

take a hint

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Summary

“You *came* just because she said your *name*.”

“There were a few other things happening too!”

“You can't fool me.” That's almost sympathy in B'Elanna's eyes. “Chakotay, you know she'll never let it happen.”

Chakotay and B'Elanna decide to help each other relieve stress (mostly) and deal with trauma (rarely), until B'Elanna notices that he's kind of stupid for Janeway and sets out to make it happen.

Notes

This is a Janeway/Chakotay fic, but it does include B'Elanna/Chakotay FWB in the early chapters.

the holodeck (sort of)

Janeway begins giving him orders almost as soon as they meet. After the destruction of the array, she calls him into her ready room. She gestures for him to sit down and says, "I'd like to invite you and the rest of the Maquis to join Voyager's crew."

"I don't see a lot of other options for us." He's known this was coming since Voyager showed up, so it shouldn't be as hard as it is now.

"We could drop you all at the next Class M planet," Janeway offers. "I don't think you'll all fit in the brig."

There's a split-second of rage before he realizes she's joking. "No. We'll join." He imagines pulling on that Starfleet uniform again, that badge, contorting himself until his conduct conforms to what the rules were. He spent twenty years in that uniform before abandoning it to join the Maquis. He doesn't know how it will fit when he puts it on again.

"This ship can only have one captain," she says, fixing him with her gaze. "You know that as well as I do—"

"Yes." It will chafe to be relegated down below the lowliest ensign. He'll hate it. His people will hate it.

"—so I'd like you to be my first officer."

He snaps to attention at that. "What?"

"You're a talented commanding officer. Your people respect you. If we're going to have any hope of merging these two crews, you have to be sitting there with me on the bridge."

"Your crew will accept that?"

"They will." He believes it. Janeway's crew will accept serving with the criminal Maquis—begrudgingly or not—before his crew will yield to Starfleet's will.

In some ways, he thinks it's easier for the other Maquis. They never attended the Academy. They never swore their loyalty to the Federation. Their anger—their hatred—is clean, focused. There's no internal conflict, no identity crisis. But he and B'Elanna are different. They know what it is to be Starfleet. They know what it's like at the Academy, learning about the lofty ideals of the Federation. B'Elanna never had to take an oath; he forswore his when he joined the Maquis.

Now he has to be the good Starfleet officer he once was. He has to stand firm in support of Janeway. This ship will never make it home if it fractures between the Maquis and Starfleet. In public, at every moment when someone else can see him, he has to maintain the façade. There will be no discontent tolerated. There will be no attempted mutinies, not even a whisper. He yells at B'Elanna—actually yells—when she can't get it through her head that she can't just punch Starfleet crew, even if they are idiot engineers. He smiles serenely and plays the gentle first officer, the temperance where Janeway is bold.

It's hard to keep it so tightly bound within him, the rage. He joined the Maquis to fight the Cardassians, to avenge his father. Now he's trapped here, fighting Kazons and whatever other aliens come their way, for no reason other than that they're in the way. And he has to wear this uniform and follow these rules and make sure everyone else follows these rules, and however much he admires Janeway, he's starting to go insane with all of it. Whatever 'peaceful Indian' role he found in Starfleet, it's the angry warrior of his youth, of the last few years, that's struggling to keep control now.

The holodeck is his saving grace. He fights—Cardassians, usually, but sometimes he tells the computer to randomize it, as long as it's someone larger. He doesn't punch down. He's fighting a particularly large Cardassian when B'Elanna says, "I think he's a little out of your weight class," and the sound of her voice startles him so much that he lets his opponent land a heavy punch. It leaves his ears ringing.

"Computer, freeze program." He spits blood onto the floor. "No one is out of my weight class."

She laughs mockingly. "No one, *Commander*?" She climbs under the ropes and up into the ring. "Computer, delete opponent, provide correct attire." The computer provides boxing gloves, shorts, a tight shirt that barely covers her breasts.

"I'm not going to fight you, B'Elanna."

She taps her gloves together and attacks him. He's not ready for the first punch to his jaw that sends him reeling back, and he responds too aggressively with a body blow that forces B'Elanna against the ropes. She throws back her head and laughs, shoves him away with both gloves to his chest, until he's backed up against one of the posts—and then she bites first his cheek, then his neck, hard. "You don't have to fight me," she says, and licks the bite-marks.

If they were both in a different frame of mind, a different place—on the bridge, even in Engineering—they would separate and laugh it off. But he knows B'Elanna's rage, the storm in her, as well as he knows his own, and so instead he flips them around and kisses her almost brutally, teeth catching her lower lip, and there's a very Klingon growl in her throat that tells him it's the right choice. She wrestles him to the ground and he puts up only as much fight as he knows she wants before they're rolling on the floor, hands rough in each other's hair. He shoves her shirt up around her shoulders so he can get to her breasts even as she's working his shorts down to free his cock. B'Elanna shimmies partway out of her own shorts so that he can thrust into her and they both groan. It doesn't take long for either of them to come.

When Chakotay pulls out and rolls onto his back, staring up at the ceiling, some of the simmering rage inside him has retreated. He looks at B'Elanna. "I'm not saying I didn't enjoy myself," he says. "But what brought that on?"

Her laugh is as fierce as ever. "I know you, Chakotay, and I know anger. You're ready to explode and you're trying so hard to keep it in, to be

the mild-mannered gentle first officer to the Captain.” She shrugs as well as a person can while lying down. “I figured we could both use a little—relief.”

“Well. If it prevents you from punching Lieutenant Carey again.”

“Look,” B’Elanna says. “I don’t want to start something like you had with Seska. But once in a while, to keep us from going insane—”

“Once in a while,” he agrees. “When necessary.”

* * * * *

Once in a while becomes a few times a week because B’Elanna is going a little insane and his control over his rage is always on the verge of slipping. It doesn’t occur to him that his quarters are next to Janeway’s, that the walls aren’t that thick, and that he and B’Elanna can be very loud until Janeway calls him into her ready room and says, “Commander, I need to discuss a matter of...protocol with you.”

“Captain?” He’s thinking that maybe one of his Bajoran crew continues to wear jewelry, or that Seska has been insubordinate.

Janeway frowns. “It’s against Starfleet regulations for a commanding officer to maintain a sexual relationship with a subordinate in his chain of command.”

Three thoughts hit him in sequence: first, that he doesn’t really care about the regulations; second, that he should have known she would find out; and third, overwhelmingly, *heat* through his entire body at the idea of Janeway lying in bed next door and listening to them. Did it annoy her? Or did she hear the noise and—imagine it, even for a moment? Did she picture him and wonder what he was doing to cause the sounds B’Elanna was making? He likes the idea that she did. He likes it too much.

“This predates our rejoining Starfleet.” Not true, but she doesn’t know that. “Things are different, among the Maquis. That kind of relationship is treated as a...pressure valve.”

Janeway looks unimpressed. “You and Lieutenant Torres, of all people, are both well aware of Starfleet protocol.”

“We’ll be quieter.” When she says nothing, he says, “Captain, I’ve supported you in every possible way. I’ve adhered to all other protocol and I’ve made sure that my former crew have done the same. You’re welcome to talk to Lieutenant Torres to ensure that she doesn’t feel coerced in any way. Let me have this,” and if his voice is a little rough at the end, Janeway doesn’t comment on it.

“I’ll speak to Lieutenant Torres,” she says at last. “If I hear one word of this around the ship—”

“Straight into the brig,” he agrees.

At the end of shift B’Elanna comes to his quarters laughing and says, “The captain had quite the talk with me today. What on earth did you say to her?”

“What did *you* say?”

“Oh, that I wasn’t being coerced, that we’d been fucking like wild targs for years, that it’s all that keeps me from punching someone on a daily basis, and that I would be happy to tell her about it in great detail.” She leers at him a little. “She turned me down on that.”

“I told her we’d be quieter,” Chakotay says, and B’Elanna raises an eyebrow. She takes it as the challenge Chakotay knew that she would, throwing him against the adjoining wall and yanking his pants down just enough that she can get his cock in her mouth and swallow him down, deep enough that he hits the back of her throat and can’t keep himself from yelling at the slick pressure of it. He wants to hold her head in place and thrust but he won’t let himself, slaps his hands flat against the wall instead and finds the corner of a bookshelf, anything to hold on to. He isn’t quiet.

When he’s too close, B’Elanna pulls off, her eyes dancing as he curses in Klingon. He lifts her and shoves her against the wall, pushing inside in a single desperate stroke, and they both moan at the sudden feeling of it. He’s fucking her hard against the wall, her legs wrapped around his hips, when he hears Janeway say “Chakotay!” He comes, helplessly, blindingly.

B’Elanna, who realizes what’s just happened, stares at him in—horror? amusement?—as he awkwardly lowers her to the ground. Chakotay fumbles with his pants until he’s covered, if not exactly decent, and turns to face Janeway.

She’s looking him up and down very slowly, appraisingly, but when he looks at her, her eyes snap to his face. “Commander Chakotay,” she repeats. He shivers and tells himself it’s just left over from B’Elanna. “I believe we had a discussion about this.”

“Be a little quieter,” he says dumbly. “Yes.” It’s harder to think with her standing there staring at him, after what she’s just seen. His neck prickles as she looks at him.

“It’s my fault, Captain.” B’Elanna steps forward. She’s reassembled her clothing somewhat. “I got carried away. He’s just so—” She shivers theatrically. “I suppose you heard.”

Janeway fixes them each with her piercing gaze. “I did. Don’t make me regret allowing this to continue.” She turns on her heel and walks out.

As soon as the doors shut, B’Elanna exclaims, “Chakotay!”

“Not a word, B’Elanna.” An order she’s never obeyed in her entire life.

“You—the *Captain*? No wonder you have so many pent-up feelings in there!”

He resents the glee in her voice. “No—”

“You *came* just because she said your *name*.”

“There were a few other things happening too!”

“You can't fool me.” There's almost sympathy in her eyes. “Chakotay, you know she'll never let it happen.”

“Yes, thank you for that insight.” He knows the rules that come with this uniform. Janeway has allowed him to bend one, but she'll never break one herself.

“No more malfunctioning turbolifts, B’Elanna,” he says. When she opens her mouth to protest, he repeats, “*No more turbolifts.*”

He refuses to believe that B’Elanna is right about anything other than the idea that sometimes he looks at the captain—or listens to the captain—and has a perfectly understandable reaction to an attractive, powerful woman. It was the heat of the moment, his reaction when she walked in on him with B’Elanna, nothing more meaningful than that.

“Good morning, Chakotay,” Janeway says the morning after. “I thought we’d begin with—”

“Captain?” It takes him a minute longer than it should to realize that this is how things will go. She’s overlooking the lapse in his persona and has decided that the man she saw last night—half-naked, blatantly violating Starfleet protocol against her bedroom wall—was an aberration. “Excuse me. Yes.”

She gives him a curious look. “I thought we’d begin with crew matters. You know I made Lieutenant Torres my new chief of engineering.”

“She deserves it.” It’s a relief knowing that B’Elanna isn’t going to suffer any ill effects from being caught with him—though from Janeway’s perspective, why would she? “She’s a talented engineer, and under your mentorship she’ll do very well.”

“Is there anyone else you think should be considered for a leadership position? You know their strengths and weaknesses better than I do.”

“Well, I’d recommend Tuvok to you as chief of security,” he says, and she laughs at the joke, sounding almost surprised.

“I’ll be sure to let him know you still have a high opinion of him.” She examines the PADD list of crew names. “Hogan? Seska?”

“Hogan, Suder, Jonas, Dalby, Bendera, Jor—all to Engineering, they know how to work with B’Elanna. Ayala—ops, if you’ll trust him. He does have a history with Tuvok, though—maybe start him in Engineering too, until things settle down.” He sends Carlson, Chell, Jarvin, and Yosa to ops, Seska and Geron to science. A few others distributed here and there. His twenty remaining Maquis crew, subsumed into Starfleet, swapped into red and blue and yellow uniforms like they were never anything else. Like they never fought for anything, died for anything.

“Chakotay.” Janeway touches his arm very lightly. “Is everything all right?”

He smiles, because smiling is the appropriate response to completing this task. “I’m sure they’ll flourish.” His tone is dry enough that she must know he’s not at all sure of that fact.

She transmits the new assignments. “Come on,” she says. “Let’s see how Lieutenant Torres is getting along.”

In Engineering, Janeway says “this crew—*our crew*,” like a peace offering, like he hasn’t been convincing enough. They walk out of Engineering and he can’t stop himself from asking. “If things had happened differently and we were on the Maquis ship now, instead of Voyager, would you have served under me?” There are ways and ways to interpret that question.

Janeway walks down the steps before him without answering. At the bottom of the stairs, she turns to him and says, “One of the nice things about being captain is that you can keep some things to yourself.”

She means *no*, she wouldn’t have. She would have stood on the bridge of his ship and told him no, and there’s a part of him that would have liked to see that. There’s the anger again too, but it’s tangled up in something else, something insidious, nestled deep inside that he doesn’t want to examine too closely.

Chakotay follows her into her ready room. He isn’t prepared for when she stops abruptly and turns around—she must be about to ask him something—and he nearly runs into her, has to sidestep and catch her by the waist to keep from knocking her over. It brings them close together, close enough that she puts her hand on his chest as though to push him away, but she doesn’t. She only leaves her hand there long enough for him to get his bearings and step away. That alone is too long. He wants to push into the pressure of her hand, wants to see if it will help him keep this Starfleet shape.

* * * * *

“Look,” B’Elanna says that night, when he’s deep inside her. “The sooner you admit it to yourself, the sooner you can get over it.” She shimmies a little until the angle is just right for her and wraps her legs tighter around his waist.

“Can you—not—” He has a lot more trouble forming thoughts than B’Elanna does when they’re like this.

“What is it you want, Chakotay? Do you want her to stand there and look up into your eyes and tell you how she couldn’t do any of this without you?” B’Elanna bites his earlobe for emphasis. “Or do you want her to remind you that she’s the captain and she’s in charge and you have to do as she says?” He jerks a little at that and B’Elanna laughs in his ear and moans theatrically.

“Be *quiet*,” he tells her, because now his mind is full of thoughts of Janeway, of Janeway telling him no, she wouldn’t serve under him, of Janeway next door who doesn’t care in the least what he does with B’Elanna beyond the fact that they’re too noisy once in a while, and that

shouldn't bother him. "I had to take apart our crew today," he says, and there's the anger that he's been suppressing. "I had to confine each of them to a Starfleet uniform that they never wanted to put on."

"I know," B'Elanna says, and they grip each other tighter; she tugs his head to the side to expose his neck and bites, hard, almost hard enough to draw blood. "Do you think I wanted to put it back on? To be reminded every day of how I failed?"

"I led you all here." Chakotay pulls out, turns B'Elanna around and bends her over a table, spreads her legs wide before he pushes back in and hears her growl of delight. She swears in Klingon, and if the way he fucks her makes the table bang against the wall he shares with Janeway, well, he can't help that. There's something white-hot and mean inside him that he can never show Janeway outright—can never be anything but supportive—but he wants her to *know* it anyway, wants her to realize that he's something else, something fierce and dangerous and that it takes everything he has not to give in to it.

* * * * *

Janeway never looks bothered in the morning. Oh, maybe she sips her coffee with greater satisfaction, but he's never met a woman who loves coffee as much as Janeway does. It doesn't matter what B'Elanna has done to make him beg himself hoarse, what he's done to make her scream with satisfaction—maybe Janeway has erected some kind of sound-blocking forcefield in her quarters.

The hardest thing is that Janeway wants to be—not partners, because she's in command, but something more than an ordinary captain and first officer. He's spent more than twenty years of his life serving on Starfleet vessels. He knows what that relationship looks like. There should be—separation. Distinction. The captain meets with the first officer, consults with the first officer, but the captain doesn't expect to...stroll around the ship together, chat together, speculate about very personal things.

