

photons and force fields

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photons and force fields

by [meriwethersays](#)

Summary

B'Elanna clears her throat. Engineering is deserted around them. "Captain. If I said that you seemed attached to a—tall black-haired man with dimples, a tattoo, and a history as a freedom fighter—"

Kathryn inhales very slowly, because otherwise she'll have to laugh hysterically at herself. "You know," she says distantly, "Michael wasn't even like that, originally. I reprogrammed him."

Janeway does a little too much tinkering with the character of Michael Sullivan in Fair Haven.

Notes

See the end of the work for [notes](#)

"Mr. Paris," she says, "I believe you've outdone yourself." The village is picture-perfect, the kind of place that never actually existed except in holonovels, but she can see the care that Tom has put into its creation. The people are friendly, folksy without being caricatures; the air smells like fresh bread and rain on cobblestones and green things growing, with a faint hint of horse.

"Wait until you see the pub," Harry exclaims. "It's incredible—"

"*Not* that any of us have spent time drinking in there before going on duty," Tom says. He shakes his head at Harry. "It's right up there—Sullivan's. Go ahead, Captain, we'll catch up with you." He and Harry are already looking at a pair of apple-cheeked milkmaids approaching, and Kathryn can't help a smile. Ensigns—and lieutenants—are very predictable sometimes.

Dusk is falling, and Sullivan's is so crowded that Kathryn has to push not-so-gently to get to the bartop. Tom has not, she notices (with some relief), programmed in the inevitable strong smells of people who spend long hours doing physical work around livestock—only beer and meat pies and old wood. There's a dark-haired man behind the bar with a broad grin, and he catches her watching him and winks. "What'll it be?" Before she can answer, he pulls out a bottle from below the bar and pours a splash of it into a small glass. "On the house—a welcome to Sullivan's!"

Kathryn is very tempted. "I'd love to, but I can't just now. I'm looking for some friends of mine who promised to meet me here—"

"Young Harry and Tommy?" The bartender nods at the shouting knot of people that's formed around a table. "Tryin' to beat Liam, I'm afraid. No one's whipped him in three years, now."

She sees Harry's face. "There's a first time for everything."

"An optimist, eh?"

"A realist."

He flashes a grin at her as she starts to leave. "Next time, then. Ask for Michael, they'll know." He lifts the glass in a toast to her and swallows it, and she watches the line of his throat and thinks, *It's definitely been too long.*

Kathryn edges her way into the group of people around Harry just as he beats the famed Liam and says, "I hate to break up the party, but we have some business to attend to. There's a neutronic wavefront approaching. Class nine."

"A wavefront?" That's Harry's arm-wrestling partner, Liam.

"A... wee bit of bad weather," Tom says. He stands and drags Harry up with him. As they leave the bar, Kathryn can't help glancing back. Michael is watching, and when he smiles at her again, she can't help the blush.

* * * * *

The wavefront pins Voyager in place, safely shielded but without warp engines. On the Doctor's recommendation, Kathryn allows Tom to keep Fair Haven running on Holodeck A, just to let the crew distract themselves. "Go ahead, Captain," Chakotay says, when she hesitates to leave the bridge. "I think Mr. Tuvok and I can keep things under control while you're gone," and when he grins at her, she can't help smiling back. There's something so *solid* about Chakotay, a kind of certainty of his support even when he disagrees with her. She can't imagine doing this without him.

It's so late at night that it's nearly morning in Fair Haven, that silent hour before the sky begins to brighten. She goes to Sullivan's almost automatically and sees that it's deserted inside, but Michael waves at her through the window. When she opens the door, he says, "Come back for that drink?"

"It looks like you're closed."

"No, never, I'm only puttin' the stools up so I can sweep. I'd welcome a bit of company while I do it." She walks gingerly across the floor and perches on one of the remaining bar stools. "What'll it be?" Michael asks. "You don't look the type to start your morning with whiskey."

"Coffee," she says automatically, and then realizes she's in a pub in late nineteenth-century Ireland and it's not likely to be available. "Tea."

"What, together?" Michael's smile lights up his face. "I've some coffee I can brew up, or tea ready now." Apparently Tom's commitment to versimilitude isn't complete.

"Tea, please. Cream if you have it." The floating feeling of exhaustion has settled over her.

He talks quietly as he sweeps, asks her ordinary questions about herself and doesn't expect much in the way of answers. Finally, he says, "*Cead mile failte*," and Kathryn dimly remembers the phrase.

"A—hundred welcomes?"

"A hundred *thousand*," he corrects, and leans his broom against the wall. "You speak our language?"

"I had an aunt who grew up in County Clare," Kathryn explains. "Irish temper and all."

"You've got one as well, I'd imagine," Michael says. Before she can protest, he adds, "You're closer to home than you think, Katie O'Clare."

There's something in his eyes that makes her look at the clock and say, "It's later than I thought, I should be going."

"There's no need." He gestures toward the dartboard set into the wall and the gashes all around it. "This may be your only chance to play darts in here without fellows elbowing you."

Kathryn hesitates a moment, and Michael takes the opportunity to toss one to her, very gently. The tip is capped—a surprising nod to safety, here—and she pulls off the cap. "I suppose one game wouldn't hurt." It might help her wake up a little, anyway. She's no good at darts, but she does enjoy throwing things, even when they land deep in the wall next to the dartboard. Michael cheats rampantly and unrepentantly, stepping well over the line, and she says, outraged, "You're cheating!"

