago. She would have to be joined with the darkness, learn its secrets and come back changed, just as the light had already changed her.

In this world of abstraction, she would have to traverse the path of darkness to see how death exists in its purest form. Feelings and images would be usurped into this disjointed context. It would take time but in the end. She would be wiser than any of her fellow races. And the truth, as is its custom, would present itself.

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Sisko had lost all track of time in the linear world. In the celestial temple, the concept was as formless and abstract as a Picasso, moving in the space of thought rather than a line, and it was here that he searched endlessly and tirelessly for a course of action that would lead them to a favorable solution. So far, each possible action was being met with an unacceptable outcome: annihilation. It was an outcome he couldn’t, no wouldn’t accept.
It was a puzzle he was finding impossible to solve, and with their biggest piece off the board, the answer was eluding him. Janeway was the key, of that he was certain, and when it came to winning this undeclared war, they would need her to do it. However, it was a riddle stuffed into an enigma wrapped inside a sepulcher even the prophets could not solve. Where in the universe was Kathryn Janeway? It was a simple question with an inaccessible answer, one that had to be solved before the possible outcomes became reality.

In almost every scenario, if they moved against the darkness as they were, death was waiting to envelop them with its jaws stretched wide. If they continued to remain stagnant, the war would come with death lingering behind to pick its just desserts. It was yet another unreasonable end. He could not allow himself to feel the hopelessness that was creeping quietly into his soul. The darkness could not win, he had to cling to that belief.

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Chakotay had dared to dream. It was a concept that seemed to have no place in his life. Every time he allowed himself to feel content, fulfilled, something would arise to remind him that it was as fleeting as it was unattainable. So, he decided to let go of the things he wanted, accepting that it was a useless pastime that would never lead him to any happy ending. He would move on to a new phase, one that didn’t search for love or meaning. A life of servitude would be his penance and his salvation. He would join the Wraiths.

Picard considered his request, his background, and in these uncertain times decided that his skills could be put to greater use. His application had been accepted and approved. A new life would begin. He would now be known as Grey.

Black had taken him into the program, his training would begin immediately which was fine with him. Once his skill levels had been determined, it was only a matter of programming to not only enhance and sharpen those skills but to introduce new ones into his repertoire. Lowering himself into the hyperbolic time chamber, the capsule closed, encompassing him in a world devoid of senses. If he was able to remember back that far, it would have been like floating in the womb.

His eyes closed, allowing his thoughts to drift, unsure of what the process entailed. How would the knowledge be attained? It was a question he had asked but was declined a direct answer. “Subconsciously, you will begin to acquire the knowledge that will help you attain your immediate goals. However, consciously you will be drawn to thoughts and images, not of your choosing. Time shows you want it wants you to see, nothing more.” Black had explained.

The longer he drifted, his senses were useless. Whether he closed his eyes or left them open made no difference. Time had become a meaningless concept in this place, making him feel as though he were drifting between several worlds of consciousness, all of them black. Without knowing when it happened, a small circle of light opened before his eyes, as if he were looking down a long twisting corridor. The more he focused in, the larger the hole became, revealing a twisting pattern of colors until it collapsed, revealing the darkness of space.

Deep Space Nine was on his left as he passed the station, a few ships were docked there, including the one he was on now. But it was not here that the vision directed his focus, it was much further, past many worlds he knew and some he didn’t. Driven on, he focused on what appeared to be a pocket folded into space. What was it hiding? What strange curiosity lay between its folds? Trying to get a closer look, many malevolent silver eyes illuminated from its depths, forcing him to urgently and desperately move away before he could be drawn into the very faces of death themselves.

His heart pounding, he felt himself being drawn to another symbol of death, but this time it was on
its own. Chakotay found himself trying to escape it until he felt the warmth of benevolence and light. Drawn like a moth to a flame, he moved toward it. Two entities were embroiled in the dance of combat. Using their swords of gold and silver, they pummeled each other. Each trying to regain dominance over the other. The entity of light was nearly blinding as the opponent exuded inescapable darkness.

Their movements were impossibly quick, each taking turns to knock the other into the terrain that surrounded them. Chakotay hadn’t been able to determine who they were until the entity of light fell to the ground; her helmet dislodged from her head. It was at that moment he knew who it was, Kathryn. Jumping up, silver sword raised overhead, the brown hood fell away revealing a man he was very familiar with, Tuvok. Landing, he had impaled the silver sword into her chest, causing a cry to escape both he and Janeway’s lips. Leaning onto the sword, he held it down firmly and Janeway began climbing hand over hand to pull herself toward him, her hands being sliced to ribbons until she was close enough to reach his face.

She grasped his arm weakly. “No, it’s too late for that. You are safe now, that’s all that matters.”

“You are my friend; it matters to me.” Pulling off the cloak, he began to shred it, making compresses, along with enough long thin strips to bind it in place. Securing her wounds, he waited with her for a moment. She attempted to pull out the sword on her own but having trouble finding purchase. Carefully, Tuvok removed her hands and closed his eyes as he recited a Vulcan prayer. Picking her up against her protests, he began to walk carefully away from Chakotay’s view, holding her as if she were precious cargo. Several feet away he watched as she went completely limp.

“KATHRYN!” He screamed. His hands beating on the chamber door. “NO! You can’t die.” His emotions raw as his energy seemed to be siphoned away from him. Several tears escaped his brown devastated eyes. The woman he loved, had waited for, was now dead, and there was nothing he could do to stop it.

The capsule opened; a pair of strong hands held him down. “You’re okay, stay calm.” The feminine voice assured. In the thick ooze, he could get no purchase to push himself up, the voice making nonsensical sounds to his ears.

“Physically he’s fine. Emotionally he’s under great stress.” A male voice said. “We need to get him out of here.”

“She’s dead.” He said, almost whispering the declaration.

“Who’s dead.” The woman nearly demanded.

No response was given. Chakotay was too numb to think, to speak. As much as he tried to resign himself to a life without dreams, they had never really left him. Now, they were being ripped away from him in the cruelest way.

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Red didn’t know what to make of his words. The capsule was completely sealed against sound and light, in and out, it had to be in order to manipulate the flow of time within the space, so no one had
heard his cries of grief, only the words he uttered afterward. Based on his current behavior, there was only one woman who had the power to invoke such strong emotions: Kathryn Janeway.

Green monitored his condition, unable to provoke any change that would entice him out of his catatonic state. She had avoided seeing him, not wanting to be confronted with her own precarious feelings. Without confirmation, she could continue to remain in a state of uncertainty. Like Schrodinger's cat, she could think of Janeway as both alive and dead, neither taking precedence over the other.

Taking her to the side, Green said, "Red, I know this is hard for you considering your history with Grey, you loved him once, and he needs someone to pull him back from his grief. Someone must break through to him, let him know he doesn’t have to suffer alone. You of all people know what that’s like."

She did, but what Green didn’t know was that she hadn’t stopped loving him. In his absence, the feelings only seemed to become dormant over time. Seeing him again brought it all back, striking a pain within her heart knowing that he never felt the same way. Those levels of feelings had always been reserved for one person alone. "I don’t know if I can do it."

He could see the anxiety rising within her. This wasn’t about the fear of emotions leading her down the long path of humanity – which she had made immense strides in over the last year. It was something deeper and closer to home. Taking her by the shoulders, he locked eyes with her, kindly, gently. "I’m not going to say anything that would make you feel any more uncomfortable than you already do. What I will say, is there is a man in there you care deeply for, who is lost and hurting, and sometimes you have to put your personal feelings aside and do what’s best for them because that’s what we do for the people we care about."

In her heart, she knew that. She had wanted to provide that comfort, but at the same time, her heart was broken and trying to protect itself. "Is this really what it means to be human? To continuously make sacrifices to your own well-being in order to help another?" She thought. Why would any rational thinking being intentionally harm themselves to do this? Because it’s one of the many traits’ humans possess that keeps them one step above the animals. The contradictions were maddening at times, but in their own way, began to make sense. "Okay." She replied and gave a sigh of acquiescence.

Green smiled. "It’s hard to believe that only five years ago you stepped out of a Borg alcove and began the long road back. I’m proud of you Red."

She wished she could share the sentiment. Giving him a hint of a smile, she made her way into the observation room. Trepidation coursed through her veins, each step forward becoming harder than the last. It was then that she thought of how Janeway must have felt when she began her relationship with Chakotay. How insurmountable a task it must have been for her to have encouraged, listened, and advised a woman who knew nothing of these complicated emotions. If she never admired her before, she certainly did now. She didn’t have the strength of character Janeway possessed, but to bring balance into the equation, she didn’t have the wealth of experience either.

He was hunched over in the chair, looking frailer than she had ever seen him. It was an example of how powerful love could be, wounding a person more fatally than any weapon in the universe. And yet, people will give their lives for it, just to have experienced it once, if only for a moment. These emotions, once escaping and eluding her level of understanding, had begun to shape her life in ways that were both painful and beautiful; and now, at this moment, she understood what it meant to be human.
Armed with new appreciation, she pulled up a chair to sit in front of him. Reaching out, she gently took his hand. There were so many things she needed to share, but now it was about him and what he needed. “Chakotay,” she began, breaking the rules, “look at me.” His eyes slowly moved to touch upon her face. “Black told you that time shows you want it wants you to see, that is true. What she didn’t tell you was that it’s not always the truth. The Admiral is not dead, she’s too implacable to die. Besides,” she said leaning in close enough that only he could hear, “the entity wouldn’t allow it. She needs her to complete the mission. I doubt that the mission was to save Tuvok.”

His eyes changed focus, growing suspicious. “How do you know about Tuvok?”

“You’re asking the wrong question. What you should be asking is why didn’t I know about it sooner.” She gave it a moment to register. “That’s what the Wraiths do, watch the watchers, it’s rare that something escapes our notice for long.” Then smiled. Lying was something she was still getting used to but didn’t always see the value in it, until today. There was no way for her to know with absolute certainty in which state she currently existed, but it didn’t matter. “Life has to go on. Love will go on. You will be hurt, you may suffer unfathomably, but we all must play our part. Yours is not over. Kathryn wouldn’t stand by and let you silently fade into obscurity, and neither will I.” He was stunned and surprised all at once. In all the years he’s known her, she had never used her first name. “Now, you are going to get up and start living, you have way too much to fight for to let it all slip away now. You are Grey, you have a purpose, now move like you have one.”

Ultimately, he knew she was right. Seven knew how to be adamant, persistent, but this was a side of her, until now, that had been completely unseen. A veil had been lifted, revealing a woman – had she not been assimilated – was destined to become, and he smiled. “Would you think less of me if I told you that you scare me a little?”

She laughed softly. “No, but I would if you ever gave up again.”

He nodded and squeezed her hand. “Thanks for the verbal slap in the face Red.”

“I’m here to provide that service whenever needed, except for Sunday’s, I’m always off on Sunday’s.” He laughed out loud, unable to help himself.
Vultures are Circling

White – better known as Jean-Luc Picard – stepped aboard his ship, the Leonidas. Black following behind announced. “White on deck!” All non-essential motion stopped, instantly shifting the focus of the room.

“As you all know, we have been left in an uncomfortable position. Do we continue to wait, or do we move on without guidance? It has been nearly two months since anyone has heard from Captain Sisko and nearly three from Admiral Janeway. I do not believe that it would be prudent to continue to wait indefinitely. It is we who must act, that is why the Wraiths exist. You joined this organization because you sensed a shifting in the tide. Questions on whether we could continue to trust the Federation, Starfleet, or Section 31 to do as their mandates dictate have come seriously into question. Many of you were not here when those changes began after the Dominion War.

“Slowly, discreetly, our liberties were being withdrawn in the name of safety and security. What many of us saw occurring was not a concerted effort to restore balance and tighten our borders, it was a subterfuge to assume control over its citizens. I had not realized until it was upon me, that I would be asked to choose between duty to our principals and morality or duty to the Federation – which in my mind stood for the same ideals.” He stopped, considering his next words before continuing. “When I was asked to fire upon and destroy a heavily damaged Cardassian supply ship after the Battle of Cardassia; carrying almost three-thousand men, women, and children whose only crime was wanting to get out of the war zone, I knew something had gone horribly wrong.

“I refused that order, which only invited another Starfleet vessel to carry it out. So, I left the fleet, acquired new allies, and began an organization with one goal: to bring our people back to its founding ideals. We did not rise above the struggles of our own planet to create a set of principles that have guided us into a new era of enlightenment just to watch them slip away like sand through an hourglass. We will fight to take back what was stolen and use it to create better lives for everyone.

“I have asked some hard things of you in the past, but this might be the hardest to attain. There is a ship docked at Starfleet Headquarters, some of you may know it, the USS Voyager. That ship carries modifications brought back from the Delta Quadrant. Starfleet has had difficulty in trying to reverse engineer those systems into a workable prototype, however, we have an advantage. Red has memorized those schematics, and once they are brought back online, it would be a formidable ship in our arsenal. This must be done with the utmost caution and delicacy. We are fortunate to have several members of Voyager’s previous crew amongst us. Listen to them, take advantage of their knowledge. If anyone knows that ship, it’s them.” Looking to Black he asked. “Shall we get started, dear?”

“I thought you’d never ask.” She replied with a smile. Turning to the rest of the crew she said. “You have the rest of the evening to prepare, get some sleep, you’re going to need it. We leave at zero-six hundred. Dismissed.”

Grey asked Red, Black, and Purple to join him for dinner, which was accepted. Who knew, it might be the last night for all of them.

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The Leonidas wasn’t “pretty” but she was fast, highly maneuverable, and armed to the teeth. It also possessed a kind of cloaking technology that is banned by the Treaty of Algeron. However, if Section 31 was using an alien artifact to annihilate a planet and its inhabitants, they would need
every edge in their arsenal; illegal or otherwise.

Red had been able to adapt the stealth technology that the future Admiral Janeway had brought back with her, along with a few enhancements. They would need every edge to be successful, especially since they were headed into the lion’s den.

Going over their preflight checks, Chakotay couldn’t help but admire the woman Seven had become. At dinner, she was witty, charming, and personable. A far cry from the woman he knew over a year ago.

He was surprised to see Brown stepping onto the bridge. “So, where do you need me to take you?”

“Glad you’ll be with us,” Purple said. “As long as you remember that this isn’t a Captain Proton episode.” They all chuckled.

Appearing to sound hurt, he put his hand over his heart. “You wound me sir with your negativity.” He said with a grand wave of his hand. “Do not be jealous of my cool Proton skills.”

“I’ll remember that.” Purple replied with a smile.

“Okay, people, enough with the antiquated story characters,” Black said. “Ours is much cooler.” Then she smirked before continuing. “If everything is ready, let’s get the show on the road.”

Getting permission to leave Deep Space Nine, they left for Earth. With their speed, they should reach them in about five days. Looking around the bridge, for Chakotay, it almost felt like old times. He missed those days, more than he thought. Now he was with a new ship, and even though most of the people he knew, they weren’t the same, time had changed all of them.

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They had activated the stealth field and cloak before entering the Sol system. It was their first test to see if the new technology would stand up to higher standards, and so far, it had. It was eerie to get this close without being noticed, but for Chakotay and the others, it was something they were used to. As they crept up to the docking ring, they saw their prize, Voyager. She had seen better days, most of the external systems looked to have been removed. He could only imagine the horrors he would face inside if the hull was any indication.

“All right,” Black said, “you have your assignments. Once we get Voyager up and running, we’re taking her into the Pillars of Creation long enough to check over and repair any systems we need before taking her back to Deep Space Nine.”

The group nodded and headed toward the airlock. They would use their gliders to make their way to the hull before entering. “I got you Red,” Grey said before they would be followed by Purple and Yellow. Using a small mechanical booster, they shot themselves into the air to glide down onto Voyager. Their camo suits provided the bulk of their protection. When activated, the wearer would blend into any environment, making them almost invisible.

Reaching their point of entry, Seven started to immediately tap commands into the keypad, attempting to override the current lockout. After a few moments, the door to the airlock began to open slowly. As a unit, they moved into space, their tactical displays giving them vital information about the environment. The suits were a closed world unto themselves, once activated, it provided air recycling or internal life support. The body of the suits was made of an extremely flexible yet surprisingly strong alloy which allowed them to move soundlessly. All communication was designed to be heard internally without alerting the outside world. These prototypes housed a few
other tricks, hopefully, they wouldn’t have to use them.

“Grey, go to the bridge and see if you can access the navigation and flight controls,” Red ordered, “Yellow, report to engineering, we’ll need to know what state the warp core is in. Purple, you’ve got security and transporter control. I’ll head to the main computer core.” Each gave an acknowledgment before heading to their primary targets.

