

## why don't you and I get together

Posted originally on the [Ad Astra :: Star Trek Fanfiction Archive](http://www.adastrafanfic.com/works/1783) at <http://www.adastrafanfic.com/works/1783>.

Rating: [Mature](#)  
Archive Warning: [No Archive Warnings Apply](#)  
Category: [F/M](#)  
Fandom: [Star Trek: Voyager](#)  
Relationship: [Kathryn Janeway/Chakotay](#)  
Character: [Kathryn Janeway](#), [Chakotay](#)  
Additional Tags: [Fake/Pretend Relationship\(s\)](#), [Friends to Lovers](#), [Mutual Pining](#)  
Language: English  
Stats: Published: 2024-09-07 Words: 13,292 Chapters: 8/8

## why don't you and I get together

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### Summary

The very public relationship between Lieutenants Paris and Torres sets off a flurry of hasty romantic pairings, as though everyone on the ship has suddenly realized that they'd like to have sex again before they die of old age.

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Chakotay suggests to Janeway that the only way to fend off the crew's amorous advances is...to pretend to be in a relationship.

## Chapter 1

The very public relationship between Lieutenants Paris and Torres sets off a flurry of hasty romantic pairings, as though everyone on the ship has suddenly realized that they'd like to have sex again before they die. Kathryn notices it only obliquely until the day that Ensign Cartier is telling her about some modifications to the warp coils and he suddenly says, "You're looking very beautiful today."

It's been such a long time since someone made a romantic advance—not counting the holo-novel kiss and its disastrous aftermath—that she reacts without recognizing the intent behind his words. "Thank you, Ensign, but that's not relevant to the warp coils." Seven must be rubbing off on her. At least she didn't say 'Beauty is irrelevant.'

"And you were so smart, saving everyone from that security simulation on the holodeck. I'm working on my own two-person holo. Would you be willing to run through some of it with me and give me your opinion?"

This conversation has taken a strange turn. "I think Mr. Tuvok would be better qualified to advise you."

Cartier looks a little desperate. "I have a lot of replicator rations saved up," he says. "We could have dinner in my quarters."

She finally realizes what's happening. "Ensign Cartier, that would be...inappropriate." He was Maquis, so maybe he doesn't know. "Starfleet regulations prohibit any...fraternization of that kind between officers and crew under their supervision." When she sees that he's about to keep talking, she adds, "The answer is no, Ensign. Dismissed."

He leaves, looking a little crestfallen. Kathryn would chalk it up to a freak occurrence until it happens again with Lieutenant Carey, whom she firmly reminds that he's married and who should very much know better, and then again with Ensign Sprague, who's about twenty-two years old and looks near tears when she says sharply, "No."

Kathryn is worried that it's something *she's* doing until the time that the turbolift opens and she sees that the Delaney sisters have cornered Chakotay. Jenny whispers into his ear and Chakotay smiles resolutely, but Kathryn can see the discomfort. "Chakotay!" She waves him over.

"Thanks for the rescue," he says, and they don't discuss it further.

She sees it happen again as she turns the corner on her way to the holodeck. Seven is standing close to Chakotay—very close, it seems like barely an inch between them—and puts her hand on his lower back. He laughs and says something quietly to her. Kathryn turns and walks away, her mood soured. She should have remembered, Chakotay has a different attitude toward this kind of thing. Yes, hologram-Seska modified his behavior to be more extreme, but he's admitted that he was in a relationship with his subordinate while he was a Maquis. She should talk to him about it. Seven may also have a different attitude toward sexual relationships, but she can't allow that kind of blatant violation of the rules.

When he comes to her ready room that evening and begins, "Kathryn, I don't believe you've eaten dinner yet," and smiles his soft smile, she decides to broach the subject.

"Chakotay. I need to talk to you about your interactions with the Delaney sisters, and Seven of Nine—"

He grimaces. "I heard it's been happening to you too. Cartier, and Carey, and Sprague?"

She's momentarily thrown. "Yes, they've behaved—inappropriately."

Chakotay nods and sits down on the other side of her desk. "I've been considering the problem."

"The problem?" This isn't how she expected the conversation to go.

"Seven explained what's going on. Some of the crew see me, and apparently you, as...romantic prospects."

"That's preposterous! We're in command of a Starfleet vessel! I know that things were—different, among the Maquis, but everyone here agreed to abide by Starfleet's regulations."

He flinches at that mention of the Maquis and his smile disappears. Kathryn hates it when that happens. "I believe that even among the original Starfleet officers, those particular regulations are beginning to lose their appeal. Particularly when it looks like we're still going to have a long trip home."

Kathryn leans back in her chair and closes her eyes. What a mess. She massages her neck for a moment and then hears Chakotay approach. He puts his hands on her shoulders, her neck, and massages gently. A shiver runs through her at how good it feels, and she remembers New Earth, the way his big hands had felt on her then. She's only indulged herself by letting him massage her neck a few times since then, only when it was very painful. "You said—ahh—you've been considering the problem?"

"Yes." His hands work their way up to the base of her hairline, until his fingers are threaded into her hair. "It would be very inappropriate for either of us to engage in that kind of relationship with a subordinate."

"Yes," she mumbles. It's hard not to feel half-drunk when he does this. "Highly inappropriate."

"To avoid any more advances from the crew, I'm suggesting that you and I—pretend to be involved."

She sits bolt upright in her chair and turns to stare at Chakotay. He's lifted his hands away in a don't-shoot gesture and he takes a step back. "You're my subordinate."

“Yes. But respectfully, Kathryn, I don’t think the crew views me as your subordinate in the same way that everyone else is.” There’s his soft smile again, a little broader. “I think it’s the best way out of this situation. But of course it’s up to you.”

\* \* \* \* \*

It’s easy to get the rumor started. They stand very close together in a place that Neelix will be able to spot them. Chakotay pulls her into a quick kiss, easy, affectionate, like they’ve done it a hundred times before. His lips are very soft, but she barely has time to appreciate them. Then he leans back minutely and Kathryn says against his lips, “Did he see?”

There’s a very loud *clang* and they both turn to see that Neelix has dropped a metal crate of—well, Kathryn hesitates to call them vegetables. “Captain! Commander! I’m so sorry to interrupt!”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about, Mr. Neelix.” Chakotay touches his thumb to his lips thoughtfully. Kathryn can’t help but track the movement with her eyes.

“I don’t want to hear about this in the hallways,” she tells Neelix. “This is a—private matter.”

“Of course, of course not! My lips are sealed! You can trust me,” he assures them.

Within the hour, the entire ship knows.

## Chapter 2

### Chapter Summary

“While I was treating...someone else...for a personal medical issue, that patient commented that you did not appear to be 'getting any.' I understood the phrase to mean—”

“I know what it means, Doctor.”

“I asked what the basis was for this statement, and the patient explained that neither you nor Commander Chakotay appear to spend significant time in each other’s quarters. It is believed that you are both far too discreet to engage in intercourse outside of your quarters. Ergo—”

Chakotay is very good at feigning their passionate romance. On the bridge, sometimes he leans in unnecessarily close to tell her things like, “There’s a nebula about an hour away that we could investigate,” or “I’ve reviewed tomorrow’s duty rosters.” She used to be the one who initiated most physical contact (entirely innocent), laying a hand on his shoulder or chest, linking arms once or twice when a kind of goofy spirit overtook her. Now he seems to find excuses to touch her—beckoning her over to look at something by cupping one big hand around her shoulder, gently tucking a strand of hair behind her ear when they walk down the hall together, even putting a guiding hand on her lower back when they step into a turbolift.

“You know, we don’t have to pretend when people aren’t around.” She says it a little waspishly when they’re alone in her ready room. “I doubt anyone is going to suspect that this is all a show if we’re not in some passionate embrace when no one can see. Or even if someone walks into the room.”

Something flickers in his eyes. “Of course. If you don’t like it, I won’t do it.” The problem, she’s realizing, is that she does quite enjoy it, and him play-acting when they’re alone makes it feel too real.

She thinks she understands a little why Paris and Torres were so irresponsible. There’s something intoxicating about all of the physical contact, even if it isn’t leading where she wishes—yes, she admits it—where she wishes it would. It’s natural, of course. The people pairing off on the ship aren’t just doing it for the conversation. And she hasn’t had sex since she said goodbye to Mark.