When he tells Janeway about animal guides, she leans close to him, close enough that she's practically leaning out of her chair. "Let me guess – yours is a bear."

"Why do you say that?"

"You strike me as the bear type."

He laughs at that. "Thank you." He wonders how she would react if he told her the truth, that it's nothing so blunt, so obvious. She must see him as very straightforward, nothing deeper—the Indian with the bear guide, with strength and little else.

"And he guides you well?"

"Actually, it's female. But yes, she usually guides me very well." He wonders what the rest of the bridge crew makes of this conversation, of their scientifically-minded captain asking about Native American animal guides. Some fit of insanity takes him and he offers to help Janeway find her own, reveals parts of himself that he shares only very rarely. The parts that he largely ignored until the Cardassians murdered his father.

B'Elanna walks in as he's trying to help Janeway find an animal guide and raises an eyebrow at him. "I hope you have better luck with yours than I did with mine," she tells Janeway, but there's a warning to Chakotay in her eyes.

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"You're trying to help her find her *animal guide*?" B'Elanna has shoved him back onto his bed and is pulling his shirt over his head.

"You know, we could talk about this some other time," he says. "Sometime when we're not naked."

B'Elanna snorts. "When else do I have time to pause and have an actual conversation? I spend about twenty hours a day keeping this ship going with a crew of *morons* and children. I have to multi-task."

"Fine." He takes off his pants. "I want to—help her. There's a lot on her shoulders."

She pauses. "Chakotay. I'm the only other person you actually helped to find an animal guide, even if I did try to kill it. And I maintain that it attacked me first!"

"You needed it. She needs it. She needs *something*."

"And you want to be that something." B'Elanna frowns and abruptly sits next to him on the bed. "This isn't really doing it for me tonight."

"I did say that we didn't need to talk about my interactions with the captain while we're in bed."

B'Elanna shakes her head. "Maybe we need a new strategy."

He stiffens. "A new strategy for what?"

"Don't worry about it," she tells him, and he doesn't like the sly smile on her face. "Get on your knees."

* * * * *

The turbolifts develop a strange tendency to malfunction whenever Janeway and Chakotay are alone inside them. The first time, Chakotay gets on the turbolift with Janeway and says, "Computer, bridge." The doors close and the turbolift fails to move.

Janeway raises an eyebrow. "Maybe you need to be a little firmer with it."

He smiles at that and repeats, "Computer, bridge!"

The turbolift moves for about three seconds and then stops. "Computer—" he begins.

"Turbolift controls locked. Command codes required to resume function."

He and Janeway exchange a look. A turbolift should never require command codes. "It could be a trick," Janeway says. "To get us to reveal our command codes."

Chakotay is suspicious for other reasons. "Chakotay to Engineering. What's the status of the turbolift system? We're locked in here."

"Sorry about that, sir!" It's one of the Starfleet engineering personnel. He doesn't know their voices well enough to identify them over comms yet. "Routine systems check. We'll have you on your way shortly."

* * * * *

The second time that it happens, he and Janeway are both on their way to the mess hall. The turbolift freezes and Janeway's stomach audibly rumbles. "I persuade you to eat a meal for once, and this is what happens," he says.

She smiles at him, almost fondly. "Another mark in favor of coffee. Janeway to Engineering, what's the status of the turbolifts?"

"We're working on it, ma'am. ETA thirty minutes, there have been a few high-priority crises."

After fifteen minutes, Janeway says, "I don't know about you, but I've been on my feet all day," and sits on the turbolift floor, leaning back against the wall. Chakotay follows suit. "How are the crew doing, Chakotay?"

They've had this conversation a few times—she lives in hope that the crew is bearing up well, that they all remain optimistic and expect to be home in a month or so. "I'd say it's variable. Some are...beginning to despair. Some seem fine. Others are almost—happy."

Janeway closes her eyes. "Are you looking forward to getting home?"

She's never asked him point-blank. "I'd like to—rejoin the fight," he says carefully. "But, Captain—the former Maquis on this ship, myself included, are criminals in the eyes of the Federation. When Voyager reaches spacedock in the Alpha quadrant, we may well be arrested and imprisoned." He wonders if she's forgotten this somehow, or if she's so confident in her ability to pardon them that she thinks it won't matter.

"Chakotay." Her voice is full of regret. "I'm sorry. I didn't think—"

"A lot of the Maquis don't have a home to go to in the Alpha quadrant," he adds. "We joined because our families were killed, our homes overrun. It's not as simple as Harry Kim seeing his parents again, or you and your dog."

"Or Mark." There's a slight edge in Janeway's voice. Of course. The fiancé. He likes to forget about the fiancé. "What about you? Do you have—someone waiting for you?" She looks uncomfortable and she adjusts the way her back presses against the turbolift wall.

"No. I burned all my bridges when I joined the Maquis. And...there hasn't been anyone. For a while."

"I suppose you have Lieutenant Torres, here. Did you begin your relationship when you were teaching at the Academy?"

If he weren't distracted by being trapped in a turbolift with Janeway, he would have seen the trap. "B'Elanna? I recruited her to the Maquis, but I never met her in Starfleet." How will Janeway feel about that, the idea that he's the reason B'Elanna is a criminal?

"How long have you been together?"

A question he would've come up with an answer to, if he and B'Elanna were actually pretending to be in a relationship instead of just... helping each other out when one of them needs it. He doesn't answer for too long, and then finally admits, "Captain, we're not—I wouldn't call it 'together.'"

"It certainly sounds that way," she says, and there's that full-body jolt again at the idea that Janeway hears them as she lies in bed. Maybe she hasn't put up a sonic field.

"I'd rather not talk about the details of our—arrangement. Captain." He can't resist adding, "Unless you'd like to know."

"No, Chakotay." Of course not. "I apologize for prying."

The air is charged in the turbolift now—literally, he can see fingers of electricity beginning to creep along the wall, and he pulls Janeway to the center of the turbolift just in time. He taps his comm badge. "Chakotay to Engineering, can you hear us? We're about a minute away from a severe electrical shock."

"We have a transporter lock!" he hears, just before the turbolift fades away and he and Janeway are huddled together on the transport pad.

* * * * *

Their turbolift halts abruptly, tossing Janeway against Chakotay. "I'm going to have Lieutenant Torres run a systems-wide check on these turbolifts," Janeway says. "This has to be the third time they've malfunctioned."

"That seems wise." Or pointless, since he's sure B'Elanna is behind every single one of the turbolift malfunctions when he and Janeway are inside. "Chakotay to Engineering," he says. "What's the matter with the turbolift this time?"

“Just a malfunction, Commander. It may take some time to fix, so just sit tight.” B’Elanna is definitely behind this one.

“Next time we take a Jefferies tube,” Janeway says. “It must be faster than this.” She frowns. “How often has this been happening?”

“I...haven’t heard other reports of it.” He suspects it hasn’t happened to anyone else.

Over the next forty-five minutes, the air inside the turbolift gradually heats up until they’re both sweating. “Chakotay to Engineering, it’s starting to get a little hot in here. Any ETA on the turbolift repair?”

“We’re working on it, Commander!” B’Elanna sounds distracted, as though there might actually be something wrong.

“If you’ll excuse the breach of protocol,” Janeway says, “I’m afraid I’m going to have to violate the uniform code.” There’s wry humor in her voice as she pulls her uniform shirt over her head. It almost takes her tank top with it, and Chakotay reaches out and says “Here” before he thinks about it, gently pulling the tank top down into its proper position.

“Thank you.” She fans herself. She’s flushed red, her hair coming out of its tight bun in damp little tendrils.

“All those Indiana summers and you can’t take a little heat?” ‘Little’ might be an understatement. Chakotay takes his shirt off too, a slight reprieve, and he can almost feel it when she looks him over, eyes lighting on his bare chest, the rise and fall of each breath, the sweat starting to trickle down his neck. It feels like the air is growing steadily more humid.

“What about you? Didn’t you wander around the jungle as a youth?”

“Very unwillingly. I left home when I was fifteen to join Starfleet. I had to lie just to get in.” He taps his badge again. “Engineering, it’s turning into a sauna in here. Any chance we could get out of here?”

“Sorry, sir, there was a plasma conduit rupture. We’re working on it now but it could be another hour.” B’Elanna wouldn’t manufacture that.

At a certain point, Janeway says, “Look, Chakotay, we’re both thinking it.” Chakotay, who’s been watching a drop of sweat trickle down the line of her throat as she leans back against the wall, somehow doubts it. “It’s getting very hot in here and it’s ridiculous that we’re both still wearing pants.” They’ve long since abandoned socks and shoes. “I’m game if you are.” She’s definitely not thinking the same thing that he is.

“All right.” They’re down to nothing but underwear now, their various clothes heaped together on the floor. “Tuvok would be horrified by this breach of the uniform code.”

“Tuvok is from Vulcan,” Janeway points out. She’s listing slightly toward Chakotay. “He’s used to heat.”

“We’re going to need something to drink soon.”

Janeway gestures vaguely at the rest of the turbolift. “By all means, find some.”

He can only blame the heat for the insanity that takes him. The drop of sweat has made its way to her naked collarbone and he leans over and licks a long line from her collarbone to her chin, drags his tongue along her neck to taste the salt there. Janeway’s breath catches and she arches into it. He can’t stop himself from leaving a wet kiss just where her neck meets her shoulder and she puts her hand to his face—whether to stop him or to encourage him, he doesn’t know. He turns his face into her hand and she runs her thumb over his lips. He catches her thumb gently in his teeth, licks at the salty skin and hears her sharp indrawn breath.

When he dares to touch her lips with his own fingers—he can’t let himself kiss her—she does open her mouth to him, sucks two fingers into her mouth, grabs his wrist and holds his hand there as her soft tongue explores them, and this is disastrous. They’re both still just sitting with their backs against the wall and it will be too real if either of them shifts too far. Janeway releases his fingers from her mouth with a slick pop and lets go of his hand and he allows himself to slide it down her sweat-slick neck, her collarbone, hook his fingers in the front of her tank top where it covers the dip between her breasts, but no further. If he allows himself that, his hand will fall much further, down between her legs where she must be even wetter, and whatever line still exists will be irretrievably crossed—

—and then he comes to his senses and breaks away, brings his hand firmly away from Janeway and lets his own head fall back against the wall with more force than he intends. He’s painfully, obviously hard in nothing but his underwear, but he can’t do anything about that here, not with her. Neither of them says anything.

“Engineering to Chakotay,” his comm badge says from somewhere in the pile of their clothes. “Engineering to Chakotay, please respond.”

Dazed as he is, it takes him a solid minute to dig through the clothes and find his badge. “Chakotay, go ahead.” His voice is wrecked.

“We’re still having trouble getting the turbolift running again. I know it’s getting pretty hot in there, so we’re going to try to vent in some cold air to balance it out.”

“I don’t suppose you could transport in some water, or even better, transport us out of here,” Janeway says. She sounds a lot more coherent than he feels.

“Transporters are on the fritz. Something to do with an ion storm that just hit. We’ll have you out of there as soon as we can.”

The blast of cold air hits almost immediately, and it’s a relief except that he can see Janeway’s nipples hardening through her tank top where he wouldn’t allow himself to touch her before, the goosebumps rising on her skin, knows the same thing is happening to him.

“Clothes back on, I think,” Janeway says. He wouldn’t know she was cold from the way she speaks, only from the very visible responses of her body. They spend a moment disentangling their clothing and then—

—the turbolift fades away and they're in sickbay. The Doctor, Lieutenant Paris, and B'Elanna are all standing over them. Chakotay thanks every power he can name that the cold air has dealt with his reaction to Janeway.

"No more malfunctioning turbolifts, B'Elanna," he says. When she opens her mouth to protest, he repeats, "*No more turbolifts.*"

the shuttle

Chapter Summary

Tom and B'Elanna flank his bed, wearing identical expressions of shame. He has a sudden horrible suspicion about the nature of their shuttle malfunction.

Chapter Notes

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

Janeway is either selectively amnesiac or truly doesn't care about what happened in the turbolift. "Chakotay, come look at this," she says, beckoning him over in the mess hall. "There's a planet that appears to have extensive ruins and fruit and vegetable life only three light-years away. We could stop by, let Neelix see if he can find anything to add to his kitchen storage—there's no indication of any sentient life or ships in orbit that would indicate danger."

Chakotay is experiencing some severe cognitive dissonance. Since the turbolift incident, he's taken a shower, come so hard that he thought he was dying, taken another shower, spent a brief period of time trying to re-center himself, tried not to think about what just happened, and then replicated a fresh uniform. Meanwhile, Janeway has been sitting here with a cup of coffee reviewing scans of neighboring star systems to find supplies for the crew, apparently undisturbed by anything that just happened. "It looks like—a good candidate for a side trip," he manages.

"Good," she says. She offers him her cup of coffee and he drinks from it almost automatically. "I thought you might like to be on the away team. I recall you telling me that you're interested in archaeology."

The coffee helps bring him into reality. "Yes, thank you." He walks over to Neelix and says, "One plate for the captain, please." Then, when Janeway reaches for her coffee, he hands her the plate of food. "You get the coffee back when you've eaten," he tells her.

It takes a few hours to organize the away mission, enough time for Chakotay to almost persuade himself that he imagined everything in the turbolift. Paris is supposed to pilot them down, but he comms from sickbay, the snake, and says, "Commander Chakotay, I'm not feeling so well. I think you and the captain will have to go ahead without me." Chakotay would suspect B'Elanna of putting him up to this if not for the fact that Tom and B'Elanna openly detest each other.

Neelix and a few security personnel are taking the other shuttle to collect supplies, and their rendezvous point is carefully designated. Voyager will be waiting for them. That's the plan, at least. Not long after jumping to warp, Chakotay hears an explosion and their shuttle is thrown out of warp; he and Janeway are both flung from their seats.

"Are there any ships on sensors? Anything to explain what just happened?" Janeway asks it while they're both still standing back up, already turning to the console to answer her own question. "Nothing on sensors. Not even an asteroid field or some kind of spatial anomaly."

"The warp engine is offline. We've lost all of our antimatter somehow." He walks gingerly to the rear of the shuttle to check the systems there.

"What's our situation?"

Chakotay makes his way back to the cockpit. "The long-range communications array is destroyed. We have life support for less than a day, assuming we keep the temperature controls low. I'll drop a message buoy in the hope that Voyager will pick up the signal, but..."

"I'll see what I can salvage of the communications array," Janeway says. She works in silence while Chakotay reviews the shuttle systems to see if he can figure out what went wrong.

It's getting chilly in the shuttle. Not so cold that it's dangerous yet, but definitely unpleasant. Chakotay has moved to the floor, sitting against the wall, as he examines the scans. Janeway looks over at him, her hands still deep in the shuttle's guts. "You always seem to be so—calm, Chakotay. Unfazed by whatever happens. As though you're certain everything will work out. How do you do that?"

It still surprises him, when she misunderstands him so badly. He supposes it's a mark of success, that his performance is so complete that she sees only the calm, smiling first officer, always steady, always easy. "When Tuvok was on my ship, spying on us—did he send you reports about our conduct, our personalities? What we—what *I* did?"

Janeway frowns. He can see her suppressing a shiver. "The information he deemed necessary. We talked about it more when I invited the Maquis to stay on the ship. He said that you were a captain devoted to his crew and a cool head in a crisis."

"That doesn't sound like Tuvok."

"I'm paraphrasing."

He laughs harshly and lets his head fall back against the wall, too hard. "Have you ever killed someone, Captain? I don't mean fired on a starship in self-defense. I mean—stood on the ground, facing someone, and ended his life with your own hands?"