"D'you think you'd be winning if I wasn't?" He smiles at her outrage and then grabs her hand. "Here, I'll show you how to do it." Funny, Kathryn could swear she'd been drinking liquor instead of tea, the way her body reacts. He pulls her close up against him, so close that she can feel his breath against her neck, and clasps his hand around her fingers on the dart. He lays his other hand flat across her stomach and says, "It's all in the breathing." When they throw the dart together, it bounces off the wall and clatters to the floor and Kathryn laughs so hard her stomach hurts. "I give up," Michael says, releasing her. "You've a nice way about you, but it can't help you at darts."

"Flattery is the food of fools," she tells him. When he looks a little puzzled, she adds, "Jonathan Swift?" His face is blank. "The author?"

"Ah, a writer. I was never much one for reading," Michael says.

Kathryn can't help her disappointment. "Some of the greatest writers in the world are Irish." Swift is her favorite of all of them, for his acid wit. *A Modest Proposal* is still the sharpest indictment of society that she's ever read. She goes to pick up the dart.

"Oh, well." Michael takes the dart from her. "Doctor Gilroy has a library of books, I hear. Next time I see him, I'll ask him, can I borrow one or two? Swift, you said?"

That's when a young woman walks in, neatly dressed with a crown of dark braids. "Mornin', Michael," she says.

"Mornin'—oh, no, the time!" He waves the woman over. "Frannie, there's someone I want you to meet. Katie O'Clare, this is my wife, Frances."

His wife. A pit opens in her stomach. "Pleased to meet you," she manages to say, and thinks, *Idiot!* These are only hologram characters.

"I hope Michael hasn't been bending your ear all night long," Frances says. "Once he starts talking, it's hard to stop him." Her smile is patient and full of affection.

Kathryn feels sick. Even if Frances is only a hologram, she wouldn't have flirted with Michael if she'd known he was married. "Thank you very much for your hospitality and now I really must be leaving."

Frances nods and Michael says, “Drop in again before you leave town, Katie, won’t you?”

Kathryn can only nod and say, “I will,” and walk out of Fair Haven into the real world.

* * * * *

The real world is a lot less pleasant than Fair Haven right now, whatever its flaws. The storm batters Voyager and ruptures a plasma conduit. “I believe that will be the worst impact,” Seven says. “However, we will continue to be immobilized for at least seventy-two more hours.”

Most of the crew has decamped to Fair Haven by the time everything reaches equilibrium. Kathryn has even managed to catch five hours of sleep, which is quite a bit for her. “I will maintain control of the ship,” Tuvok tells her. “If you wish to resume your—recreational activities.”

“Chakotay?” she asks. “Have you been to Fair Haven yet?” She wonders what he would make of it—of the strange peacefulness of it. Sometimes when she looks at Chakotay, she thinks he’s desperate for some respite from the universe, and then she blinks and he’s back to steady, even Chakotay.

He shakes his head and offers her one of those smiles that’s just a twitch of his lips and a flash of the dimple in his cheek. “I hear very good things about it, though. You should go on, Captain.”

She goes to the holographic research lab first and says, “Computer, display Fair Haven character Michael Sullivan.” The man appears as though in suspended animation in front of her—almost right, but not quite. “Adjust his parameters to the following specifications. Give him the education of a late nineteenth-century graduate of Trinity College. And add a—period-appropriate background including some form of—struggle, beyond the ordinary.” She’s not sure what she’s saying, but she’s certain that a person who’d never faced challenges in his life wouldn’t be right for her. As a diversion. In a holodeck simulation.

“Modification complete.” Is it her imagination, or does the computer sound a little disapproving?

“Access interactive subroutines. Make him more—subtle.” It’s hard to describe what she wants. “Make him more empathetic. And more curious about the world.”

“Modification complete.”

“Now, access physical characteristics.” She considers. “Set height at two meters. Broader shoulders. Black hair—no, a little shorter. Clean-shaven. Dimples.” He morphs slowly, features appearing and disappearing, until he’s close enough to what she was imagining.

“Modification complete.”

Kathryn wonders if other people are sneaking in here to tinker with their favorites in Fair Haven. “One more thing,” she says, and she feels a little guilty. “Access his interpersonal subroutines—familial characters.” Kathryn takes a deep breath. “Delete the wife.”

“Modification complete.” The computer *definitely* sounds disapproving.

* * * * *

It’s quite late in the night when she walks into Sullivan’s again. An older man is working behind the bar, and he looks puzzled when she asks, “Where’s Michael?”

“Up on the roof, of course. Who’s lookin’?”

She suddenly feels silly. More subtle, she’d told the computer, and here she is being the exact opposite. “Katie—O’Clare? He said—”

“Of course, of course.” The man lowers his voice in a conspiratorial fashion. “He’s got his telescope out, doesn’t usually like to be disturbed, but he said it’d be alright if you were looking. Outside and up the back stairs, love.”

Kathryn is very, very aware that by the standards of propriety in this time period, she’s just declared herself to be a woman of loose morals, even if she isn’t actually going to the roof for some kind of—assignment. She does hope that the computer implemented all of her changes, though. The back stairs lead up to a small walkway, then a very steep second set of stairs with a creaking handrail—thank goodness for holodeck safety protocols—and there she finds the newly-modified Michael sitting with his eye to a beautiful antique telescope.

He must hear her approach, because he sits back from the telescope. His smile is different now, quieter, with the slightest hint of something else behind it. “Want a look? Swift-Tuttle won’t be back in our lifetime, but the Perseids are beautiful.”