That’s probably why, the next time that he kisses her lightly when he walks onto the turbolift, she presses him back against the wall with her hands and with her hips, turns it deeper and a little dirty. He groans into her mouth and pulls her tight against him, one hand snaking up into her hair to hold her head in place. Kathryn hears the telltale hiss of the turbolift doors just in time and pulls away, but she must look like a wreck. She can feel her hair tumbling out of place, the bun about to give way, and her heart is pounding. Chakotay is still leaning back against the turbolift wall, eyes closed, breathing hard.

The assembled engineering crew waiting for the turbolift have the sense to avert their eyes. Ensign Cartier is bright red. Kathryn strides off the turbolift and turns left for no reason other than that she doesn’t think Chakotay will follow and she needs a moment. Probably more than a moment.

Kathryn tries not to let it happen again. This is...false.

\* \* \* \* \*

None of them remember what happened during the Hirogen occupation of Voyager while they were all still trapped in the neural interfaces—their memories begin only when each of their neural interfaces were deactivated. But sometimes Kathryn has dreams of what seem like other memories. The broad, callused hand of Captain Miller peeling back Katrine’s shining white suit; his neatly-parted hair as he knelt down between her legs, his low voice saying, “You’re pretty different, aren’t you.”

The Doctor is fixing a mild plasma burn on her hand—her own fault, she got distracted in Engineering—when he decides to make conversation. “Captain, do you come from a strict religious background?”

Kathryn manages to stifle a laugh at that. “Not at all.” She questions the wisdom of what she’s about to say. “Why do you ask?”

“You may recall that I am undertaking a study of the mating habits of a variety of species.”

“I think I recall telling you not to.” Maybe not in so many words, but she thought she’d made herself clear.

“Captain, if we are going to be traveling for a substantial period of time, there will inevitably be—concerns that will have to be dealt with. In my study of adult humans, I have determined that romantic relationships typically progress to sexual intercourse in a relatively short period of time. Unless those individuals adhere to some sort of religious doctrine that prohibits intercourse outside of a religiously-sanctioned marriage.”

She’s suddenly hideously aware of where this might be leading. “Doctor—”

“If you do not adhere to a religious doctrine, I am concerned that there may be some—private health concern that is preventing you and Commander Chakotay from reaching that point. Rest assured that you may share any information about your ailment with me and I will be entirely discreet.”

“Are you done with the burn?” Either way she’s leaving sickbay before the Doctor can continue asking why she and Chakotay haven’t had sex

yet. God only knows why he knows that. But she can't help asking, "How did you reach that extremely inappropriate conclusion, Doctor?"

"While I was treating...someone else...for a personal medical issue, that patient commented that you did not appear to be 'getting any.' I understood the phrase to mean—"

"I know what it means, Doctor."

"I asked what the basis was for this statement, and the patient explained that neither you nor Commander Chakotay appear to spend significant time in each other's quarters. It is believed that you are both far too discreet to engage in intercourse outside of your quarters. Ergo—"

"Thank you, Doctor, that's quite enough." If she has to hear him say the word 'intercourse' one more time, she'll deactivate him.

That evening, when Chakotay comes into the ready room to try to persuade her to eat dinner with him, she waits until the doors are fully closed before she says, "I don't have time for dinner, but you'll need to spend the night with me." At his stunned expression, she adds, "In my quarters! You need to spend the night in my quarters."

"All right," he says slowly, though he looks a little on edge. "May I ask why?"

Kathryn inwardly curses whatever loudmouth crew member decided to crudely speculate around the Doctor. "It's...the Doctor told me that..." She tries to think of the easiest way to put it. "Apparently some people have questioned exactly how serious our relationship can be, given that they believe we're not—" She's a grown woman. It shouldn't be this hard to say.

"Having sex?" Chakotay smiles a little. Somehow the sound of his voice makes the situation seem a little less absurd.

"Well, the Doctor used the word 'intercourse' about fifteen times, but yes, that's the gist of it."

"I see. And you'd prefer that I spend the night in your quarters occasionally rather than engage in something a little more public."

Something deep inside her tightens at the thought of that—finding an out-of-the-way Jeffries tube, or using her ready room and not quite staying quiet—but she says, "Yes, it seems like the easiest way to do it."

"All right." The smile broadens until the corners of his eyes crinkle a little. "In that case, I'll see you later."

\* \* \* \* \*

Kathryn is in her nightgown and a robe by the time he arrives. It seemed safer than changing with him already in the room. He's still wearing his uniform, but she kisses him in the doorway and pulls him inside. "The last time a man was in here, Q was asking me to bear his children," she says, trying to lighten the mood. "He had very different ideas about appropriate sleepwear."

Chakotay's face goes dark at that. "He should never have been in here." Then he admits, "It...bothered me, that he would ask you that. He had no right—"

"Chakotay." She puts her hand on his chest to quiet him. "It all worked out. There's a little Q toddler running around the universe, heaven help us."

"Still. Any children you have—" He falls silent, and she knows they're both thinking of Seska's baby, the son he thought was his.

"It's been a long day, and we could both use some rest." She puts a hand on his arm. It's meant to be comforting, but it feels a little different when they're here in the dim light of her quarters. "Are you going to sleep in your uniform?"

He laughs and hefts a small bag she hadn't noticed. "No, don't worry. I'll change." He hesitates. "Would you like me to sleep on the floor?"

In a world where Kathryn is the model Starfleet captain that she wants to be, he sleeps on the floor—no, in that world, she deals with the crew's varied advances sharply until they stop, and there's no need for this subterfuge. But she's in neither of those worlds and so she says, "Of course not, Chakotay. I think we can manage to share a bed without anything disastrous happening."

"Of course." There's a change in his inflection, the tiniest—disappointment? Did he want to sleep on the floor?

While he changes in the other room, she hangs up her robe and slips into bed. There's a tension, an anticipation, running through her entire body that she hasn't felt in a very long time. It becomes almost electric when Chakotay walks back in wearing sleep pants, holding up the shirt in one hand. "I usually don't sleep in it," he says. "But I'm happy to do whatever would make you more comfortable."

She wishes he'd be a little less accommodating. Chakotay is usually so easy to read. "No," she says. "Don't wear it." Her voice sounds rough, almost foreign to her own ears. The broad expanse of his bare chest is almost mesmerizing.

"All right." He slides into bed next to her. "Do you sleep with your hair like that now? You didn't on New Earth."

In all the disruption of her routine, she's forgotten to take her hair down. "New Earth feels like another life sometimes, doesn't it?" She begins pulling pins out of her hair and lays them on the bedside table, until her hair is entirely free, and she runs a relieved hand through it.

"It was. It would have been."

Kathryn remembers the bathtub he built her, the headboard, the vegetable garden that they were planting. She also remembers his pledge to her, the woman warrior, but that was almost two years ago now, when he thought he'd never see another person but her again. "Good night, Chakotay," she says. "Computer, lights off."

It's hard to sleep with another person in the bed for the first time in years, especially another person whose presence she's so keenly aware of. He lies still, but she rolls over onto one side for a few minutes, then to the other, until eventually he says "Kathryn" very quietly and gathers her to him with one arm. He holds her loosely enough that she could roll away if she wanted, but she stays there, presses her back against his chest and is all too aware of all the points where their bare skin touches. Eventually, though, she does fall asleep.

Kathryn wakes up gradually. Someone—Chakotay—is breathing warmly against her neck, still asleep. His hand has drifted lower, down to her hip, and her nightgown has rucked up to mid-thigh. He's pressed firmly against her back, so firmly that when she moves just a little—just to see if it will push her nightgown further up her thighs—his breath catches. He might be awake, but they both continue pretending that they're asleep. Everything is excusable if they're asleep.

The tips of his fingers are at the hem of her nightgown, and it's a shock—an entirely pleasant one—when they graze her bare skin. It's more difficult to breathe evenly now, when she can feel him hardening and all she wants is for him to lift her nightgown entirely—

No. This is all a show. This is a pretense they're putting on for the crew. And even if it weren't, she's the captain. She can't—ask for anything.

And yet. She shifts her hips and his hand tightens on her thigh. Some force—some insanity—grips her and she rolls over. It brings her directly into contact with his body, her breasts pressed against his bare chest with only the thin silk between them. He stares at her and strokes his hand up her spine to her neck, to cradle her head, and then leans in very slowly to kiss her, open-mouthed and sleepy. Kathryn meets him, lets herself lick into his mouth and slide her hand over his smooth skin, feels him shiver as she does—shameless self-indulgence—and he groans a little, the way he did when she kissed him in the turbolift. She can't quite let herself do what she wants, hook her leg around his waist and roll them until he's on top of her, but this is almost as good, the way he holds her head in place as they kiss, the weight of his body against hers.