Moving to the bridge, Chakotay could attest that Voyager had seen better days. Nearly every panel on his way to the Jefferies tubes had been removed. He wondered briefly what they were hoping to find. It would take some time for him to climb his way up five decks to reach the emergency hatch for the bridge. Although he was a man in his late forties, the unexpected but not unwelcome age reversal had given him an advantage.

The ship appeared to be devoid of life other than himself and his companions. Either Starfleet Command had extracted all of Voyager’s secrets or they’d given up trying. At this point it didn’t matter, all he needed was to make sure they could fly out and navigate away to safety.

“Red to the bridge, report.”

“One moment,” he replied stepping over to the con. Pressing a few buttons, Voyager looked ready to fly. “Helm is a go.”

“Acknowledged. Wait for further instructions.”

Looking around, he decided to make his way to the ready room. Stepping inside, he noticed many of Kathryn’s things, but it was only one he wanted to get was her favorite teacup. Putting it in his hip pack, he stood and really took a good look. It would take time to put her back together, but it seemed that was all they had.

“Yellow, are you ready to reactivate the warp core?”

“I’ll need about ten minutes.”

“Purple, status?”

“Everything looks good.”

There was something gnawing at him. Things were just a little too perfect for his tastes. Personal experience had taught him nothing less. Something told him to check tactical, see the status of their weapons. What he found was unbelievable. The locking clamps released with a jolt, causing him to reach out a hand to steady himself. “Yellow shut down the warp core.”

“Is there a problem Grey?” Yellow asked concerned.

“I think they have something rigged to the weapon systems,” using his internal sensors, he scanned the data so everyone could see it.

“Is that what I think it is?” Purple asked.

“The artifact,” Red replied, “appears to be fused into the primary weapons systems.”

“Once we use weapons, we’ll be firing with the artifact.” Grey couldn’t understand why they were doing this. What were they planning? “It might take some time to disable.”

“We don’t have it. Starfleet Command may have been notified once the warp drive was brought
back online,” Red pointed out.

“Then I suggest we get moving. I’ll go down to engineering and help Yellow,” Purple said.”

“Get on it.”

“We can’t continue to stay here much longer,” Grey reminded. “I’ll see if I can break the link between them.”

“I wouldn’t recommend it; we have no idea what would happen if you touched it.” Red objected. “I will rendezvous with you on the bridge Grey. Don’t do anything until I get there.”

“Acknowledged.” He waited, taking his old seat. Looking over to his right, he could almost see Kathryn there. So many years of their lives had been lived on this ship. In many ways, if felt he was coming home.

Red entered the bridge. Grey stood to greet her. “Just thinking of old times?” She asked.

“Can’t seem to help myself.”

“Me too,” She admitted. “So, let’s take a closer look at the weapons systems. See if we can find a way to disable them without harming anyone.” Before he could give her a hand, the ship started to move. “What the hell is going on down there Yellow?” She demanded.

“It’s not me.” He sounded just as puzzled and panicked as she did.

“He’s right,” came Purple's voice. “Voyager just seems to be taking off on her own. I can’t interrupt the command.”

“Where are we being taken?” She asked Grey.

Studying the helm, “By these readings, we’re…what?” He said confused.

“What is it?” Red wasn’t happy with his reaction.

“We’re headed for the Great Barrier.”

Voyager had been pulled so fast through space; every inch of the ship felt it was going to break apart. When the occupants thought they would no longer be able to withstand the force of pull, she slowed to a stop, appearing in front of the Great Barrier. They didn’t need sensor readings to tell them where they were. This place was well known within their galaxy. Eventually, all of them made their way to the bridge.

Seeing the massive barrier before them, Red explained, “In 2287, the Enterprise was the first ship to penetrate the once thought impassable barrier. A Vulcan named Sybok who claims that he spoke to God, told him where to find a planet beyond the barrier called Sha Ka Ree. It was the late Captain Kirk who believed that the Enterprise would be destroyed if they attempted to enter it. Sybok maintained that the barrier was just an illusion and that no harm would come to them. When they passed through, they found the planet called Sha Ka Ree along with a malevolent alien entity named 0 who they discovered was imprisoned by the barrier. It attempted to impersonate a God Sybok was expecting to find in order to manipulate him into providing a starship so it could leave, but only managed to kill Sybok in the process before the Enterprise crew could escape. It was their intention to destroy it, but the alien appeared to have survived.”

The immense barrier was not only intimidating to observe but left a sense of dread. “Do you
believe the entity called us here?” Yellow asked.

“There is not enough proof to be certain,” Red stated simply.

“If the entity did call us halfway across the galaxy for a ride it picked a lousy choice. Most of Voyager’s systems are offline. It would take weeks to repair them,” Purple said.

“No,” Grey said. “I think it made a perfect choice. We have an extremely powerful artifact attached to Voyager’s weapon systems. If it sensed this object, perhaps it’s thinking it can use it to escape its confinement, permanently.”

“What do you suggest?” Purple asked. “We can’t warp out of here under our own power, and thrusters will take us centuries to return to Deep Space Nine.”

“The only way back is forward,” Grey answered, “We’ll have to go in, see if we can attempt to avoid the entity and repair Voyager’s systems.”

“Make the preparations,” Red ordered, “Looks like we’ll be here a while.”

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An object spun end over end through the vastness of space. To the naked eye, it could have been any number of manmade or astrological phenomena. However, if one took a closer look, they would see a silver sword. Its power was beyond the comprehension of any of the races via one. End over end it continued as if it were being pulled by a magnet until finally reaching its goal.

The fold in space that Chakotay had seen weeks ago, silver eyes coveting the object. They fell upon each other like a pack of wolves, fighting for the right to wield its power until one was victorious. Armed with the weapon, the power to annihilate all life was at its fingertips except for one important piece, the artifact, without it their plans would surely fail. It would formulate a new plan, one its predecessor moved too slow to accomplish. Death would be its instrument, and it knew just how to deploy it.

Its ship moved from planet to planet undetected. Slipping into the secret places all leaders dwell. Whether murdering them in their sleep or waiting for the opportunity to present themselves, each leader of every major world fell. Leaving clues at each site implicating another world was responsible for the other’s misfortune.

Leaving Earth for last, it cornered Fleet Admiral David Clayton. Without warning or permission, he entered his body, it would now be the spokesman for the war that was to follow and its greatest champion.
News of the Caitians massacre had spread across all subspace bands. The Ferasan Empire had been blamed for not only destroying a planet but committing genocide. As rumor grows, the Klingon’s were being accused of providing the technology to facilitate their task. Retaliation was coming for them both even as more bad news poured in. New reports were being relayed across the quadrant regarding the assassinations of prominent world leaders. Kira Nerys listened, thinking the whole quadrant had gone mad as they vowed revenge on their enemies.

She was only one of a select few who knew what the real threat was, and as much as it pained her to hear of Kai Opaka’s murder, she had to remember who the real enemies were. The war they all feared was coming, it would take root and rise from a quadrant of ashes. It was unclear as to who or what would be standing once it was over, or if she would live to see it.

Something had to be done. What stone had been left unturned? Cardassia would be coming to challenge Bajor soon, and because it was Cardassia who was being blamed for Kai’s death, her kinsman would see it as an opportunity to wipe out the Cardassians once and for all.

“Morrissey, how long before the Cardassian fleet arrive?” Kira Nerys asked.

“Approximately three hours.”

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The moment Voyager crossed the barrier, Grey felt strange. Looking around, he looked to see if anyone else appeared to be out of sorts but came up empty. Something was pulling at him, trying to get him to move the ship in a different direction. “Does anyone else feel that?” He asked finally.

“Feel what?” Purple inquired.

“That…pull.” His head ached horribly, blurring his vision slightly.

Red moved over to him at the con, concerned. “Grey, what’s wrong? Talk to me,” She pleaded, but all he could do was moan in pain, curling up in his seat. “Purple, take the con. Yellow, take over tactical and operations.”

Helping him out of the seat, they led him over to his old command chair. “Something’s happened here. Something’s different,” Grey spoke barely above a whisper, “We need to head to Sha Ka Ree.”

Red strained to hear him, “We can’t Grey. We don’t know if 0 is still there. It’s an unacceptable risk.”

His face changed before her eyes. He looked desperate, terrified, distressed. Gripping her arm, he asked again, “We need to change course now. Listen to me Seven, you have to trust me.”

Lack of protocol notwithstanding, she was becoming alarmed by his behavior.

“Red,” Yellow called out, “I’m picking up a distress signal.”

“Where?” She asked, but kept her eyes on Grey, his erratic behavior concerned her greatly.

“Sha Ka Ree.”
For the first time in a long time, she didn’t know how to proceed. Part of her wanted to answer that call, but the other part knew she couldn’t put their mission at risk. Grey’s eyes pleaded with her, no, begged her to answer the call. Slowly she responded, “Change course. Can you determine who’s sending it?”

“Nothing Voyager recognizes.”

“Well,” she began straightening, “From my time on this ship I have learned three things. There’s the right way, the wrong way, and the Janeway.” Purple and Yellow smirked, still focused on their consoles. “Let’s go find trouble, it was getting boring anyway,” she said with a smile.

The closer they got to the planet; the better Grey felt. In fact, he seemed like his old self. “We’ll have to take a shuttle to the surface,” Red announced, “see who’s sending it,” turning toward Yellow she gestured for him to join her. “Let’s go.”


She studied his face, knowing that the proper thing to do was to deny his request, but her feelings for him often overrode logic. “Grey…” she was going to try and at least do the right thing, “don’t make me regret this.” Turning to Yellow she said, “You have the bridge.”

“Understood.”

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They headed toward the signal in silence. “I’m sorry Seven.”

“Red.”

“What?” Chakotay questioned.

“My name is Red.”

He turned toward her; he could see she was uncomfortable. Time had changed a lot of things about her, but not all. “I don’t care about protocol right now. I just want to have a conversation with you, Seven.”

“Say what you have to say,” she replied defensively.

He sighed, his head falling forward for a moment before righting itself again. “We need to talk about your feelings…about me. I might not be the smartest guy around, but I’m not blind. You know I care for you deeply, I’m just not in love with you.”

“Were you ever?” She asked before she realized the question had left her mouth.

He was caught off-guard, forcing him to stop and think for a moment. Slowly he answered, “If we hadn’t returned home when we did, honestly, I think I would have in time.”

Trying to keep the emotion out of her voice she said. “Let’s say things did turn out differently, and you and I were in love. Once we were back in the alpha quadrant, and Admiral Janeway was then free to explore a romantic relationship, would you still feel the same way about me?”

“I would never have left you.”

“That’s not what I asked.” She said putting the shuttle on autopilot just so she could look him in the eyes, then turned toward him. It was now he who was uncomfortable. Saying nothing, she
turned back to the console and resumed piloting control. His silence was the only answer she needed. “Look, I don’t have much experience with relationships, in fact, you were my first real boyfriend, but I have come to understand the disappointment. Do I wish things could be different between us? Yes, I do. It’s not going to happen though, and I know that. You’ve been in love with her for a long time, and there isn’t a person alive who could compete with her. I think it’s taken a long time for me to accept that, but it doesn’t hurt any less. Since the day I met her, we’ve been in an ongoing competition without realizing it. I have to let go of what might have been and start focusing on what will be.” She said the last part more to herself than to him. “I meant it when I said I want us to be friends, I think I just need a little more time before I can get there.”

“Well, whenever you figure it out, I’ll be around.” He said kindly.

“Landing coordinates straight ahead. I’ve never seen that configuration of a ship before.”

“Even as a drone?”

“Not even then.”

They landed close by, a man stood up to stare up at the shuttle, watching it set down. Red exited first, followed by Grey. As the man came closer, they recognized him immediately. “Tuvok?” Grey questioned, stunned.

“Are you all right?” Red asked.

“I am well. However, I have been waiting for the ship to let me know it was ready.”

“For what?” Red asked.

“Admiral Janeway to emerge.”

They were both stunned. “I saw her die, Ambassador. You killed her.” Chakotay said.

“It was my body, but the actions were not mine. The entity now resides in Admiral Janeway. I was simply its vessel. The ship called to me asked me to bring Admiral Janeway and leave her with it. I believe, the vessel has been attempting to repair the damage.”

“So, Kathryn has both entities living inside her?” Chakotay asked.

“That would be a logical assumption. However, I do not know. She has been inside the ship for close to a week. I have not seen her in that time. I have been assured by the vessel that she is alive and will be ready to leave soon.”

“Is that why you put out a distress call?” Red asked.

Tuvok raised an eyebrow. “I was not aware the vessel had sent any signal.”

“The ship wanted us to find it?” Chakotay began, “why would it bring us halfway across the galaxy?” He reasoned, walking toward the ship. As he approached, tentacles that had once been a bright white were now swirling with a black inky mass. The ship had also changed its configuration.

“Curious,” Tuvok stated, “it appears the ship has taken on aspects of the darker entity. I would suggest caution Commander, the ship will defend itself against anyone it perceives as a threat.” As if on queue, the tentacles reached toward Chakotay, the end splitting itself into smaller tentacles, a mixture of white and black energy pulsed between each of them. Once Chakotay took a step back,
the tentacles withdrew.

“I guess I won’t be doing that again,” he said.

“That would be ill-advised,” Tuvok agreed.

The ship began to reconfigure itself again, everyone stood back waiting to see what would happen next. A mass of white and black tentacles stretched forth. Withdrawing, they could see a figure standing before them. Their armor was now gold and silver, their tentacle wings swirled in the same black and white mass as the ship. Unable to see behind the hood, the entity reached up, extending its hand in the same direction as Voyager. Moments later, Yellow’s voice erupted over their com’s. “Red, something is pulling us down toward the planet. We can’t stop it.”

“Don’t fight it Yellow. Let it come.” She ordered.

Time seemed infinite, waiting for any further sign of Voyager. Then, there she was. Coming down through the atmosphere. Landing struts extended, giving the ship a soft landing. The entity headed toward it. Once it was underneath the ship, it opened a hatch and began to climb up. After several moments, it returned with the artifact.

Once in hand, it walked back toward the group. In the center of the hilt was an empty space, one that was the same size as the artifact. Inserted, the sword began to glow white, then dark before a mixture of both gold and silver replaced it. Holstering the sword across its back, the entity pulled back the hood to reveal Kathryn Janeway. Her eyes were now a swirling mass of gold and silver, her skin as pale and smooth as a porcelain doll. Her shoulder blade length hair was a mixture of black on one side and white on the other. “I apologize for the deception. It was the only way to obtain the artifact and keep it safe.” She addressed no one in particular.

“Kathryn?” Chakotay questioned.

She turned toward him, unable to see the woman he loved there. “We know how you feel about the vessel. She will be returned to you in time. Do not worry.”

“Don’t worry?” He mused, extremely stunned. “Is she still even in there?”

“Of course.” The voice sounded almost kind. “She has always been the key, both of us needed her. Through her, she has allowed our forms to exist together in a way we have not done for billions of years. Our brothers and sisters are coming. We will need to greet them.”

“How?” Red asked.

“The place where all things began,” It answered simply.

“And where would this be?” Tuvok inquired.

“The celestial temple,” Chakotay said as if the answer were obvious. The entity nodded.

“We will need to leave as soon as possible.”

“Voyager is in no condition to fly. It will take weeks of work,” Red stated.

The entity took one look at their ship, concentrating on it. Raising its sword, it manipulated the artifact before raising it to point at Voyager. In less time as it would take to fly the shuttle back into orbit, invisible hands looked to be putting the ship together from the outside.
“What’s going on out there?” Purple questioned worriedly.

“Stand by Purple. The entity seems to be repairing the ship,” Chakotay answered.

The deflector dish glowed brightly for a moment. After that, the entity reholstered the sword. “Red, that was one of the strangest things I’ve ever experienced. However, Voyager seems to be better than new. We could leave any time,” Yellow sounded astonished like he’s just seen a miracle.

Chakotay took a few steps toward the entity. “I don’t know if you can hear me Kathryn, but I’m here, and I love you.”

“She knows.” It replied. “Let us depart for Deep Space Nine. It is where the war begins, and possibly ends.”

He didn’t want to leave without her. He’d lost her once, thought she was dead, he wasn’t about to let her out of his sight again. “Don’t make me leave without you, Kathryn.”

The entity stared at him curiously. “We do not understand.”

He scoffed. “I love her. What more do you need to understand?”

“What a strange and curious creature you are.” It said before seeming to hold a conversation with itself. “All right, you may join us. Janeway has assured us that you are not a threat.”

“I will accompany Seven and the rest of the crew,” Tuvok said.

Seven thought about protesting but knew, in the end, it would be pointless. There would be no way she could talk him out of it. “Okay Grey, see you at Deep Space Nine.”