"No," she says. "I've never had to."

"How many people do you think I've killed? Did Tuvok put that in his report?"

“I don’t know.”

“Neither do I.” He closes his eyes. “The first one—the first with my own hands—was a Cardassian. I crushed his head with a rock. Like a *savage*. I think—I hope—that they were all Cardassians, maybe a collaborator or two. You don’t always know.” His voice is thick and he clears his throat. “I’m not *calm*, Captain. I—” He struggles to articulate it. “Imagine if we returned to Earth and when you saw it from above you couldn’t believe the destruction. You were sure someone must have hidden, must have escaped. And you stepped onto the surface to find...slag. Not even ruins. The total erasure of every place that you knew. Every member of your family, every person you’d ever known.”

“I can’t imagine it.” Her voice is very soft. It would probably be soothing if he weren’t so deep in the memories.

“When I say in the ritual that I’m far from the bones of my ancestors—there are no bones, not anymore. They were vaporized with everything else.” He clears his throat again. “It’s easy to say that there’s a treaty. The lucky worlds on the right side of the line are under Federation protection. But the Maquis know that the treaty means nothing for the people on the wrong side of the line.” Chakotay strikes the bottom of his fist against the floor, hard enough to hurt, not hard enough to damage himself. “I’m not calm,” he repeats. “For years I couldn’t feel anything at all. And then the only feeling that came back was *anger*. That’s what’s useful in war.”

“Chakotay, I’m so sorry.”

He closes his eyes, shrugs as best he can leaning against the wall. “I had a purpose, before this. I killed Cardassians. I tried to protect the worlds that still weren’t like my—home. I tried to protect my crew from the Cardassians and the Federation alike. I had a ship. It was war. And now—” He keeps his eyes closed. He doesn’t want to see her expression. “If I let anyone see the anger, anyone who doesn’t share it, I’ll never be able to keep the smiling face on again. The calm man, the smiling face that the crew needs, that *you* need.”

“You’re showing me now.” He suspects that Janeway very much wants to put a comforting hand on his shoulder, on his arm. It’s good that she doesn’t.

“No. I’m *admitting* it. That’s very different than ever letting you see it.” Chakotay opens his eyes, stands, and paces the length of the shuttle. It’s not a long walk. “I suppose even admitting it means I secretly think that we’re going to die.” He finally meets Janeway’s eyes. It’s hard to read the emotions there—is it shock, compassion, horror, grief, disgust, something else? “I don’t regret what I did as a Maquis, Captain. I know it isn’t the Starfleet way, but I left Starfleet before I became a Maquis.”

“It must be difficult to have returned to Starfleet.”

He wants to scream. This is the problem with lowering the façade around her, even for a moment. “There was no *choice* other than to return. And there’s no way to keep my old crew in line except to be exactly who you think I am—who you need me to be.”

“I’m sorry,” Janeway says again. “I wish it didn’t have to be this way.”

Chakotay has to end this conversation. The more they talk about it, the more he frays. “We should eat something,” he says abruptly. “To help keep our body temperatures up.”

She lets the conversational thread end. “Lieutenant Paris usually hides a few extra rations in the toolbox in that compartment.” Janeway also stands and walks over.

They both reach for the compartment at the same time. He has a good five inches of height on her and it brings their bodies close together. In the chill of the shuttle, her body exudes warmth and when she doesn’t recoil, he can’t help leaning into it. His hand finds the toolbox. “Got it,” he murmurs into her hair. He wants to put his other arm around her and pull her tight against him—for warmth, for comfort, for who knows what else—but he only lifts down the toolbox and forces himself to step back into the cold.

“Well,” Janeway says, “Either we use the power to heat them and lose about five minutes of life support, or we eat them cold.” They both look down at the ration packs. Vegetarian chili. Not ideal.

“I think that’s a command decision.” He wants the specter of his admission stuffed firmly back inside of himself, so he smiles as he says it. She looks at him strangely, like she doesn’t believe the smile. “I would heat them. Five minutes is unlikely to make a difference either way and we’re both cold.”

Janeway frowns. Of course. In her mind, Voyager will come for them, and so they have to stretch their life support for as long as possible to give Voyager time. Even out here, she’s still stuck in the Starfleet mindset—that they have other support, that someone will come to help them. The Maquis know better. “If we heat them and turn down the temperature controls by two degrees, it should balance out.” She bends and puts the ration packs on the heating charge.

He imagines what it’s going to be like to sit in this small cold box for another ten hours, gradually reducing the amount of power to environmental controls to squeeze out every last second of life support, slowly lowering the temperature until it’s just above the point of certain hypothermia, reducing the power to the CO2 scrubbers until the air contains just enough oxygen to prevent hypoxia, all lighting off to preserve any conceivable power. “You know,” he says, “life support would last a lot longer with only one person on this shuttle.”

She straightens abruptly, eyes sharp. “Absolutely not.”

“You’re the captain. The crew needs you.”

“*Our* crew needs *both* of us.” She slaps the extremely hot ration pack into his hands and says, “Stop talking that way and eat.”

He thinks he’d rather die quickly than suffocate in this little coffin, but there’s no point bringing it up again right now. The food is exactly as he expected it to be, but it clearly makes them both feel a little better. Maybe it’s that little bit of energy that emboldens him enough to ask, “How close to the end of our life support would we have to be, for you to abandon Starfleet protocol?” For her to stop caring about the chain

of command, for her not to think of herself as his superior officer, for her to—

“Given the Doctor’s abilities, he might be able to revive us even after life support stopped functioning, if they located us quickly enough.”

“Never, you mean.” That should be clear enough for him. “You don’t ever give up, do you, Captain?”

She’s meticulously squeezing every last drop out of the ration pack. “I think you can call me Kathryn, given the circumstances. And—no. Not out here. Not when there are people depending on me.”

It should frustrate him. It should make him angry—angrier—her stubborn belief that they’ll survive in the face of all evidence to the contrary. But he wants her to be right. “Hypoxia will start to affect us well before we freeze to death,” he points out.

For the first time, she looks annoyed at him. “I’ve programmed the life support controls to automatically balance the power to temperature and CO2 scrubbers for maximum length of survival,” she says. “Were you hoping to die faster?”

“Kathryn.” He tries it out. “No, of course not.” Smile. Be calm, be steady, that’s what she needs. “I want to have a full picture of the situation.” He knows where the medical kit is, what it contains. If it becomes necessary for her survival, he’ll do what has to be done.

* * * * *

They’ve been emptying every compartment, looking for every possible item that might allow them to get out of here—or at least, prolong their miserable short lives, as Kathryn is determined to do—when Kathryn laughs and says, “Of course.” Chakotay turns to see that she’s holding a bottle of what’s clearly liquor.

“I thought we had to do everything necessary to extend our lives,” he says. “I hate to say it, but won’t that increase the risk of hypothermia?”

“As you’ve pointed out, spending another nine cold miserable hours waiting for likely death or unlikely rescue is going to be unpleasant.” Kathryn lifts the bottle. “I’m willing to take the risk if you are.”

He extends his hand for the bottle and she passes it to him. It’s unopened, which is good—he hates to think that any of the crew are drinking on duty. He cracks the seal and inhales. “It smells like rum.”

“Appropriate, for a ship.” Kathryn smiles. “Go ahead.”

There are probably cups, but he puts the bottle to his lips anyway and takes a swallow. He doesn’t usually drink liquor, only the glass of wine he’s had at their two meals together, but it’s smooth. “I suppose it’s fitting that the last bottle of alcohol I ever drink will be with you.” He passes it to her.

“No,” she says, “We drink only on the condition that neither of us calls it the last bottle ever.” She takes a swig, her mouth easing over where his just was, and passes it back to him.

He’s already beginning to feel it—he’s a little warmer now, everything a little smoother, softer. Straight liquor when he’s only eaten a single ration pack in the last twelve hours may be a bad idea, but there are no good ideas now. How long, he wonders, until he tells her that the smudges on one side of her face look better than any makeup ever has? That her hair has fallen half out of its severe bun while she was digging into the shuttle’s wiring? That, at least, she knows, because she catches him looking at her hair and says, “Yes, it’s a mess, I know.”

“Here,” he says. “I’ll fix it for you.” That’s innocuous enough, isn’t it? She raises an eyebrow, but she takes the bottle back from him and shifts until her back is to him. He breathes on his hands to try to warm them a little before he pulls out a few pins and the bun collapses entirely.

Kathryn takes another drink and sighs. “That already feels better.” She angles her head one way, then the other. “I must have done something to my neck when we were thrown around.”

“Here, let me help.” He runs his fingers through the length of her hair once or twice, then collects it in one hand and drapes it over her shoulder to keep it out of the way. He massages her neck very gently and she groans.

“Oh, that feels good.” She tilts her head back against him.

“I’ve had a lot of practice at this.” He can confide it now, when she can’t see his face. “My mother used to get sore necks all the time. I was the only one she’d trust not to make it worse.”

“Thank you,” Kathryn says, but she doesn’t pull away, and so he doesn’t stop.

His world narrows to those points of contact, each place where his finger meets her skin, and he finds himself pressing a kiss to the cool skin of her neck. She groans again and grabs the back of his head, holds him in place. There’s nothing he can do but inhale deeply, turn the kiss wet and hot with the slightest bit of teeth against her neck to hear her hissed breath, kiss further along her neck to where her collar covers her skin and then all the way back to her earlobe, the shell of her ear.

She inhales deeply and then releases him without saying anything. He remembers he was only ever supposed to be fixing her hair. He pulls back and combs his fingers softly through her hair, braids it loosely, and—he can’t stop himself—breathes a last kiss into the crown of her hair before he releases the braid. “There,” he says. “Is that better?”

“Much.” She passes him the bottle again.

“Kathryn,” he says. “I’m not sure that’s a good idea,” and every other part of him is screaming at his brain for saying it.

She turns a little and it would be so easy to kiss her now, to lean forward just enough to catch her mouth with his. He remembers, vividly, the feeling of her lips, her tongue, beneath his fingers in the turbolift. He wants to feel that again. If he kisses her, Voyager probably will show up. Voyager will rescue them and this will again be forgotten, or at least Kathryn will forget it.

It occurs to him that he's actively contemplating not kissing her, just to ensure that they die rather than be rescued and face emotional discomfort. He starts to lean forward, but she's already stood up again, leaving the bottle with him. He takes another drink and stands as well. "Looking for something more to do?" At her look, he says, "I know you well enough to know that you hate just sitting here waiting to be rescued."

"Apparently you know me a lot better than I know you." That stings. She contemplates the bottle. "I don't suppose anyone stashed some water here to go with this rum."

"If they did, I'm sure you'll find it." Chakotay regrets having told her the truth about himself now, without even the liquor to blame it on. "Kathryn—I don't want it to—to change the way you see me, whether or not you trust me, what I told you. About myself."

She looks almost surprised. "It doesn't," she says. "Maybe I didn't know the details, but I knew that you were Maquis. And I know that since you came to Voyager, you've been the best first officer I could hope for." Kathryn presses her lips together. "But—I hope you'll come to feel that you *can* share these feelings with me. That you don't always have to be—who you're pretending to be."

Personally, he thinks that's almost impossible, but he smiles and nods. "Maybe eventually."

* * * * *

It's very cold now. They're curled up together, Kathryn half in his lap, his arm wrapped around her back. The emergency blankets draped over them might as well be tissue paper. The only warmth is that of her breath against his neck, a steady in-out that reassures him she's still alive. The air is thin, thinner than that of the highest mountains at home. "Warning," the computer says. "Five minutes until complete life support failure. Warning."

Kathryn stirs a little, just enough to say "I thought I'd turned that damn voice off."

"Warning. Two minutes until complete life support failure. Warning."

"Kathryn," he says, "I know you're not going to give up on being rescued, but I'm going to give up so that I can violate protocol myself." She makes a questioning noise and he adds, "I'm going to kiss you now unless you tell me not to."

"Warning. One minute until complete life support failure. Warning."

He isn't expecting it when she surges forward and kisses him instead. Their lips are papery, mouths dry. It doesn't matter. Maybe it's the lack of oxygen or the hypothermia, but his entire body is warm now, one hand pulling her as close against him as humanly possible, the other tangled in her braid as she clutches the back of his head, as they breathe last breaths into each other's mouths—

* * * * *

He wakes up in sickbay. "Commander Chakotay! You and the captain gave us quite a scare," the Doctor declares. "A minute later and even I wouldn't have been able to save you!"

Chakotay is cocooned in hot blankets and every part of him is too warm. He can just barely manage to turn his head and see Kathryn—is she Janeway again?—similarly wrapped in the next bed over.

"Chakotay, I am so sorry," B'Elanna says. Tom and B'Elanna flank his bed, wearing identical expressions of shame.

He has a sudden horrible suspicion about the nature of their shuttle malfunction. "You're both confined to quarters. You know why." His tongue feels very heavy in his mouth. They both nod and walk out of sickbay together.

Chapter End Notes

I'm taking much of Chakotay's backstory from Jeri Taylor's novel *Pathways*.

the decontamination chamber

Chapter Summary

The computer chimes and the ultraviolet light turns off. It gives them just enough warning to separate as best they can before the Doctor re-appears on the viewscreen. “Captain, Commander, how are you feeling? Mr. Paris suggested that I give you another ten minutes in the chamber, but your vital signs are very elevated despite the fact that the pathogen appears to have disappeared from your bodies.”

Chapter Notes

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

When Chakotay lands on Helenum IV with Janeway and Neelix to discuss trading for what Neelix claims are very nutritious tubers, he can't help noticing the fat bumblebee-like insects that seems to buzz all around them, covered in pollen. “You have a very fertile planet,” he tells the trader.

The trader beams. “Yes, we're well-known for our ability to grow almost anything! It's thanks to our genetically-engineered bees.” A bee lands on Chakotay's hand and busily cleans its face; another does the same to Janeway. “If you'll follow me, I'll show you the crops that we have available for trade.”

Chakotay starts to feel a little dizzy as they walk. Suddenly, the Doctor comms, “Captain, Commander, I'm afraid I need you both to transport back to Voyager immediately. We've detected some very concerning and fast-acting pathogens. We'll beam down another pilot to assist Mr. Neelix with the trade.”

They exchange glances as they're beamed up—directly to sickbay. “I've erected a Level 10 forcefield around this area,” the Doctor says. “Unfortunately, the transporter was unable to filter out the pathogen.”

Tom Paris scans them both with a tricorder. “It's as we suspected, Doctor. The only treatment is a decon chamber.”

“Would someone like to tell me what's going on here?” Janeway's tone hasn't reached angry, but she's definitely annoyed.

“Mr. Paris was monitoring all three of your life signs while on the planet, as part of his medical training. He noticed that you and Commander Chakotay had suddenly developed unusual symptoms. The symptoms are consistent with a pathogen that, among other things, lowers inhibitions. It seemed best to return you to the ship. We began researching treatments immediately.”

Tom brandishes a PADD and Chakotay immediately has a bad feeling about this. Janeway staggers the slightest bit—she must be feeling the dizziness too—and he braces her with one hand. “We haven't found anything in modern medical treatments. But when the original Enterprise set out on its mission, it contained a decontamination chamber that used a combination of ultraviolet light and certain medical gels to deal with pathogens such as this.”

“A decontamination chamber.” He's heard the stories. When Chakotay looks at Tom, Tom won't quite meet his eyes.

“We're replicating the appropriate gels now. I believe Lieutenant Torres is constructing the chamber itself. You'll be beamed there as soon as it's ready. Until then—” The Doctor gives them each a hypospray. “That should help with the dizziness.”

It's not long before they're both transported into a room smaller than one of the shuttles, containing two benches and a small shelf. Two cups of iridescent gel sit on the shelf. There are long windows on either side, but it's still unpleasantly small. The Doctor pops up on a screen. “Now, you'll need to spread the gel thoroughly.”