"Captain! Ma'am, I apologize," Tom Paris says in a strangled tone. In the four years they've spent on this ship, no one has ever walked into her quarters without getting permission—not until now. "I'll just—be going—"

"Lieutenant." Her voice is as dry as it's ever been. "I can only assume this is a matter of some urgency. What is it?"

He says something about Neelix having a crisis in the kitchen, but she has a hard time paying attention. She and Chakotay disentangle themselves slowly and separate to their respective duties. If the crew had doubts about the veracity of their relationship, those doubts are certainly gone now.

\* \* \* \* \*

And yet. As they walk out of her ready room later that day, he leans close and whispers, "What time should I come over tonight?"

She can't quite stop the shiver. "0100 hours," she tells him, her voice a little hoarse. "There's—another of Mr. Neelix's luau's tonight."

"Ah yes, the luau." Somehow Chakotay's smiles these days always seem to contain a secret. "I'll come to your quarters after that."

Tom blanches as they walk onto the bridge together. "Lieutenant Paris," Kathryn says. "I will remind you that we have turned into futuristic slugs and produced...offspring together. I can't imagine that there's anything else that could be more upsetting than that."

He swallows audibly. "No, Captain. Of course not."

Kathryn is late to the luau because she loses track of time reviewing reports and almost forgets to change. By the time she gets there, Chakotay is wearing a 20th-century Hawaiian shirt almost entirely unbuttoned, a lei hanging around his neck. "Kathryn," he says, "Glad you could make it." He lifts the lei from around his own neck and drapes it around her own. He doesn't let go for a long moment, not until one of the shirtless male holograms brings her a drink and interrupts them.

She can't help her awareness of Chakotay throughout the luau. He accepts another lei and a drink from a hologram—an attractive female hologram this time, and it should be impossible to be jealous of a hologram, but of course Harry seems to fall in love with them right and left. She watches the line of his throat as he takes a drink and finds herself appreciating it more than she should for a man she's only pretending to be in a relationship with.

She's only had one drink but she lets herself relax more than she should. Usually she might pat Chakotay's shoulder once in a while, or link her arm through his, but this time he snakes his arm around her waist and pulls her close against him. Her heart pounds in her ears like she's a teenager even as Seven explains to her the inefficiency of the crew's frequent holodeck use.

They end up sitting side-by-side in two lounge chairs, looking out over the ocean as the sun sets. Their hands are casually linked, two fingers each, as they sit and talk the way they always have. After a while, she looks around and says, "Well, Chakotay, I think we may have outlasted everyone else at this luau."

"Oh?" There's something just a little dark—a little *eager* in his voice. "Are you sure?"

Kathryn sits up and looks around more carefully. "I don't even see any more holograms. Past their bedtimes, I suppose."

"Kathryn," he says. "I'd say it's just about 0100 hours." He leans over and kisses her, gently, strokes his tongue against hers, and she lets herself fall into it for a moment, putting her hand on his chest and sliding it under his shirt.

"I think it's time to go somewhere else." She feels his breath catch beneath her hand and realizes how her words could be taken. "Past our bedtimes, Commander."

"Of course." Chakotay rises smoothly and offers her his arm in the familiar gesture.

Something pleasurable settles in her stomach at the fact that his sleep pants are neatly folded at the end of her bed, like they belong there. They

turn away from each other to change, but they don't bother leaving the room. The air feels particularly warm, suffused with—something, some tension, something that Kathryn doesn't think will be alleviated by climbing into bed together.

When they do, Chakotay settles his arm around her again. This time she rolls over in the circle of his arm, putting her face very close to his own. His eyes are wide in the dark, just the slightest glint of light reflecting. "Kathryn," he says, and his voice is very quiet, barely more than a breath against her mouth. Their bodies are pressed together from chest to thigh, so close that she would swear she can feel his heartbeat.

She can't imagine spending the entire night like this without what's about to happen next. She closes that last tiny bit of distance and it's like an electric shock shoots through Chakotay; he pulls her hard against him, one hand dropping to her thigh, rolls them over until she's sitting atop him with her nightgown around her waist. She's not surprised that this is what he wants, for her to dig her fingers into his hair and hold his head in place as she kisses him, to press her hand against his chest and keep him against the bed as she rocks against him, and she's only too happy to oblige. He looks up at her the way he often does, with naked admiration, but there's something even more open about his face as he gazes up, so intense that eventually she has to close her eyes to keep from being overwhelmed.

## Chapter 3

### Chapter Summary

“It is inefficient for you and Commander Chakotay to continue to reside in separate quarters,” Seven tells her one day. “I have noted similar inefficiencies throughout the crew.”

The problem with really good sex, in Kathryn’s experience, is that the more you have it, the more you want it. Chakotay still whispers things like “One of the EPS conduits is malfunctioning, so I’ve sent B’Elanna and Seven to work on it” so that she can laugh and whisper back, “I hope at least one of the three of them survives.” But sometimes instead he whispers different things, much dirtier things, including something that poor Harry Kim once overhears and then can’t meet her eyes all day. It’s a good thing they’re traveling through a relatively quiet area of space, because she spends far too much of her time with her mind on things other than the Delta quadrant.

They’re a little more subtle than some of the crew, though she has to admit not by much. It’s impossible to crawl into a Jefferies tube these days without finding two ensigns in a passionate embrace. She performs a hasty marriage between two Bolians who feel that, having been caught, they’re obliged to marry, despite her many assurances to the contrary. Chakotay watches steadily as she does it and it’s terrible how just his gaze now makes her heart turn over a little. No. Not her heart. Her heart isn’t supposed to be involved.

To put it in the Doctor’s horrifying phrasing, she and Chakotay are *too discreet to engage in intercourse outside of her quarters*, but apparently not too discreet to kiss in the turbolift, hands wandering like teenagers instead of the sensible adults they’re supposed to be. She watches him box on the holodeck and then licks the sweat from his skin, which makes him gasp in a way that she wants to hear for the rest of her li—in a way that she likes.

“It is inefficient for you and Commander Chakotay to continue to reside in separate quarters,” Seven tells her one day. “I have noted similar inefficiencies throughout the crew. Given the frequency with which the Commander sleeps in your quarters—”

“Seven!” She takes a deep breath. “I appreciate your—observation. But you’ve overlooked some variables in determining efficiency.”

“Oh?” Seven sounds as annoyed as she always does when someone tells her she’s wrong. “What are the variables?”

“It’s also inefficient for two people to move in together and then have to move out when they separate. Moving in together is—a big step.”

“Explain.”

How is she supposed to explain it? “Romantic relationships don’t always last.”

“Yes. People die.”

“Not just that. People—grow apart. They want different things. They don’t fit well together. Relationships end even when the people are still alive.”

Seven tilts her head to one side. “It is inefficient to pursue sequential relationships if there is no reason to terminate the original one. You and Commander Chakotay appear to be sexually fulfilled by your relationship. I see no reason that your relationship would terminate other than the fact of your death, in which case there is no additional inefficiency created by sharing living quarters.”

It would probably be good for Seven’s understanding humanity to see—at a distance—a healthy adult relationship. God knows Tom and B’Elanna aren’t modeling it. Kathryn doesn’t want Seven to get invested, if that’s the right word, in the success of Kathryn and Chakotay’s relationship. “There are other variables,” she says. Like the fact that she and Chakotay aren’t actually in a relationship. When Seven starts to speak, she adds, “Seven. Enough.”

Kathryn tells Chakotay about it that night as they’re getting ready for bed. “This morning in the astrometrics lab, Seven told me that we should move in together.”

Chakotay laughs at that, and it sounds strangely discordant. “What ever gave her that idea?” He sees her rub her shoulder and says, “Here, lie down, I’ll give you a massage.”

She lies flat on her stomach, head half-buried in her pillow. “She said it was inefficient to live separately.” He chuckles a little at that. The mattress dips as he settles above her, one knee on either side of her hips, and begins to move his hands over her shoulders. She can’t hold in a groan. “Because you—sleep here—so often—ahhh.” He digs his knuckles gently into a knot in her back.

“And what did you tell her?” Chakotay seems almost cautious.