“Follow our ship into orbit, we will extend our time vortex around your vessel, to increase travel speed. Do not attempt to bring your warp drive online while inside the vortex.” The entity advised.

“Understood,” Red acknowledged, “We should get going. We have a war to fight.”
Once they were on their way, Red turned to Tuvok, indicating she would like to see him privately. Heading toward Janeway’s former ready room, he followed her inside. “I have a few questions,” she stated, still unsure as to whether he could be completely trusted. He seemed to be the Tuvok she’d always known, speaking to him would help her decide what category he fell into.

“Certainly,” he replied, his voice cool and smooth.

Secure behind the door, she turned to him. “I been wondering about something the entity said,” he regarded her curiously, “when it said that she was the ‘key’, do you have any idea what it meant by that?”

He took a moment to consider the question before replying, “It is difficult to explain, but I will try,” he began, “there are races throughout the galaxy who have used genetics to manipulate the DNA of either their own or other species in ways that would provide an advantage or detriment, and all for personal gain. These practices have been prohibited within the Federation. If I understand the motives of the entity that inhabited my mind, it is a process they have perfected over billions of years. Their races were not always separate. There are many among them who wish to return to an earlier time in their history before the immense genetic separation. Both races have put their considerable skills into practice on who they refer to as their ‘younger siblings’, other races within the galaxy who came after them.”

“What did they hope to gain by this process?” Red questioned, still unclear as to the answer.

“A being which could be altered to serve as more than a vessel but would exhibit all the traits necessary to hold and survive the inclusion of both entities in their mind. Admiral Janeway was designed to facilitate this process.”

Red shook her head, unsure if she was truly grasping the concept, “Are you attempting to explain that the Admiral has been bioengineered to do this?”

“Yes.”

“Did it happen when you were both stuck on Sha Ka Ree?”

“No, it occurred before her birth.”

“Hold on,” she said taking a seat in the chair, “are you telling me these entities created Admiral Janeway?”

“In some ways, yes. However, she is not the only species manipulated to serve this purpose, but she is the first who has not died or suffered a form of insanity as a result of the merging. Again, based on my understanding, both entities have been working to create what they consider the ‘perfect’ being. Her parents, without their knowledge, were studied in order to determine if they had the necessary genetic markers that would allow them to create what they needed. Once confirmed, it was a matter of manipulating the combined material into a working prototype, altering her genetic structure while she was in utero to exhibit traits they felt were necessary for their success.

“In all the years I have known Admiral Janeway, she exudes a high level of both perception and intuition, more so than I have observed in most humans, along with a pension for self-sacrifice and an ability to inspire others. It is these combinations of traits that seem to make it possible for her to maintain the balance.”
“And the entity just relayed this to you?” She found all this hard to swallow.

“Not voluntarily. Based on my assessment, it would appear the uniqueness of the Vulcan brain proved to be particularly challenging for the entity to manipulate. It was unable to not only deny me access to its thoughts but memories. I believe this caused a source of frustration for the entity when or if, it ever needed to deploy an exit strategy.”

“What does that mean?” Red wondered aloud.

“Normally, as it leaves a host, a chemical reaction occurs which erases the memories of the experience.”

“So,” Red began, thinking, “you’re saying that because of your brain’s physiology, it was unable to complete this task?”

“That is correct. However, the entity who inhabited my mind was not part of the movement attempting to affect this change, it was trying to prevent it.”

Red nodded, there were still so many unanswered questions. If the dark entity did not wish to rejoin with the entities of light, what were their motives? There was also the matter of Admiral Janeway and the unimaginable power she now wielded. What did they intend to do with this power? Was there anyone who could stop them? A resounding no answered, scaring the hell out of her. And once this was over, if anyone was left alive, would the admiral even remember the experience, or would the memories continue to inhabit her consciousness due to the level of bioengineering Tuvok claims occurred? “I have never known you to be a man given to grandiose tales. However, I’m…” Her thoughts trailed off.

“I understand your trepidation, if I were in your position it would be unwise to accept the information at face value,” He replied, finishing the thought for her, “Regrettably, I am unable to provide the sufficient evidence required to facilitate absolute certainty. I am only left with the veracity to relay the truth as I perceived it.”

She nodded, delaying her final question to him for several moments, attempting to quell the fear of the answer she was likely to receive. “You claim you were able to observe the entities’ thoughts and memories,” Tuvok nodded, “do you know what their motives are for facilitating this conflict?”

He regarded her face carefully, attempting to ascertain if providing the answer would only serve to frighten her further, “Are you certain you wish to know?”

Steeling herself, it had no longer become a question of whether she wanted to know, but needed to, “Yes.”

“If the dark entities are successful, it would precipitate the eradication of all life in the universe, other than their own.”

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Chakotay found himself near a cabin by the river, like the ones he and his father built when he was a boy. He was sitting on a stump trying to catch fish without a pole. Using only a hook, line, and bait. The fast-moving water making it easy to catch a snack.

From inside the house, he heard a squeal of delight, running onto the deck, it was his two-year-old daughter. She was laughing as she tried hiding behind him. Following behind her came a smiling Kathryn Janeway, bent over and gently stomping the ground like she was a monster. “I’m coming
to get you!” She said in her best monster voice.

“Run inside and hide before the monster finds you. Under the bed is always a good place.” Chakotay encouraged. Liking the idea, the girl began running and squealing back inside.

They both shared a laugh and Kathryn straightened up, by his estimates she was about six months pregnant. Stepping forward, he placed a hand on either side of her belly and rubbed. “How are we this morning?” He asked, offering her a kiss, which was accepted. Resting her hands on top of his, she looked down and said. “I can’t believe you talked me into doing this again.”

“As I recall madam, it was you who decided on the second one. I only showed my willingness to assist in the task and was prepared to make as many sacrifices as it took to guarantee success.” She laughed, giving him a light punch on the arm, only making his smile widen. Admiring how she looked in her maternity uniform he commented, “Going into work I see.”

“A Starfleet officers’ duty never ends.”

“I know,” he said, a sudden feeling of melancholy clouding his thoughts.

She touched his cheek, giving it a gentle caress, “What’s wrong honey?”

He looked up into her eyes, “I want this to be real, but it isn’t.”

She offered a quizzical expression, “What do you mean?”

Grasping her hand lightly, he pressed the palm against his cheek. The last thing he wanted was to let go, regardless of how impossible the task, but did, “This is a dream, a fantasy, a stray thought.”

She smiled, “We have a wonderful life together. Isn’t this what you wanted?”

He sighed softly, “Yes, it’s what I wanted.”

Taking his face in her hands, she captured his eyes with her own, “Then enjoy it.” She said, joining his lips with hers.

The manipulation of his feelings both angered and induced an almost overwhelming sadness. He wanted to stay with her like this forever, but it was a lie, one he couldn’t resign himself to. Breaking the kiss, he said, “I’ve had this fantasy off and on for the last few years. It’s so ingrained in my conscious that it seems like a memory.”

Kathryn nodded, “We wanted to give you a moment of peace before the end. Just in case.”

“In case of what?” He questioned warily.

“In case none of you survive. Should you not have at least one beautiful memory to cling to?” She answered.

He knew who he was talking to, the entity, which one he didn’t know, “Yes, and I already have it. I don’t need a fantasy to pacify me into oblivion. Everyone dies, it only matters how we truly lived.”

“And if you never see Kathryn again?” It wondered, genuinely searching his face for the answer.

“Then I never see her again, but I hope that’s not true.”

“We only wish to ease your pain. Provide you with a perfect memory,” It said confused by his reaction to the gift.
“I have plenty of those, but I thank you for thinking of me,” He replied kindly. “If it is fate, destiny, God, that we die or live it’s not always up to us how that happens. The dream must end. I need to face the future with her, if the fantasy comes to fruition then it was meant for us to have it.”

The entity using Kathryn’s form nodded. “We have a question. One which has caused immense confusion and contention among my people.”

They seemed to be masters of everything as far as Chakotay had observed, so the question left him feeling slightly confused. “What question could I answer that is beyond your understanding?”

“What is the purpose of deceit, lies?”

He had a feeling he knew which of the entities he was talking to now. “Many,” he began “some people lie for gain, to avoid punishment, spare another’s feelings, to cause pain in others.”

“Is this the reason you did not tell Admiral Janeway of the death of the Maquis, to cause her pain?” It wondered.

“No!” He replied quickly, “it’s complicated.”

Kathryn’s face gave him a puzzled expression. “Your definitions do not appear complicated.”

He sighed, “I know, but the feelings surrounding them can be,” He took a breath, needing to try and mentally distance himself for a minute before answering. The entity remained patient, waiting for an explanation, “Sometimes a lie can be so closely wrapped in other emotions it’s hard to separate them. Losing them felt as if I had lost my family all over again. We were closer than family, our despair and alienation giving us common ground, bonding us together in ways others couldn’t or wouldn’t understand. It reminded me too much of our situation on Voyager. Growing close to people, caring deeply for them, sharing a common goal. I didn’t lie when I told Kathryn that I couldn’t explain it, that I didn’t have the words. I just didn’t know how to convey that loss without revealing my innermost feelings about her, and what it might do to me if I ever lost her. Revealing anything on that level would have made her uncomfortable, so I kept it hidden.”

“Thank you for your honesty,” The entity replied with a smile, “I think I understand.”

Reaching up, the entity touched its finger to his forehead. Chakotay could feel himself closing his eyes and falling back into a dreamless sleep.

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Harry wasn’t sure what kind of life he would be returning to once this was all over if any of them would live long enough to see it. Over subspace, it wasn’t just the Cardassians and Bajorans who were in the fight, but the Klingon’s, Ferasan’s, Caitians, among others. It was going to be an all-out war in the quadrant, every warp-capable race had a bone to pick with someone, and most of them were gathering at Deep Space Nine. All he wanted was Libby. She was all he ever wanted.

The Admirals ship had stopped just outside of the station as Red and Tuvok exited the ready room.

“Status Purple.” Red questioned.

“We’re at Deep Space Nine.”

“How long before the Cardassians arrive?”

“Approximately two hours.”
“The Admiral is hailing us, audio-only.” Yellow announced.

“Open a channel,” Red ordered and waited for the announcing beeps. “Admiral, we’re ready. What do you need us to do?”

“Bring all the Maquis on board Voyager, you’re going to need them. I’m docking with the station so Chakotay can disembark.”

“Understood.”

“It’s about time,” Red turned to look behind her, it was Benjamin Sisko, a relieved smile gracing his lips. “I was beginning to think you’d abandoned us, Admiral.”

“There was some unfinished business I had to take care of. Sorry I couldn’t leave you a note.” Her voice sounded slightly playful.

“As long as you found your way home that’s all that matters. However, we’ve got more trouble than we’ve bargained for on the way. I hope you have a plan.”

“Just making it up as I go along,” a smile in her voice, “However, there’s something I need to do before the Cardassians, and the other ships arrive. I’ll return shortly, Janeway out.”

Sisko looked to Tuvok who only raised an eyebrow. Red, Purple, and Yellow all had a knowing smile on their lips. “She’s kidding right?” He asked slightly alarmed by her response.

Standing, Purple stopped to place a hand on his shoulder as he made his way toward the turbolift, “One thing I’ve learned about Admiral Janeway, is that she always has a plan, even if you don’t know what it is.” Giving a laugh, he headed out.

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“Grey!” Harry called, waving him over. Seeing him, Chakotay returned the wave, heading toward him. When he was within reach, the men gave each other a friendly hug in greeting with a clap on the back. “So, what was it like?” Harry asked as they started walking back to Voyager’s docking port.

“What was what like?” He asked genuinely confused.

“You know, the Admiral’s ship,” He acted like a kid on Christmas.

Understanding dawned on Chakotay’s face, and he gave a laugh, “I don’t know.”

Now it was Harry who seemed confused, “You were there? What do you mean you don’t know?”

When they stopped just outside Voyager’s docking port, Chakotay looked Harry in the eye, “I wasn’t allowed to see it. They put me to sleep.”

“Are you kidding me?” Harry said it more as a statement than an actual question.

“No, would have been something though.”

Harry nodded. “It’s good having you back. Voyager wouldn’t be the same without you.”

“I think you have it covered. Red is a capable leader, with you riding shotgun Voyager will be unstoppable.”
He seemed taken back, “You’re not coming with us?”

“I’m staying on Deep Space Nine. Someone has to help Colonel Kira with the defense of this place. I’ll be offering my expertise in that department.”

Harry seemed disappointed but understood. Offering his hand, Chakotay took it and gave it a couple of pumps. “Give them hell Grey.”

“You too,” He said with a smile and watched him until he disappeared behind the docking port door.

***

It took no time for the entities ship to arrive in orbit of what used to be the Caitians homeworld. There was sadness here, despair, fear as several billion voices cried out in terror and were suddenly silenced. They could not bring them back; nothing was left to reanimate. However, they could reshape this baron rock into a thriving living planet.

The artifact could be used to create life, as well as destroy it. This was the only relic left of its kind in the known universe, created when they themselves were an infant species. This power came to them at a time when their own race was in turmoil, during the immense genetic separation. War had consumed them for a time, constructing weapons and ships based on the relics design and capabilities. Once the war had ended, the artifact seemed to disappear as mysteriously as it arrived.

Their species, split by power, genetic alterations, ideology, went off in search of it. Each side attempting to follow it’s call wherever that may lead. One side wanting to harness it’s power, the other wishing to remove its influence entirely. Some tired of the search, longing to return home and end the savagery of war, others continued the hunt, giving themselves over to their obsession. Throwing themselves with abandon to its unquenchable thirst.

Light encompassed the planet, seedlings began to sprout and grow, spreading across the landscape. Water returned to the oceans, seas, lakes, and rivers. Trees, lush and full of color, filling in the spots which were baron. The entities knew this power would awaken the others and refocus the hunt, only this time, they would determine the battlefield.
If You’re Going Through Hell, Keep Going

The Cardassians jumped into the system, without so much as the courtesy of a hail, they began to open fire on the Bajoran ships, including Deep Space Nine and Bajor itself. Voyager and the Leonidas attempted to redirect their fire, trying to buy time for the Admiral’s return and the Bajorans to implement a counterstrike. None had dreamed they would dare attack the planet from orbit.

Inside the station, security had problems of their own. Breeching pods had been launched by the Cardassian ships, passing through the shields and burning into the hull. Fighting had erupted, sickbay was being overloaded with casualties.

Chakotay’s team had just arrived when the first breach occurred. The Cardassians began shooting indiscriminately, killing two of his team and several civilians before they’d gotten a chance to take up a defensive position. Trying to give the rest of his team time to find cover, he pushed himself against the wall, making his way forward. Once he was close enough, he raised the plasma shotgun and fired, immediately blowing off the head of the unfortunate Cardassian. He managed to get two more before releasing the shotgun, it fell to the length of its tether. Pushing it back, he drew his obsidian blades and without hesitation, plunged them into the neck of the Cardassian stepping out of the smoking hole. Cover fire had been established, forcing the Cardassians into a defensive position.

Voyager swooped down, its ablative armor easily deflecting any weapons fire as it charged the Cardassian line, forcing them out of their tight formation. The Leonidas followed, dropping antimatter mines. After a few seconds, the mines began to move toward the closest targets, once they impacted, the containment field within the mines collapsed, annihilating the hull and resulting in an instant explosion. Three of the Cardassian fleet fell.

Other ships began to warp into range, creating a battle on two fronts. The Klingon’s and Ferasan ships began to fire on Voyager, the Leonidas but ignored the station. A rogue blast from a fallen Cardassian Warship impacted with the hull. Colonel Kira Nerys, along with everyone on board, were knocked off their feet as the inertial dampeners went offline. Managing to hold onto the rail, a few Bajoran expletives left her lips as she pulled herself toward the panel, straining to reach the controls that would allow her to switch to backup systems.

Her fingers didn’t feel long enough to accomplish the task. She could see Morrissey out of the corner of her eye, he was trying to do the same thing. She could feel herself sliding down the handrail, her arms losing strength. It was only a matter of time before they would let go, even her considerable will would not make them hang on forever. Suddenly, her feet began to find solid ground, her arms developing a temporary ache as the blood began rushing back to her fingers. Looking up it was Morrissey; he’d managed to access the console. “If we live through this, remind me to send a recommendation to Starfleet requesting your promotion.”

He smiled, a welcome sight on his sweat-stained face, “Is there anything else I can do for you, Colonel?”

A mischievous smile spread across her lips, “Can you arrange a back rub and a bottle of Kanar, 2236?”

“I’m afraid I can only perform one miracle at a time, I’ll let you know when I can walk on water,” he said with a soft laugh, offering her a hand and pulling her to her feet.
Her smile widened, “As you were Lieutenant.”