“Do we need to remove all of our clothing, Doctor?” Janeway picks up one of the cups.

“Based on Mr. Paris's research and the efficacy of the gel when exposed to ultraviolet light, you can keep what's necessary to—preserve modesty.” The Doctor is strangely squeamish about some things. “But you should fully expose the rest of your skin.”

Janeway meets Chakotay's eyes. “Well,” she says. She sets the cup of gel back down and begins undressing. She does it efficiently, like everything else she does—shoes off, then uniform top, undershirt, socks, pants, all folded neatly on one of the benches. Her eyes are very bright in the dim light. Chakotay forces himself to look away, but he can feel her gaze and finds that his limbs feel awkward and ungainly as he undresses.

“All right, now the gel.” Chakotay had almost forgotten the Doctor's presence. “It's important to be very thorough, so you'll need to assist each other. When you're done, activate the ultraviolet light and leave it on for at least ten minutes. I'll check in on you then.”

It's almost hypnotic, watching Janeway rub the gel into her skin—her face, her stomach, just under the edges of her bra—as he spreads it carelessly on himself, trying not to focus on the sensation too closely. “Here,” Janeway says. “Turn around and I'll get your back.”

He startles at the feeling of her slick hands on him. The gel is body-temperature, and she rubs it into his skin in broad swaths, across his shoulders, sweeping along his back, and then dipping just below the waistband of his briefs, just far enough down that his hips jerk the tiniest bit. She works her way all the way around to the front and he's dizzy from something else entirely as she lifts her hands from the waistband and runs them all the way up his chest, casually brushing her thumbs over his nipples. This is far beyond what he'd imagined when they were told to assist each other. He keeps his eyes closed like a coward to keep from meeting hers as she does it, opening them only when she

crouches down in front of him to massage the gel into his thighs. He finds that his legs are actually shaking with the effort of keeping still. If she leaned forward another two inches—if she reached into his briefs with her soft slick hand—

When she stands, she says, “Your turn,” and presents him with the expanse of her back. She pulls her bra straps of each shoulder and he—daring beyond what he should—unfastens the bra entirely to spread the gel over all her skin. The gel makes her pale skin shine and it takes him two slippery tries to re-fasten the bra and pull the straps up gently. The only sounds are their breathing and the quiet wet noise of skin on skin. When he follows her example and spreads the gel all the way down to her hips, rolling her waistband down just slightly to get beneath it, he hears Janeway’s breath catch. He pauses, but when she doesn’t pull away, he continues, letting his hands follow the same path that hers did on his body. In front of her, he finds that she’s closed her eyes—all the better for her to pretend later that this never happened. When he reaches her bra, he slides his fingers beneath the cups to spread the gel on the undersides of her breasts, over and around on the sides, across the tops—he leaves only her nipples untouched, some kind of mad torment to them both, and he can see how hard she’s breathing. The—pathogen, it must be affecting them.

Chakotay kneels before her to rub the gel into each thigh, down her legs, and when he’s done and still on his knees in front of her, he can’t help leaning forward and just—resting his forehead against her stomach, breathing hard. His hands are on her hips and it wouldn’t take much to drag her underwear down—with his fingers, maybe with his teeth. Janeway slides her hand into his short hair and grips tight, holding his head in place, nose just brushing the waistband of her underwear, his breath hot a scant distance below. He’s noticed she likes to pull his hair like that, to move him wherever she wants him. How he *wants* to slide even just a finger beneath the fabric and feel how wet she must be—

“Computer,” Janeway says. “Activate ultraviolet light.” Her voice sounds so unlike her that for a moment, Chakotay can’t understand what she’s saying. Then the ultraviolet light turns on and it’s even more overwhelming, like they’re all alone at night on an alien planet. She spreads her legs just slightly more and he takes it as an invitation. He slides his fingers very, very slowly across one thigh, so that she can pull away at any moment, and then works them into her underwear. She’s dripping wet, messy and hot, so much hotter than the rest of her skin. When he touches her she makes a kind of high-pitched noise and tightens her grip in his hair. Chakotay rubs his knuckles back and forth against her, over and over, never quite enough for her—her hips hitch and she rocks against his hand—and he never allows himself to slide a finger inside her as he desperately wants to do. Can’t even let himself think of what else he wants to do.

The computer chimes and the ultraviolet light turns off. It gives them just enough warning to separate as best they can before the Doctor reappears on the viewscreen. “Captain, Commander, how are you feeling? Mr. Paris suggested that I give you another ten minutes in the chamber, but your vital signs are very elevated despite the fact that the pathogen appears to have disappeared from your bodies.”

Chakotay shakes his head. He feels like he’s emerging from some kind of dream state. Almost unthinkingly, he brings his fingers to his mouth and licks them, and he hears Janeway’s strangled gasp before she says, “Thank you, Doctor. And please thank Lieutenants Torres and Paris for their—quick thinking, in solving this problem. If you don’t mind, I think it would be best if you transported us both to our quarters to—clean up a bit from all this gel.”

“Of course,” the Doctor says. “But I’d like you both to come to sickbay for further examination once you have, just to make sure that everything is all right.”

When the familiar glow of the transport beam fades away, he’s not in his own quarters. They’ve both been transported into Janeway’s quarters. There’s a moment when she looks him up and down—slick all over from the gel, hard and wearing nothing but his underwear—and it’s the first time their eyes have met this entire time. It’s electric. He has to clench both of his hands into fists just to keep himself from reaching down and gripping himself, from doing something insane like walking closer to her.

She asks, “Computer, is there anyone in the hallway?”

“Negative.”

The message is clear. “Captain,” Chakotay says, and half-runs out the doors of her quarters and inside his own next door. Once inside, he finds himself stumbling to the wall that separates their quarters, bracing himself against it and furiously stroking himself until he comes. He can’t stop whatever word it is that he groans when he does.

Chapter End Notes

Heavily inspired by the infamous decontamination chamber scene in the first episode of *Enterprise*, of course.

the holodeck, redux

Chapter Summary

Janeway stands on the high rocky outcropping just within the holodeck doors. Half her face is illuminated in chiaroscuro by the frozen flash of a bomb that just detonated. And there's the horror in her eyes he's been waiting to see, the final understanding of what he is beneath his performance as her first officer: true Maquis.

"B'Elanna. This has to stop." They're in one of B'Elanna's holodeck programs, which is more or less a firing range populated by Cardassian targets and a few of their dead Maquis comrades. Not exactly Starfleet-approved. Chakotay should probably be more concerned about the program than he is.

"It's a harmless program," B'Elanna tells him. "Just keeping your skills sharp. Nice!" She says it as he takes out a Cardassian before it can harm its hostage.

"That's not what I mean. The turbolift, the shuttle—you could have killed us with that shuttle incident."

"That wasn't entirely my fault," she protests.

"Oh?" He takes cover behind a stand of trees as three Cardassians fire at them.

"Apparently Tom and I...both made a few modifications to the shuttle. Without communicating. They magnified each other."

Chakotay dodges out to shoot and, embarrassingly, misses. "Since when do you and Tom work together on anything? And what was that with the decontamination chamber?"

"Looks like you're getting slow, Chakotay!" She shoots all three of them. "What about it?"

"We both went to Starfleet, B'Elanna. Just because the Doctor doesn't know about all the dirty holonovels involving decon chambers doesn't mean I believe for a second that you've never heard of them, or that—or that Tom hasn't! Was there even a pathogen to begin with?"

"Of course!" They both dart out to shoot an advancing phalanx of Cardassians. When the—men—have all fallen, he gives B'Elanna a stern look. "Well, there was a pathogen, but let's just say that the decontamination chamber was ready to go as soon as a likely one appeared."

"Computer, freeze program." They're both breathing hard. His Maquis camouflage clothing feels strange on his body. "Why are you doing this? To torture me?"

B'Elanna frowns at him. "Look, Chakotay, I like having sex with you, but it's pretty obvious how you feel about the captain."

"And how is that?"

She raises an eyebrow and doesn't dignify that with an answer. "Obviously she's hung up on Starfleet protocol, but we figured—"

"We?"

"Tom and I." She looks very uncomfortable. "Anyway, we figured that, given enough opportunities, she would get over the protocol issue."

"So the two of you decided to—periodically trap us?" It's dangerous to let himself get angry now, surrounded by the holographic bodies of dead Cardassians. "Just hope that Janeway—the captain—would be so overwhelmed by the desire to have sex with me that everything would work out?"

"It seemed like a good idea when Tom and I talked about it!"

"Congratulations, all you've done is make things harder for *me*, not change anything about her! All that will happen is that I'll cross a line and it will destroy our working relationship!" There's rage building in him.

"We'll stop," B'Elanna says hurriedly. "No more—incidents. I promise."

"Make sure Tom understands too, B'Elanna. Or you'll both be spending a lot of time in the brig."

She looks almost pitying. "All right."

B'Elanna is the only one here. He can give in to the cold rage inside him. "Computer, change parameters to close combat, safety protocols at fifty percent."

"Reduction in safety parameters not advised. Please confirm."

He meets B'Elanna's eyes and she shrugs. Fifty percent won't allow any serious injuries. "Confirm reduction, code Chakotay beta 371. Resume program."

In the sky above, Cardassian ships are engaged in a dogfight with the *Liberty*; stray torpedo fragments rain down. This is what he's missed.

Grappling with a Cardassian attacker until he can reach his own knife to end it, blood in his teeth and a sharp ache in his side, getting just enough distance to shoot another, sometimes back-to-back with B'Elanna or one of the holographic Maquis comrades, and sometimes all alone, lawless and dangerous. Another Cardassian gets him in a headlock and he has a brief moment to wonder what it will feel like in here when the man snaps his neck, before he finds the Cardassian's own weapon and stabs it into his side. He's on his feet again, Cardassian knife in one hand and his own in the other, when everything stops and he realizes that someone has frozen the program again.

He finds B'Elanna in the carnage and she looks horrified, which means she didn't do it. The holodeck doors are supposed to be locked. Chakotay turns very slowly. One of his ribs grinds as he does it, probably broken. His right shoulder is dislocated and one eye is swelling shut. His hands are throbbing.

Janeway stands on the high rocky outcropping just within the holodeck doors. Half her face is illuminated in chiaroscuro by the frozen flash of a bomb that just detonated. And there's the horror in her eyes he's been waiting to see, the final understanding of what he is beneath his performance as her first officer: true Maquis.

The emotion on her face only lasts for a second. "Commander Chakotay," she says, and her voice is so steady that you'd think he wasn't surrounded by the bloody bodies of Cardassians. "You weren't answering. You're needed on the bridge."

He'll never understand how she can process things so quickly. His brain is still stuttering through what she's just seen.

"Computer, end program," B'Elanna says quietly. The bodies vanish and suddenly they're all much closer in the emptiness of the holodeck. B'Elanna slips past Janeway and out the doors.

When Janeway turns to follow, Chakotay can't help it. "Captain," he chokes out. He can't flip the switch as easily as she can. "I'm sorry you ___"

"Even on the holodeck, you have to answer if someone is trying to contact you." Janeway says it like he was at a noisy concert instead of the middle of battle.

"Captain—"

She looks him up and down. He's very aware of the blood, the filth, the torn clothing, everything that tells her that the safety protocols were reduced. "Go to sickbay before you come to the bridge."

The agony he feels is far worse than anything physical. "Yes, Captain," he finally manages. She waits for him to leave and he walks past her, careful not to brush against her even slightly. He winces and pulls away when she puts a hand on his dislocated shoulder and she doesn't ask why.

B'Elanna knows him well enough to come to his quarters that night. "I should order you to delete that program," he says. His shoulder is still tender—the Doctor had frowned at him and put it in a sling, apparently believing that it was a holodeck boxing injury. So he lets her do the work of removing both of their uniforms, lets her push him down gently on his bed instead of their usual against-the-shared-wall, lets her kiss him surprisingly tenderly and says, "This is the last time, isn't it."

"I don't think it's helping either of us," B'Elanna says. She slides down his body, tells him "Be glad I didn't inherit Klingon teeth," and takes him in her mouth. It's the first thing that's felt good all day and he lets himself react, lets himself be noisy, because they've never tried to hide it before and there's no point in changing that now.

* * * * *

He expects the holodeck incident to affect Janeway's behavior toward him. A chill in their interactions. A flinch when he gestures quickly. No more smiles. It would help, he thinks. He would have to accept the truth about the limits of their relationship, if she pulled back like that.

Instead, the next day, Janeway seems to go out of her way to touch him. They're all innocuous touches, of course—a hand on his arm, his shoulder, his back. She stands just a little too close to him when she shows him a report on a PADD or a ship schematic, when they walk out of her ready room onto the bridge. It almost feels like she's trying to reassure him that what she saw doesn't change her opinion of him—her *trust* in him—and he wishes he could believe it. Every time she says "Chakotay," he thinks she's going to finally say something more, but she never does.

the festival

Chapter Summary

"It is very important that the Captain's first mate be here to take part in the festival as well!" G'Na'Far smiles again. Chakotay is growing uncomfortable with the repeated use of the phrase 'first mate.'

It's been over a week since she walked in on him on the holodeck. In that time, they've fought off a Kazon ship, very nearly been sucked into what looked like a nebula, and dealt with two scuffles between Starfleet and former Maquis crew. Privately, he doubts that time confined to quarters is going to cool anyone's tempers, but he can't discipline his crew the way he would have on their old ship—the way he wouldn't have needed to.

"Let's have dinner tonight," Janeway says near the end of shift, when he's about to leave her ready room. "It's been a long week and I've got an old family recipe I want to try."

"You've fixed your replicator?" Chakotay knows her well enough now to know that she never minds being teased about her lack of cooking skills.

"I must have mis-entered some of the proportions last time," she insists. "You, me, a bottle of wine, an old family recipe..."

"It might be safer to stick to the bottle of wine." He remembers the shuttle as he says it and hastily adds, "Or not, I'm sure you have the proportions worked out this time."

"1900 hours. You know where my quarters are." She stiffens the slightest bit. "Unless you have other plans."

"B'Elanna—Lieutenant Torres and I aren't involved anymore, if that's what you mean."

"Yes." Her voice is very dry. "I'd gathered that from the silence lately." Chakotay tries to tamp down the heat that streaks through him whenever he imagines her listening on the other side of the wall. "I assume it won't affect your work?"

"What?" He's genuinely surprised. "Oh, no, of course not. B'Elanna is one of my best friends on this ship." What a ridiculous thing to say, that his fifteen-years-younger subordinate with whom he only recently stopped having sex is one of his best friends. "There are no hard feelings."

Janeway's lips twitch and he finds that he can't stop himself from laughing at himself. "Commander," she chides, and he hears the humor. "I'm glad to hear there are no...hard feelings. That would prevent you from attending dinner tonight. 1900 hours."

He's not blushing but he knows he's smiling widely enough to show his dimples. It's always been his tell, the difference between a pleasant ordinary smile and the helpless kind.

* * * * *

The acrid scent of whatever dinner was supposed to be has already started to filter into his quarters by the time he gets out of the sonic shower at 1855. If it smelled good, he would wait until the appointed time to go over, but there's no reason now.

When he rings the door, Janeway snaps, "Come in!" She's down to a tank top and pants, a streak of sauce on one arm. He can't stop the affection bubbling in his heart. "I'm going to get this right," she tells him.

"I'm sure you are." He finds the bottle of wine on the table, opens it, and pours two glasses.

She accepts one from him with a "hmpf" noise and slumps down in her chair.

"Defeated by the replicator? Little do the Kazon know that all they have to do is ask you to cook." There's a certain intimacy to getting to see her like this, the only time she ever seems to be frazzled or inept.