This version of Michael does know how to sweet-talk a girl. “Oh, I don’t know,” she says. “Maybe if we’re lucky.” It’s due back around Earth in 2391. She’ll miss it if they’re still in the Delta quadrant, of course. She likes the Perseids better with the naked eye, but it’s fun to try to catch one quickly enough to follow its path with the telescope. Michael sits next to her, not quite touching her, and finally she says, “I’m hogging the telescope, I’m sorry.”

“No trouble—you’re here tonight, and they’ll be back tomorrow. I like to look out there and imagine there’s other worlds, worlds without quite so many troubles as ours.” She wonders how much of their conversation from the other night is left in his memory, after the way she modified him. Drunken laughter echoes in the street below. “Sounds like Davey is closing early.” His voice is mild, stating the fact without anything behind it.

“If it’s still on the table,” Kathryn says carefully, “I would take that whisky you offered.”

“Even better, I’ll give you a fresh glass,” he teases, and offers his hand to help her down the stairs. Her dress is a strange weight on her body that she keeps forgetting, an unexpected bulk that expands the space that she occupies, and she has to grip his hand tightly a few times as they

make their way down. Michael lets them in through the back door, and they walk down a very narrow hallway toward the space of the bar. Another door is cracked, and Kathryn catches a glimpse of a cot, an overstuffed shelf of books, a battered coat hung from a hook. Delete the wife, indeed.

By the time they reach the bar proper, Davey is the only one left, collecting abandoned glassware and dishes. He sets a stack on the bartop. "G'night, Michael," he says, and leaves.

"Do you usually close this early?"

"No," Michael says bluntly. "Whisky, you said? I think we've even got a bottle from County Clare, if you'd like." She sits on a stool at the bar as he finds two glasses and a dusty bottle.

"I haven't had it for years. I snuck a little bit when I was a girl visiting my aunt, and she—"

"Waloped you?" He passes her one of the glasses. "That's what my auntie would've done."

"I suppose that's the best word for it." The glass is a very pretty one, faceted to look like crystal. She lifts it to toast him and remembers the word. "*Sláinte*," she says.

"*Sláinte is táinte*." He clinks his glass against her own.

When she sips it, the whisky is harsh, but she can taste the sun and the peat behind it. She wonders where Tom Paris found the recipe. "I have a friend who says something very like that," she says.

"Oh?" Michael lifts his glass expectantly. "What's that?"

"Live long and prosper. Though I'm not sure he ever meant it to be used as a toast."

"No?" Michael leans against the bar. "Not Irish, then?"

"No, not at all. It's a farewell, among his people."

"Not from you?" He doesn't move, just watches her as she sips at her whisky again.

"There's quite a bit still left in this glass," Kathryn says.

"I'm a heavy pour. Bad for the books but good for business." Michael picks up his glass and walks around the bar to sit on the stool next to her. His sleeves are rolled up, and when he leans back and props his elbows on the bar, she sees the tattoo on his inner forearm—a green flag with a spiky yellow sun half-risen at the center. He catches her looking. "You know what it means?"

"You're—part of the Irish Republican Brotherhood?" Trust her to bring conflict into this peaceful little place, telling the computer that she wanted someone with a little struggle in his background. "The independence movement."

Michael flexes his wrist a little. "I was, once," he says. "Another life. Before I came to Fair Haven, where no one cares to hear of the fight and certainly not to join." He cuts a glance at her. "What do you know about the brotherhood, Katie O'Clare? You're no revolutionary." His tone isn't quite accusatory, but there's a question in it.

"It's not—my fight," she says. "But I know what it's like to see injustice and to feel helpless in the face of it, and to act anyway." Tom must have skipped over the 'history of Ireland' section of the databank when he decided to build an Irish village.

"It was another life," Michael says again, but she sees a little of it in his eyes. She knows that restless expression; she sees it every time she looks at Chakotay in an unguarded moment.

Carefully, Kathryn puts her hand on his wrist. "*Éirinn go Brách*," she says, and holds up her glass again.

Michael brushes his glass against hers, barely hard enough to make a noise, and finishes the glass. Then he slides off his stool and steps forward to kiss Kathryn. He rests one hand on her side, cradling her face with the other, and his hands are warm and calloused, just a little rough against her skin. Her breath catches in her throat as he touches his lips to hers and she leans into it.

"Harry, my boy, I owe you—*oh god!*" The door opens and then abruptly slams shut. Kathryn recognizes that voice and cringes.

Michael steps back regretfully. "I'm sorry about that," he says. "I didn't expect—"

"No," Kathryn says, "Neither did I." She's very warm from his kiss, and from the whisky trickling through her body. "It's late—I should go." God only knows what's happening on the ship around her while she's playing house in here. He looks uncertain and she adds, "I don't regret it, I just need to—go right now."

"But you'll be back?" When she nods, Michael takes her hand and kisses the back of it. "All right then, Katie O'Clare. Until next time."

Tom Paris has wisely absented himself from the hallway as she leaves the holodeck. When she strides onto the bridge, it's Chakotay's raised eyebrow, of all things, that makes her flush red. "What's the situation?"

"The radiation bombardment from the wavefront remains steady," Tuvok says. "There are no changes predicted. The Doctor continues to administer inoculations as needed. If you find yourself growing dizzy, Captain, you should obtain another."

"All right. Keep me posted. I'll be in my ready room—Mr. Paris, a word?"

Tom, who has been studiously avoiding her eyes at his station, stands up so quickly that he knocks his knee against his console. “Of course, Captain.” The doors have barely shut behind them before he’s babbling, “Captain, I am *so sorry*, I thought the pub was still open—I didn’t realize you were in there or I never would have intruded—”

“Mr. Paris, sit down before you give us both a heart attack.” He collapses into a chair as she sits. “As you may recall, you and I have already shared a number of uncomfortable circumstances, so there’s no need to panic. Yes, you observed me in an—unexpected situation with Mr. Sullivan.”