“That it’s also inefficient for people to live together if one of them eventually has to move out.” Her words are half-muffled in the pillow.

Chakotay’s hands still. “Yes. I suppose that’s true.”

Kathryn rolls over with some effort between his legs to look up at him. What else was she supposed to say? “I was thinking of Tom and B’Elanna,” she lies. “Though it might be better for those two to live separately even if they do get married eventually.”

His smile returns, somewhat diminished. “I’m not sure how I’m supposed to massage your back if you’re lying like that,” he says. She laughs,



bucks a little in the cradle of his hips—he's half-hard already, she can see it through his sleep pants, just as he always is after a massage, and she reaches to touch him. He slides his hands down from her shoulders to her breasts, rubs one nipple through the silk of her nightgown until she hisses, and leans down to kiss her.

There's something a little strange, a little more intense than usual, about it tonight. They both like it best when she's on top, but this time when she pins his wrists briefly to the mattress, he leaves them there as though restrained until she tells him "You can touch me, Chakotay." Then it seems like he's trying to memorize her entire body with his hands, with his eyes, as though this is the last time he'll ever see her. Kathryn doesn't like it and she kisses him roughly, bites his lip a little, anything to break that patient gaze that makes her skin prickle.

When they're finished, he rolls away from her and she feels chilly despite the climate controls.

## Chapter 4

### Chapter Summary

Chakotay passes her a fork, handle first. “As your first officer, it’s my responsibility to make sure you eat. One bite of casserole for every sip of coffee.” At her expression, he tries, “One bite for every half-cup of coffee?” He pulls the flower out of the top of the casserole and presents it to her as though it’s a bouquet of roses. She loves the way his cheeks dimple when he’s laughing at her—no, it’s cute, it’s charming, she doesn’t *love* it.

She wakes up and she’s warm again, Chakotay’s arm wrapped loosely around her. He says, “Good morning,” directly into her ear and it tickles and she laughs. This shouldn’t be so easy. As much as she loved Mark, things with him were never *easy*. But of course that was a real relationship. Why shouldn’t things be easy with Chakotay? Why shouldn’t it be—dare she say it—fun?

In the mess hall he takes a plate of Neelix’s latest casserole experiment. Neelix beams and sticks a flower in the middle of it with an exaggerated wink. When she and Chakotay sit down and she begins her blessed morning coffee, Chakotay says, “You need to eat more, not just drink coffee.”

“Coffee got me through the Academy and every post I’ve ever held,” she tells him.

Chakotay passes her a fork, handle first. “As your first officer, it’s my responsibility to make sure you eat. One bite of casserole for every sip of coffee.” At her expression, he tries, “One bite for every half-cup of coffee.” He pulls the flower out of the casserole and presents it to her as though it’s a bouquet of roses. She loves the way his cheeks dimple when he’s laughing at her—no, it’s cute, it’s charming, she doesn’t *love* it.

“You’ve got yourself a deal.” Washed down with ample coffee, the casserole is tolerable. “Neelix’s cooking is improving.”

“I’m sure he’d be happy if we banned all replicated food, though I’m not sure that would help morale.”

“No. On the bad days, I think all that keeps this crew going are replicator rations and holodeck time.” She pours herself a second cup of coffee.

“And their faith in their captain.” Chakotay holds her eyes as he says it and she chokes a little on her coffee—not because he said it, because it’s the kind of thing he says often, but because of how intensely he *means* it, his belief in her.

“Yes, well.” She breaks Chakotay’s gaze and gulps down more coffee. “I still say it’s the holodeck. You know Harry figured out a randomizer option? If you want, you can ask the computer to select a random program and it’ll select between any programs that aren’t privacy-locked.”

“That sounds ripe for disaster,” Chakotay says, “but I’m sure the crew is enjoying it.”

They’re both quiet for a moment, Chakotay steadily eating the remaining casserole. “After I died—well, I suppose after I almost died, we went sailing on the holodeck,” she muses. “Do you remember? Moonlight, champagne?” At the time, somehow she’d convinced herself that it was the kind of thing a captain did with her second-in-command. In retrospect maybe it’s not that surprising that the crew has been so willing to buy their fake relationship.

“Yes.” Chakotay’s smile has that hint of sadness that she saw last night. “The moon was very bright.”

And what might have happened, if the moon hadn’t been quite so full, quite so bright? Kathryn hesitates. “Why don’t we do it again tonight? I certainly have enough of my own holodeck time saved up.”

“Not spending so much time with Master da Vinci these days?”

“I’d rather spend it with you,” and no, what was that, she shouldn’t have said that. “I’m taking a break from sculpting.”

Chakotay picks up the flower again and twirls the stem between his fingers. “You think the Doctor would give up his time practicing arias just for us to go sailing?”

“He’s still searching for a new soprano to add to the program. I’m sure he can reschedule by an hour.” The Doctor has been bemoaning his inability to find someone who will match his talents without becoming overbearing. Kathryn doesn’t have the heart to tell him that he’s not going to find an immensely talented opera singer who comes without the ego.

Chakotay nods. “All right. If we have time.”

Things feel strangely unsettled. “Only a few more decades of it.” She means it to sound like a joke, but his shoulders tighten and he nods once more, short and sharp.

“I should get to the bridge,” he says, and he abandons her with the rest of the casserole.

\* \* \* \* \*

As though summoned by Chakotay’s words, calamities start piling up almost as soon as he leaves the room. First, the warp core readings begin to fluctuate wildly with no discernible reason, eventually blowing out half of the ship’s relays and requiring round-the-clock work on repairs by anyone with any basic engineering abilities—including Kathryn. Then, just as she’s dreaming of a good sonic shower, the ship shudders in

that all-too-familiar way that means someone is shooting at them. Paris calls, “Captain to the bridge.”

When she gets there, it’s yet another misunderstanding to be dealt with—an alien race that harvests particles from solar winds around this particular sun and believes that Voyager is there to steal their harvest. It takes two hours of tense negotiation and then three subsequent hours of helping to repair their harvesters in exchange for a small amount of plasma before everything settles back to normal. Whatever normal is.

Afterward, she goes back to her quarters for that long-awaited sonic shower. A bath would be nicer—she can’t help thinking of the bathtub Chakotay built her on New Earth, wishing that they’d taken it along when they left. Of course she can take a bath here, but it’s not the same as something so real, something made just for her. And anyway, all she has time for now is the sonic shower.

Chakotay meets her just outside the holodeck as she tells the computer, “Janeway 5.”

As they walk inside, he asks, “What are the other four? If that’s not too personal a question.”

Janeway settles on one of the padded bench seats on the sailboat and lifts a bottle of champagne from the ice bucket nearby. It’s a calm night on the lake, only a little wind, so there’s not much actual sailing to be done. She clears her throat. “Well, the first was a—holo-novel sort of program.”

“The governess, with the children?” He sits beside her and pops open the bottle of champagne. She forgot to grab the glasses, so a little of it bubbles over his hand before he drinks straight from the bottle and passes it to her.

“Yes.” It’s a little embarrassing to admit. “Janeway 2 is Leonardo da Vinci’s studio.”

“Of course.”

Kathryn sips the champagne. “Janeway 3 is...an animal rescue. Dogs, mostly. I couldn’t bring my own dog, but I wanted to still be able to spend time with dogs.”

“No? Admiral Archer brought his dog on the first flight of the Enterprise.” It’s a little chilly out on the water tonight and Chakotay presses his shoulder against hers.

“That was a very different time.” And Archer was a man, and as much as that isn’t supposed to matter anymore, she can’t help feeling that it still does.

“And Janeway 4?”

“An Olympic-size swimming pool. The Earth Olympics, not an Olympic-class ship.”

“A little big for your baths,” he teases.

She wants to stay awake. This is supposed to be a romantic night for the two of them—for the crew to see that they’re still very much dating. The moon is a waning crescent this time and all the light around them is soft, the lake smooth and free of waves. But she’s exhausted and the first sip of champagne has gone straight to her head. She can’t help listing heavily to one side—toward Chakotay—until he says, “Kathryn?”

“I’m fine. Just a little tired.” Her eyes keep falling shut until she jars herself awake.

Chakotay sets the bottle of champagne very carefully on the deck and says, “Come here.” He closes the short distance between them and gently rearranges their bodies so that she can lean back against his chest, warm in the circle of his arms. “Sleep, Kathryn,” he says. “It will all be here when you wake up.”