Voyager and the Leonidas had fast become outnumbered and outgunned. The Bajorans were scattered, trying to stop the Cardassians from sending orbital strikes against their homeworld and failing. Another group of ships warped in to join the fight, the Caitians, their ships headed straight for the Ferasan and Klingon ships, creating an unintentional buffer zone between the Cardassians and the Bajorans, preventing them from getting a good lock on the planet. Modified shuttles were launched from both Deep Space Nine, Bajor, and the Caitians, each pursuing different targets.

The battle inside the station continued to escalate. Some of the breeching pods had been cleared but not all, Chakotay found himself having to rush to the next pod once the previous one had been secured. It was taking time he didn’t have to waste as innocent civilians continued to be murdered without order and without a goal. He found himself having to reload the plasma shotgun several times, using it without mercy on the invading Cardassians.

In one instance, he was forced to use the body of a dead Cardassian as cover in order to get close enough to the breech to throw a plasma grenade into the pod. Once they realized what it was, the Cardassians attempted to flee but were ready with melee weapons. It had been a while since they were forced to fight on the defensive, usually having dominated their enemy due to the use of less than acceptable weapons and means.

Chakotay wasn’t Starfleet anymore, he was a Wraith, and they knew how to play dirty, having their own standards of conduct. When the explosion happened inside the pod, many people had been thrown to the ground by the blast, himself included. Forcing him to almost drop his obsidian blades on more than one occasion. Using the cover afforded to him, he made his way through the seriously injured, regardless of who they were. He saw a small Bajoran child lying motionless amongst the rest.

As Chakotay bent down to check their pulse, one of the injured Cardassians lifted himself up, sword in hand he reached out and thrust it into his back. Chakotay turned automatically, ramming his blades into the neck of the Cardassian without a second thought before finding himself dropping to his knees and falling unwillingly forward onto his face. He lay there, unable to move his legs, having suddenly gone numb.

“We got more dropping in,” Morrissey announced.

“Who is it?” Colonel Kira asked as she continued to shoot any Cardassian who was foolish enough to try and enter the command deck.

The man’s face turned white as he stared at the readings, unable to reconcile the information he was seeing, “It’s…impossible.”

“Don’t make me ask again,” Kira said in annoyance, exchanging fire between sentences.

“It has a Cardassian signature. According to these readings, there are two ships, each large enough to cover half of Bajor. It’s got enough firepower that it could destroy half the planet in one volley.”

Kira’s face paled at the news. Her mind racing to try and come up with a solution, finding she was empty. “How do you mount a defense against something that large?” She thought desperately.

“More ships are dropping in,” he continued, “Federation.” He sounded almost relieved until he noticed what they were doing. “They’re keeping their distance, staying out of the fight.”

“What? Open a channel,” Kira ordered. “This is Colonel Kira Nerys, Commander of Deep Space
Nine. We need your assistance.” When no one replied, she looked back at Morrissey.

“They hear us, they’re just choosing not to reply.” He answered in disbelief.

Voyager and the Leonidas continued to try and take out the Cardassian, Klingon’s, and Ferasan weapon systems, but they were hard-pressed to do so. They needed more ships, and right now the only allies who weren’t occupied elsewhere were the Caitians, and they seemed to be having problems of their own between the Klingon’s and Ferasans. With their ablative armor almost gone, there wouldn’t be much more they could do to stop them. Voyager would be overtaken by the two capital ships, their other allies soon to follow as the Federation sat quietly out of range.

Everything was falling apart, as hard as they fought to defend themselves the fight was not to be theirs. Deep Space Nine was on the verge of complete anarchy, and there wasn’t much anyone could do to stop it. Most of the Bajoran ships had been destroyed, and the Caitians numbers and strength were no match for the Klingon’s, much less the Ferasans and the Klingon’s united. The Cardassian capital ships were reaching optimal firing range on Bajor, the bright red buildup of energy emanating from their ships would be ready to bring destruction soon.

Seven felt there was only one choice left to her. She couldn’t take out both ships, but she could ram one, if nothing else, it would at least give the Bajorans a fighting chance at survival. Harry felt numbed by the decision, all he could think of was Libby, and how once again the universe was cruelly taking her away again even as his fingers tapped in the commands, preparing for ramming speed.

It took a moment before Libby realized what Voyager was planning to do. Their ship had been lucky to make it as far as they had. She would mimic their movements and prepare the Leonidas to ram the second capital ship. To increase their chances, she ordered the last ten antimatter mines to be deployed behind them. She’d guessed that once they were in position, she would need about twenty seconds to reach full impulse, on twenty-two, the mines would activate and attach themselves to the ship, adding another layer of damage to the explosion, hoping it would be more than enough to ensure success, even though she wouldn’t be alive to see it.

Chakotay could only lay paralyzed as he saw his comrades falling around him. He was having trouble staying conscious, thinking he was going to die. A stillness seemed to accompany the knowledge. The only thought that kept going through his mind was his conversation with the entity when it asked him about not seeing Kathryn again, remembering his response he didn’t feel as confident. It was one more thing he could add to his list of regrets. He heard a voice he recognized Tal Celes, better known as Maroon.

“Grey, help is coming. You have to stay awake,” she demanded, exuding an authority which always lay within, but never realizing was there. He tried to comply, tried to keep his eyes from closing. He wanted it more than anything, knowing that once they closed, they might never open again. Suddenly he felt alert, the pupils of his eyes dilating to twice their normal size.

The light was too bright, all colors morphed together as if he were looking through a kaleidoscope. He could hear her grunting as if the action being performed was putting her under great strain. The sound of a pulse blast flew past his ear, uncomfortably close. She cried out enraged just before something wet hit the side of his face, forcing his eyes to close, a reactionary impulse. Then, as if she’d never left, knelt down beside him. “Sorry about that,” she said breathing heavily, using a piece of nearby fabric to wipe the liquid from his eyes, “I injected you with a stim. It should keep you conscious for a while. Besides, Admiral Janeway would murder me if I let anything happen to you,” there was a smile in her voice, but he couldn’t see it.

“Maroon, thank you,” he said, the numbness in his body had spread further than he realized. There
was nothing he could feel from the neck down but said nothing.

“We’ll get through this, don’t worry, you’re going to be alright,” she tried to assure him, but deep down, knew it wasn’t true.

“Something is coming through the wormhole,” Morrissey said, sounding more resigned to the situation.

Kira recognized that tone immediately, having felt it herself many times in the past. She moved over to him, the fighting had died down in the area, giving everyone a chance to breathe. “How many?”

He looked pensive, unsure. “Hard to say, not picking up any specific readings yet.”

The wormhole opened; a swarm of ships began to pour out. The large white glowing ships with their constantly shifting geometry, tentacles lashing at the darkness made their way to the fight. Behind the row of Federation ships came a wave of distortion. Against the backdrop of space, it was impossible to distinguish any discernible shape until they were closer. Another ship arrived, it’s dimensions and colors an amalgamation of both ships, flew toward the opposing fleet.

“Sorry I’m late,” Admiral Janeway said, after establishing contact with Voyager.

“Better late than never,” Sisko replied, “Do you think you can do something about the Cardassian capital ships?”

“Already on it,” She assured, then opened up her com to the fleet, “Move your ships away to a safe distance, we’ll protect the station and Bajor.”

Abandoning their original plans, Voyager, the Leonidas, Bajorans, and Caitians began to move away. Leaving the fight to the Admiral’s fleet. As soon as the entities ships began to fire on the capital ships they went down effortlessly, giving the remaining Cardassian’s, Klingon’s, and Ferasan’s pause, ceasing their fire almost immediately. Janeway’s ship stopped between the inevitable clash of the opposing entities as if she were waiting for something.

Fleet Admiral David Clayton stood up, staring at her ship with animosity. Then he felt it, the artifact, making him forget her momentarily as he felt himself being drawn toward its power. This is what he needed, what he had been searching for. If they could not possess the key, they would possess the relic, even if he had to take it by force. “Fire on that ship!” He demanded. Surprised, the crew looked to each other, uncomfortable with the order.

“Sir, her ship hasn’t taken any action against us,” Captain William Riker reminded.

He turned to the man, seething, “I’m giving you an order Captain.”

Riker’s face turned to stone; he had gone along with this charade long enough. Standing, he pulled his weapon and aimed it at the Admiral, “I stood by and watched as you allowed a Federation outpost to be shot to hell. I even stood by, knowing I should have acted sooner when those Cardassian capital ships began firing on Bajor. I will have to live with that. But I will not continue to stand idle while you take out some personal vendetta on Admiral Janeway, regardless of the threat you claim she is.”

“You are relieved of duty Captain!” He spat venomously, “Take him to the brig!” No one moved, no one wanted to, they all knew this was wrong. “Cowards!” He screamed.

Through his open mouth, something black – like a swarm of bees, shot forth with surprising force,
making Riker scramble backward. The swarm hung in the air for a moment over the Fleet Admiral as his body dropped to the ground before making its exit through the bulkhead.

“Lieutenant Capel, open a channel to the fleet,” Riker ordered. Once he received the go-ahead he continued, “This is Captain William T. Riker of the Federation Starship Titan, you’ve got trouble. Some kind of entity left Fleet Admiral Clayton’s body and is headed your direction.”

Admiral Janeway was the one who answered, “Acknowledged Captain, get your ships to a safe distance.” Inside the vessel, she pulled the silver and gold sword from her back, the swirling mass inside the artifact sped up. Her eyes, began to glow, an intermix of black and gold. Pointing her sword into the face of death. She had hoped to lure them here, forcing a confrontation, and they had taken the bait.

A pulse emanated from her ship, sending out a shockwave, stopping time temporarily. Everything within two light-years stood still, unnaturally frozen. The sword felt heavier, taking all her focus to control it. Another pulse was released, opening the rift that would encompass the black fleet, causing them to fly into it once time resumed normal function, sending them to a space between galaxies where their influence and lust for power could not reach the living again. Beads of perspiration clung to her skin; she was tiring. Releasing the last pulse, time was restored.

The black fleet, unable to stop, flew into the rift. Several seconds later, the portal closed behind them. It had captured all but one. She could see him coming. As sand runs through a sieve, the dark entity poured himself onto her ship. Reforming into a solid mass, it held up its silver sword, pointing it at her in rage. “You will use the key and undo what you have done,” it spoke directly to the entities living inside Janeway, “or I will kill her.”

“We cannot brother, this must end. We have tried to reason with you, end the war, but you have persisted. Do not make us kill you. Come with us, we can start over,” the woman pleaded, slowly offering him her hand.

“No! The war is not over until we control the artifact, until all life is extinguished. We will bring a new balance, create a new life that shares our vision of perfection,” he countered before swinging his blade. Attempting to take Janeway’s head off. Wings of light and dark fluttered, using them to maneuver throughout the large space. Janeway and the entities inside her would fight to the death if necessary to keep this power out of its hands.

The artifact had the power to destroy and well as create life. If she used the power of life on this dark brother, Janeway surmised two outcomes. It would either kill him or change him. Using the last of her strength, she aimed at him, infusing him with white light. He held up his sword, attempting to block the beam. Although powerful, his sword was no match for the artifact’s power. It vaporized, forcing an anguished cry past his lips as the light hit him full force. He willed himself against it, attempting to flee but finding no escape. Focusing the beam to the point of exhaustion, she found she no longer had the strength to wield it and dropped to the floor. The two entities inside Janeway’s head had merged into one, it was the only way they could hope to survive in the new era. Leaving her body, she approached her brother as he rose to his feet. He had indeed been changed, the light infusing pureness within in him he hadn’t felt in several billion years.

He could see all the missing pieces denied to him, of their home, of the artifact's influence and power. How it had corrupted him to carry out its will. “The artifact must be taken out of reach, where its influence can never be used to harm another.” A consensus after so many long and wasted years, had come to pass, “What of her?” The brother indicated to Janeway, “Take her with us?”

“No, the woman said, she will be needed to help pick up the pieces. There is also a mate she
wishes to return to.”

“What of the fetus?” He asked, knowing it had been touched by the artifact’s power.

“She is aware of its presence.” If the child possesses any power, it will be able to choose its own path, much the same way any of our younger siblings do. Until now, the fetus has been held in suspension. She is free from our influence, and the fetus now grows within her.”

“I hope you are right sister. However, only time will tell.”

She gave a nod before placing a hand on his shoulder, “Shall we finally return home.” He agreed. “Once we have returned Admiral Janeway to Deep Space Nine, we will return through the celestial temple. If they are smart and do not kill themselves, they may be enlightened enough to join us one day.”

“Until then, we watch and wait.”

Sending a signal to the other ships, each of them turned toward the wormhole. Leaving this quadrant for what could be the last time. Janeway had been transported to the station, just outside of sickbay. Benjamin Sisko had been giving his thanks to all those who believed in the cause and chose to help, despite their misgivings, over local subspace. Just as he finished, he shimmered out of view, joining the last ship as it entered the wormhole.

The other races were still counting their losses. Captain Riker approached the station, Fleet Admiral Clayton was in sickbay, receiving treatment. He offered to help with the recovery efforts and did his best to establish a temporary peace until diplomats could be dispatched to help sort through the information and get to the bottom of the assassinations. It wouldn’t take long to discover how involved the black fleet was duplicitous in every massacre in an attempt to create a full-scale war. Negotiating a new peace would be difficult, but in time, it would be accomplished.

Janeway was found and moved to a bed in sickbay, she was unconscious but alive. It didn’t take Doctor Bashir long to discover that the Admiral was simply suffering from exhaustion, and was moved to her quarters to rest, making space for more serious cases. On the other hand, Chakotay was placed in an induced coma until Bashir could determine the level of damage to his spinal cord. He had stopped the internal bleeding, performed minor triage to stabilize his condition. Once the swelling went down, he would then consider surgery to repair the damage to his spine. However, there was a good chance he might never walk again.
Kathryn awoke with a moan, feeling an ache in her limbs. As she lay staring at the ceiling, allowing her eyes to focus, noticed something had changed within her. The entities had kept their promise, the war was over, and they were gone, her thoughts and actions were now hers alone. She remembered everything.

It had been a struggle to accept many of the things she’d learned over her time with them, especially about herself. It still bothered her in many ways to discover how her DNA had been manipulated – even though the DNA used still belonged to both her parents, but reconfigured to serve another’s purpose, causing her to wonder who she might have been had they not interfered. In the end, it didn’t change anything. She couldn’t imagine being anyone other than herself.

Her thoughts wandered to her unborn child and how her time with the entities might have changed him or her. From that one night of passion, she became pregnant, did the entity have something to do with that too? Some questions would always continue to remain open-ended.

She knew Chakotay would be thrilled to learn about the baby. Thinking back to that first night they were together, how she finally admitted her feelings for him. He had told her he wanted to have a child with her someday, now it appeared he would be getting his wish. However, it left her wondering about their future. She was a Starfleet Admiral, he was a Wraith, and the quadrant found itself once again in a very precarious and uncertain moment in time. Later she would have to face those challenges with him, but right now she needed to know he was alright.

Pushing herself out of bed, she took a shower before putting on a clean uniform. Sliding the door open to the living area, she was surprised to see a face she hadn’t seen in so long. “Doctor,” she greeted with a smile, despite the fact he was sitting in her living room. She could see the smile he returned was half-hearted, causing that same phaser blast to erupt in her gut, “Something’s wrong.”

“I apologize for the intrusion. However, I felt it was important I be here when you awoke. Please, have a seat Admiral.”

Without protest, she found herself moving to sit across from him, her body oddly numb. “What’s wrong?”

He withheld his reply, knowing that the information he possessed would cause her pain. “There’s a problem with Chakotay.”

Her mind became hyper-focused as she stared into his face as if she could read his mind. “What kind of problem?”

“He’s paralyzed from the waist down. During the battle, one of the Cardassians stabbed him while his back was turned, severing the spine in the Lumber region between the L2 and L3 vertebrae.”

She could hear the words but didn’t want to accept it. Right now, she needed to know everything. “What’s the treatment?”

The Evolution of Life
“There’s a lot of swelling. We’ll have to wait and see the precise condition of the nerve endings and his spinal cord once it goes down. As to a course of treatment, we won’t know until then.”

“We?”

“Doctor Julian Bashir, he’s the chief medical officer. Highly skilled,” he reached out a hand and placed it on hers, “I know the news is grim, but Grey is strong. Whatever the entity did to rejuvenate his body’s age will only serve to help him.”

“Grey?”

He didn’t seem to understand her question at first, then he remembered. “Ahh yes. That’s his name in the Wraiths, everyone is referred to by a color, helping to protect their identity.”

She nodded, “When can I see him?”