Tom looks uneasy. “He’s a bit different than I programmed him.”

Ah. “I added a few details to make him a more interesting conversationalist,” Kathryn says. That’s one way to put it.

“He looks a little different too.”

“If you’re trying to say something, Lieutenant, spit it out.”

Tom shifts uneasily. “He’s—no, it was just unexpected.”

“I expect your discretion,” Kathryn says. “If I hear a word about this on the bridge or in the mess hall—”

The expression of horror that crosses his face is enough to reassure her.

* * * * *

She goes back to Fair Haven a day later. It’s morning; the streets are bustling with the kind of people that Michael used to be, cheerful and empty-headed, and the sun is shining down in defiance of Irish weather patterns. She’s just about to walk into Sullivan’s when B’Elanna comes hurrying up, followed by—Chakotay. Kathryn couldn’t say why, but her stomach tightens at the sight of him. “Captain!” B’Elanna says. “I finally dragged Chakotay in here to take a look—I heard that this place sells breakfast?”

“Yes—yes, that’s what I was coming to get,” Kathryn says. “Breakfast.” Chakotay raises an eyebrow at her and she has to fight back the smile. “We can all get breakfast together.”

The place isn’t too busy, only Spencer soused in his usual corner, and they claim a rough-hewn table. “I’m guessing this isn’t the kind of place that has menus,” Chakotay murmurs.

“Hm?” Kathryn has been scanning the room for Michael. “No, I don’t think so. I’ll go order us some food.”

Michael takes his spot behind the bar just as she walks up, and he smiles a little shyly at her, his cheek dimpling. “Back again, Katie?”

“With a few friends,” she says, and why should that sound like an apology? “They wanted to see about breakfast and I was—on my way in anyway.”

He bends his head just a little closer, enough that his voice won’t carry out through the bar. “I’m glad to see you. What would you like?”

It takes her one moment too long to realize that of course he’s asking what she’d like for *breakfast*. “Coffee, if you have enough. And three of —”

“The house special?” He smiles a little as he prompts her. “I think I can manage that. Go on back to your friends, I’ll bring it out to you.”

When she returns to the table, B’Elanna asks, “Who was *that*?” Chakotay gives her a sharp look. “I’m just—curious about all these people that Tom invented!”

“It’s a little more complicated than that.” Kathryn looks around. “They’re not quite the Doctor, of course, but they have more personality and independence than your ordinary holonovel character.” She sees Michael approaching with three precariously balanced cups of coffee. “Hello, Michael. These are my friends.”

“B’Elanna Torres.” B’Elanna likes raktajino, which is about three times stronger than ordinary human coffee, but until Tom programs a Klingon town, this is probably the best she’ll get.

Chakotay has been watching her—watching Michael—the entire time, and now he says, “Thank you. I’m Chakotay. Kathryn told us that Fair Haven was a beautiful place.”

“Katie told you that, did she?” Michael smiles and she has a bizarre sense of *deja vu*. “If you like a quiet place, you can hardly find a quieter one.” She’s never heard something facially pleasant sound so much like an insult. It’s not even damning with faint praise. “I’d best get back to the bar, Davey’s in the kitchen working on your breakfast.”

“B’Elanna,” Chakotay says sharply, before she can speak. “Don’t.”

They talk about little things—how the crew is holding up during the wavefront, which Seven now predicts will last several more days; whether Tom has gone to church yet to see how the Doctor is doing as the town priest; whether the coffee here or in the mess hall tastes more like Earth coffee—before Davey lays an enormous plate of food before them. “To start your day off, before you go wherever you’re going.”

“Well,” Chakotay says, as they all stare at it. “Mr. Neelix’s portion sizes have nothing on Sullivan’s.”

“That looks like most of a pig.” Not quite, but there’s black pudding and white pudding and bacon, and then eggs and mushrooms and tomatoes and potatoes and onions fried up, with a round loaf of soda bread that steams when Kathryn breaks it open.

“Guess they want us to stay.” B’Elanna spears a piece of black pudding. “Nice,” she says. “Maybe he could give Neelix a little help sometimes. Or a cooking class.”

The sheer amount of food keeps them all quiet, until Harry and Tom arrive and shoot so many longing glances at their table that Kathryn finally waves them over too. It’s not as though she was planning to do anything with Michael that can’t be done out in the open. She’s not going to forget that it’s the holodeck and there are other crew members all around.

* * * * *

Well. Michael takes her for a picnic in the forest on the outskirts of Fair Haven, at the far reaches of where the holodeck matrix will allow, and they eat and talk and then he kisses her again or she kisses him and she ends up with grass stains on the back of her dress and twigs in her hair and a kind of shivery feeling all through her.

They go on a lot of picnics.

Chakotay always seems to *know*, when she walks onto the bridge, whether she’s just been to Fair Haven. Voyager is free of the wavefront and continuing on toward home at a steady clip, but the crew all voted to keep Fair Haven running continuously. It means that it’s all in real time, when Kathryn can’t get there for days at a time or when she goes and it’s the middle of the night, and Michael always looks somewhere between haunted and relieved. “You’re the only one here who *knows*,” he tells her, when she touches his tattoo, “The only one who understands that it’s too quiet,” and she regrets that she took his peaceful Fair Haven existence away from him. But he’ll talk to her about the things in his past—his imaginary past! Remember, Kathryn!—and how they’ve affected him, the way that other people on this ship can’t or won’t.