“As long as you are,” she murmurs. She gives in and falls asleep to the quiet sound of the lake lapping at the boat and the beating of his heart.

\* \* \* \* \*

Kathryn wakes in the morning to find Chakotay partly dressed already, with his shirt half over his head. She doesn’t recall exactly how they got back to her quarters, but she hopes he transported them rather than carrying her. “Chakotay?”

If she didn’t know him so well, she would have missed the flinch. He pulls his shirt fully on and says, “Captain. Good morning.”

She laughs in surprise. “*Captain?* I think after last night—”

He won’t quite meet her eyes. “I should get to the bridge.”

“A little early, isn’t it?”

She’s never seen his posture so stiff. “I think that our—relationship—has served its purpose at this point, Captain.”

It’s like stepping into a shower expecting it to be hot and finding it ice-cold instead. “You’re saying you want to end it?” She deplores the hitch that she hears in her own voice, the level of emotion that it reveals. She can’t stop herself from asking, “Why are you doing this?” and hates the small hurt way it sounds.

Chakotay adjusts his uniform and looks resolutely past her. “I think it would be for the best, Captain. It was only ever to fend off crewmembers pursuing us inappropriately, and I believe we’ve done that successfully. After all, this performance violates Starfleet regulations too. We don’t want to let it go on for too long and risk it becoming—” He doesn’t say *permanent* or *real*, but she can hear it anyway.

She’s fumbling for the appropriate response, sitting here in her bed with the sheets still messy and her nightgown falling off one shoulder. “I

didn't realize you—I thought we were both enjoying it.” That's too close to saying that she does want it to be real. “Of course, Commander.” Something horrible is growing inside her. Chakotay is a devoted first officer. He tries to anticipate her needs. He saw the crew's behavior and wanted to protect her from it. He's put everything into this performance, because he's Chakotay and he doesn't do things by half measures, but he's not wrong that it's served its purpose. Maybe he can tell that she's gotten inappropriately attached. “Of course,” she repeats. “Yes, it does violate regulations.”

“I hope this won't cause any problems between us.” He's straightened his uniform at least three times now. “I'll see you on the bridge, Captain.” And then he leaves.

She's reeling. Last night she was admitting her holo-programs to him and falling asleep on his chest, and this morning he's ended it all. No problems between them. Right. No problems other than that she thinks she might have fallen in love with him and he's just made very clear that he can tell and doesn't want anything beyond the working relationship they've always had.

## Chapter 5

### Chapter Summary

“I miss you.” He says it very quietly, almost unwillingly. “I’m trying not to, Kathryn. I know it wasn’t real.”

They return to their old patterns, more or less. No one comments on what’s very obviously the end of their romantic relationship. They don’t touch each other anymore, not even the innocent touches that were so characteristic of their relationship before. Every time she goes to put a hand on his chest or pat his arm, she remembers what it felt like to touch him beneath that uniform, the way he looked at her sometimes when they were lying in bed, him propping himself up with one elbow and smiling down at her.

If she weren’t the captain, she would retreat and lick her wounds in private. If she were an ordinary officer, she might have requested to change duty shifts. But she is the captain, and he’s her first officer, and they have to gut their way through it. It’s one thing on the bridge, where they’re surrounded by other people. In the ready room, though, it’s very different.

“Thank you for your suggestions,” she says, accepting a PADD that he passes her. Their fingers brush and they both snatch their hands back. The PADD falls to the floor.

After a moment, Chakotay leans down and picks it up, and this time they don’t touch. “Sorry about that.”

“No, it was my fault.” She sighs. “I don’t want things to be like this between us now, Chakotay.”

He arranges his hands carefully. “We were never really in a romantic relationship to begin with,” he reminds her. “We don’t have to be... awkward about it.” Something about the way he says it rings false.

“No, of course not.” She sits up a little straighter and pastes on a smile. “Thank you.”

Chakotay looks a little pained when he stands up. “Of course.”

\* \* \* \* \*

She’s sitting alone in the mess hall, scrolling through reports, when Neelix walks up to her and exclaims, “Captain!”

“Mr. Neelix. How can I help you?”

He sets a cup of something that is very much not coffee and a plate of...eggs? in front of her. “I’ve noticed that you’re not eating as much, Captain. I know it’s been hard since you and Commander—” At her look, he stops and swallows. “What I mean to say is, I thought I remembered that you said that you like eggs Bernadette.”

She considers correcting him, but it’s not worth it. “Yes.”

“Well, I’ve made you some! With the finest ingredients that the Delta quadrant has to offer!” He pushes the plate closer. It jiggles slightly. On closer inspection, there are definitely two... yolks, and some kind of sauce atop them.

“Eggs Bernadette indeed.” She lifts her fork. “Thank you, Mr. Neelix.”

Instead of leaving, he sits down across from her. “Captain, you know you can talk to me any time, about anything.”

“Thank you, Mr. Neelix,” she repeats, and takes an emphatic bite. For all the substitutions he’s made, it’s a reasonable facsimile.

Neelix stands up again and rocks slightly, like he’s desperate to say something more. “You should know, Captain. He miss you—not just misses you, he—”

“That’s enough, Mr. Neelix.” He stands there almost beseechingly, until she has to say, “I’m his superior officer. I can’t be the one—” She swallows the words. “You understand.” Whatever Neelix thinks, Chakotay doesn’t feel the same way, or he never would have ended things.

“Yes, Captain.” He looks very sorry. “Yes, I do.”

\* \* \* \* \*

After a week of this tension-pretending-not-to-be-tension, Kathryn needs something mindless and relaxing. She goes to the holodeck and decides to try out Harry’s invention. “Computer, random program.”

“Parameters?”

Wise of Harry to install some kind of algorithm. “Relaxing. Somewhere I can have a drink. Historical. Earth.”

“Program is active.”

She walks through the doors and finds herself in Le Coeur de Lion—postwar, she thinks, or at least post-liberation, given the lack of Nazi officers and the presence of American GIs. She’s back in her white suit. “Madame Katrine!” the bartender greets her. “Welcome back! I have

your table already prepared for you.” He gestures to a table near the back with two chairs, a cocktail set in front of one.

Kathryn weaves her way through tables of GIs flirting with pretty French girls and a few older soldiers who tip their hats to her as she passes. She sinks into the chair and lifts the cocktail, toasting the room at large. It’s powerful, gin and lemon juice with a champagne fizz to it, and it settles into her bones with the first few sips. The computer chose this program well for her.

She almost doesn’t recognize Captain Miller as Chakotay when he walks in. The bartender gives him a drink and points him to Kathryn’s table.

“Hiding from your crew, Captain?”

At least she knows he’s the real Chakotay, though for a moment, she wishes he weren’t. “Just a few of them,” she admits. She takes a sip of her drink—the second, probably—to cover the roughness in her voice.

“From me?” He hesitates, and then sits in the other chair, a safe distance away. He drinks half of his cocktail in one swallow.

“What do you want me to say?” She’s too honest with a cocktail and a half in her.

“I miss you.” He says it very quietly, almost unwillingly. “I’m trying not to, Kathryn. I know it wasn’t real.”

Kathryn is very still, almost afraid to breathe. “What are you saying?”

Chakotay finishes his drink and looks into the empty glass for a moment. Then he says, in a very different tone, “At least we’re still friends.”

Yes, how well she knows that they’re friends. He keeps making it clear that that’s all they ever were or would be. “I know.” She asks something that she would usually never ask: “Does it bother you? To have been captain of your own ship, with your own people, and then suddenly to be—under my command?” That’s what he is, after all, under her command. She has to remind herself of that.

“There’s no place I’d rather be.” There’s a smile somewhere deep in his eyes. A bartender exchanges his empty glass for a fresh one—and Kathryn’s, which is surprisingly empty.

“You had different rules on your ship.” She’s treading close to dangerous territory. “Different—attitudes toward hierarchy.”

The smile fades. “Have I been insubordinate, Kathr—Captain?”

“No, of course not.” Is she really going to say this? “But when you were a captain, you—” No. Everything she says is dangerous. “Never mind.”

He leans closer. “I wish you would tell me.”

“You were involved with a subordinate,” she says and wishes she hadn’t. “You and Seska. And you didn’t feel that it was—inappropriate. For you to do that.”

Chakotay sits back in his chair like he’s been slapped. “That was an error in judgment. One of many reasons you’re better as captain. You would never make a mistake like that.”