“As soon as you like,” she started to get up, but his voice stopped her, “There are a couple of other things we should discuss first.” Retaking her seat she waited for him to continue. “He is showing signs of depression – which is perfectly normal given the circumstances. Please keep this in mind when you see him. It’s entirely possible he will attempt to make life-altering decisions, perhaps try to end your relationship. It’s important not to let him, regardless of any personal feelings you may have until he’s in a better place.”

“Doctor,” she began, her eyes locking with his so there would be no misunderstanding, “Please believe me when I tell you, I am hopelessly and unabashedly in love with him. Nothing can change that,” It wasn’t until she said it aloud, admitted the information freely how perfectly natural it sounded and felt.

He smiled, happy to hear it, “Good, he’s going to need you more than he ever has. However, I would make one recommendation if I may,” she indicated he continue, “I wouldn’t tell him about the baby just yet. Give him time to deal with the shock of the injury first.”

She sat upright in the chair, stunned, “Did you scan me while I was asleep?”

“No, I noticed it in Doctor Bashir’s report when you were brought to sickbay. I reviewed the scans he took of you in more detail; however, I would like to reexamine you at a later date to run further tests.”

Relaxing a bit, she found herself needing to be reassured, at least temporarily if their child was alright. “You said you reviewed the scans, and I need to know…” she trailed off, afraid as to what the question might reveal.

The corners of his lips turned up, widening into a reassuring smile. “Your baby, from what I could tell is healthy with no abnormalities.” She could feel her lips stretching into a smile, relieved for the moment, “Thanks to the entity you are in perfect health and of optimum childbearing age, I don’t foresee any problems.”

“Thank you, and I’ll be sure to keep the information to myself as you suggested for now.”

He nodded, “I’ll give you some time with Chakotay before I run any further tests on you and the baby. I’m sure I’ll know where to find you,” he added knowingly.

“There is something I want you to help me arrange for later when Chakotay is better. It might seem strange.”
He held up a hand, “Compared to what all of us have been through over the last eight years, especially if you consider recent events, strange is just another day at the office.”

They shared a laugh as the sound of her door chime rang. “Enter,” she called. When the door opened, it was Admiral Picard. Janeway and the Doctor stood up to greet him.

“I’ll speak to you later Admiral,” he said to Janeway before heading toward the door, “White,” he acknowledged before exiting the room.

“Green,” Picard returned before turning to look at Admiral Janeway, the door closing behind him.

“Admiral Picard, please have a seat,” she said indicating the sofa where the Doctor had just been sitting. Taking it, she asked heading for the replicator. “Coffee? Tea?”

“Earl Grey, hot.”

Replicating their drinks, she returned to the chair, handing him his tea before taking the seat across from him, a coffee in her hands. “How can I help you, Admiral?”

“Please, call me Jean-Luc.”

“As long as you call me Kathryn.”

He nodded, allowing silence to fill the space for a moment, taking a sip of his tea before speaking. “I know you must be anxious to visit Grey, or Chakotay as you know him. He is a good man and a fierce warrior, I’m sure he’ll recover.”

“So, you are aware of his condition?”

“Oh yes,” he said setting down his cup of tea on the table beside him, “It’s my business to know, along with things others would like to keep hidden.”

She regarded him curiously, “What are you saying, Jean-Luc?”

“I have been made aware of the bio-engineering done to you. Fascinating and yet, terrifying.” She looked as though she were going to protest, explain, but he cut her short, “Your secret is safe Kathryn, no one will learn of this,” she appeared relieved as he stood up, “Starfleet Command has reached out to me, asking me to return.”

“And what have you decided?”

“I have my reasons for leaving the fleet in the first place, but now it’s become clear as to who was behind it. Now that they are gone, I may consider their offer. When you have some free time, I would like to discuss a working relationship. Other than a few of my former officers, you appear to be the only Admiral I can trust. I believe this could work to our advantage.”

She nodded in agreement, “I would like that too.”

“Give Grey my best,” he said before leaving.

“I will,” setting down the cup, she exited her quarters behind him.

***

Harry couldn’t wait to see Libby, especially now that all-out war had been averted. It wasn’t too long ago that certain decisions almost prevented their reunion. Had it not been for Admiral
Janeway and her fleet, they would be dead.

They decided to meet for dinner at Morn’s, the restaurant and casino which moved in after Quark left. Named after the Lurian who’d spent so much time there. His epitaph over the bar read “The life of the party”.

He was nervous, which was not an unfamiliar feeling when she was the focus of his thoughts. He’d ordered a bottle of champagne and two glasses to celebrate their living through it. Seeing her enter, he waved her over to the table and pulled out her seat. She looked beautiful, just as he always remembered. Retaking his own seat, he began to pour the champagne. “A toast,” she picked up her glass, “to life.”

Gently clinking their glasses, she noticed something odd in hers. Looking closer, it was a ring. She nearly knocked over the glass in surprise. Harry smiled and used a fork to reach in and retrieve it. Getting down on one knee he said, “Libby, would you do me the honor of becoming my wife?” She said nothing, only stared at him in shock, “I’ve loved you for a long time, and even though we’d been separated for many years, my feelings for you now have only strengthened over time. I don’t want to go on without you. Please say yes.”

She hated this, the tears welling up in her eyes, desperately she blinked them back. As much as she tried to forget him, move on, never really could. Once he got under her skin, she was unable to let go completely. “Yes,” she said softly, not even realizing she’d said anything.

Smiling a wide smile, he placed the ring on her finger and pulled her up to her feet to take her into his arms. Kissing her gently, applause erupted around them, along with cheering. They had forgotten where they were for a moment. Harry pulled her closer, kissing her with all the passion he felt, which she happily returned.

Regardless of the situation, Libby had already given her resignation to the Wraiths, wanting to try and find a piece of happiness now that the immediate threat had been eliminated. Now, she was beyond happy to finally have the one person she’d always wanted to share it with.

***

Red had no idea why she was being summoned to White’s quarters, being given no indication as to any reason why it would be necessary. Ringing the chime, the door opened. Inside, White sat in a comfortable chair, reading a data padd, a cup of Earl Grey close at hand. Looking up he acknowledged, “Ahh Red, please have a seat, there’s something I’d like to discuss.”

Nervous, but trying not to show it, she took the seat he offered. “How can I be of assistance White?” She asked, trying to appear at ease, professional.

“It appears there are a few of our merry band who will be leaving us soon.”

“I understand.”

“Do you have any such plans?”

She hadn’t really thought about it, keeping herself busy. “Are you encouraging me to consider another alternative?”

“No,” he said with a wave of his hand, “What I’m attempting to ascertain are your plans for the future if you have any.”

“Not at this time. I am content to remain with the Wraiths unless you deem my abilities
unsatisfactory.”

“That’s what I like about you Red, always to the point,” He commented with a smile, “I find you more than sufficient, in fact, I would like you to be my new right hand.”

She seemed confused. “Are you disassociating yourself from Black?”

“She has submitted her resignation to me. For the last three years, she has been my right hand, someone I’ve come to trust implicitly. The war, the subterfuge, extensive recon missions have left her feeling burned out. She needs to find something new, and I understand it. However, it does leave a huge set of shoes to fill. Ones that I feel you would be more than qualified to inhabit. That is if you want the job.”

This was something she did not expect, much less consider. Did she want to continue with the organization? For the last year, it’s all she’s been familiar with, and she did enjoy working behind the scenes, giving her a level of anonymity, she’s never experienced before. It would also give her a new way of life, one that didn’t revolve around her confusing feelings for Chakotay. With Admiral Janeway back in his life, it was more likely he would leave the Wraiths, even if he hadn’t been severely injured. It was selfish on her part she knew, but it was the best solution for everyone. “Yes, I’ll accept the position.”

Smiling he said, “Good, I’ll be leaving Deep Space Nine in a few days once I work out some details with Starfleet Command and Admiral Janeway.”

“White?”

“The fleet have asked me to return to service, and I’ve decided to accept. I believe that forming an alliance with Admiral Janeway will give us both a mutual advantage, including the intelligence we’ll receive from the Wraiths. You will be responsible for reporting to both of us. Is that going to be a problem for you?”

“No, I don’t foresee any issues.”

“Glad to hear it. While we’re still here, take some time off along with the other Wraiths. You’ve earned it as much as anyone.”

“I will, thank you.”

“That will be all Red.”

She nodded and left his quarters. Although he didn’t know it, she did find the idea of working with the Admiral again uncomfortable, especially after what she’d done on Voyager. Eventually, she would have to find a way to reconcile it.

***

Kathryn entered sickbay, unsure of his reaction to her presence. Spotting him, he appeared to be asleep. Taking the seat beside him, she put her hand on his. Almost immediately his eyes opened at her touch. Turning his head, he saw Kathryn staring back at him, a gentle loving smile gracing her lips. Raising her hand, she stood up and leaned forward to caress his cheek before giving him a soft kiss on the lips. “How are you feeling?”

She’d noticed the smile he returned seemed forced, “As though I’ve been stabbed in the back and left to die.”
There was no humor there, only a bitterness he was trying to hide. Retaking her seat, she took his hand in hers again. “I’ve missed you.”

“I’ve missed you too,” but his expression didn’t show it. She could tell he was angry, frightened, hurt, in pain, and entirely uncertain as to how the rest of his life would play out if he remained paralyzed. “The chances are good that I might never walk again. Once I leave here, I’ll need to see about having an in-home nurse.”

“Chakotay, we’ll worry about that if it happens. It’s still too soon to know how bad the damage really is,” she assured.

“I can’t feel my legs, Kathryn,” He started punching his thigh with his fist as hard as he could, as if she needed a physical demonstration, “how much more do I need to understand?”

“Stop it,” she said trying to grasp his wrists, “you’ll only injure yourself further.”

He released a mocking laugh, “Injure myself further huh? What damage would that be? I can’t feel anything from the waist down!”

She attempted to calm him, his voice drawing unwanted attention. Taking his face in her hands she stared into his eyes. “I don’t pretend to know what you’re going through, but I understand your anger and fear of it. This type of injury would be devastating to anyone, but we’re going to get through this, together. I love you too much to let you suffer alone. They’ll be good and bad days, and I will be here through all of it, no matter how long it takes. And if you’re unable to walk again I will take care of you because that’s what you do when you love someone.”

There was a hint of tears in his eyes. “Even if I’m only half a man?”

“You’ve been many things my love, but that’s something you’ll never be.”

“You’re saying that if it came down to it you would give up your career to care for me.”

“I’d give up damn near anything for you,” She took a breath, “Is my career important to me? Yes, but compared to you and our life together there’s no choice. I’d choose you every time.”

He turned his face away. “You say that now, but when it starts to get too hard you’ll be gone.”

“Look at me,” she said turning his face back to hers, the tears extremely evident in his eyes, matching her own, “When have you ever seen me give up on something because it’s hard?” No reply came, “That’s right, never. You are stuck with me for life, so I would suggest you make peace with it.”

Chakotay closed his eyes, not wanting to talk anymore. He was angry all right, scared, all the things she’d said. He didn’t know how to reconcile this in his mind. He seemed to go to extremes when any emotion came forth, and he didn’t know how to stop himself from surrendering to it. He tried to turn away from her completely, but the pain in his spine sent him screaming out in agony.

Doctor Bashir rushed over to see what the problem was. “What happened?” He queried, scanning him with a medical tricorder.

“He tried to turn onto his side,” Kathryn explained, and he nodded.

Preparing a shot, he placed the hypospray to his neck and injected the contents. “That should help him sleep for a while, keep him from moving,” He explained, “I don’t believe we’ve met Admiral…?”
“Kathryn Janeway. Chakotay and I are a couple,” she added knowing it would be his next question.

“I see, it’s a pleasure to finally meet you. Please, if you’d like to come with me I’d be happy to discuss his latest scans.” She nodded and followed him into his office. Offering her a seat, he took the one behind his desk and began searching for something. “I apologize, Admiral, it’s been an extremely hectic couple of days.”

She held up a hand, “No need to explain Doctor, I understand.”

As he bent down behind the desk, she heard him mutter, “Bugger,” making her raise an eyebrow. Then the next there was a bang and a cry of pain.

“Are you alright?” Janeway asked.

Pulling back out from under the desk he rubbed his head with one hand, a data padd in the other. “I’m sorry you had to see that Admiral. I’m not usually this scattered or clumsy.” She would have to take his word for it. Activating the terminal, he turned it toward her so they could both see the data. “This is the first scan I took of Chakotay; you can see the damage to his vertebrae, spinal column, lumbar muscles, the Ascending Colon. At the time I had to repair the damage to the Ascending Colon, due to internal bleeding. Being a triage situation, he was no longer in danger of dying so I had to move on.” He brought up the second set of scans he took earlier today. “Much of the swelling has reduced so I was able to get a better scan. The spinal cord has been completely severed. We could attempt to repair the vertebrae and the spinal cord piece by piece, but it would be a patch job at best. He might regain some feeling in his legs, but it would be intermittent.”

The tears she was attempting to hold back were beginning to fall. “There has to be some hope of a cure Doctor. Something that would give him a chance at a normal life.”

“That’s why I wanted to speak to you. The Doctor and I have been talking about a technique he discovered during our research. There is a neuro specialist by the name of Doctor Sara Russell who developed an experimental spinal replacement treatment called Genetronic Replication several years ago. There was only once species trial, a Klingon, due to their backup organ redundancies, they were able to survive and make a full recovery. Since then, further research has been made in this field. Another neuro specialist by the name of Doctor Kenneth Ingram based on his research the studies have increased the chances of success from thirty-seven percent to eighty-one percent in human trials. Granted, it’s not perfect, but it’s the best chance he’s got.”

It was a lot to take in. “What would be the prognosis?”

He sighed, “I’m not going to lie to you Admiral, there’s a lot of things that could go wrong. Best case scenario he would make a full recovery.”

She didn’t want to know but had to ask. “And the worst?”

“He could die,” he could see this was painful, and it was an impossible decision, “I think it would be better to take some time to think it over, study the research. If you feel the risks are too great we don’t have to mention this option. In the meantime, Counselor Deanna Troi from the Titan has offered her services to anyone who needs them. Perhaps it might be a good idea to discuss them over with her.”

“I’ll take that into consideration. Thank you,” Janeway replied, trying to once again pull herself together. The choices were impossible, the options limited. She couldn’t bear to lose him, not after everything, but at the same time, the acceptance of the injury would change him as well, making him more bitter, resentful. Counseling could help the situation if he was willing, but she couldn’t
see him making the effort just yet. Perhaps talking to Counselor Troi would give her another perspective she couldn’t see right now.
The Universe is Indifferent

Kathryn Janeway was nearing her wit's end. She had tried speaking with Counselor Troi about Chakotay’s condition, had hoped she would be able to offer further insights, but there were no easy answers, only a discussion as to what to expect from him. Upon further urging, Kathryn tried to get Deanna to speak with Chakotay with extremely limited success. He was too angry, scared, insecure to get to the heart of any of the feelings that threatened to tear him apart. He could be just as stubborn as she was.

Thoughts kept going around in her head. How do you get someone to accept that you’re not going anywhere? That you have made the commitment to stay by their side and be believed? His pain continued to linger just below the surface, always on the defensive. She loved him, needed him, but somehow it wasn’t enough to reassure him of her promise.

She decided to tell him about the procedure, mostly because it wasn’t her choice to make. If he decided to take the risk or not she would stand by his decision, regardless of the outcome. However, death was not an option she would ever be willing to accept. Couldn’t even fathom the possibility. He told them after hearing the information from Doctor Bashir and the Doctor that he was willing to take the risk; eighty-one percent was better than thirty-seven. What he told her afterward hurt her to the core.

“I don’t want you there Kathryn. I want you to make plans to go on without me.”

She was stunned. “I’m not leaving Chakotay. I thought I’d made that perfectly clear. You and I are in this together, no matter what happens.”

He was angry, “I guess I didn’t make myself clear. I don’t need you anymore. I thought I was in love with you, but I’m not.”

The words hit her hard, forcing her to grasp his bed rail for support. Then the information she’d promised she’d keep to herself spilled out without intent. Even though he didn’t know about the baby, it felt, at that moment, he was rejecting them both, “Why are you trying to deliberately hurt me?” She asked, keeping the tears at bay, “Especially now when we’re having a baby. I didn’t think even you could be so cruel,” Then the tears spilled, no longer able to control them. The last thing she remembered before turning away was the stunned look on his face. He was lying about his feelings, she knew, but it didn’t hurt any less for having heard them.

“Kathryn,” he called, “Kathryn, come back!” Without thinking he tried to get up, but only managed to fall out of the biobed. In immense pain, he used his arms to crawl toward her. The nurses attempted to stop him, get him back in bed but he fought them, still trying to get to her. “I’m sorry! I didn’t mean it! Please come back!” He cried.