“You spend a lot of time in Fair Haven,” Chakotay says one day.

“It’s very popular with the entire crew.” They’re in her ready room, going over the latest reports from stellar cartography. “I think people like to have a peaceful place.”

“And you’ve found the only person who doesn’t.” When Kathryn looks at him in confusion, he clarifies, “Your Mr. Sullivan. He doesn’t seem to like it”

“Well.” She doesn’t really have a follow-up. “Are you concerned about something, Chakotay?”

“We haven’t had dinner in a while, you and I,” Chakotay says abruptly. “We used to, every so often.”

“Yes, we did. It’s what kept me sane, those first months,” she admits. “You’re right, we should.”

“Not in Fair Haven, please. My stomach can’t take any more traditional Irish food.” He pats his belly and Kathryn feels a curious kind of pleasure at the sight of it.

“Tom could have programmed in a slightly wider range of options,” she admits. “I promise, I’ll—”

“Oh, no,” Chakotay says. “No, it hasn’t been long enough that I’ve forgotten your cooking. I’ll make dinner. 1900?”

“I’ll bring wine.”

Funny, what a good mood she’s in, even as B’Elanna calls her down to look at some alarming plasma conduit readings. “Going back to Fair Haven tonight?” B’Elanna asks when they’ve found the problem.

“No, Chakotay and I are having dinner.” At B’Elanna’s choked noise, Kathryn says, “Speak freely, B’Elanna. Lord knows I can tell you want to.”

B’Elanna clears her throat. Engineering is deserted around them. “Captain. If I said that you seemed attached to a—tall black-haired man with dimples, a tattoo, and a history as a freedom fighter—”

Kathryn inhales very slowly and evenly, because otherwise she’ll have to laugh hysterically at herself. “You know,” she says distantly, “Michael wasn’t even like that, originally. I reprogrammed him.”

“Oh, no,” B’Elanna says.

“He was—a flirtatious bartender. I told the computer to make him taller, stockier, darker hair and dimples, and some kind of—struggle in his past. Better-educated, too. Quieter.” What an admission to make, especially to a subordinate, but B’Elanna has always been a bit outside the usual structure.

B’Elanna looks about as horrified as Kathryn feels. “So—you’re dating a hologram that you turned into an Irish version of—”

“B’Elanna.” She wonders if this is what B’Elanna kept trying to point out, all those times that Chakotay cut her off. “Believe me, it was unintentional.” Why is she trying to justify herself to B’Elanna? “Have you mentioned this to Chakotay?”

“*Absolutely* not.” B’Elanna turns away to look down at the console again, but the plasma conduit readings are normal again—no way to ignore it. “No, Captain, I don’t plan to mention it to anyone. I just thought—you might want to know. Before it becomes too obvious to other people.”

Kathryn goes to the holographic research lab first and says, “Computer, display Fair Haven character Michael Sullivan.”

He appears as summoned. Even frozen in front of her, there’s a tension in the lines of his body that wasn’t there before, a caged restlessness. “Computer,” she says, and then she can’t make herself do it.

“Modifications?” the computer asks.

“No.” It was one thing when he was just an outrageous flirt, when there was nothing below that surface. But she’s gone and ruined him, created a hologram that can never be happy—and she knows he’s only a hologram, but she still feels guilty. “I’m sorry,” she says.

“Restate new parameters,” the computer says.

“No new parameters. Terminate current modification session.” He disappears back into Fair Haven, back to his dissatisfaction and his drunken clientele.

* * * * *

After a minor crisis in stellar cartography and another in the kitchen, Kathryn heads for Chakotay’s quarters at 19:30. It’s not the latest she’s been, but she’d really meant to be on time this time. “Oh, Neelix,” she says as she leaves the kitchen. “Do you happen to have a bottle of wine?”

Neelix barely manages to contain his excitement. “An excellent vintage!” he says, pressing a bottle into her hands. It’s not exactly what she’s used to—definitely Delta quadrant, not replicated—but she takes it anyway and then run-walks to Chakotay’s quarters.

“I’m so sorry—”

Chakotay smiles at her, and something loosens in her chest. “Don’t worry,” he says. “I programmed the recipe into the replicator, but I haven’t replicated it yet. I thought you might have a few other things to handle.” He’s not in his uniform, she realizes, but a soft dark sweater that fits him all too well, and she wishes it had occurred to her to dress differently. She never has to think about it in Fair Haven, not when the holodeck automatically dresses her.

“Neelix gave me this.” Kathryn holds out the bottle. “It’s a little—murky, but he claims it’s very good.”

He breaks out into a grin. “I feel like I’ve heard that before, and it ended with quite the hangover.” He gestures to the table, already set with plates, silverware, and two wine glasses. “Go ahead, dinner will take about thirty seconds.”

Kathryn pries the cap off the bottle and is rewarded with an eye-watering odor that somehow, after the first blast, settles into an aroma not unlike wine infused with cedar or pine. “Don’t judge it by the first sniff,” she warns, and wafts it under Chakotay’s nose. He coughs, pretends to stagger, and grabs Kathryn’s shoulder to steady himself. It shouldn’t feel any different than any other time he’s touched her, but his grip is somehow firmer and at the same time almost tentative, as though she might shrug him off. Instead she puts a hand on his back and teases, “If that’s what a single sniff will do you—”

“Let’s see what a glass will do.” He moves away from her to take a covered dish of food from the replicator and she misses the feeling of him beneath her hand. Kathryn makes herself busy pouring two wineglasses of the foreign wine. It has a certain pearly sheen to it, tiny green sparkles floating in it, and she suspects that Neelix has chosen something very unusual for them.