It almost sounds like a question. She’s silent for too long before, eventually, she remembers to say, “No, I suppose not.” Her throat closes on the words. “Aside from my post-transwarp reproduction with Mr. Paris.”

That lightens things again, enough for Chakotay’s lips to tug in a smile. “Should we have captured your…offspring and brought them back to the ship, Captain? Naomi Wildman might enjoy some other children to play with.” He’s let his hand fall carelessly on the table. His fingers are inches away. She can see the condensation from his drink on his fingertips.

“I shudder to think what games they would play.” She wants to reach out and touch him—no, she wants him to reach out and interlace his fingers with her own, the way he did when she offered her hand on New Earth. A ship can’t have two captains, but she wishes that she weren’t his superior, at least not right now.

“Kathryn,” he starts. He closes his hand in a fist almost spasmodically, then spreads his fingers wide again. “I don’t—” She wants him to keep talking, desperately, but he doesn’t finish.

“It’s all right,” she says at last. Casting about for something, anything, she says, “I suppose you’re a captain too, here,” and nods at the rank on his uniform.

“Captain Miller. Yes.” He looks at her and she recognizes the heat in his eyes. “It was the computer’s idea, I promise.”

“And I’m the bar owner. We could be—” Her voice catches. “We’re not Starfleet in here.”

Chakotay doesn’t have to ask what she means. He does reach out, lays his hand on hers for a moment, and then half-drags her chair over to him and kisses her like he’s drowning. He tastes bitter but she can’t get enough of him, never mind the holograms all around them. She has his shirt half-undone as he mouths at her neck, hot and wet, teeth scraping her skin, and it feels like he wants to consume her entirely.

“Computer, remove staff and patrons,” she manages to gasp, and they’re alone in the bar. She didn’t realize how intensely she wanted this until right now, until Chakotay clears the table of their drinks and lifts her up onto the table, pressed close in between her legs and she can feel exactly how much he wants it too.

“I’ll regret this,” he breathes against her neck, even as he tries to unbutton her shirt, fumbling with the slippery pearl buttons. “Kathryn—I’ll

regret this—” He can’t seem to stop himself, though, abandoning the buttons and pulling her hips tight against his own.

“Am—” It’s impossible to think with his mouth on her, with him hard between her legs. “Am I supposed to stop you?” She can barely gasp it out, but she does still her hands on the button of his pants, which she’s been working at unfastening. “I don’t—”

He kisses her again, until she can barely breathe, and then stumbles back a few steps. His pupils are blown wide and dark when she looks at him, and it feels like her entire body is throbbing. “I’m sorry,” he says, panting. “This isn’t why I came here—I’m sorry.”

Kathryn closes her eyes. “Computer, end program,” she croaks, and then it’s just the two of them, standing in the emptiness of the holodeck. “I thought you wanted to end the relationship. The *pretense*.”

Chakotay shoves a hand through his hair in frustration. “We’re not—there was never anything to end!”

“No?” They’re both back in uniform, but she’s still very wet and she can see that he’s still hard. “Why *did* you follow me in here?”

He turns away. “We can’t continue having sex. Even if we’re not...pretending. To be romantically involved.”

“I got that message. I’m not sure why you needed to interrupt my holodeck time to deliver it again via a practical demonstration.” Her frustration is turning rapidly into anger. “I don’t understand what you want. You’ve made it clear that our relationship is now solely professional. I agree. Anything else violates Starfleet protocol, and I am a Starfleet captain.” If there’s one thing she can hold fast to, here in the Delta quadrant, it’s that fact.

“And you would never make a mistake like being involved with a subordinate.” He keeps saying it like he’s scolding her for thinking that there could be anything else.

“No. Starfleet protocol forbids it,” she says, mostly to remind herself.

“Yes, Kathryn, you’ve told me about the damn Starfleet protocol!”

It’s not fair that he’s angry. She’s the one who was enjoying some quiet holodeck time, away from thoughts of him, when he intruded and kissed her. “I’m going to take a shower,” she tells him. She adds, “*Alone*,” just in case there was any doubt.

He doesn’t follow her out of the holodeck.

## Chapter 6

### Chapter Summary

Chakotay makes a strangled noise somewhere between rage and grief even as Kathryn says, “Don’t tell them anything, Commander. That’s an order. No matter what happens.”

Two mornings after—whatever it was—on the holodeck, Chakotay sits down on the bridge next to her and says, “Captain, there’s a class K nebula about fifteen light-years away. If you’re interested.”

It sounds like a peace offering. She starts to say, “You know I can’t resist a nebula—”

The attack comes out of nowhere. One minute, there’s nothing suspicious on scanners. Then everyone is flung sideways—it feels like she’s broken a rib against the arm of her chair—and several stations blow out, sparks showering. “Red alert!” she croaks, once she can get the air into her lungs to do it. “Who’s firing at us?”

“Captain, our shields are at 80 percent. Ten intruders have just beamed aboard.” Tuvok taps at his console. “I have dispatched security teams to their locations. But I cannot identify our attackers.”

“Species 8472?”

“Negative.” Three aliens force their way onto the bridge and Tuvok goes down—only stunned, she hopes.

Kathryn gets off a shot with her phaser before they spot her and she has to take cover. She can’t see Chakotay. Harry shoots one of the aliens; it takes three hits with a phaser before it falls. “Engineering, can you get us out of here?”

“We have warp but just barely!” B’Elanna yells.

“I have erected a Level 10 forcefield around Engineering,” Seven says over the comms.

“Good enough for me—Computer, transfer navigation controls to Engineering and lock out all other controls, let’s go before anyone else decides to show up!” While they still can.

Kathryn doesn’t know if they make it to warp, because one of the aliens grabs her around the throat and half-drags her into her ready room. She sees Chakotay already there, bound to one of the chairs with some kind of electronic cuffs, and barely has time to process it before they’re strapped her to one of the chairs too. He’s already bleeding—it looks like he’s been hit in the face a few times.

“Give us the command codes to access your bridge controls,” one of the aliens says. They’re humanoid, but with strange silvery scales that looks like armor.

“I’m Captain Kathryn Janeway of the Federation starship Voyager,” she tells it. “There’s no need for violence. We’re not your enemies.”

“Oh, there’s no *need*,” it says, and she shudders inwardly at the laugh in its voice. “We could probe your minds and eventually get the information that way. But that would leave you...less than functional. We’d rather you just told us.” It looks between them. “Your crewman hasn’t been very *helpful*,” it hisses. “We hoped you might make him more compliant.” It nods to the other alien, who punches Chakotay in the stomach.

“No!” She steels herself and says, “I’m the captain. If you’re going to interrogate someone, it should be me.” It’s a foolish thing to say when Chakotay is more able to survive that kind of treatment, physically speaking, but she can’t stand the thought of letting him suffer.

“Very well.” She barely has time to brace herself before the blow. It snaps her head to one side and she must lose consciousness for a second because when she’s aware again, there’s blood dripping into one eye. “The command codes, Captain.”

“Kathryn—” Chakotay chokes out the words. “Captain, let me take it—”

Even through her dizziness, she can see the sudden delight in the alien’s eyes. “*Kathryn*, is it? You call your captain by her first name? Do you want to take her place? Do you care for her a little too much, crewman? You can’t imagine what she’ll look like when we’re done, if you don’t give us those codes.”

Chakotay makes a strangled noise somewhere between rage and grief even as Kathryn says, “Don’t tell them anything, Commander. That’s an order. No matter what happens.” He’s struggling hard against his bindings. “Even if we gave you command codes, it wouldn’t matter. We’re both locked out.” It could be true, Seven can do almost anything with a computer.

“So you’re no use to us? We should kill you both?” The alien nods to the other one, which draws a knife. “Who first? Your loyal crewman?” It looks to Chakotay. “Your beloved captain?” He jerks hard against the bindings. “Your captain, I think.”

“No,” Chakotay yells, and one of the aliens shoves him back against his chair. “Kathryn—”

She’s been in bad situations before, but this may be one of the worst. “Chakotay, it’s your job now. You have to get the crew home.” The other alien approaches with the knife. “Get them back to Earth.”



“You need her,” Chakotay tells the aliens frantically. “She’s the captain, she can keep the crew under control. They’ll revolt if she dies—”

“This is very touching,” the alien says, “but you have five seconds to give me command codes and tell me how to access the computer, or she dies.”