She stood there, her back turned and out of reach just outside sickbay. She could hear him calling to her, pleading with her to return. At this moment she was deeply hurt, even knowing what kinds of things he might say to end their relationship because he was afraid. She couldn’t blame him for that, but it didn’t stop the pain in her heart. Soon, she found herself getting angry, really angry. Going back inside he stopped struggling with the staff when he saw her approach, tears reflected in his own eyes.

Kneeling down in front of him, she wanted her words to be clear so there would be no mistake. “Don’t you ever, even in a moment of anger, tell me you don’t love me unless you really mean it. If it ever happens again, I won’t be coming back. Do you understand?”
“Yes.” He pleaded, his face contorted in a mixture of emotional and physical pain.

“We’ve been through a lot together. I know you feel in some ways that your life is over, it’s not. I’ve been telling you every day for nearly a week that I love you, and no matter what happens I will always stand by your side.” This new level of fear was making him calmer. “Now you’re going to let the nursing staff get you back into bed and allow Doctor Bashir to reexamine you, just to make sure you haven’t injured yourself any further. Understood?” He nodded.

From there, the staff was able to get him back in bed with no further incident. Doctor Bashir began scanning him as Kathryn moved up to the side of his bed. “You’re very lucky Chakotay, it appears you didn’t do any further damage, but I wouldn’t try that again.” He said, then injected him with a mild muscle relaxer, which would also help calm him down.

He laid back, not saying anything as he stared at Kathryn. This time, the nurses strapped his legs down to keep him from rolling off the bed again. He made no move to stop them. When the doctor and staff were gone she moved closer to him. Taking a breath, she continued, “I want you to know that I don’t care anymore about what you felt you could or couldn’t tell me about in the past. Whether you felt I would or wouldn’t understand your reasons for withholding it. I only care about our future, which now includes our baby.” She turned to Doctor Bashir who was still close by. “Doctor, I want you to do something for me.”

“Yes Admiral,” he said walking up to them. “What do you need?”

“I would like you to contact Admiral Picard and ask him to report to sickbay. I have a favor to ask of him. The sooner the better.”

He wasn’t sure what it was about but would do as asked. “Yes Admiral, right away.”

Chakotay didn’t dare say a word, he knew her well enough to know that by doing so would only exacerbate the situation. “Now, rest,” she instructed, and placed a gentle kiss on his forehead. She couldn’t stay angry at him, especially knowing all the reasons why he was behaving so out of character. This life-altering situation had changed him, as it would anyone. What he needed right now was to be reassured, and that’s just what she would give him.

Soon, Admiral Picard arrived, looking slightly confused. Janeway met him at the door, talking to him out of Chakotay’s earshot. He wasn’t sure what she had in mind, leaving him wondering. When they approached, the Doctor who had just arrived with the Admiral followed. Doctor Bashir also stepped forward to see what was happening. Returning to him, all stood around his bed. Chakotay looked to each of them, trying to get a hint of what might be happening but came up with nothing before focusing his eyes back to Kathryn.

“This is not how I envisioned this moment, but I feel it’s the only way to prove my love and loyalty to you.” Taking his hand, she asked. “Chakotay, will you marry me?”

He was beyond stunned; he couldn’t find the words to reply. This was a moment he had also envisioned differently.

“Do you accept?” She asked.

Without thought, he nodded before finding the words. “Yes.”

She looked to Admiral Picard, who smiled. “It is my privilege as Admiral, that I have the honor of marrying these two people in matrimony. Chakotay, do you promise to love and honor her, in sickness and in health, for all the days of your life?”
“I do.” He answered, still feeling a little stunned.

“And do you Kathryn Janeway, promise to love him and honor him, in sickness and in health, for all the days of your life?”

“I do.” A smile spread across her lips.

“By the authority of the United Federation of Planets, I now pronounce you husband and wife.” He said with a warm smile. “You may kiss the bride.”

Kathryn leaned down to kiss him, it took a second for his brain to catch up but kissed her back. The crowd that gathered in sickbay, began to applaud. Picard reached out his hand to Chakotay and shook it. “Congratulations, you’re a lucky man.” Turning to Janeway, he gave her a kiss on the cheek. “Congratulations Kathryn, I’m sure you’ll both be very happy together.”

She nodded. “Thank you, Jean-Luc, I understand it was an odd request on such short notice.”

“Nonsense, I was happy to do it.”

“Now I think we should leave these two love birds alone. Chakotay needs his rest,” The Doctor said before giving them both a quick congratulations of his own before moving off into another part of sickbay.

Once everyone had gone, he looked to Kathryn still appearing stunned and confused. “What just happened?”

She smiled, “Weren’t you paying attention?”

“Yes, but…”

Taking his face in her hands she silenced him with a kiss. “I believed this was the only way you would truly accept my level of commitment to you. When I told you that I wanted to spend my life with you I meant it, regardless of what that means.”

At this moment he did feel assured of her love for him. Especially after going to all this trouble to prove it. A single tear fell from his eye and he pulled her into his arms. Whispering in her ear he said. “I don’t deserve you; you know. I can’t apologize enough for the hateful things I said to you, but I’ll certainly spend what’s left of my life trying.”

She laughed softly, hugging him back gently. “I’ll hold you to it,” then kissed his cheek before pulling back, leaving a hand behind to caress the same cheek with the back of her fingers.

“So, I’m going to be a father?”

“Yes.” Her smile still lingering, “But we can discuss it later. Right now, I need to make the arrangements for the surgery.”

Giving her a nod, along with a soft smile, she left to pursue just that.

***

Doctor Kenneth Ingram was a man full of exuberance. He seemed to maintain an almost childlike wonder for research and science, a respectfulness for the art of his passion. He wanted genuinely, to help people. So, when asked to come to Deep Space Nine to perform the surgery he agreed. It didn’t matter who the person was or what their circumstances in life were, it was only that his help
was required, and he would provide it.

He’d scanned, took samples – some painful and uncomfortable, but he would use this information to give Chakotay the best possible chance for success. Janeway couldn’t help but admire his passion for the work, she herself having similar feelings about science and exploration. She wanted to help him whenever possible, pouring over his research to the point of exhaustion, knowing the Doctor had made a wise choice when suggesting his talents.

Chakotay had his good and bad days, physically and emotionally. The process was hard, the constant reminder that what they were attempting would not guarantee success. It was a level of uncertainty that was daunting and potentially heartbreaking.

The possibility of death was not discussed, even though all were aware of it. Lingering in Chakotay’s consciousness for entirely selfish reasons. He could see it in Kathryn’s eyes at times, when the need for sleep, worry, or fear was present. She did not show these things willingly, preferring to keep them inside until she was alone and in private.

Seven had kept her distance, not wanting to intrude on such an intimate matter. She had seen them share moments of love, fear, anger. The stress was getting to them both. Each having invested so much of their lives and feelings in the other. She had caught the Admiral in a private moment, one she hadn’t intended to see. She and Chakotay had just had an argument, nerves were frayed, tensions high. The Doctor was performing her weekly maintenance, and while he remained on the station, so did she.

The argument had been uncomfortable to witness, even though she couldn’t hear everything being said. She tried to ignore it, pretend like the rest of sickbay’s occupants that it wasn’t happening. Janeway had turned away from him, unwilling to accept what he was saying. He didn’t let go of her arm, trying to pull her gently toward him as she resisted. Seven could tell she was tired, weak with hurt and profound sadness by his words as he managed to finally pull her down beside him and into his chest.

She remembered well the feeling of comfort his touch provided, having taken advantage of it many times throughout their brief relationship. Then, as though she’d received a second wind, pushed herself away from the confines of his chest in order to secure a more private venue. He was calling to her, his own voice heavy with sadness. Janeway had found an unoccupied corner of the room, and it was there she was unable to stop herself from falling apart.

Feeling an overwhelming need to comfort her former mentor and captain, she rose from the biobed without warning and headed for her. Taking her into her arms, she headed for Doctor Bashir’s office and closed the door, allowing the woman a moment of much-needed privacy in the face of such pain. She was many things to many people, but at the heart of it, she was also a woman who was just a human being with all the feelings and complexities that lay within.

Seven took her in her arms, providing her with an unspoken sense of comfort and understanding. Janeway clung to her, to do otherwise would have left her lying on the floor. The words Chakotay had spoken left her wounded, broken. She didn’t know what they were, only that they had ignited a pain she couldn’t stop herself from immediately reacting to. When she pulled back, her face was a mosaic of every emotion that had been wearing on her over the last few weeks, and her heart couldn’t stop itself from going out to her.

“Admiral, are you going to be alright?” She asked, genuinely worried.

“To tell you the truth Seven, it’s getting harder to know,” Janeway replied, trying to pull herself together as Seven handed her the box of tissues from Bashir’s desk. “I can’t – no won’t do it.”
The words made no sense, not having been privy to the entire conversation. “I’m afraid I don’t understand.”

She sat up straight in the chair and closed her eyes. Allowing her head to fall back slightly, taking in a much-needed breath, using it as a means of cleansing herself and regaining control over her most volatile emotions. “He wants me to make arrangements for his funeral. In case the worst happens,” opening her eyes she met hers, “What he’s suggesting makes sense, and I understand his reasons for saying it. I just…”

“Can’t let him go,” she finished for her.

Janeway nodded. Looking into her eyes reminded her of something she’d forgotten, “You’re still in love with him, aren’t you?”

The question wasn’t directed at her hurtfully, it was merely an observation, “Yes, but that doesn’t matter anymore.” She answered truthfully, something she hadn’t intended. It was the look in Janeway’s eyes, caring, sympathetic, which pulled it out of her.

“Oh, but it does Seven. We can’t just ignore our feelings, I did it for years and it only brought more pain, regret. I have a pretty good idea of how my relationship with Chakotay is making you feel.”

Seven bowed her head, trying to hide the tears forming in her eyes. A tissue came into view, which was accepted. Wiping her eyes, she thought back to the childish way she felt at the time. Rubbing the relationship in Janeway’s face, feigning ignorance to the pain she knew it was causing. She was ashamed of her behavior; of the pleasure, she had taken from it. They had been separated for over a year, he had made his feelings clear to her on the shuttle to Sha Ka Ree. Reaffirming everything she’d already been painfully aware of. She might have had his body then, maybe even his love eventually, but his heart would never be hers.

Janeway took her into her arms as the tears burst forth, comforting her. It felt wrong, a betrayal to the friendship they shared. Pulling away harshly, she looked up seeing the confusion in her eyes. “I have wronged you Admiral, and I can’t apologize enough for it.”

“You’ve never done anything to hurt me Seven. There’s nothing to apologize for,” she said sincerely.

Hearing the words only served to deepen those feelings of guilt, “I know you don’t understand, but I have hurt you, and I took pleasure in it.”

Her words only served to leave her mind racing, trying to think of anything she could have done which might explain her obvious feelings of guilt but was coming up empty. “Listen to me. Whatever you felt you did to wrong me; I’m not going to try and tell you you’re wrong to feel that way. It’s obviously affected you deeply, and if you don’t wish to discuss your feelings I’ll understand. It’s never easy to admit feelings of guilt or regret.”

Unexplained anger erupted within her, “Would you stop being so understanding? So damn comforting?”

If the sudden shift in gears hadn’t taken her off guard Seven’s choice of words had. She’d never heard her speak this way before. She sounded more, human. “You’ve grown up Seven, and I didn’t even see it. When did that happen?” The question was aimed at herself, not at Seven.

If she didn’t share her guilt now she never would, allowing it to continuously eat away at her. “Admiral-” she began but was cut off.
“Call me Kathryn, you’ve more than earned the right.”

She nodded starting again, her voice softer. “Kathryn, do you remember when I came to you for advice regarding my relationship with Chakotay on Voyager?” Janeway nodded, “All those questions I’d asked you about sex and how to express your feelings during the act? How I would discuss my sex life with you, ask for clarification when it came to certain sounds, words, touches, kisses? I could tell it was making you extremely uncomfortable, and not just because of the subject matter but who I was asking those questions about.”

Kathryn swallowed hard. She did indeed remember those conversations; they were impossible to forget. At the time, when Seven was describing their first sexual encounter, she tried to stop the discussion, but she persisted. Asking her to explain the sound of his moans, the words he’d said to her, how his touch and lips made her feel. She remembered becoming hyper-focused, unable to shut out the meticulous observations she was relaying. How her feelings on the subject turned from being extremely awkward and distressing to jealousy, then anger. She told herself she was being irrational, she had no claim on him, no right to feel the way she did, but it didn’t stop or negate those feelings. Whether it was Seven who had finally noticed the level of distress in her, or her inability to discuss the subject any further, she apologized and excused herself quietly, leaving her alone behind the swish of the door.

“I knew exactly what I was doing, what I was saying. I reveled and delighted in the way it affected you. The level of dejection you tried to hide but clearly expressed, and my feigned artlessness of the subject matter. I’ve never behaved that way before or since, and I don’t know why I was so adamant to hurt you.”

Her first impulse was to punch her in the face but stopped herself, knowing the action would have only given a brief boost to her vanity, but ultimately would have solved or changed nothing. She scrubbed her face, the amalgamation of so many emotions flowing through her over the last few weeks had taken its toll. It was hard to think, her preoccupation with Chakotay’s condition, the prospect of a cure that also had the potential to kill him wasn’t lost on her. “I’m sorry Seven.”

Those were the last words she expected to hear, “Why are you apologizing?” She asked, perplexed.

“I should have seen it then, what you were trying to do, what I allowed you to do. I spent so much time trying to distance myself from your relationship that I didn’t give you the support you obviously needed. You behaved like any teenager, and emotionally that’s where you were. Torn between your feelings of the mother figure I represented and the possible competition for Chakotay’s affection. I hadn’t expected nor considered it at the time. But you were never in any danger from me.”

She didn’t understand this reaction, obviously expecting a different turn. “I was and am still jealous of your relationship, but not for the reasons you may expect. He never told me how he felt about you, and I’d never asked. I had considered that something might have happened between you before my arrival, it was a closeness few share from what I’d observed. I was content to pursue our relationship, ready to see where it would lead. It wasn’t until we’d had our first intimate encounter that I knew it wasn’t me he wanted; it was you. I know this is uncomfortable to hear but I need to say it,” Kathryn nodded, girding herself, “While we were being intimate he began to moan, and when he found his release it was your name he called not mine. I didn’t know what to feel. Afterward, I began to understand he didn’t realize he’d done it.”

She was instantly horrified for her. Not only was it her first time, but the man she was with called out another woman’s name. She’d never had that happen to her, but she could only imagine how the experience would have left her feeling used, substituted for another’s selfish desires. “Seven,
I…” she didn’t know what to say.

“I never mentioned it to anyone. I found myself resenting you, as much as I tried not to.”

“It makes sense why you didn’t mention it. I’m amazed you were able to handle the situation as well as you did under the circumstances. I’m not sure I would have been able to do the same,” she admitted, completely honest in the assessment of herself, “You’ve completely surpassed my expectations. I surmised it would have taken many more years to reach that level of maturity,” Reaching out she placed a hand on her shoulder, offering her a smile.

Seven hugged her without thinking, and Kathryn hugged her in return, “I take it you’re not angry with me.”

“No, how could I be? You were only being human.”
The day of Chakotay’s surgery would arrive in the morning. Kathryn slept on the biobed with him so they could have a night together. The Doctor, having administered a mild sedative to the Admiral, hadn’t attempted to point out how unwise the decision was, knowing it would make no difference. She needed the rest, in some ways more than Chakotay did. And if they never saw each other again, at least they’d have this, and it was something he fully understood.

In this quiet moment, he held her close, needing to feel her presence more than ever. After tomorrow he might never get another chance. He listened to the sound of her breathing, the smell of her hair. His hand reaching down to rub the slightest swell of her stomach. He was going to be a father, and the knowledge both frightened and saddened him at once.

He didn’t have to do it, he could live out the rest of his life in a hover chair, he’d hate it, but he’d be alive. However, there would also be too many things he’d have to give up. Playing with his child, teaching him or her how to box, taking them on hikes like he used to do. Teaching them how to build and craft items. He couldn’t enjoy the simple pleasures of just standing over their crib at night and watching them sleep or reach down to pick them up when they needed him. All physical activities that involved moving his legs would be out of the question.

Then there was Kathryn, he couldn’t care for their child, just as he couldn’t completely care for himself. They’d have to have someone who could take on both roles to make it work. And she would have to help him with what used to be simple tasks, like going to the bathroom, bathing, dressing, transferring to a bed or chair. The last thing that crossed his mind was the hardest to accept. He would never be able to make love to her again, the paralysis had taken care of any feeling in his groin. When they’d discussed this, she’d made it clear that a physical relationship didn’t matter to her, but it did matter, it mattered a great deal to him.