Janeway takes a large sip—possibly too large to be called a sip—of her wine. "Maybe you and I should take turns cooking for these dinners. You must have some old family recipes."

He expects the pain, at the thought of his family—the thought of his mother's cooking, his grandfather's refusal to eat certain herbs—but it's an ache, not stabbing the way he expects. Janeway starts to apologize and he says, "No, you're right. May I?"

"Of course. Computer, clear replicator contents and settings." She gestures to the now-empty replicator. "Whatever you want to make."

He walks to the replicator, runs his fingers across it gently. "This was my mother's favorite meal," he says. "Computer, two whole crabs."

"Specify species and preparation."

"Dungeness. Steamed, seven minutes per pound. And a sauce of two parts butter—dairy butter—and one part lemon juice."

The replicator produces two plates, each containing a whole crab, accompanied by single dish of drawn butter. Chakotay removes the plates from the replicator and sets them on the counter. "Computer, one tablecloth, one large debris bowl, two sets of leg crackers." The computer obeys. "Here, help me with the table," he tells Janeway, and they carefully swap out the plates, the silverware, and the candles, until the table

is safely swathed in the tablecloth. He reaches between the candles to set one of the crabs in front of Janeway.

“What’s this?” she asks.

“Captain,” he says. “We both lived in San Francisco. You never had whole crab?”

Janeway looks a little misty. “No,” she says. “I did. On a few very special occasions.” She doesn’t elaborate.

“On my home world, there were crabs very much like this. It was the meal we ate when we were celebrating something. In San Francisco, Dungeness crab was...the closest thing I could find.” He passes her a crab-cracker. “I’m guessing you know how to eat it.”

“Yes.” She tears off a leg and very carefully cracks the shell to extract the meat, then dip it in the butter. “Yes, I remember.”

Their hands are sticky with sweet crab meat; the stem of Janeway’s wineglass has acquired a small bit of crab shell. Her lips are shiny from the lemon butter and every once in a while, Chakotay thinks that he catches Janeway watching his mouth. “How do you like it?” he asks.

“Really, it’s cheating if you’re just going to tell the replicator to give you a whole animal.” Janeway sucks some juice off her forefinger. Chakotay takes the opportunity to refill his own wineglass, and when Janeway gestures, hers as well. “It’s delicious, of course. Thank you for sharing it with me.”

“Of course.” His voice is a bit rough. They wipe their hands, their faces, and then take the wine with them to Janeway’s couch. Chakotay sits in the chair next to her couch—safer this way—but nevertheless finds his legs tangled with hers. She doesn’t move them, and so neither does he.

“Do you think we’re going to get home, Chakotay?” Janeway’s voice is gentler than usual, more melancholy. “I’m sorry—I know it’s not home for you, or most of the Maquis.”

“If there’s any person in the galaxy who could get this ship back to the Alpha quadrant, it’s you.” He feels a kind of complete certainty as he says it that he hasn’t felt in a very long time.

She stares out into the space between them. “We’re up against a lot. The Kazon, spatial anomalies, the Vidians, enemies that we haven’t even begun to imagine yet...”

“Kathryn,” he dares to say, and he puts one hand very lightly on her knee. “You’ll get us home.”

Her gaze re-focuses, shifts to him. “Not without help,” she tells him.

“I’ll be beside you. Every step—every lightyear.” He doesn’t take his hand off her knee, but neither does he advance it. “You can trust me. I promise.”

“Yes,” she says, and when she meets his eyes the force of it is like a blow. “I believe I can.” There’s a long, tense moment when either of them could do—something, and then Chakotay lifts his hand and sits back and picks up his wineglass and time resumes its normal progress.

* * * * *

Trade negotiations have been going well with their latest contact, the C’Nihuan. Chakotay is on Voyager, coordinating with B’Elanna, while Janeway, Tom, and Neelix are down on the surface for the diplomatic pleasantries. The C’Nihuan mine dilithium on several of their moons and are happy to trade for replicated Federation art and some of Neelix’s secret recipes.

“Commander, the away team is hailing from the surface,” Harry reports.

“On-screen.”

Janeway appears with the C’Nihuan ambassador. “Commander, allow me to introduce G’Na’Far, our host. This is Commander Chakotay, my first officer—”

“Yes, the first mate! Your lieutenant Paris has told me of your ship, of the captain and first mate and bosun and engineer! It is my pleasure!” G’Na’Far’s face has some unfamiliar protrusions, but Chakotay knows a smile when he sees it.

“It’s a pleasure to meet you, G’Na’Far. Thank you for taking such good care of my captain during her time there.”

“We’ve been invited to attend the C’Nihuan—harvest festival,” Janeway says. “I understand that attendance and participation is—good luck, for a successful trade.” Chakotay can read between the lines. The dilithium trade hinges, at least in part, on a show of good faith by participating in whatever festival this is. “G’Na’Far has expressed that—”

“It is very important that the Captain’s first mate be here to take part in the festival as well!” G’Na’Far smiles again. Chakotay is growing uncomfortable with the repeated use of the phrase “first mate.”

“As the first officer,” he starts.

“You’ll beam down to the surface immediately,” Janeway interrupts. “We expect to conclude the negotiations by nightfall, when the festival begins.”

“Aye-aye, Captain,” he says, because what else is there to say.

“Oh, and Chakotay—” Something about her tone makes him uneasy. “Dress lightly. There will be—traditional festival clothing for us.

Janeway out.”

On his way to the transporter room, Chakotay summons B’Elanna. “You and Tom had better not have any schemes going on,” he hisses.

“I don’t know what you mean—”

“Lieutenant Paris has told them all about the captain’s *first mate*?”

“You know Tom! He gets—excited about that kind of thing. Historical things. It’s all filtered through the Universal Translator anyway.” B’Elanna looks innocent. He doesn’t believe it for a second.

“If this is some kind of ploy, you’ll both be punished,” he tells her. “The Starfleet way, not the Maquis way.” She looks actively disappointed.

It’s twilight on the surface when he beams down. In the distance, he sees a grand city—where Janeway and the rest of the away team have spent their day—but here there’s a great flat plain, bonfires dotted across it, colored lights fizzling in the air above like everlasting fireworks, small shelters scattered throughout. Everyone seems to be dressed in white, with the occasional bright spot of red or blue, and music emanates all around.

G’Na’Far is nearly seven feet tall, with a buoyant air about them, and presses clothes into their hands. “Please, change into the festival clothing. Your belongings will be safe until you return for them.” They gesture to a long, low building that seems to be the entry to the festival. “But first, share a celebratory drink!” It gives them each a shining beverage in a tall stemless glass.

“Thank you for your hospitality,” Chakotay says. He looks to Janeway for guidance, and when she drinks the celebratory drink, he follows suit.

G’Na’Far beams. “Go, first mate! Share in our celebration! Enjoy your time with your captain!”

There’s that ‘first mate’ business again. He walks with Janeway, Paris, and Neelix into the building, which is full of curtained areas where people seem to be disrobing. Paris and Neelix make quick eye contact with Chakotay and then hurray away. The C’Nihuan idea of festival clothing is more or less a waist-wrap. Janeway manages to stretch it to cover her breasts as well, but from the C’Nihuans around them, Chakotay suspects that’s less than traditional.

On their way out of the building, a very wrinkled (old?) C’Nihuan hands each of them a pot of white mud paint with a brush and a smaller pot of red mud. “You must—prepare,” they say.

“How?”

The C’Nihuan gestures at the other festival attendees, who are busily covering each other’s mostly-naked bodies in white mud. “So that the mischief-makers will not be able to see you. You must prepare.”

Chakotay assumes that the mischief-makers are some kind of destructive spirit force. “What about the red?”

“That, only if you wish. There is no need. Only if you wish.” The C’Nihuan gestures again. “Go on, go on, there are more to welcome!”

Ten meters away, Chakotay sees Tom watching; when Tom realizes he’s been caught, he turns abruptly to the nearest C’Nihuan and offers up his bucket of paint. “Captain?”

Janeway looks around and sighs. “I think I know how I’m supposed to be wearing this *festival clothing*.” She adjusts the cloth until it rests at her waist, baring her breasts.

“Captain,” Chakotay repeats, and he keeps his eyes firmly on her face.

“You can stop saying that, Chakotay. We all went to the Academy, I would think we’re all comfortable with—the kind of thing you see in a locker room.”

“Of course.” It’s a little hard to get the words out. “The C’Nihuan said we should—prepare.”

“Yes. I think we’re supposed to paint this mud all over each other.” It sounds absurd when Janeway says it. “Would you like to go first, or shall I?”

“Why don’t you start.” He can take his cues from her.

He braces himself for the first touch and Janeway says, “I’m not going to *hurt* you.”

“I’m ticklish.” He is not.

Janeway stands in front of him with her paintbrush in one hand, assessing him as though trying to decide where to start. She runs her hand along his side, slowly, and he tries to keep his breathing even. They’re just participating in a local custom. That’s all. She paints the white mud along his collarbone—across his chest, and his breathing quickens—down to his hips, the paintbrush dipping below the waist of the ceremonial garb and he has to close his eyes at the feeling of the brush’s path, tries desperately to think of anything else. They’re supposed to be fully painted. To hide from the mischief-makers. She dips the paintbrush goes a little lower below the waist, down to the base of his cock, flicks it back and forth a few times, and he gasps “Kathryn” and then strangles the noise in his throat. He can’t let himself move.

She paints in broad swipes across his back, his shoulders, his arms, haphazardly on his legs, and then more carefully on his upper thighs, again painting beneath the cloth. She brushes the paint very carefully across his balls, and it feels like they must both be drunk, high, somehow altered, for her to allow this to happen. Eventually the only part of him left unpainted is the length of his cock, hard beneath the waist-wrap.

She could make him come, he thinks, if she touched the brush to him again. He's gasping in breaths now, sides heaving,

"Your turn," she says, and spreads her arms wide. He wants to kiss her. He wants to throw the paint away and kiss her and pull her to the ground with him, wants to push his cock into her and let the paint on his body cover hers. He knows she would enjoy it—even wants it, from what she just did to his body. But she's asked him to paint her and so he does, in sweeping strokes across her back and arms and her stomach and chest. He lingers on her breasts, painting back and forth across her nipples as they harden, until he can't bear it and has to take a nipple between his fingertips and pinch gently, roll it slightly as though he's just trying to be sure it's fully painted. The noise Kathryn makes when he does it hits him deep inside and he does the same to the other nipple to see if she'll react the same way. What would she do if he used his teeth, his tongue, the same way—what would the paint taste like, would he care at all?

He kneels in front of her to paint her legs—they both remember the decon chamber—and paints all the way up to the crease in each thigh. He wants, so badly, to push the wrap up just enough to get his mouth on her, on the one unpainted part of her body. He's honestly contemplating it when he hears Tom's very unwelcome voice say "Captain!"

Chakotay doesn't turn, doesn't stand up. How would it be any better if he turned to look at Tom now, revealed the desire that's so obvious that Tom and B'Elanna have been plotting all this time?

"Did they tell you what the red paint is for?" Tom's voice is thick and lazy. "If you want to *claim* someone. A red handprint. To claim them for the night. What a place, right? We should spend more time here! Dilithium mines and claiming people at parties!"

"I see." It's some comfort that Kathryn's voice is far from her normal equanimity. "Thank you, Mr. Paris. Go away." When his footsteps fade, she says, "Chakotay. Stand up."

He does, almost automatically. She looks eerie covered in white paint, and before he realizes what's happening, she's put her hand in the bucket and she reaches out to leave a red handprint on him, fingers spread just at the base of his throat. His breath catches as though she's just gripped him by the throat. He takes it as permission and puts his own hand into the red bucket, leaves a red handprint right over her heart.

People come pouring out of the building behind them, a tide of white-painted aliens, and Chakotay grabs Kathryn's hand before they're swept away and half-driven, half-carried out onto the plain. The wave of people breaks, spreads out around one of the bonfires; they talk and laugh and cavort as though they don't feel this breathless desperation spreading through Chakotay, Kathryn's red handprint as her *claim* for the night.

He turns to her and threads his hands into her hair, tilts her head so that he can lean down and kiss her and she opens her mouth to him eagerly. He doesn't know how long they stand there just kissing, tongues slick against each other, her hands pulling his hips tight against her own, before someone laughs too close and they break apart just enough for him to say, "We could go somewhere else."

It takes them a long time to make their way to a less crowded area. Every time he sees his own handprint over her heart he has to stop and kiss her until they can barely breathe, and the same thing seems to happen when she looks at him. Only when they've found themselves some modicum of privacy and they stop does Chakotay say, "Kathryn, please," and find himself kneeling in front of her.

"Yes," she breathes and he takes it as permission to lift her waist-wrap and find her clit with his tongue. She does almost collapse then, until they're both on the ground and she's gripped his hair tight with both hands as he works. He brings his unpainted hand down and just barely slides one fingertip into her; when she pulls his hair hard in frustration, he slides his finger in all the way and moans against her even as she spreads her legs for more. Soon he's pumping two fingers in and out in time with his tongue, his other hand on her nipple again, and she cries out and comes on his fingers. He licks her through it, spreads his fingers just slightly wider and pinches her nipple hard and he doesn't know if she comes again or just never quite stopped.

Whichever it was, she pushes him down onto his back and undoes his waist-wrap entirely so that he can see his cock stark against the painted white of the rest of his body. "Kathryn," he begs, when she just stares at him, eyes roving. "Please," he says again, and she moves forward just enough to straddle him, to sink slowly down onto his cock even as he can feel the tremors still running through her, the way she clenches suddenly sometimes. He can't help working his hand beneath her waist-wrap to find her clit again. He wants her to come on his cock, wants it even more when she's taken him all the way and has put her hand on the handprint she left to hold him in place. When she starts to move, he thrusts up hard against her, as much as she'll let him, over and over in time with his fingers until he can tell she's close again—how he wants to feel it. He shifts up enough that he can get his mouth on her nipple, paint be damned, and when he bites just slightly, she comes again, almost wailing. The clench and release, over and over, is too much for him and he rolls them over, puts his mouth to his own handprint over her heart and thrusts into her until he comes and all his senses abandon him.

* * * * *

The morning sun on C'Nihua is gentle, soft. Chakotay wakes slowly as Janeway shifts against him. The white paint has begun to turn to dust, though as far as he can tell, the red remains bright as ever. "Chakotay," she mumbles against his chest.

"Good morning." He says it into her hair and pulls her closer against him. The air is just cool enough that the warmth of her body is overwhelmingly pleasant.

She tilts her head up and kisses the handprint at the base of his throat, then wriggles up just enough that she can kiss his mouth. Everything is languid, golden, though the colored sparks still hang in the air everywhere. When he lifts his head a little more, he can see that the bonfires are still burning, some with white-painted figures dancing around them. He doesn't see Tom or Neelix, thankfully. So he leans down and kisses Janeway again—it still feels safe here, even in the light, and he'll happily accept whatever more she'll offer. Her hands come up to his face and then she trails one of them down his neck, down to the handprint, which she fits her hand to and presses hard.

Chakotay would like to blame his response on something in the paint, some chemical reaction with Janeway's skin, but he can't really. The kiss turns deep and dark, his tongue finding hers, one hand clutched in her hair as the other searches for his own handprint, rediscovers it over her heart—and maybe there is something chemical, based on the way that she jolts and moans into his mouth, on the way they roll back and

forth, half-fighting for the right to be on top, on how easily he slides into her again, how quickly they both come.

By now, the sun is starting to get uncomfortably warm. “We should get back,” Janeway says, almost regretfully. It’s the first thing either of them has said that acknowledges the existence of the outside world.

“I suppose so.” Chakotay disentangles their discarded clothing and passes one length of cloth to Janeway. They stand and attempt to reassemble the wraps.