Chakotay puts the dish in the middle of the table and, when they’ve sat, lifts his glass. “May all the things we hope come to pass,” he says.

“That’s lovely.” Kathryn clinks her glass against his. “I don’t think I’ve heard you say it before.”

“It was my father’s toast, at big family gatherings.” He takes a sip of the wine and swallows slowly. “Unexpectedly good.”

Chakotay talks about his family only rarely, even less about his extended family. She doesn’t press for details, instead trying the wine. It fizzes on her tongue like champagne and the taste of it at the back of her throat is herbal and bitter. “My grandfather used to pray over the meal,” she says. “His prayer drove my grandma crazy.” Chakotay raises an eyebrow. “Good bread, good meat, good God, let’s eat.”

He grins, and there’s that dimple again. “I think I’ve heard that one before.” He uncovers the dish to reveal delicate filets of white fish, drizzled around with a sharp-smelling green sauce. “May I?”

It takes Kathryn a moment to realize what he’s asking. She extends her plate and lets him transfer one piece and spoon sauce over it. After a bite, she closes her eyes and groans. “You should cook for me every night,” she says. When she hears the slightest catch in Chakotay’s breath, she realizes what it sounds like and opens her eyes quickly. “I mean—that Mr. Neelix could learn from you.” She takes a gulp of wine.

“What is it you say in Fair Haven?” Chakotay asks. “An Irish toast?”

The question startles her. She’s almost forgotten Fair Haven, sitting in here with him. *Sláinte*, she says. “It just means ‘to your health.’”

“I see. I think I’ll stick with mine.” He takes a bite. “You know, the replicator did an even better job with it than I thought it would. It’s a family recipe, you know. From our home, not from the jungles on Earth.”

It feels like a gift that he’s offering her. “What is it?”

“Any kind of white fish—this is wahoo.” She can’t help her smile at the name. “Allium—garlic, here, and then all the green herbs you can find and a few green chiles.”

“It’s wonderful.” Kathryn is eating hers too quickly, she knows, but she can feel the warmth of the strange wine in her blood and it’s making her less than mannerly.

They’ve decamped from the table to opposite ends of the couch in his quarters, nearly halfway into the bottle, when Chakotay says, “Captain—I have to ask.”

“Kathryn,” she reminds him. “At least here, Chakotay, it has to be Kathryn.”

His eyes are soft. “You’re very fond of Michael Sullivan.”

She stiffens immediately. “He—it’s only a hologram.”

Chakotay leans forward a little on the couch, resting his elbows on his knees. “But you made him the way that he is.”

“I—who told you that?” She’s going to bust B’Elanna down to ensign—

“Mr. Paris. He warned me that he didn’t intend to allow anyone else to modify the characters, seeing how much you had changed Michael. What did you do to him?”

Kathryn flushes hot and takes another long drink of wine. Of all the people in the world that she doesn’t want to discuss this with, it’s Chakotay. “I made him smarter, better educated—and more complex.” At Chakotay’s skeptical expression, she clarifies, “I made him less—blunt, more empathetic. Modified his physical appearance to make him taller and darker-haired and”—this is excruciating—“gave him dimples.” Chakotay smiles wide at that, his own dimples appearing, and how did she ever miss it in the first place? “And I ruined his happiness in Fair Haven.”

“How’s that?”

Her smile is sardonic. “I asked the computer to give him some kind of—struggle, in his past. It made him a former Irish revolutionary—that’s what the tattoo is.”

“I recognized it.” Chakotay’s voice is even. “The Maquis studied the tactics of all kinds of historical rebellions, as part of our training. I was the one who developed the curriculum.”

Of course he did. Of course Chakotay knows. “And now he’s miserable in Fair Haven because he’s cut off from the fight,” and how did she not see what she was doing, when she made him? “He thinks I’m the only one who can understand it because I’m the only one who knows what it means. Aside from you and B’Elanna, I suppose.”

“And a hologram is—safe,” Chakotay says carefully, and it sounds almost like a question. “No risk of—the sort of concerns Starfleet might have.”

Kathryn takes a deep breath, because she can hear what he’s asking. “I didn’t realize what I was doing until B’Elanna pointed it out,” she admits. “I didn’t mean to—adopt anyone else’s likeness or history.” Her wineglass is empty and she refills it; when Chakotay offers his own glass, she refills it as well.

“But you like—him.” Chakotay is closer than Michael was, the first time that he kissed her. Less than a meter away, at the other end of the couch, and her knee is practically touching his own, but it feels like an infinite gulf. He may be out of uniform, but she isn’t.

“He’s a hologram.”

“And if he weren’t?”

“I gave him all those traits for a reason,” she says. It’s the closest she can come to admitting something she’s only just now realizing is true. “There are no regulations regarding...relationships with holograms.”

Chakotay leans back against the arm of the couch. “You know, I’d almost forgotten how many conduct regulations there are in Starfleet. Though not regarding interpersonal relationships, I recall. What was it you said, Starfleet tries not to interfere?”

“Yes,” she says. “For everyone but the captain.” It may be unwritten, but it’s a rule nonetheless. Especially for female captains.

“Do you think Starfleet would expect you to be alone for the next seventy years, if we don’t make it home?” He must see the expression on her face, because he amends quickly, “Not *alone*. I’ll always be here for you,” and she doesn’t think she’s imagining the way his voice catches, “and the rest of the crew, but that’s—not the same.”