So, when the option for the experimental surgery was offered, he grasped the opportunity. Thinking that the risks didn’t outweigh the reward of being able to get himself back for all of them. Later, he began to wonder about his possible death if the surgery failed. He had never been afraid of dying, it was what he’d be leaving behind that kept him up at night. How would Kathryn fare if she had to raise their child alone? It was painful, but not as painful as the thought of losing her a piece at a time. The resentment she would ultimately begin to feel at having to care for him and their child, the hatred that would develop in her eyes knowing she would have to do this for the rest of his life. He couldn’t do that to her, if he couldn’t regain his mobility, then he’d rather be dead. It would hurt her in the short-term but save her from a lifetime of feeling obligated.

He’d never mentioned any of these thoughts to her, knowing it would only serve to keep the wound open, and his current condition was causing enough pain already. He should have known better when he asked her to start making a plan for his funeral as a precaution, she completely lost the plot. It was not something she was willing to discuss, she wasn’t ready to consider the alternative, preferring to cling to hope. He had already come to terms with the possibility and in his attempt to try and prepare her, invoked a deep pain in her heart. It was at that moment he understood she was not interested in preparing for those kinds of contingencies unless she had no choice. So, he let it go. Keeping any further feelings to himself.

Now, as he held her, feeling the weight of her in his arms, couldn’t stop thinking about how much he loved her. Would always love her, even into the great unknown. He kissed the top of her head before resting his cheek on it and slept peacefully with no dreams for the first time since the nightmare began.
They had prepared Chakotay for surgery. Doctor Ingram would be the lead surgeon, the Doctor, and Doctor Bashir would be assisting. Kathryn stood over him holding his hand. “What’s the first thing you want to do when you wake up?” She asked, trying to keep the tears out of her eyes.

He was finding it hard to do the same, releasing her hand he reached out to rub her stomach, a look of longing and sadness in his eyes, placing her hand over his she smiled. This simple action had an unexpected effect. Every emotion he had tried to suppress erupted, grasping her arm he pulled her to him, his face buried in her chest. His body trembled, she pulled him close, her hair – which had grown long over the last year – provided a veil, giving them a hint of privacy. There were no words, only the sounds of a man desperate to hang on to the only things that mattered. She held him, her emotions reflecting his own, unable to imagine life without him.

The Doctor stood by patiently, unwilling to interrupt. If this moment was a silent goodbye he didn’t know, and he didn’t have to. He watched as they parted, noticing how everything around them had been shut out as if they were the only two people in the room. She held his face with both hands, caressing his cheeks as their eyes locked. His hands grasping her forearms lightly, his thumbs gently rubbing her skin.

“You didn’t answer my question,” she said softly.

He smiled slightly and replied, “Surprise me.”

She couldn’t help returning the smile before the cloud of emotions descended, her smile erased. It was then she kissed him, slowly, gently, passionately. No emotions were disguised, this was their last moment together before fate took over. The Doctor continued to wait, his feelings on this display of affection began to create a cascade of emotion within himself. If he were made of flesh and blood instead of photons and forcefields his heart would be breaking. Resting their foreheads together, each said a soft I love you before parting.

“Okay Doctor, take good care of him,” She said straightening, the tears still prominent on her cheeks.

Stepping forward he grasped the antigrav bed and replied, “I intend to.” Then began pushing him toward the operating room.

She followed until they disappeared behind the door. All she could do now was wait as a hand went unconsciously to her stomach, gently rubbing the slight bump. Heading into the waiting area, she was surprised to see Tuvok standing before her, T’Pel at his side. Behind him were Seven, Harry and Libby, Tom, B’Elanna, and Miral. Tuvok, without a word and in highly uncharacteristic fashion, stepped forward and took her in his arms. She was stunned but grateful for her old friend’s comfort. Other members of her crew came up to offer their support, including a one-year-old Miral who wanted Kathryn to pick her up immediately.

Holding her in her arms, reminded her that she would be doing this with her own child one day. “Ant-e,” the child said patting Kathryn on the chest, making her smile.

“That’s right, I’m your Auntie Kathryn.”

Miral looked confused, turning her head to the side and resting it on her own shoulder. “Kaf-ryn?”

Kathryn’s smile widened as she looked to Tom and B’Elanna, “I can’t believe she’s already talking.”
“It’s the Klingon side,” B’Elanna said, language skills develop faster than in human children.

“Tell me about it,” Tom said pretending to be annoyed by it, invoking a light punch to the ribs, “Ouch, save it for later dear,” soft laughter erupted from most in the room.

Miral’s tiny hand was suddenly on Kathryn’s cheek turning her face toward hers, demanding her undivided attention. “Play Ant-e.”

“I don’t think Auntie Kathryn is in the mood right now,” Tom tried to explain.

“No, it’s alright,” she said putting her down and offered her hand instead, “What do you want to play?” It was a welcome distraction. Miral smiled and took it.

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“The patient’s life signs are steady, all within acceptable parameters,” Doctor Bashir advised.

“Alright,” Doctor Ingram began, “cease cardiac function.”

“Cardiac function ceased, the patient has six minutes before brain death,” Bashir said.

“It’s now or never,” Ingram said picking up the genetically cloned spinal cord, “make sure the incision continues to stay open during insertion and the nerve endings and brain stem remain exposed Doctor.”

“Acknowledged,” he answered.

It was a painstaking process. If the spinal cord was not aligned perfectly within the spinal canal, not only would they be unable to fuse it correctly with the medulla oblongata but to the lumbar region of the vertebral column. Any deviation could damage the spinal cord and they would have to start again. Thankfully, Doctor Ingram created a backup just in case, but all of it would have to be done quickly before brain death occurred. The Doctor had been studying and practicing with Doctor Ingram on the holodeck to get the technique correct, he was the only one fast enough to make all the connections in time.

“Two minutes,” Bashir advised.

“Connections secure, reintroduce the cerebrospinal fluid back into the column,” The Doctor said.

Ingram began to infuse the canal with the fluid, “There is about 125mL of CSF we have to fill, if we don’t have enough introduced, there won’t be enough cushion to provide basic mechanical and immunological protection to the brain inside the skull.”

“How long will it take?” Bashir asked.

“To get it perfect. Forty-five seconds.” Ingram answered.

“That will only leave us a minute to close the incision and restart cardiac stimulation. Cutting it a little close aren’t we?” The Doctor asked.

“As we practiced, it all comes down to precision. Now, begin closure.”

Although the Doctor was fast, speed was not necessarily the key here, it was precision, and he was the only one who possessed the visual acuity to close the incision along the same line it was cut.

“Twenty seconds,” Bashir called out.
“Almost…there. Now, begin cardiac in conjunction with cortical stimulation.” The Doctor ordered.

All they needed was to wake up the spinal cord by sending mild shocks to the brain along with shocks to the heart to get it beating and restarting blood flow. Both men began the process while Bashir continued to observe the time and the levels of activity.

“Five seconds,” Bashir announced.

“Come on Chakotay, you’re going to live,” The Doctor said, “get that heart beating.”

“We’re losing him.” Ingram said, raise the shock value to fifteen percent.” The Doctor recalibrated and tried again, still wasn’t working. “go up to thirty-five percent.”

"Doctor Ingram, you could fry the valves of his heart at that level.” The Doctor pointed out.

“Yes, but if we don’t he’s going to die either way. At least this will give him a final chance.” Uncertain, The Doctor raised the shock value to thirty-five percent, at which point they received a pulse. “He’s breathing, check the metabolic brain functions.”

“All normal….wait.” Bashir stopped himself. “Brain function is having a cascading effect down the spinal column, but the cardiac muscle is weakening.”

“Twenty CC’s inaprobuliane.” Doctor Ingram said. "It should help speed up the cardiac function.”

The Doctor quickly filled it and tossed it to Ingram who placed the hypospray to the side of Chakotay’s neck. They waited for a sign that it was working, what they received was a flatline.

“He’s dead,” Bashir said stunned.

“No, we have to keep trying.” The Doctor said. “I’m giving him another shot of inaprobuliane forty CC’s. Start the cardiac stimulation again.” Although Bashir thought it was foolish, he did.

Doctor Ingram stepped out and took off his surgical mask. Looking up at the expectant faces in the room, he shook his head sadly. From her position on the floor, Miral sitting across from her, she let out a wounded cry. Harry sat down behind her and pinned Kathryn’s arms to her side so she wouldn’t hurt herself, fighting against him as she tried to get up.

“Doctor to Doctor Ingram, we need your assistance in surgical bay one.” Without a word, he headed back into the room. “We have him back and he’s stable. In the future, I would recommend everyone is in consensus before giving the family any news.”

“He was dead Doctor.”

“I know that, but I’ve picked up a few tricks during my time in the delta quadrant that have been invaluable and isn’t part of the SFMD. I’ll go inform the family while you prepare him for inpatient recovery.

Kathryn was still struggling, however weakly against Harry’s chest when The Doctor came into the room. “I have to apologize for upsetting all of you, especially you Admiral. We were able to bring him back just as Doctor Ingram came to give you the news.”

Harry let go of her and Tuvok helped her to her feet, she rushed to the Doctor. “So, he’s going to live?”

“Yes, Admiral.” He answered with a smile,” he’s being taken to inpatient recovery, but won’t be
awake for several hours. We’ll need to keep him for tests and observations of course in order to determine how much feeling has returned.”

At that point, she hugged him. Feeling a weight being lifted off her chest, she smiled. He hugged her in return, “Thank you, Doctor, I appreciate your efforts.”

“I never like losing a patient, and I wasn’t going to let it happen today. Chakotay is family to all of us.”

She nodded before pulling back, “When can I see him?”

“In a few hours, I’ll let you know when. In the meantime, get some rest, have a meal with our friends. He’s just about out of the woods now. The hardest part is over, now the real work begins.”

Eight Months Later…

The house was finally finished, they’d settled in Arizona on the banks of Lake Mohave. Chakotay was now able to walk with a cane, but it would still be a while longer before he could say he no longer had use for it. Kathryn had agreed to the log cabin design, but certainly wanted the amenities and creature comforts within. She had never been the type of woman who liked ‘roughing it’. Especially now when they’re baby would be due at any time.

Over the last few months, Admiral David Clayton stepped down as Fleet Admiral which allowed Admiral Jean-Luc Picard to inhabit the position. Together with Admiral Janeway and the Wraiths, they had managed to smooth over many of the tensions which had been broiling since the battle at Deep Space Nine. Slowly, the Federation was returning back to its guiding principles. She had also managed to fight for the rights of her former Maquis crewmembers, preventing them from going back to prison. As for the rest of the Maquis, their crimes had been reevaluated and the majority had been freed.

Harry and Libby were married a few weeks after Chakotay’s surgery and are expecting a child of their own. He was able to reclaim his commission and return to Starfleet, currently assigned as a tactical officer on the Federation Starship Independence, promoted again to the rank of Lieutenant Commander a few months later under Captain Joanna Hunter.

Tom, B’Elanna, and Miral left the Wraiths, deciding to take up jobs as civilian contractors for Starfleet’s piloting and engineering divisions with an open invitation that should they ever decide to return to service, they would be welcomed. They live in Arizona near Kathryn and Chakotay’s home.

Tuvok and T’Pel returned to Vulcan, Tuvok taking on an ambassadorial role, but still spent time working at the Vulcan Science Academy when time allowed.

The Doctor, Icheb, Seven, Tal Celes, William Telfer, and several of the former Maquis decided to stay on with the Wraiths, for now, offering positions to the recently freed members as well. Many had accepted, working directly with both Admiral Jean-Luc Picard and Admiral Janeway to ensure the quadrant doesn’t slip back into their previous state of terror and fear. The rest were allowed to leave to pursue their own interests.

Chakotay sat next to the water, trying to catch a fish without a pole, using only a line, hook, and bait. The fast-moving water making it easy to catch a snack. A squeal of delight erupted from the house just before Miral ran onto the deck and tried to use Chakotay as a form of cover. Kathryn came out behind her, heavily pregnant, and in her best monster voice said, “I’m going to get you,” with her hands raised to claws in the air, her feet gently pounding against the deck.
“You know, I hear a good place to hide is under the bed. No monster can get you there,” Chakotay spoke to Miral quietly. She put her fingers over her lips to indicate silence before attempting to sneak behind Kathryn as she pretended she didn’t know where Miral was. The scream of delight she released once making it past the door could be heard as she ran through the house, causing both of them to start laughing.

Walking up to him, Kathryn kissed him gently on the lips while caressing his cheek. His hand went to the fullness of her belly, rubbing gently as he returned the kiss. “So, are you going or coming home from work this time?” He asked, admiring the way she looked in her maternity uniform.

“Well, I was there, but was sent home.”

“Why?” He questioned.

“Fleet Admiral Picard put me on maternity leave. He said it was time I started slowing down and get some rest before the baby comes.”

Reaching out, he took her hand in his, “I agree with him. You’re exhausted all the time love. I know you hate taking time off, you say it always makes you feel worse, but this is different. You’re having a baby; you can’t keep dragging yourself around until it arrives. Besides, falling asleep at your desk is not the kind of rest your body needs.”

“Oh, I get it, you and Azan have concocted some plan to get me out of the way for a while. Who is she?” She asked with a smile.

“Let me see,” he said standing, “She’s about your height, beautiful, extremely sexy, intelligent, and pregnant with my child,” a wide smile spread across his lips.

“Well, that’s two women you’ve managed to impregnate. Any other’s I should know about?” She kidded, the smile spreading across her lips before gently grasping his collar and pulled him toward her. Dipping his head, he kissed her passionately, pulling her into his arms.

“Ewww! Gross!” Miral called out.

They both pulled apart to look at their visitor. “You know Miral, one day you’ll find a handsome man you’ll want to do this with someday,” Kathryn said with a smile.

“No way! Boys are stupid!” She said dramatically and walked back into the house.

They couldn’t help but laugh at the display, before taking each other’s hand. “Shall we?” Chakotay asked holding his cane and gestured toward the door. Agreeing, they both headed inside.

Miral had become a fixture in their home since Tom and B’Elanna both worked, and she wasn’t old enough for school yet. Chakotay didn’t mind, it gave him plenty to do during the day. “Go upstairs and take a hot bath, you’ll feel more relaxed afterward.” She began to protest, “That’s an order.”

She gave him an odd look. “I’m an Admiral, you can’t order me.”

“I’m your husband, and while you’re pregnant that means I’m in charge.”

Laughing she threw her hands up. “Well, I guess I’d better follow orders then. But just remember, as your wife I control what happens in our bedroom for the rest of your life.”

He swallowed, “Noted.”
Laughing she began to head upstairs, halfway up she stopped, a hand went to her stomach.

“Honey, are you alright?”

“I’m…I…” She couldn’t form the words. Unable to describe the sensation.

“I want you to slowly make your way back down here.” She nodded, doing as asked. Reaching the last step, a puddle began to form under her feet. “That’s it, we’re going to Starfleet Medical,” he announced then called to Miral, “Where are you, my little prizefighter? Auntie Kathryn is having the baby!” They heard thumping through the house, then saw her exit the kitchen, a sandwich in her hand. “Baby! Oh Boy!” She said jumping up and down.

“Get your shoes on, we have to go.”

Giving him a salute, she ran out of the room to find her shoes then came back with them on the wrong feet. With a sigh, he motioned her over to the sofa to sit down which she did. Putting them on the right ones he asked. “How are you feeling Kathryn?”

“I’m alright for now, but I’d like to get out of this uniform first. It’s suddenly very uncomfortable.”

He laughed, “Okay Miral, you stay here with Auntie, and if something happens you call me okay?”

“You got it.”

Chakotay did his best to get up the stairs as quickly as possible. Finding her maternity bag, he grabbed it along with a change of clothes before heading downstairs. He could see Miral holding Kathryn’s hand, telling her to breathe, she was all business now. They helped her quickly change before heading out the door and to the hovercar. Miral insisted Kathryn sit in the back so she could take care of her, and Chakotay agreed. On the way, he informed Tom and B’Elanna of the situation and where they were headed, each of them advising they would be on their way soon.

Reaching Starfleet Medical, there were many advantages Kathryn received due to her rank, none of them requested. All she cared about was getting into a soft bed where she could lay down and rest. Perhaps being given pain blockers to help with the contractions.

They were given a luxurious birthing sweet, and the on-call doctor was being paged. What she wanted was her Doctor but wasn’t sure it would be possible. At the moment, she wasn’t sure if he had arrived back from his previous mission yet.