“I swear there was some kind of special way to wrap this,” Janeway says. She sounds very much the way she does when she’s cross with the replicator. “I saw it done.”

“Here, let me.” Chakotay closes the distance between them and carefully wraps the cloth around her hips several times, then ties the end together. He kisses her bare shoulder when he’s done and comes away with a dusty mouth. “I’m sorry about your hair,” he says.

She touches the mess gingerly. “I can only imagine what a bird’s-nest it is right now. Maybe I’ll finally cut it shorter.” She laughs a little. “What I wouldn’t give for a good hot bath right now.”

As they walk across the plain toward the entrance building, Chakotay tries to dust some of the paint off himself. It’s easy enough to wipe off his shoulders, his abdomen—he tries not to think about the fact that she painted all but one part of his body, tries not to remember the precise feeling of it—but the red remains firmly intact. Janeway has been imitating his movements. “The paints must have different chemical compositions,” she says finally. “But I’m sure they would have warned us if the red was permanent.”

What a thought, that they would wear each other’s handprints forever. The tattoo above his eye is easily explained, easily understood. This one, though—“My captain claimed me with it,” he imagines telling someone who sees it, any time that he’s shirtless. “She put her hand on me and now I’m hers.” Ridiculous thought. Ridiculous, to feel that hit of arousal as he thinks it. “I’m sure they would have,” he said.

G’Na’Far is waiting for them when they reach the building. “Captain Janeway, first mate, welcome to the morning! The cleansing area is to the right, and you will find your clothes safe as you left them. When you are finished, we have breakfast for you. Your crewmen have already begun.”

“Thank you, G’Na’Far,” Janeway says. Chakotay watches her slip smoothly back into the role of diplomat and marvels at her, a woman who can appear at ease and in charge of any situation, even half-naked in white paint with his come still wet between her thighs. That’s why she’s the captain.

The cleansing area is an artificially-created waterfall with a strange wavy edge, pouring down into a pool of recirculating clear water. Other C’Nihuan are unconcernedly splashing in it, washing every part of their anatomy—which differs in certain substantial ways from that of humans, a thought that almost comforts Chakotay because it means they might not know the significance of the way that he and Janeway are painted. The shape of the waterfall creates little alcoves, which people seem to use as quasi-shower stalls for one or two or three or more.

They find an unoccupied alcove and begin to wash off the paint. The white comes off easily, in little rivulets, so cleanly that they barely have to do more than stand beneath the water. Janeway unpins what remains of her bun and shakes out her hair in the water, and somehow it falls straight like a curtain, almost to her waist, the tangles gone. She says something about what substances must be in the water that Chakotay is entirely unable to hear. The red handprint stands out brightly against her pale skin, as clear as it was when he first put it there. He tilts his head up, exposes his neck fully to the spray, and knows that her handprint is still there too.

“Chakotay?” she says. “Any luck?” He reaches out and puts his hand back over her heart—maybe under the pretense of trying to help, maybe not—and feels it again, that urge to touch more, to touch all of her, as she does the same to him. “Let me help.” Janeway reaches down with her wet hand, down to his cock as though to wash off the last vestiges of the paint, and he can’t help it; he pushes them both through the falling water, to the small space behind it where they’re shielded from view. Her skin is clean now but for the print and he kisses her, gathers her long hair in one hand and pulls just enough that she gasps and throws her head back so he can get his mouth on her neck. He leaves long scraping kisses along her skin, the kind that will mark her neck until she heals them, until she pulls him back to her mouth. She tastes like water, with the faintest hint of some unfamiliar herb, and he doesn’t realize that she’s wrapped her legs around his hips until he’s halfway inside her yet again.

Eventually they stumble out of the waterfall shower and walk beneath a vent of strangely-scented air on their way back to their clothes. They’re abruptly dry—even Janeway’s hair—and the handprints are just as bright. After they find their clothes and dress themselves, they leave the building and find G’Na’Far waiting again to guide them to a private breakfast room with Tom and Neelix.

“Thank you for your participation,” G’Na’Far says. “We are loading your shuttles with the first two loads of dilithium.”

Chakotay is ravenous and has already dug into the breakfast, with as much control as he can muster. Janeway, though, remembers to say, “Thank you for the use of your cleansing area. The red paint appears to—remain, though. How long should we expect that to last?”

“If you stayed as our guests, it would last another week or so,” G’Na’Far says. “As soon as you are beyond the reach of our star, though, it will disappear.”

“And any—side effects?” Janeway says it delicately, but both Tom and Neelix are obviously immediately interested.

“What kind of side effects, Captain?” They ask it almost simultaneously.

Chakotay thinks that the expression on G’Na’Far’s face is confusion, but the C’Nihuan smooths it over too quickly to be sure. “Some—visitors who do not share our biology may experience—heightened sensation. Heightened emotional reaction. When the red paint is touched by the one who applied it.”

That’s a pretty mild way of describing whatever happens when he or Janeway touch each other, but he can’t rule out the possibility—the

likelihood, even—that they used whatever minimal effect there was from the paint as an excuse.

* * * * *

As usual, they don't talk about it. He doesn't know if it's cowardice on his part or hers, that neither of them is willing to mention the fact that they spent about twelve hours completely absorbed in each other to the point of having public sex repeatedly.

Or at least, they don't talk about it until two days after the handprints have faded, until she summons him to her ready room and says, "Sit down, Chakotay."

"Captain?" He obeys, of course.

Janeway abruptly says, "I've considered it, and I'm open to—an arrangement."

"Captain?" There's a strange feeling starting in Chakotay's chest. "What kind of arrangement?"

"As we both know, Starfleet prohibits...relationships between commanding officers and their subordinates." He's damn well aware of that. "But obviously we have a certain—connection. As though the universe is encouraging us."

"You know 'the universe' was mostly Tom and B'Elanna." He feels obliged to mention this even if it undermines what she's saying. He can't believe she's finally going to say this.

Janeway smiles. "Yes, after the turbolift incident, I got that impression. I assume you disciplined them both for the shuttle crisis."

"Yes." Is this going where he wants it to? It's almost impossible to believe.

She leans back in her chair a little. At least he's also sitting down for this. "We've clearly both enjoyed it every time. We may be in the Delta quadrant for a long time. You told me that in the Maquis, people find—pressure valves. As you did with B'Elanna."

Ah. No. His entire body is cold now. "You're suggesting—"

"I know it would be—*bending*—the rules a little, for us to engage in something like that." Janeway looks so calm, as though they're discussing which replicator should be upgraded first. "But we would have to be very careful to keep it solely—sexual, and we're both under a lot of pressure—"

"No." He says it before he's even thought about it. "No." It should be an immediate yes. How is he possibly turning this down? But now, faced with that prospect—meticulously kept separate from any emotional involvement, and he knows she would be meticulous about it—it suddenly seems less appealing. He spends so much time dissociated from his actual feelings and he's not sure he can add this to it. Not when it would have to be so definite, unlike all the hazily-defined things that have happened so far. Maybe the good first officer he's supposed to be would happily take it, but of all things, this is the one beyond his ability. Chakotay does force a smile and adds, "I appreciate the offer, but I think it could negatively affect our working relationship."

Janeway looks surprised and—maybe?—a little disappointed. "If you say so. I didn't think it had so far, but perhaps I was wrong. It appeared that your arrangement with B'Elanna didn't impact anything, but of course." She meets his eyes. "May I ask why?"

His ears are roaring a little. "No," he says again, automatically, and his voice is too rough—too obviously emotionally affected. "That is, I'd rather not discuss it."

"Of course. I'm sorry if I made you uncomfortable."

"It's not a problem, Captain. Is there anything else?" He's good at holding his body like this, emotions locked down tight beneath the casual, cheerful projection. She shouldn't be able to tell that anything is wrong.

Janeway glances down at the PADDs spread on her desk. "No, Chakotay. Thank you."

He stands up smoothly, so smoothly. He has to make it clear that he isn't upset. "Computer," he says to the nearby replicator. "Coffee, black." When it materializes, he gives it to Janeway. She starts to protest and he says, "Don't worry, I'll take it out of my own replicator rations." Then he turns and walks out of the ready room onto the bridge, makes eye contact with each of the crew and smiles appropriately, settles himself down into the first officer's chair and lets his mind go blank.

Chakotay doesn't tell B'Elanna about Janeway's offer. It's acutely painful in a way that he doesn't want to examine too closely. He knew from the beginning that Janeway would never engage in a romantic relationship with a subordinate. All the rest of it—of course Janeway could find a way to put it into a rational box, because she's the captain and she has the monumental task of getting them home and her fierce mind can accomplish whatever it needs to.

Playing very fast and loose with the timeline.

He has to be even more careful than usual, now. Janeway can't think that anything is different. That would be tantamount to a confession. They have dinner together again; Janeway makes an edible biryani, and he accuses her of having someone else program the replicator; he drinks a single glass of wine and sits in the chair next to her couch after dinner, but he can't allow his legs to touch her own. When she doesn't immediately return to the casual physical contact—the hand on the shoulder, on the arm—he does it himself, once or twice, to show her it's all right.

Seska seems to intuit that something has happened, something that makes him vulnerable in a way that's out of the ordinary. She's mostly kept her distance, but suddenly she's everywhere he turns. On an away mission, in the hallways, coming to his quarters with a bowl of mushroom soup made from stolen mushrooms. And then, when he tries to be the good first officer instead of the Maquis captain and discipline her correctly, she says, in her soft mocking voice, "You'd put me in the brig? After everything we've been through?" She walks up behind him and threads her arms through his, rests her forehead against the back of his neck, slides her hand up his chest and asks, "Can we make up now?" He holds her hands in his own as he turns and she asks, with that familiar grin, "Who else knows how to make your favorite soup like I do?"

"No one," he admits, and for a second—for a minute—he remembers what it was like with her. The way she teased him, laughed at him, drove him to distraction—and why he ended it. "We agreed a long time ago this wouldn't work," he reminds her. There's a reason he agreed to casual angry sex with B'Elanna, and a reason he never could have agreed to anything like it with Seska.

"Look around, Chakotay. There aren't that many potential mates out here," she says. Any ordinary day, that barb would land lightly. But now, so soon after Janeway's—offer—it cuts deep. She can see it, too, punctuates it with another jab about young Harry Kim, as though jealousy is what would make him yield to her. If Seska herself didn't feel so dangerous, he might anyway.

And then. Then everything starts to point to her as a traitor in the worst way possible. He probably knows it's true from the first time that someone says Seska was off on her own when the Kazon arrived—knows, deep down, that she was involved somehow, even if he doesn't want to believe that she actually stole technology. Maybe she was naïve, somehow (even though Seska has never been naïve since the day he met her). Maybe someone else did something wrong, and she was just—in the way. He tries, far too hard, to persuade everyone else of her innocence.

After they interrogate Carey, Janeway reminds him—viscerally—that he and the Maquis may be here, but they're not truly crew members. "Carey has had a distinguished Starfleet career," she says. "Seska has spent most of the last two years as an enemy of the Federation." She spits out the last few words as she starts to walk away.

"So have I," he reminds her. Janeway turns and looks at him—in horror? in surprise? as though she's forgotten?—and that brief moment cuts deep before she walks away from him. He follows her onto the bridge, his heart heavy.

Then comes the worst of it, the worst that he never could have anticipated. Tuvok tells him—in front of Janeway—that Seska is a spy for the Cardassians. And not just a spy for them, but *one* of them. There's nausea rising in his throat, and he feels like he's been—not just duped but *flayed*, every tender part of him opened up to stinging air.

He goes to sickbay to see Seska to set the trap and because he still hopes, against all reason, that there's a different explanation. She lies to him about a childhood disease, about a bone marrow donation from a Cardassian. She asks him, her eyes pleading, "Do you think I gave you my heart to get your Maquis secrets?"

"I was starting to wonder," he says. He knows, now, that she's lying. She's the traitor, and worse, the spy.

"I had only one agenda with you, Chakotay. And I never kept it secret." He hears the emotion in her voice. If he weren't so revolted right now, he might even wish it was true. But he dutifully lays the trap, telling her about the engineering inventory, how it'll show them the truth, and they catch her in it. "You're a fool," she tells Janeway, hate in her voice. "And you're a fool to follow her." Seska shakes her head at him and her voice turns gentle, poisonous. "I can't imagine how I ever loved you."

He can't imagine that she ever did. After Seska is gone, he asks Tuvok, "From someone else who pulled the wool over my eyes—was I particularly naïve? Was I not paying enough attention? What the hell was it that let all you spies get by me?" There's a certain kind of howling pain in the back of his head.

Tuvok frowns. "Like all humans, you depend on feelings and instincts to guide you, and they invariably let you down."

"Did you ever see anything about Seska that made you suspicious?" That's the only thing he really wants to know. Tuvok sneaking by him, well, Tuvok's Vulcan. They're impossible to read. But Seska—he didn't just rely on Seska as another member of his crew. He thought he knew her better than anyone else on his ship.

"No. She quite expertly pulled the wool over my eyes as well."

"Well. That makes me feel a little better."

* * * * *

It takes another hour for his—deeper self to catch up to what’s happened. To Janeway, to Voyager, Seska is a traitor because she wanted to work with the Kazon; she’s always been a criminal anyway. He doesn’t care about the supposed betrayal of Voyager, not really; if the captain had come to him with the idea, he would have supported it. Seska’s betrayal of *him* though—he believed Seska was Bajoran, one of the few people that he thought shared the depth of his hatred of the Cardassians. She’s the one who brought him into the Maquis. Everything that was once between them was all part of her role as a spy, and worse than that, *she’s a Cardassian*. His outer persona is burning away, like cotton set alight, and beneath it the walls around his rage are crumbling.

He makes it to his quarters. He wishes he could vomit, would purge every trace of her from his body, but his own body is too well-trained for that. He could throw things in here. Could break things. Could destroy his own possessions in a tantrum—but no, he has enough sense left to know that when this passes, everyone will remember what he did. He can’t leave traces of his weakness like that.

“Computer.” He recognizes his voice, but it’s not the voice of the man who serves on Voyager. “Is there anyone on Holodeck Two?”

“Holodeck Two is unoccupied.”

He debates, for a minute, whether he should waste the energy on a site-to-site transport. Too risky to walk there, through the hallways, where he might encounter someone. Where someone might express their sympathy for a betrayal they couldn’t possibly understand. He stacks the commands in his mind, the last few things that will require sense before he can give in. “Begin program Torres Beta Ten in close combat mode. Engage privacy mode. Lock program and set to end after one hour. Remove safety protocols.”

“Not recom—”

He overrides the computer’s objection, braces himself, and transports onto the holodeck just inside the doors. The battle rages in front of him—the Cardassian attack on a village on a world insignificant to anyone but the people who live there—and he draws a knife and a phase pistol and charges in. His desperate scream of anger is the last thing his conscious brain registers before he kills the first Cardassian.

Chakotay comes back to himself when the computer announces, “Scheduled program termination has been reached.” The program freezes and he looks around. He’s cut a swath through the invasion force in the last hour, but it didn’t matter. The village is on fire anyway, most of the villagers dead, the few survivors rounded up under Cardassian guard. His Maquis comrades are all dead too, except the one who the program has frozen just as she’s being knifed by a female Cardassian.

There’s a lot of blood dripping into his eyes, he realizes. When he tries to wipe it away, his hand comes away thick with blood—must be a head wound, they always bleed badly. He feels a sharp pain in his side and sees the wet patch spreading there. One of his sleeves is charred and beneath it he feels the incipient agony of a burn. He seems to be getting dizzier—very suddenly the world shifts and he’s on the ground. He should tell the computer to transport him to sickbay. When he tries, he can’t manage to speak. After all this, to be killed by Cardassians that are no more than photons and field emitters—he would laugh if he could. Seska’s final triumph over him.