No, not the same as waking up in the morning with someone in your bed, holding someone after a terrible day, the blissed-out feeling of sex with someone you love, knowing you’ll get to have it for the rest of your life. She forces a smile. “I suppose not. I haven’t given up on getting home, though.”

“Of course not,” Chakotay says. “You shouldn’t.” He extends his leg just enough to bump his ankle against her own and she traps it against the couch, holds it there as though it’s the only thing she can hang on to. Somehow it feels less intimate than gripping his hand, even though that’s what she’d really like to do.

* * * * *

She’s eating dinner at the bar, alternately chatting with Michael as he doles out beers and flipping idly through a book, when Michael whistles and says, “Never thought I’d see him in here with a lady.”

The bottom drops out of her stomach even as Kathryn turns on her barstool. Chakotay has just walked in with a blonde woman about Kathryn’s age, and he bends his head close to hers before coming to the bar. “Hello, Kathryn,” he says, and glances down at her whisky and its slowly-dissolving ice cube. “Michael, I’ll take two of whatever Kathryn is having.”

“Oh, Katie’s got the County Clare specialty,” Michael says. There’s a slight sharpness to his voice. “I keep it just for the County Clare lasses. But I’ll find something for you two. I don’t think I’ve seen your lady friend here before?”

Chakotay looks uncomfortable for the briefest second, but it passes. “Moira Walsh,” he says. “She’s just moved to Fair Haven—I offered to show her around.”

“What does Moira do?” The words come out of Kathryn’s mouth a little too aggressively, but Moira isn’t a member of the crew and she knows everyone who lives in Fair Haven, which means that someone has added Moira—just for Chakotay, she realizes.

“She’s a scientist.” Chakotay accepts two glasses from Michael. “She’s been traveling extensively in other countries and was looking for a place to—call home.” Every word feels like a pinprick to Kathryn. Is this how he felt, when she was describing the characteristics she gave Michael?

“Well, enjoy the whisky,” Michael says. “I’ll come by later to see how you liked it.”

* * * * *

“Would you forget it, if you could?” They’re lying on the roof of the bar, staring up at the stars. Kathryn’s head is pillowed on Michael’s jacket, but she can’t help feeling like his warmth next to her isn’t quite—enough. As though if she reached out to touch him, her hand would pass right through him.

“What, be ignorant and at peace?” Michael is quiet for a moment, and he strokes his fingers over the back of Kathryn’s hand. That, she feels. “No,” he says finally. “There are people who died that no one’d remember but for me. There’s still a cause. How could I abandon that, just for a little calm for myself?”

She’d wished he would say yes. She would’ve modified him again to take it away, even though it would make him entirely different. For all the little things, height and hair color and education, *this*—this yearning, this sense of a cause left incomplete—is what makes him the Michael that she cares for. It would feel like a betrayal to remove that. “No,” she says. “I know someone like you—very much like you—and he would never want to forget.”

Michael is silent again, and his fingers fall still against her skin. “Chakotay, isn’t it?”

The stars are very bright above them. There’s no point lying to a hologram. “Yes. He was—at war, for a long time. He’s lost almost everyone. He’d never want to forget.”

“You’ve known him a long time,” Michael says, and there’s no accusation in it.

“Years, now.” Hard to imagine there was ever a time that she *didn’t* know him, a time when she was hunting him down.

“Is that what his tattoo is for?” She feels Michael brush his hand across his own. She hesitates, long enough that Michael says, “Never mind. I’m only curious about the people you know, the ones you spend time with outside of Fair Haven. You came from another place, and—sometimes you’re here with me and sometimes you seem a hundred miles away.”

“Hundreds of thousands,” she murmurs. He doesn’t ask.

* * * * *

It seems like every other time she’s in Fair Haven, she sees Chakotay and Moira. Walking down the lane, their heads bent close together, or sharing a meal while she sits at the bar and chats with Michael. Kathryn can’t help her awareness of Chakotay—she used to think that it was because he was her trusted first officer, but that’s been a self-deception all along, hasn’t it. It’s not part of ordinary command to know just how far away your XO is at all times, to feel the phantom presence of his hand on your back or your shoulder. And to watch him put that hand on Moira—it curdles something in her stomach.

She shouldn’t ask it on the bridge, but it’s been a quiet shift and there’s little else to think about in this relatively empty stretch of space. “Did you have Mr. Paris make—someone for you?” Her throat is painful as she says it. “In Fair Haven? Moira?”

Chakotay sits a little straighter in his chair. “I had a conversation with Mr. Paris. There were—unnamed characters already programmed in as the occasional updates to the scenario. He accelerated the introduction of one.”

“A scientist. Who’s been traveling extensively. Does she like dogs too?”

Chakotay’s mouth tightens a little. “The subject hasn’t come up. Is there a problem, Captain? I considered what you said about the captain being—unable to engage in romantic affairs with subordinate crew members, and it occurred to me that the same could be said about me.”

“You were in a relationship with Seska,” she points out. She keeps her voice quiet, but Harry Kim makes a high-pitched noise in his throat that suggests he’s overheard them and is wishing for an alien attack.

“Her tampering with Mr. Tuvok’s holo-novel wasn’t exactly an accurate portrayal,” he says. “But yes, I was. Before I returned to Starfleet.”

Kathryn hates how stilted this conversation has become, hates the fact that she’s the one complaining about Chakotay creating an ersatz Janeway in this Irish hologram that doesn’t really matter. “Were you the one who came up with her parameters?”

“Mr. Paris offered to—generate her for me. I made modifications, just as you did.” There’s something pleading in his eyes. “Is this really what we’re going to do?”