“Under no circumstances, Chakotay.” She makes her voice as harsh as she can. “You have your orders.”

Time slows. He says, “I love you—” just before the knife pierces her chest and there’s only blinding pain.

\* \* \* \* \*

She wakes up in sickbay—Voyager’s sickbay. She’s surprised that even the Doctor could save her. She turns her head—it hurts to move anything else—to see Chakotay sitting next to her, tapping through documents on his PADD.

“Commander.” She barely recognizes her voice.

He starts at the sound and jumps up so she can see his face without having to move. “Kathryn! You’re finally awake.”

“Are you all right? Is the crew safe?”

“Everyone is fine,” he assures her. “B’Elanna and Seven got us to warp and security took down the rest of the invaders. It took...a little more time for them to get to us.”

It hurts to raise her hand, but she does it anyway, and reaches out to grasp his arm. “You’re all right?”

Chakotay covers her hand with his own. “Aside from having to watch you—” His hand clenches on her own almost painfully. “Yes.”

“Just before the alien stabbed me, I thought I heard you say—” She blames her medical state for her difficulty speaking.

“That I love you?” He lifts his hand away slowly, rubbing his thumb across her knuckles, and then touches his thumb to his lips in an ersatz kiss. “I do.” Chakotay smiles and the corners of his eyes crinkle. “I hope you don’t mind.”

She’s reeling. “No,” she says. “No, I don’t mind at all.” She slides her hand down his arm until she can link her fingers through his own. “I suppose you had a good reason for waiting to tell me until I was about to die.”

“I’ll tell you again,” he promises almost hesitantly. He leans down and kisses her very softly, the lightest brush of lips, just as the Doctor hurries in.

“Commander, the captain needs rest! I must insist that you leave her in peace!”

She thinks she can feel Chakotay smile against her lips. “Later,” he promises.

## Chapter 7

She spends another night in sickbay, largely unconscious. From what she hears when she's conscious, the crew is dealing with what sounds like a multitude of ship-wide repairs and Chakotay is in the thick of it. When she's finally truly awake, it's just in time for two engineering ensigns to come in with plasma burns and another to transport in with three broken limbs. Tom Paris is repairing the plasma burns and the Doctor is occupied with the broken bones, so she takes advantage of the situation and says, "Doctor, unless you can tell me that I'll collapse if I get out of this bio-bed, I'm leaving."

"Yes, yes," he says, and he must be very distracted indeed if he's not fighting her on it. "Lieutenant Paris, discharge her appropriately."

Paris releases her to her quarters with a hypospray, strict instructions, and a sensor attached to her neck to make sure that she doesn't drop dead. She can admit—to herself—that it's painful to do more than walk a few steps. She's just lain down on her couch when the door chimes. "Enter," she says.

Her breath catches when Chakotay walks in. "I heard the Doctor allowed you to leave sickbay. I'm impressed."

"I escaped when he wasn't paying attention." She moves her feet enough that one of the couch cushions is free. "Please, sit down."

Chakotay obeys and then pulls her legs across his lap almost automatically, squeezing one ankle gently. "How are you feeling?"

"Physically? Like there was a knife in my chest a few days ago." His hand tightens minutely on her ankle. "Or did you mean emotionally?"

"I'd like to think I meant both." He shifts to face her and it's impossible not to respond to the warmth in his voice.

"Confused," she admits. "Confused, but—happy?"

"I told you how I felt a long time ago. Have you forgotten?"

Kathryn shakes her head a little. "That was a different time," she tells him. "We were trapped on New Earth for three months—we could be different people there. So much has happened since then. Seska's baby, the alliance with the Borg, losing Kes—and then you came to me and said that you wanted to falsify a relationship. Not that you still felt that way, or that you wanted a *real* relationship—how was I supposed to know from that?"

He sighs. "I hoped it would...pass, originally. You didn't say anything after we were rescued. I assumed that either you didn't feel the same way, or you would never be open to something real, something that violated Starfleet regulations. When I proposed the—false relationship—I did want to protect you from the crew's behavior, but I can't say it wasn't selfish too."

"But you're the one who ended things." She's not sure if the ache in her chest is from breathing in too deeply or from the memory of that ending.

"It became—too painful for me. To have every part of you but your heart. I thought I would be all right, having—whatever you were willing to give." He shakes his head a little. "I was wrong about that."

Kathryn wishes she could sit up and reach for him, feel the strength of his shoulder under her hand, but it's painful just to breathe too fast, let alone move. "You kept telling me that I would never make the mistake of being involved with a subordinate. As though you were emphasizing that I shouldn't."

He tilts his head a little. "Are you saying you *would*?" She doesn't answer quickly enough, because he adds, "It's all right. At least I know that you know how I feel, even if it won't—"

"Chakotay." She does reach her hand out, as far as she can without sitting up, and he takes her it in his own. "Give me a moment to explain. In the—ordinary course of things, no, I would never involve myself with a subordinate. But it turns out that when that subordinate is you—" Kathryn takes as deep a breath as she can manage without stabbing pain. "It turns out that when I feel this way, I care a lot less about Starfleet protocols than I thought." Chakotay doesn't respond, like he's waiting for something more. "The legend of the angry warrior." She's never even said it aloud.

Chakotay's gaze sharpens. "Yes?"

"The legend was unfinished." Her entire body feels hot. "What happened to them? The angry warrior, and the woman warrior?"

He smiles softly. "You do realize, Kathryn, it was never a legend."

"Yes," she says. "But I'd like it if you told me again."

"I'll show you." Chakotay slips out from under her legs and off the couch, then kneels at her side. "I'll try not to make your injury worse," he promises, and leans down to kiss her. It's gentle, unhurried—his soft lips on hers, tongues touching slowly. Her fingers trace the shape of his jaw, the dimples in his cheeks that appear when he smiles broadly enough; he cradles her face in his hands and runs his thumb over her cheekbone, all without ever breaking the kiss. A lazy kiss for a sunny weekend morning, long and sweet and without any intent behind it but affection. She couldn't say how long it lasts—seconds, minutes—before she shifts a little to pull him closer and hisses in pain. The sensor on her neck beeps angrily.

Chakotay pulls back slowly, regretfully. "I think we'll have to wait for anything else." When she starts to object, he says, "You have a terrible sense of self-preservation. Someone on this ship has to remind you to stay in one piece."

Before she can say anything else, “Commander Chakotay to the bridge” comes over the comms. “Commander Chakotay to the bridge.”

They both sigh, and Chakotay begins to stand up. “Wait,” she says, catching his hand. “I haven’t even said it aloud yet.”

He smiles so broadly that she sees the dimples. “I know,” he says. “When you’re ready.” He kisses the back of her hand and then pulls away. Then he taps his badge and says, “This is Chakotay. I’m on my way.”

## Chapter 8

### Chapter Summary

Kathryn is, at last, very blunt with Tuvok. She tells him, “You have the conn. Unless we’re under attack and shields are below fifty percent, Commander Chakotay and I are unavailable for the next two hours.”

### Chapter Notes

Okay, *this* chapter probably merits an E rating.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#).

Kathryn loves her job. She really does. She loves making first contact. She loves investigating scientific anomalies. She loves the adrenaline rush of negotiating her way out of a tense situation, the satisfaction of a well-constructed trade deal that helps them get home faster.

But. Sometimes she wishes she were a little less essential to the functioning of the ship. And that Chakotay weren't quite so essential either. She has about six hours of peace after escaping sickbay—including her time with Chakotay—before Seven comms to ask, “Captain, are you functional?”

She considers her answer. “Minimally.”

“Please report to Astrometrics when you are able—”

“Belay that order, Captain. Report to sickbay when you are able. Astrometrics can wait.”

“I believe the Captain should be made aware—”

“I need to run scans to make sure she is healing—”

Kathryn closes her eyes. She should’ve said that she wasn’t functional. “Seven, Doctor, this is a shipwide channel. I appreciate both of your perspectives.” She lifts herself off the couch—painfully—and hobbles to the door before giving up and saying, “Computer, transport to sickbay.” She tries not to abuse site-to-site transports, but she suspects that it might become an emergency medical transport if she actually tried to walk all the way to sickbay.

The Doctor is displeased, to say the least. “I never should have allowed you to leave. I don’t know what I was thinking, putting Mr. Paris in charge of discharging you.” He gestures emphatically at the absent Tom Paris with his tricorder. “Under no circumstances are you to be running around to—to *Astrometrics*, or Engineering, or the mess hall, or anywhere else!”