A few minutes later, Tom and B’Elanna arrived. Miral was so excited about the situation but wasn’t happy when she had to be told that this was something Auntie Kathryn and Uncle Chakotay had to do alone, but that they would come to see them all later once the baby was born. Giving them both hugs, she made Kathryn and Chakotay promise to message her when the baby arrived, and they did, it was the only way she would willingly leave the room.

Once they were alone, Chakotay took the seat next to his wife and left a message for the Doctor, letting him know where they were, before taking her hand in his. “I’d ask how you’re feeling but I can tell it’s not good.”

She cried out softly as another contraction hit her, “What gave you that impression?”

“Just a wild guess.” He answered with a smile.

A nurse came in, holding a hypospray. “Admiral Janeway, my name is Michelle, and I’ll be your
nurse today. I’ve brought you a pain blocker to help with the contractions. It might be several hours before the baby’s ready.” Kathryn gave a nod and the woman injected the contents. “You should be feeling better within a few minutes. Try to get some sleep, you’re going to need it. If you need anything, don’t hesitate to call.”

“Thank you, Michelle, I appreciate your help,” Kathryn replied before the young woman left the room.

Hours passed, Kathryn slept, Chakotay tried but was unable to find it. When he looked up, finally saw the Doctor arrive. “Green, good to see you.” He said quietly.

Keeping his voice low he replied, “You too. I had a hard time getting here. I’m glad I didn’t miss it. So, how is she?”

“Sleeping, has been for a few hours now.”

“And you?”

He shook his head. “I’m just too nervous I guess.”

“I understand,” he said and moved to check Kathryn’s progress, “She’s nearly there, almost dilated to a ten. We’ll have to wake her and start getting her ready.”

Chakotay woke her gently, which she did not appreciate. She couldn’t remember having felt so tired in her life. “The Doctor is here; he was able to make it. He says it’s time to get ready for our little bundle to make its appearance.” She tried to sit up but didn’t have the energy. Helping her up, she kept laying her head back trying to drift off to sleep. Causing a soft laugh to emanate from his lips.

As the activity in the room began to increase, so did her alertness. She was ready. When the Doctor began instructing her to push, she did so, the pain blockers still helping her do the job. An eternity seemed to pass before the baby was free. The Doctor announced it was a girl before putting the baby onto Kathryn’s chest. She held her as Chakotay cut the cord, looking into her precious little face. “Hello there, I’m your mother, and this is your father.” She said as Chakotay came to her side to see their daughter.

Reaching out his finger, he caressed his daughter’s cheek. “Have you finally decided on a name?”

She nodded, “Charlotte Sayen Janeway.”

“Sayen, she who is sweet and lovely,” Chakotay said.

“How did you know?” She asked raising an eyebrow.

“The name comes from my tribe, of course, I would be aware of it,” He laughed, “It’s a beautiful name for a beautiful girl. Just like her mother.”

The nurse reached for the baby, “We need to perform a few scans and get her cleaned up. Shouldn’t take long.”

Relinquishing the baby to her, Chakotay and Kathryn sat next to each other content and happy. “I love you; you know,” Kathryn said finally.

“I love you too, always will.” He said then kissed her on the forehead.
They enjoyed a few moments of peace before the Doctor came back into the room, holding their daughter, a bewildered look on his face.

Alarm shot through both of them. “Is something wrong?” Kathryn asked.

“That depends on your point of view, but I think you need to see this.” He said handing her the baby.

Both of them leaned in, neither of them having to ask what the problem was. The baby’s eyes were open, staring back at them with two colors Kathryn and Chakotay recognized immediately. One was vibrant gold, the other, vibrant silver.

The End
Alternate Ending

Chapter Notes

I decided to add this, the idea kept swirling around in my head so I finally wrote it down. For those who decide to read it, I hope you enjoy the alternate ending. This ending takes place after the surgery in Chapter 17.

Doctor Ingram stepped out and took off his surgical mask. Looking up at the expectant faces in the room, he shook his head sadly. From her position on the floor, Miral sitting across from her, she let out a wounded cry. Harry sat down behind her and pinned Kathryn’s arms to her sides so she wouldn’t hurt herself, fighting against him as she tried to get up.

Another half-hour passed before the Doctor exited the surgery, a sadness in his eyes. Harry was comforting Janeway now, they all were. When she saw the look on the Doctor’s face she knew. Finding the strength to stand was difficult, and for a minute didn’t think she would accomplish the task. Slowly her legs moved, putting one foot in front of the other, it was agony. Reaching him she said, “Tell me it’s not true,” she was fighting back the newest wave of tears.

He didn’t want to reconfirm what she already knew, but he had no choice. “We tried everything we could, even after Doctor Bashir wanted to call it. I just wasn’t prepared to give up, but eventually, even I had to accept it.”

Her legs went out from under her, the Doctor reached out and caught her before she could hit the floor. The group went to her, offering their strength and support. No one was immune to the loss. Finding her footing, a sudden detachment seemed to be taking place, causing concern within those who were watching.

“I need to start making arrangements for his funeral,” Kathryn said.

“Admiral,” the Doctor began, “That can wait. Take some time to process this first.”

“Tom and I will be happy to make the arrangements for you,” B’Elanna said, wiping the tears from her eyes. Chakotay had been her friend, one of the best she’d ever known.

“It will give you one less thing to think about,” Tom added.

She shook her head. “It’s my responsibility.”

“You have just experienced a tumultuous trauma. You must give yourself time to process this loss.” Tuvok advised.

She looked upon his face, but not really seeing him. Completely back on her feet, her right hand hung in the air for a moment, then came down and gave him a light pat on the chest. The life she had hoped to have with Chakotay was gone. Somewhere, deep down knew this would be the way things turned out. She wasn’t meant to keep him it seemed, but she still had a piece of him growing inside her.

She held the funeral on his homeworld Solosos IV so he could be buried next to his mother.
Sayoona and father Kolopak. His sister Sekaya, along with her husband Hakan and their young son Wohali, came to help perform the burial rites along with his closest friends on Voyager. First, they washed his entire body in boiled willow root as the tribe dressed in worn clothing, ashes on their heads as they sang Chakotay’s name over and over.

When his body was ready, it was encased in two overlapping wooden boxes and buried, large stones were then placed on top. Gifts were then left among the stones, ornate jewelry, weapons, rattles to ward off evil spirits.

Seven days of mourning followed, no one was to be angry, and speaking was done in a light manner along with eating the lightest food and liquid. On the hearth of the family’s home, the priest put on a medicine pot and filled it with a weed. Later, the family would have to first drink the liquid before washing themselves in it. He then smoked and purified the living space with wood and weed. Once this was done, the priest then took the rest of the purifying items away and placed them in a hollow tree or rock where they could not be found.

Finally, the priest took the family to a river where he prayed for them and ordered them to immerse. They did this, alternating between east and west, this was done seven times. Abandoning their polluted clothes, they were given new ones. Afterward, the priest's principal assistant sent a messenger to them with two gifts: a piece of tobacco to "enlighten their eyes" so they could bravely face the future, and a strand of sanctified beads to comfort their hearts. He also asked them to take their seats in the town council house that night. The tribe, who in turn took them gently by the hand and placed it to their hearts. Once everyone had done this, the mourners either returned home or stayed to watch while the other tribe members performed the ghost dance.

The dance served many purposes and had been banned in North America during the nineteenth century. It’s knowledge and existence nearly lost over time. It was a means of reuniting the living with the dead, invoke the spirits to fight on their behalf, bring peace, prosperity, and unity to the tribe.

Mourning continued for another two days. On those two mornings, the entire tribe arose at daybreak, and after going to purify themselves in sanctified water, went to the gravesite. The women set up a wailing. The Chief Priest sent out hunters to bring in meat for the mourning family. The family, relatives, and friends prepared food, and on the seventh night took it to the council house, where a community fete of consolation was held.

When the deceased was a husband, the widow was expected to remain single for as long as a year and to let her hair hang loose. When the year was over the elders went to her, combed her hair and placed it into a plait, before changing her out of the traditional mourning garments. Kathryn, since she was not a member of the tribe, was only asked to participate in the rituals she felt comfortable with. She felt it was important to observe them all.

Sekaya insisted Kathryn stay in her home for as long as she wished, she was her brother’s wife and was accepted as a member of the tribe. Just as they had seen past their hatred of the white conquerors whose children they gave life to so many centuries ago.

Kathryn had contacted Starfleet Headquarters, advising she was taking an indefinite leave of absence. Admiral Picard had been promoted to Fleet Admiral by then and advised that when or if she decided to return there would always be a place for her.

Kathryn threw herself into the tribal duties and customs. Learning as much as she could about their language, history, and culture. She had even taken the tattoo her husband wore, honoring him. Sekaya’s husband Hakan had not only accepted her as part of their family, but she would also be under his protection.
Living a simple life was something Kathryn had never imagined herself doing, considering how much she hated it as a child. However, she almost preferred the uncomplicated and peaceful existence. She would continue to visit Chakotay’s grave each week, bringing flowers she’d picked from crossing the field as a gift. Friday was a day of rest, and it was this day she would use to honor her husband.

Her visits were long, speaking to him as though he were sitting next to her. Telling him the events of the previous week. How her pregnancy was progressing. She would speak to him in the language of his people, it had almost become second nature to her by this point. English was only spoken to outsiders, unlike the days when he was a boy. The Elders, after the Dominion war, realized how important it was to hang on to their beliefs and traditions before they were completely lost to outsider influence altogether, remembering this was the reason why the tribe relocated here, to begin with.

Her long auburn hair fluttered in the breeze, cascading past the middle of her back. It was getting darker, soon she would have to leave him and return to the village before it became too dark to see, knowing her brother-in-law would send out a search party to bring her home. Heavily pregnant, she was no longer able to bend down and kiss the stone with her lips as she had done in the past, so she kissed her fingertips and touched them to the stone before pushing herself up to make the journey back.

As she walked, her eyes continued to be drawn to the beauty of the sunset, bringing a smile to her lips. She had never felt this healthy and fit in her life. Her friends, Seven, Tom, B’Elanna, Tuvok, the Doctor, little Miral, including her mother and sister noticed the profound change in not only her behavior but her seemingly positive outlook on life.

The tribe had become a constant source of comfort and support. They were not just a community, but a family. Rituals were extremely important, and in them, she learned more about herself. If a member of the tribe was unwell, mentally or physically, they took on that burden. No one was left alone to wallow in their misery whether they wanted to or not. If it wasn’t for the tribe she wasn’t sure how she would have gotten through the worst of her grief.

She had not decided on a name for her child, not knowing if it would be a boy or girl. The Elders had given her a name as a gift when she became a full member of the tribe, Kateri which meant Kathryn in their language. Walking into her home, Sekaya greeted her warmly.

“You’re just in time. Dinner will be ready soon.”

“What can I do to help?” Kathryn asked.

With a smile, she replied, “You may sit at the table and be comfortable,” knowing better than to argue, she did as told, “How was your visit?”

“Peaceful. It’s beautiful there,” she replied with a look of longing as if she would like nothing more than to be there now.

“I’ve thought of a couple of names for the baby, if you’d like to consider them,” Kathryn nodded, “I had forgotten them until now. Chakotay had mentioned his fondness for the names years ago,” this gem only served to increase her interest, “Cheveyo for a boy, and Aponi for a girl.”

Kathryn laughed, “Spirit warrior and butterfly. Somehow I’m not surprised.”

“Kateri?” Sekaya asked as she began setting the table.
“Yes?”

“I know you want to have your child in the same way all women of the tribe do but…”

“Go on.”

“Don’t you think it’s a little dangerous? You’ve only adapted to this way of life over the last few months, not years. I’m concerned your body may not be able to handle the strain of natural childbirth.”

Kathryn reached out and took her hand as it lingered on the table for a moment, “I appreciate your concern, truly, but I have to do this. It’s one of the last things I can do to honor Chakotay and the tribe.”

“You are as much a part of us as we are of you. You’re family, the tribe has accepted you, given you a name. You will always be part of us.” She replied laying her other hand over hers. “Chakotay would want you to live long enough to raise his child, no matter what.”

She nodded, a smile playing at her lips. “Perhaps, as a precaution, we could have a doctor present in case something happens if it eases your mind.”

A smile appeared to be playing at her lips as well, “I’m glad you feel that way because I’ve already made the arrangements.”

Kathryn’s eyes widened slightly in surprise. “And you were planning on telling me when?”

“While you were in labor if I had to. At that point, you would be in no position to argue.”

She shook her head with a laugh, “I should have known you’d be just like your brother, always looking out for me.”

“We learned it from the tribe. Some lessons always stay with you.”

The women shared a moment before Kathryn asked. “So, when will the doctor arrive?”

“He’s already here.”

“Where?” She asked.

“There.” Sekaya pointed to the doorway of their living area, it was the Doctor.

“It’s good to see you, Admiral,” he greeted. Her lips spread into a wide smile as she tried to get up, “You stay there, I can see it’s becoming harder for you,” he said crossing the room toward her with a smile of his own. When he was in reach, she took his hand and placed it to her heart, a sign of welcome and friendship. He seemed a little taken back by the gesture, but said nothing, “How are you feeling?”

“Wonderful,” and she was.

“I hope you will allow me to examine you before your meal. Just to get an idea of how the two of you are doing.”

Kathryn looked to Sekaya, uncertain. She nodded her encouragement. “Chakotay would never forgive me if I allowed anything to happen to you.”

Looking back to the Doctor she replied, “I guess I’m all yours.”
The Doctor seemed to be more than pleased with her physical and mental condition, and the baby was also doing extremely well. He’d asked if she wanted to know the sex of the baby but had refused, wanting to keep it a surprise.

A week later she had gone into labor. When she was at the point of delivery, she was taken to the birthing house where the midwives and Doctor waited. As she stood holding on to the thick leather straps, one for each hand, layers of soft cotton fibers were placed under her in order to give the baby a soft landing.

The Doctor was extremely nervous, this was not how babies were usually delivered in this day and age. He was aware of many birthing rites between human and alien cultures; however, it was his experience that most women wanted some kind of pain reducer along with a more sterile environment. Occasionally, some women wanted to have a natural childbirth but didn’t think his former captain would be one of them.

He thought the process fascinating from a medical standpoint but found it difficult not stepping in to take over. Being an observer when it came to medical care, especially when the patient was literally standing right in front of him was almost impossible to resist. When he found himself attempting to step forward, Janeway would give him her infamous death glare before finding himself stepping back again. He had to give her credit; she was handling the situation much better than he’d ever anticipated.

Kathryn was exhausted by the time the baby finally slid free from the comfort of her womb. The midwife’s hands holding the baby with practiced skill, performing the necessary functions with sureness and ease. Once the placenta was captured, she was eased onto a wooden stool to sit. Beads of sweat clung to her skin, breathing heavily as she held the hand of another midwife, the other Sekaya.

“Well done Admiral,” The Doctor said, truly impressed by her strength and resilience.

She could only offer him a smile, her body too exhausted to do otherwise. The baby began to wail, then was dunked into a basin of purified water before being placed into a hand-woven blanket. The midwife showed her the infant, the dark hair evident. “Atsutsa.” She said with a smile, then swaddled the baby within the blanket. The smile on Kathryn’s lips couldn’t have been any wider.

The Doctor thought his translator was malfunctioning. Speaking softly, he asked Sekaya. “What did she say?”

She turned her head slightly, a smile also gracing her lips. “She says it is a boy.”

The Doctor smiled, knowing Chakotay would be pleased that his wife and son were alive and healthy.

Nearly two weeks later, in a sling wrapped across her chest was her newborn son as she wandered across the field, stopping to pick flowers on her way to her husband’s grave as a gift. The newborn slept peacefully, giving her little disturbance unless he was hungry or needed to be changed.

She could see the familiar stones come into view under the large tree, its branches offering rest and comfort to any passerby. Holding the child as she knelt down, placed the blue and purple flowers she’d carefully tied with a stem, onto the grave. “My husband, my love. I present to you our son,
Carefully, she removed him from the sling, holding him to her chest. “I’m sorry I did not choose the name your sister told me you were fond of. I chose this name because of its deeper meanings of spirituality, love, and peace. I hope you approve.”

She grew quiet for a moment, fighting back tears that immediately stung her eyes. “I miss you every day,” she said softly, the emotion making it difficult to speak, “I have decided to raise our son here, where we can both be close to you. When he is older I will tell him of the journey that brought us together. I will never stop loving you, and I will never forget you,” She said, the tears falling freely from her eyes, “Perhaps one day I will show him the world outside. If he’s anything like us he’ll be just as curious about it. For now, I’m staying because this is what I need to find peace, and when it is my time to go many years from now, I hope the spirits will lead me back to you.”

The End

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