He dimly hears the computer say, “Privacy mode disengaged” and the doors hiss open, hears a voice yell “Chakotay!” and then say what he couldn’t, “Emergency transport to sickbay!” even as the program ends around him and there’s nothing left but the clean sterile walls.

* * * * *

Chakotay wakes to the Doctor’s frowning face peering down at him. “Captain, he’s awake. I really must insist that the holodeck safety protocols be locked in place! Injuries of this severity—”

“Thank you, Doctor.” Janeway’s face replaces that of the Doctor. “Chakotay, do you know where you are?”

Shame uncurls inside him. He let the rage out, let Seska draw it out, and now things are...worse. “Sickbay,” he grunts. His mouth tastes like a small animal died inside it. When he tries to lift his hand to his face, Janeway grips his wrist like a manacle.

“No,” she says. “The Doctor had to perform surgery and it was—hard on your body. You’re only going to be awake for a few more minutes before he puts you under again to recover.” Her voice grows very cold. “You had no business risking your life in there.”

Chakotay closes his eyes against the words. “No,” he agrees.

“What if you had been killed?”

“I wasn’t trying to be.” Even saying that many words leaves him breathless. He tries to lift his other hand and Janeway grabs it and pins it to the bed. He struggles just the slightest bit, just to feel the strength of her hands holding him there. It makes him feel almost— “Safe,” he manages to say, and feels her grip tighten.

“Doctor, you should—sedate him again,” Janeway says. This time when he moves, she releases him, and he hears the hiss of a hypospray.

“Don’t leave,” he mumbles as it takes hold of him. He thinks that maybe he feels her hand on his cheek. He turns his face into the phantom sensation as darkness descends.

the ready room

Chapter Summary

“You believe that we were—space pirates. Thieves, looters, opportunists. Maybe you think I was one of the good ones. But that’s not—” He takes a deep breath. Too much anger is showing, too much of the deep rage. “I’m sure there were people like that among the Maquis. But my crew—” His throat tightens. “We weren’t those people. We were true Maquis. That program, the one I was in, the one that B’Elanna made—she didn’t invent that scenario. That was a real village that we tried to save. The Maquis in the program, they were real people.” He’s getting dangerously emotional. “You discount what we did because it wasn’t approved by Starfleet, because there was a treaty. But we were risking our lives every day for *people*.” He takes a deep breath. “You know that I love the exploration, the study, as much as you do. But it’s not the same, and to trust one person because they were decorated by Starfleet for years of *service*—” The realization hits him. “That’s the only reason you trust me, isn’t it. Because I was Starfleet for twenty years before I was Maquis.”

He spends three days in sickbay. The Doctor lectures him repeatedly and at length about the dangers of combat simulations. Tuvok announces to the entire ship that safety protocols are now tied into primary holodeck functions and cannot be overridden for any reason.

The former Maquis are righteously outraged, upon learning that Seska was a spy, and they keep coming to see him under the apparent belief that Seska is to blame for his injuries. Each time, Chakotay thinks to himself *I endangered you by not seeing her for what she was*. He accepts their anger, their reassurance that they never would have suspected her either, until the third day when B’Elanna finally comes to see him.

“It took you long enough,” he tries to joke.

“It took me this long to make sure I wasn’t so angry I would kill you,” B’Elanna snaps. “What were you thinking? You know that program is meant for at least two people, and you know it shouldn’t be used without safety protocols! I would’ve been responsible for your death!” She punches him in the arm.

“Ouch! You’ll make the Doctor angry if you undo his work,” Chakotay says. “I’ve been here for three days, I’ll lose my mind if I have to stay for another.”

“Think of it as self-inflicted time in the brig,” B’Elanna tells him. “I know you’re upset, but—”

B’Elanna, at least, will understand. “Seska wasn’t just a spy for the Cardassians. She is Cardassian.” He sees the shock, the understanding gradually sinking in. Janeway and Tuvok were the only other people who knew that particular fact. “I was—”

She puts a gentler hand on his arm this time. “No. I understand.” There’s a certain thickness to her voice, almost like tears, when she tells him, “I’m still very angry at you for almost dying!”

Apparently, he’s in an especially self-pitying mood today—three days in sickbay will do that to you—because he says to B’Elanna, very quietly, “You and Tom should be proud of yourselves.”

B’Elanna looks briefly puzzled, then raises an eyebrow. “You’re not going to make me less angry by telling me—”

“No, it all worked,” he says. “The Captain finally—suggested an arrangement.”

“An arrangement.” She sounds about as doubtful as he was.

“Pressure release. Strictly physical. No emotions involved.” He’s realizing how much Seska’s betrayal actually distracted him from that particular devastation. Silver linings.

“That seems a bit of a clinical way to describe it, but—” B’Elanna’s voice fades. “You said no.”

He stares up at the ceiling. He’s spent a lot of time staring at the ceiling. “I did.”

“Oh, Chakotay.” B’Elanna doesn’t ask why. She understands what he’s saying. “You’re not having a very good month with women.”

Chakotay laughs a little, more at himself than anything else. “Really, which is worse, discovering that I spent more than a year with a Cardassian, or realizing that I’m in—” He can’t make himself say it.

“Sometimes things—start that way. Strictly physical. And then become—more.” Despite how pathetic this all is, Chakotay can’t help laughing. “Yes, I realize I sound like I’m a sexual education instructor,” B’Elanna says.

“Maybe for other people. I can’t do that. Not—with her.”

B’Elanna might be about to say something more, but his communicator announces, “Janeway to Chakotay.”

“Chakotay here.” He hasn’t seen her since the first time he woke up in sickbay. He remembers asking her not to leave and feels the embarrassment burn through him at the memory of it.

“Report to my ready room when the Doctor releases you. Janeway out.”

The Doctor frowns at Chakotay and holds up a medical tricorder before he can even ask. “Oh, all right,” he grumbles. “I want to see you back here in 24 hours. Twenty-four hours, understand? Not a minute longer!”

Chakotay jumps to his feet and escapes sickbay before the Doctor can offer any further instructions. He’s torn, briefly, between reporting to Janeway immediately and taking a shower first. There’s no alert pending, no specific urgency, and he wants more than anything to turn a sonic shower to its highest setting and let it scour everything from him. He takes the extra five minutes, puts on a clean uniform instead of the hospital garment, removes three days’ worth of stubble. Then he takes a deep breath, braces himself, and walks to face Janeway in her ready room.

“Get in here,” she says, and he obeys. She doesn’t ask him to sit. “Would you like to tell me what on earth you were trying to do?”

“The holoprogram objective is to save the village.” Some rebellious spirit has infected him. “I didn’t accomplish that objective.”

“Damn it, Chakotay, you know that’s not what I mean!” Janeway stands, flushed with anger. “You could have died in there.”

“That wasn’t my goal. And I didn’t.”

“The Doctor wasn’t sure if he could save your life, when I first got you to sickbay! You spent days there—what if there had been an emergency and I needed my first officer?”

The retort has been on his lips since she first said it. “You have many officers with distinguished Starfleet careers who could help.”

She knows what he’s talking about. “Is that what this is about? Because I suspected Seska instead of Carey?”

Chakotay closes his eyes and focuses on the precise shape of his shoulders, on the placement of his hands, appropriately formal without the rigidity of anger. “No, Captain,” he says. “No, it really wasn’t about you at all.” When he opens his eyes, her anger hasn’t diminished.

“I know you were both Maquis! I fully understand that a substantial portion of this crew used to be Maquis.”

“No, Captain,” he repeats. “You’ve said that many times, but I still don’t think that you do. You believe that we were—space pirates. Thieves, looters, opportunists. Maybe you think I was one of the good ones. But that’s not—” He takes a deep breath. Too much anger is showing, too much of the deep rage. “I’m sure there were people like that among the Maquis. But my crew—” His throat tightens. “We weren’t those people. We were true Maquis. That program, the one I was in, the one that B’Elanna made—she didn’t invent that scenario. That was a real village that we tried to save. The Maquis in the program, they were real people.” He’s getting dangerously emotional. “You discount what we did because it wasn’t approved by Starfleet, because there was a treaty. But we were risking our lives every day for *people*.” He takes a deep breath. “You know that I love the exploration, the study, as much as you do. But it’s not the same, and to trust one person because they were decorated by Starfleet for years of *service*—” The realization hits him. “That’s the only reason you trust me, isn’t it. Because I was Starfleet for twenty years before I was Maquis.”

Janeway doesn’t answer that. Her eyes are bright, color high in her cheeks, and there’s no quarter in her expression. “In point of fact, Seska *was* the traitor. Not just to Voyager. To the Maquis too.”

“To our crew.” He doesn’t specify which crew. “To *me*.” She was there in sickbay. She heard what Seska said. “You think I don’t know that? You think I haven’t spent the last three days going over—over every interaction we ever had? Every time that I should have known she was —”

“A spy?”

“*Cardassian!*”

Captain Kathryn Janeway, who has never known the kind of hate that he feels and who he hopes never will, stares at him. “Is that what you were doing? Putting your life at risk to remind yourself that Cardassians were the enemy, because you made the mistake of falling in love with one?”

Of all the open wounds to poke at. “I’ve always known they’re the enemy. Are you going to discipline me for my actions, Captain?” He means to sound like a defiant Tom Paris when he says it, but the words come out almost desperate, pleading for some kind of anchor. He needs some way to lock the rage back down, some rules to conform himself to.

“Holodeck privileges revoked for a month,” Janeway tells him. “As you undoubtedly heard, there will be no way to reduce or eliminate the safety protocols going forward.”

Wildly, he wants to tell her that he’s changed his mind, that he accepts her offer of an arrangement—anything, any outlet, for what’s inside him now. He retains enough minimal sense of self-preservation not to do it. “Yes, Captain.” He stares straight ahead, the way he would have as an ensign being disciplined.

“And I want you to tell me if there are other former Maquis crew that are struggling.”

“Other than Seska?”

“Other than yourself.” The words startle him so badly that he breaks form and looks her in the eyes, and her face softens. “Chakotay.” She reaches out and touches his cheek, the way he remembers from sickbay. He closes his eyes again and turns his face into her hand. That, of all things, quiets the storm inside him.

“I’m fine.” He’s obviously not doing a very convincing job of it. “I’ll be fine, Captain,” he repeats.

“You don’t have to try so hard to be the perfect first officer.” She hasn’t taken her hand from his face. She sighs softly. “I’m sorry.”

Chakotay stiffens his spine, and then relaxes his shoulders into the appropriate position again. "I'd like to be the first officer you need." He opens his eyes to find her face very close to his, as though she's trying to divine some insight into him. She draws her hand back abruptly and he misses its warmth.

"You must be hungry. I can't imagine the Doctor pays much attention to what he feeds his patients. Come on, we'll replicate something."

He can't stop a laugh, and she raises her eyebrow. "I revoked my own replicator privileges for two days along with a few other crew members." He clears his throat. "Seska—they stole some mushrooms from the kitchen to make me mushroom soup. And I ate it. I had to make the consequences clear to everyone."

"I know you were unconscious for most of the time, but it's been more than two days," she reminds him. "You revoked your own replicator privileges because you unwittingly ate something made with stolen food? A bit harsh, don't you think?"

"I had to make clear that it was—unacceptable to do something like that, even if it was for me."

Janeway frowns. She steps out from behind her desk and puts a hand on his shoulder, ushering him toward the door. "Well, now that you have your replicator privileges restored, why don't you use them to make me some of this mushroom soup that's worth stealing for? I think it's your turn to cook dinner."

"I think I'm just going to eat in the mess hall tonight," he says. "Show the crew that I'm alive and well." He can't handle another few hours of one-on-one with Janeway tonight, not when he's already this off-kilter.

"Tomorrow night, then."

"Tomorrow," he agrees. "I'll make you mushroom soup. With the best mushrooms I can replicate."

Usually, he tries to be careful in the mess hall, to rotate through different tables, avoid sitting with only Maquis. But tonight they form a kind of honor guard around him, glaring at anyone else who gets too close, and he doesn't have it in him to turn it down. They escort him through the mess hall line, looking suspiciously at Neelix. They find a table where he can keep the wall at his back. Ayala and Torres flank him, Jor and Tabor across from him, Hogan and Geron and Dalby and Chell gathered unobtrusively at the two closest tables. There's a warmth, a strength, that comes from having them around him. They're not here because of Seska's treachery against Voyager, a ship that some of them only barely care about; they're here because they're *Maquis*.

For all that Seska deceived him, Chakotay believes in these people. He believes Geron and Tabor, the true Bajorans in his crew, whose despair at the idea of a Bajoran spy runs deeper than either of them can articulate. He can't—won't—admit to them that Seska is truly a Cardassian, even if it might be kinder to them. He believes in Dalby, whose hatred of the Cardassians surpasses that of anyone he's ever met for what they did to Dalby's wife. And B'Elanna, always, he believes in B'Elanna. Janeway is his captain, and the entire crew of Voyager is *their* crew, but this is *his* crew.

the kitchen

Chapter Summary

They end up in their usual positions—Janeway on the couch, him reclining in the chair catty-corner to it, the bottle of wine forgotten on the floor between them. “You and B’Elanna weren’t in—any kind of relationship before you came to Voyager, were you.” They’re both at a certain level of intoxication, where any topic—almost any topic—seems like it could be safe.

“No.” He tilts his head to look at her. “No, we only started—anything because B’Elanna thought it would be more fun than boxing to deal with—however we felt about the changes to our lives.” She makes a pleased kind of noise. “You knew.”

He replicates the mushrooms and borrows a back corner of Neelix’s kitchen to make the soup. Janeway leans against the wall next to him, arms folded, and watches him cook. “I thought you were going to replicate this,” she says. Her voice is curious rather than critical.

“This is a soup you make when you don’t have a replicator. Really, it’s against the spirit to make it with anything replicated, but it’s also about making the soup with what you have, and on a starship...”

“Is there a recipe?” The mess hall is quiet, mostly deserted, but she keeps her voice low anyway. It’s hardly a secret, their dinners together, but something about it feels—private to him. And to her as well, apparently.

“Not really. This is—a Maquis dish. Because you can make it almost anywhere.”

“Oh?” Her entire demeanor has become very gentle at the mention of the Maquis, as though he’s a skittish horse.

“We traveled to a lot of different places. Planets, moons, places that were barely habitable. But if there’s one universal constant, it’s that most places produce some form of fungus.”

That startles a laugh out of Janeway. “Poisonous, too.”

“Yes,” he says, and can’t help a smile. “We relied on the advice of the locals, generally. And tricorders. And trial and error, occasionally. B’Elanna can tell you about that.”

“I hope this soup won’t contain any trial-and-error mushrooms.” Janeway sips her wine. Since he’s insisted that she join him for the cooking process, she’s brought a bottle along. Occasionally, she hands him her glass for a drink rather than pouring a second glass. They’re most of the way through the bottle by now.

“None,” he assures her. “Or at least, these were all tried on Earth quite a long time ago.” There’s something viscerally comforting about the smell of mushrooms cooking in fat, especially when the mushrooms are chanterelles and the fat is butter. “You’ll like it, I promise. At least as much as I like whatever comes out of your replicator.” Janeway makes an insulted noise but hands him the glass of wine. He takes it and manages to splash a little bit of hot butter on his uniform, shrugs and pulls the uniform shirt off and sets it aside. He’ll put a fresh one on before they eat, if either of them cares enough to mention it.

“Can we taste it now?” Janeway asks. She reclaims the glass of wine and finishes it, then empties the bottle into it.

“Go ahead, but be careful. It’s hot.”

She sidles closer and dips her finger into the pan. She scoops up a bit, but instead of tasting it herself, she offers her finger to Chakotay.