“Are you confining me to quarters, Doctor?” It wouldn’t need to be her own quarters.

“What I am *saying*, Captain, is that if your other crew members would like your input on anything, they will have to come to you.”

Kathryn closes her eyes and briefly imagines what it would be like to be resting in her own bed—or better, Chakotay’s bed—while the crew dealt with crises without her. “All right. Set me up in my ready room with whatever medical monitoring you think is necessary. I’ll be able to access whatever information I need there.” The Doctor frowns in disapproval, but he places some kind of device directly over her chest wound—beneath her T-shirt, there’s no way she could get a uniform shirt closed over it—and another sensor on her neck, gives her another hypospray of God knows what, and tells her, “I hope you know that if you die under my care, Commander Chakotay will delete my program permanently. Please have a care for my well-being, if not your own.”

“I’ll keep that in mind, Doctor.”

Sure enough, once she’s no longer willing to hurry to the different departments, everyone begins coming to her. Seven has detected a gravimetric distortion directly in their path that may affect their warp field; B’Elanna disagrees with Seven about the effect it will have, but also wants to know if the Captain would prefer to avoid it entirely or forge ahead and see what data they can gather. Chakotay comes to her with a very private smile half-hidden in his eyes, but there’s barely a moment to say hello before Tom rushes in to tell her breathlessly about a problem with the Delta Flyer, followed closely by Tuvok, with the news that two of the photon torpedoes have inexplicably armed themselves.

They stumble into an area full of space mines that do minimal damage to the shields but nevertheless make the ship rock every time they hit, and it’s only by gripping her chair tightly that Kathryn avoids being thrown to the floor. A very confused and apologetic alien trader tells them that he didn’t know their energy signature would attract the mines, and arranges repayment that he insists can only be approved by the Captain, not her second-in-command. Chakotay comes in for one of their regular dinners together, but has barely lit the candles before Neelix arrives with a special celebratory/healing meal for the Captain. He doesn’t take the hint when Chakotay says, “Thank you, Neelix, I’ll make sure that she eats it,” and instead sits down to update her on everything that’s happened aboard the ship since the original alien attack.

The Doctor finally pronounces her fully healed after another week, a week of stolen moments with Chakotay, kisses that never have time to go as far as they’d like, sleeping in the same bed but very rarely at the same time. It’s as though the universe, which gave them so much time together when things were confused, is conspiring against them to keep them from spending any time together now that they understand each

other.

With her clean bill of health, Kathryn is determined to get at least an uninterrupted hour with Chakotay. She is, at last, very blunt with Tuvok and tells him, “You have the conn. Unless we’re under attack and shields are below fifty percent, Commander Chakotay and I are unavailable for the next two hours.”

Tuvok looks as awkward as a Vulcan ever can, having just been told exactly what his captain and commander plan to do, but agrees, “Affirmative, Captain.”

She tells Chakotay to meet her in her quarters. When he walks in, he fakes a double-take and says, “Kathryn Janeway, is it? I feel like it’s been years since I saw you.”

“You’re lucky I’ve had too much on my mind to come up with some kind of terrible time dilation field joke,” she says.

“Anything in particular on your mind?” There’s something dark in his voice, something that mirrors the desire she’s been feeling ever since he was last in her quarters.

“You.” Maybe it’s too honest. “Whenever I had a minute to think—you.” He’s very close to her now and she can’t resist reaching out to pull his body against hers, untucking his uniform jacket from his pants as she does.

His breath catches and he says, “Kathryn,” and lets her pull both the jacket and his shirt over his head before he leans down to kiss her. He breaks away only long enough to remove her shirt as well and his kisses are overwhelming, her mouth and her neck and back to her mouth until she’s dizzy with it. He kisses her knife scar much more gently, tentatively.

“I promise it’s safe.” She lets her hand fall to the front of his pants, rubs her knuckles across his rapidly hardening cock through the cloth, and he kisses her and groans into her mouth, kicking off his shoes even as she unfastens his pants.

“I thought I was going to go crazy waiting for this, now that it’s real,” Chakotay says. He undoes her pants just enough that he can slide his hand inside and feel how wet she is through her underwear. He breathes in sharply when he does, pushes her underwear to one side to touch her, and she’s so slick that his finger slides inside her easily, just for a second, before he withdraws his hand entirely. She’s already shucking the rest of her clothes, stripping off the rest of his, and he walks her backward toward the bed. “I’ve had all week to think about it,” he tells her. “To remember the way you taste, the noises you make, what you like best—” He half-lifts her off the ground when they reach the bed and lays her down a little too carefully for her taste.

Kathryn pulls him down too, drags her nails through his chest hair and feels him shiver. He kisses her mouth, her chin, the line of her throat to her collarbone, the new scar on her chest, between her breasts. He says, “I’ve missed you” and his eyes meet her own, and oh does that send a shock through her, watching him kiss his way down her body until he’s between her legs. He licks her clit and it’s electric, she’s been thinking about this all day, his hot mouth, his tongue. She grips his hair to pull him closer, get his mouth in just the right place, and when he laughs a little, she feels the vibration of it through her entire body. He slides one thick finger inside her and it’s so good, even better when it’s two.

“More,” she tells him, and he adds a third finger as his tongue works furiously—finally she feels almost full, almost, and she comes around his fingers, shaking. Chakotay pulls his fingers out of her while she’s still spasming and sucks each one in turn, lips closing around them, and she shudders again, clenching on the phantom feeling inside. “Get up here,” she says, half-dragging him and pushing him until he’s on his back, and he goes more than willingly.

He’s desperately hard and she loves the way he moans when she grips him firmly, when she sucks just the head of his cock into her mouth and strokes her tongue across it in long wet stripes, when she takes him as deep as she can once, twice, three times before pulling off entirely and he begs “*Kathryn*.”

“Impatient?” She moves up his body, holds him in place as she sinks down onto him and *there*, that’s the fullness she’s missed. She doesn’t move, just enjoys the feeling of it, until he tries to thrust up a little. “Not until you make me come again,” she says, and if he begged she would relent but if anything she thinks he’s harder.

Chakotay gets one hand between them, thumb on her clit, and sits up partway so that he can lick one nipple, bite it very gently, until she makes a high-pitched noise because it’s too much. Then he switches to the other nipple and every fiber of her being wants to *move* as he does this, but she’s apparently decided to torture them both. Instead all she does is pull his head closer to her breast, gasp out incoherent noises, and clench down on his cock over and over until she does come again, almost blindingly. He says “Kathryn, please—”

“Yes,” and she does move the way they both desperately want her to, holds him down with a hand on his chest as she rides him. His pupils are blown wide and he thrusts up to meet her every time, both his hands on her hips as he tries to get even deeper. She leans down and whispers, “I love you,” and something seems to snap in him. He rolls them over, never pulling out, and she wraps her ankles around his back as he turns desperate, uncoordinated, just before he comes. She tightens around him through the aftershocks, could almost have come again just from this, until he finally pulls out and collapses flat on his back, chest heaving as he gasps for air.

Kathryn licks sweat from his chest, grazes a nipple with her teeth—he shivers—and then kisses him. He just barely has the wherewithal to bring his hand up to the back of her neck and hold her there for a minute as she kisses him before he drops his hand away again.

She leans in close to his ear and bites his earlobe gently before saying, “I mean it. I love you.” She sees his full-body shiver and it’s wonderful.

“You’re just saying that—because that—was amazing,” Chakotay pants. “Part of some—master plan.”

“Yes. My master plan to keep you.” She’s not that much more coherent than he is, but it seems important to say the right thing. Kathryn adjusts her body so she can lay her head against his chest and listen to his heart beat. “I love you,” she says a third time.

“I love you too, Kathryn.” He puts his arm around her and holds her and for a few minutes it feels like they’ll stay like this forever.

\* \* \* \* \*

“Captain,” Tuvok comms. “It has been two hours, and shields have dropped to below 50 percent due to an unidentified power drain.”

Kathryn groans and presses her face against Chakotay’s chest. Chakotay laughs. “He was always punctual when he was pretending to work for me too,” he says. “I suppose we’d better get back to the bridge.” He kisses the top of Kathryn’s head. “Dinner later?”

“You bring the wine, I’ll experiment with the replicator,” she says. She loves the way that he smiles.

#### Chapter End Notes

This was my very first Voyager fic, over two years ago...

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