“I don’t know what you mean,” she lies. Harry Kim moans and he sounds like he’s dying. “Mr. Kim, I think now is an excellent time for a full sensor diagnostic.”

* * * * *

It's a week later when she meets Michael late at night and his face is somber. "Katie," he says. "I wasn't sure how long you'd be."

"It's only been a few days," she says, and she's expecting his smile in return, but it never comes. "Is everything all right?"

He looks uneasy. "I've been wanting to talk to you. You know what you mean to me, what you always will, but—"

"But—?" This can't possibly be happening.

"But ever since she came to Fair Haven, there's been something—"

"Wait a minute," Kathryn says. "You're leaving me for *Moira Walsh*?"

"You saved me from losing my mind, here in Fair Haven." Michael is apologetic. "I thought I'd never find a person who could understand—who could help me find some way to make peace with everything that's happened."

Kathryn is struggling to contain the mild hysteria at the idea that her hologram boyfriend is trying to let her down easy. "And Moira—?"

"She knows—she understands struggle, oppression. She was in America before their war. And she's *here*, Katie—I know you've got your own problems to attend to, but you disappear for weeks and then you're back all of a sudden, and sometimes you're—" He hesitates. "I don't want to keep you from him, either."

Him. No, she can't deny that, can she. "I'm glad," she says. "I'm glad you found someone for you," and she is. After what she's done to Michael, ruining this peaceful paradise for him, she supposes it's the least she can hope for. "I'm glad she found you." That, perhaps, is a little more self-serving. She doesn't think she could bear to see Chakotay with Moira much longer, and certainly not without Michael to distract her. "What will you do? Will you stay in Fair Haven?"

Michael shakes his head. "It's not enough for us," he says. "Afraid it never would have been. It's not enough for you either."

"No. No, it's not," Kathryn admits. She thinks of the world beyond the holodeck, of the galaxy full of marvels and terrors yet to be discovered. "Thank you, Michael," she says, and she means it. She leans in to kiss his cheek, and he presses his cheek to hers for just a minute.

"Katie O'Clare." He pulls back and he does smile at her then, his cheek dimpling. "Live long and prosper."

* * * * *

Maybe fortune will favor the belatedly bold. Kathryn finds the half-empty bottle of Neelix's wine in her quarters, takes a deep breath, and goes to find Chakotay. "Come in," he says when she presses his door chime, and he raises one eyebrow at the bottle of wine but lets her in.

"I heard a rumor that our holograms have left us for each other, and I believe drinking together is the usual way to commiserate."

There's a hint of a smile playing on Chakotay's lips. "Yes, Moira let me down very kindly this afternoon. Have a seat, I'll find us a few glasses." He retrieves two from the shelf and then joins her on the couch, close enough that there are only a few centimeters between them.

The wine is pearlescent in their cups. "May all the things we hope come to pass," Kathryn says, and clinks her cup against his. Chakotay's eyes are warm when he looks at her, and she can't help feeling that as long as she doesn't say the wrong thing, they're on the verge of—something.

"Let's face it," Chakotay says. "We each created someone for ourselves and they ran off together. It's hard to misinterpret that."

"Yes. I made my restless warrior and you made your scientist-explorer, and of course they found each other." Kathryn is a grown woman. It shouldn't be so hard to cross this final line, not when Chakotay has all but told her how he feels. "Computer," she says, "Engage privacy settings."

Chakotay just watches her with his soft dark eyes until she sets down her glass and closes the distance between them. If not for the little hitch in his breath when their lips meet—the way he pulls her to him the first time she tastes the wine on his tongue—she might think it was ordinary to him. But he wraps one arm around her and slides his fingers into her hair and kisses her like he's hungry for it. She can't keep her hands off the broad span of his shoulders or the curve of his jaw; she wants to memorize the way that he shivers just a little when she traces the shell of his ear with one finger. It feels greedy to break away from his mouth and kiss the spot where his jaw meets his neck just to see if it will make his breath catch, but she does it anyway. "Kathryn," he says softly, and she feels the vibration of it. When she lifts her head, he's smiling, and she can't help touching her thumb to the dimple in his cheek.

They're awkwardly arranged on the couch now, and Kathryn feels a little like a teenager with nowhere better to go than a narrow couch. She doesn't want to get up, though, and risk puncturing whatever this fragile thing is between them. "Chakotay," she says back, and when she smiles at him, he runs his finger along the bow of her lip. He feels solid, real, in a way that Michael never did.

"I had started to wonder," he admits, and he dips his head to kiss just below her ear. "If perhaps the chance to create someone for yourself had—spoiled me for you."

Kathryn runs her fingernails through his short hair and smiles at the way it rumples him. "I suspect it was the other way around."

"Oh?" He pulls her until she half-tumbles, laughing, to sprawl across his lap. It brings their faces very close together, and his smile is wide. "I'm only glad my poor approximation of you was enough to lure your Michael away." She can't help kissing him again, leaning into him as she does, and he wraps his arms around her.

They lose themselves in each other for a long time, long enough that Neelix comms her to say, "Captain, Lieutenant Paris has arranged *cooking classes* for me in this Fair Haven place, and I really must protest—"

Kathryn breaks away from Chakotay. “Yes, Mr. Neelix,” she says, and if she’s a little out of breath, Chakotay is the only one who needs to know. “I’ll be right there.” She sighs and looks regretfully at Chakotay.

“I’ll be right beside you,” he tells her, and kisses her once more before they go to face the latest crisis.

End Notes

[*A Modest Proposal*](#) is brutally dark and very funny.

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