Chakotay is already warm from the stove and from the wine, but that’s nothing compared to the heat that shoots through him now. He doesn’t let himself think about whether it’s a good idea, only leans forward to take her finger into his mouth. Janeway keeps her eyes fixed on him as he does, as he spends far too long tracing the tongue over her fingertip. When he pulls away, he sees her exhale the slightest bit, like she was holding her breath. He’s the only person who’s going to get hurt here but he can’t stop himself, dips two fingers into the pan and holds them out to Janeway.

He feels like he’s on fire when she begins to suck his fingers. It’s barely a pretense at the idea that she’s tasting the soup, the way she swirls her tongue around his fingers, even bobs her head a little as she does it, and her intent is blatant—isn’t it? He’s struck with a vivid vision—Janeway on her knees, here in the kitchen, sucking his cock. Maybe she would pin his hips back against the wall so he couldn’t move, go as slow as she wanted until he begged her to let him come, or maybe she’d pull him closer, encourage him to thrust a little, let him tangle his hands in her hair and hold her there as he got his cock as far down her throat as she would take. And when he came, maybe she would swallow it all, or maybe she’d pull away just enough that he’d come on her chest, watch it trickle down the curve of her breast—he can almost see himself wiping a drop off one nipple and offering her his finger to suck again—

“The soup—” Janeway releases his fingers and he jumps out of the daydream. The liquid is evaporating, steam billowing, and he hurries to add more broth. She’s very red and he’s half-hard and it’s going to be a long evening, if this is where they’re starting out.

“Sorry.” His voice is wrecked and she must know what he was imagining. “I’ll try not to burn it.”

“I would have to put you on report.” She takes a large gulp of wine and holds up the empty bottle. “I’m going to get another bottle. Don’t spoil dinner while I’m gone.”

He underestimates how long it will take to cook the soup, because he's putting a lot more effort into it than the—fungus stew, to put it generously—that they used to eat on any particular rock. And because he keeps getting distracted by Janeway. They're in her quarters now, working on the second bottle of wine along with the soup and some bread that he replicated. "You weren't going to bake me bread too?" Janeway tastes the final version of the soup and says, almost surprised, "This is very good."

"You knew I could cook." The warmth suffusing him isn't entirely from the wine. Or the hot soup. Or the daydreams.

"By programming a replicator, yes." Her cheeks are flushed as she takes another spoonful. "But now I'm thinking that I'll make Neelix my first officer and promote you to cook."

"Oh, no," Chakotay says. He dips a piece of bread into the soup. Maybe it's not the right way to eat it now, but it tastes good and it's what they used to do. "My repertoire is limited. Imagine the crew's reaction on the fourth day of mushroom soup."

"I suspect they'd like it as much as I do," she says, and she follows his example with the bread, ends up sucking a few drops of soup off her forefinger. He tries not to think about the way he imagined her with her lips wrapped around his cock.

The room is very warm. Chakotay rolls his sleeves up to his elbows and pours himself more wine—the bottle at least is cold, set in an ice bucket. "Would you like more?" He offers her the bottle.

"We've gone through quite a bit of it." He assumes that's a no, but she takes the bottle from his hand and refills both of their glasses. "I suppose gamma shift can always stay on duty a little longer in the morning. They could use the practice."

He breaks into a grin at that. "Practice sitting at the helm, knowing that at the first sign of danger one of us will be out on the bridge?"

"You didn't practice that, when you were a young officer?" She looks a little dreamy. "Sitting there in the captain's chair on gamma shift, tasked with the conn, when suddenly a crisis would strike and somehow you'd be the only one to take command?"

"No, not that I recall." Funny how twenty years of Starfleet has been eclipsed in his memory by only a few years as a Maquis. "But some people are meant for command, and some people—find it accidentally." Their bowls of soup are empty. He watches Janeway wipe the last drops out of hers with a piece of bread. "There's more in the pot, if you want it."

"I think I filled my stomach with wine," she laughs. "It'll keep. I hear soup is better the second day anyway. Something about the flavors having longer to meld." She picks up the bottle of wine and gestures to the couch. "Come on."

They end up in their usual positions—Janeway on the couch, him reclining in the chair catty-corner to it, the bottle of wine forgotten on the floor between them. "You and B'Elanna weren't in—any kind of relationship before you came to Voyager, were you." They're both at a certain level of intoxication, where any topic—almost any topic—seems like it could be safe.

"No." He tilts his head to look at her. "No, we only started—anything because B'Elanna thought it would be more fun than boxing to deal with—however we felt about the changes to our lives." She makes a pleased kind of noise. "You knew."

Janeway makes more of an attempt at a shrug than an actual shrug. "It was a suspicion." He hears the trepidation in her voice—even after two bottles of wine—when she adds, "And after what Seska said—"

"You knew for sure, then." He's fuzzy enough that the mention of Seska doesn't cause the stab of pain it usually would.

"She was real, though—the woman that you thought she was. That wasn't a pressure release."

"It was real for me." Chakotay makes himself continue looking at Janeway, in defiance of his strong urge to look away. "After I learned that my family was dead—an old friend from the Academy found me. Sent me to find Seska to join the Maquis. It started then." He takes a deep breath. "I ended it about six months before we ended up in the Delta quadrant. It was a little awkward, but we got past it." It's not that he thinks Janeway is suddenly going to decide that her rules don't matter and declare her passionate love for him, but he still doesn't want to make it sound like any kind of relationship with a subordinate is terrible. He finds himself tracing Janeway's face with his eyes—the set of her mouth, the shape of her chin, her eyes that are so determined even now, when they're relaxing—the fine hairs at her temples that escaped confinement in the humidity of the kitchen.

"Do I have something on my face?" she asks. It breaks him out of his reverie.

"No, nothing."

"What are you looking at?" She sounds curious, and he wonders what kind of answer she wants.

"You. Just you." He's just drunk enough to say aloud, "You're beautiful."

Immediately, he can see that he's made her uncomfortable. "Chakotay—" she starts.

He can't help the frustration in his voice. "Kathryn. You're allowed to—proposition me, but I can't tell you you're beautiful?"

"You turned me down," she says. "I didn't push it."

"I see. And if I'd said yes to what you suggested, that purely physical emotion-free arrangement, would I be allowed to say it then? Or would you have asked me to stay quiet when we were together, to make sure I didn't accidentally say anything that sounded too emotionally involved?"

"It would be inappropriate. It's inappropriate." Her voice is raspier than usual.

“We’re alone. We’re going to be alone for however long it takes to get back to the Alpha quadrant, and odds are that’s going to be years, if not decades—no, I know you believe you’ll find a way to get back there earlier, and if anyone can, it’s you, but it’s not—likely.” He realizes that Seska made an argument very much like this to him. “It’s one thing to say you’re going to adhere to the Prime Directive, to do things the Starfleet way, but you’re telling me that you’ll bend the rules enough to have a *strictly sexual* relationship with me, but not that one step further?”

They both freeze at what he’s almost said aloud. “I have a fiancé,” she says finally.

Chakotay stares at her. “You’re splitting hairs. At the end of this, however long this is, you’re going to—pretend like nothing has changed and marry him?”

“I understand that you’re upset because you’re—emotionally vulnerable right now,” she starts, and it’s the first time he can recall her being cruel.

“No.” He stands up slowly. Amazing, how quickly he can slip into the numbness when he needs its protection. “No. You’re not going to say that to me.”

She doesn’t stand up, but he sees the way her body starts to, the way she restrains herself. “I don’t know what more you want from me,” she says, and if ever there was a lie that’s it. “I offered—what I have to give. That’s all. We could do something we both enjoy, but keep it—separate. From everything else.”

“Maybe you could. But how could I possibly do that and not fall in love with you?” The words spill out softly, too quiet in this room that’s echoing with their almost-yelling. She stares at him, eyes wide, but she doesn’t say anything, and finally he walks out the door.

deck by deck

Chapter Summary

“Captain—Commander—you’re displaying some very alarming behavior!” The Doctor’s voice is enough to cut through the haze, enough for Janeway and Chakotay to break apart. At least an inch apart. “Really, I think perhaps you should separate—”

Chapter Notes

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

It’s been almost two weeks. Janeway doesn’t bring it up, any of it. It’s staggering to him, how well she can separate any emotions that she might be feeling from their day-to-day interactions. They proceed at warp eight, travel a week out of their way to avoid unfamiliar radiation only to briefly encounter a Kazon warship and then, when they narrowly escape that, have to exchange fire with a Vidiian harvesting vessel that self-destructs just as a security team is about to beam aboard.

Janeway does stop inviting him to her quarters for dinner, and she does stop touching him quite as much. She only ever did it a little more than she touches the rest of the crew—that’s what he has to tell himself—so it doesn’t really matter. They eat dinner together in the mess hall instead. The crew always leaves a little bit of space at the surrounding tables, so that even when it’s packed it feels like they’re by themselves.

“Neelix did a good job with the stew today,” Chakotay says. “He’s getting better at hiding the flavor of the leola root.”

“He told me he wanted to make leola root ice cream. I told him to start with vanilla.” There’s that twist of humor to her lips that he likes so much.

“I don’t suppose Kes has been growing vanilla beans in the hydroponics bay?” Ship-related things are always safe with Janeway—safe for both of them.

Janeway spears a chunk of leola root from her stew and examines it. On a less controlled face, her expression might be called disgust. “I think she’s sticking to more basic provisions for now. Multipurpose vegetables, maybe a fruit or two. Herbs.”

“We should assign someone to help Kes,” he says. “If the replicators go out, whatever she grows will be all we have to eat.”

“Emergency rations,” Janeway points out. She swallows the leola root chunk without chewing it.

“I don’t care how many herbs you put on those emergency rations, the crew would mutiny after a few days of them.”

Janeway laughs a little. “I suppose so. All right, we’ll find another farmer. Anyone in mind?”

“Didn’t you grow up on a farm?” It feels strange to tease her, to keep everything so surface-level, but it’s the only way he can maintain his cheerful persona. “You could spend your beta shift there.”

“No, thank you. I may have grown up around farmers, but I have a hard time imagining myself as one.”

“Oh, I don’t know—a straw hat, some overalls—” He can’t help grinning at the expression on her face. “I think you’d make a lovely farmer,” and danger, that was a slip of the tongue that shouldn’t have happened, so he rushes to say, “but I think Geron would be better. He’s shy, Kes might be able to draw him out.”

“All right, I’ll see about reassigning him.” Janeway looks down at her bowl. “I shouldn’t waste food, and I know Neelix would be heartbroken if I gave him back a bowl with food still in it, but—”

He’s already reaching across the table to swap their bowls. “Let me help you with that.” He drinks down the rest of her stew bowl, wipes his mouth, and what a strange détente they’ve found themselves in now. Every easy moment could suddenly veer into danger, but he loves the easy moments, never wants to lose that to—his other emotions. He can’t pull back enough now to make every moment safe.

“Captain, there’s a ship approaching,” Tuvok calls.

“Janeway to bridge, I’ll be right there,” she says. “I suppose I could have just waited for an emergency to escape the rest of my stew.”

“They do come often enough.” Chakotay follows her out of the mess hall and up to the bridge.

* * * * *

It’s lucky—probably—that they’re not directly next to the drexim conduit when it blows. One minute they’re saying a surprisingly pleasant farewell to the alien ship, which turned out to contain a group of traveling musicians, and Janeway is lamenting the fact that she’s never learned to play an instrument. The next, every alarm is blaring as the computer declares, “Warning, dangerous gases detected. Please proceed to quarantine areas. Warning.” No one is listening. The air is taking on an oily pink sheen, emanating from every vent. Most of the bridge crew have very suddenly left their posts, including Tom.

“Doctor to Captain Janeway!”

Janeway taps her badge. “Doctor, what’s going on?”

“Captain, I need you in sickbay *urgently*. Come directly here and do not stop or interact with any other members of the crew.”

“I’m on my way. Chakotay?” She stands up and Chakotay stands with her. “Mr. Kim, you have the conn.” Harry is one of the few people still at his post.

She seems to assume Chakotay will come with her, which is good because he’s not sure he could let her out of his sight right now. In the empty turbolift, they crowd together, until she has an arm around his waist and he’s wrapped his arm around her shoulders and is breathing into her hair. He can see the goosebumps rising on her skin as she bows her head and it seems natural—inevitable—that he should kiss the back of her neck, just above her collar. Janeway hums a little and leans closer into him. It’s too familiar now, too comfortable. Hard to imagine living without.

The doors open onto deck five. Janeway turns into him and wraps her arms around his neck, turns her face up for a kiss, and then another and another. They only separate at the sound of a shriek very nearby—Chakotay hopes that was in response to something other than the sight of him with Janeway—and then the Doctor comms, “*Captain Janeway to sickbay immediately!*”

They walk to sickbay. Chakotay discovers that he’s holding Janeway’s hand tightly in his own and has been running his thumb over the shape of her knuckles. When they get to sickbay, the Doctor frowns at them. “What’s the crisis, Doctor?” Janeway doesn’t release his hand.

“A drexim conduit on deck six ruptured. The leaking drexim has combined with the ship’s atmosphere to form dreximetic gas.” He says it like they should both immediately know what this means. Maybe Janeway does. Though she’s also worked her free hand into the waist of his pants, insinuated it beneath his shirt and is now stroking her fingers lightly across his skin. There’s a buzzing in his ears. “In liquid form, drexim is harmless,” the Doctor explains. “An excellent lubricant.” Or that’s probably what he says. Chakotay is having a lot of trouble listening. “But in its gaseous form, it’s highly dangerous.”

“Dangerous?” He realizes that he’s running his fingers through Janeway’s hair. “How so?”

“Acute exposure to high levels of dreximetic gas results in—the heightening of a person’s strongest desire, with little regard for anything else. Long-term exposure will…”

Janeway pulls him down into another kiss, long and deep and slow, her lips moving over his—almost in exploration, as though they’ve never done this before, and he cradles her face in his hands and returns the kiss. It feels like he’s dreaming.

“Captain!”

She breaks the kiss. Her cheeks are flushed. “Yes, Doctor. Long-term exposure would be dangerous. I assume you’ve come up with a solution.”

The Doctor looks peeved by Janeway hurrying him to the end of whatever long explanation he was going to give. “As a matter of fact, yes. Since I knew that we were using drexim with the ship’s bio-neural circuitry, I was aware of a substantial risk that we might eventually have a dreximetic gas leak. I’ve prepared antidotes, both for individuals and for the bio-neural gel packs that will spread the treatment through the ship’s systems.”

“Good thinking, Doctor.” Chakotay strokes Janeway’s cheek, runs his fingers over her lips, and she bites one of his fingertips very lightly. His breath catches and he pulls her hips tight against his own.

“Yes, yes.” The Doctor administers a hypospray to each of them without warning. Chakotay isn’t focused enough to care. “I’ve given you both the antidote. I want you to stay in sickbay until it’s taken effect, and then you can go treat the gel packs.”

“How long will it take?” Janeway is kissing each joint of his fingers and it’s very distracting.

The Doctor grimaces. “I’ll check on you both in ten minutes. Until then, I’ll be in my office if one of you begins to have an allergic reaction. Which you should not. Try to stay still and let the antidote work.”

Chakotay doesn’t think whatever antidote the Doctor gave them is working. He lifts Janeway onto one of the bio-beds. They’re trying to remove each other’s uniform shirts at the same time, and when they finally succeed, he pulls her bra off too and discards it somewhere. Then he drags her undershirt down enough that he can cup her breasts in his hands, lean down and suck at one hard nipple and then the other. She grabs the back of his neck and holds him there, panting. When she releases him, he puts her shirt back into place and leaves kisses all along her neck, biting a little, just hard enough to make her hiss and squirm and reach down to grab his cock—

“Captain, Commander, you’re displaying some very alarming behavior!” The Doctor’s voice is enough to cut through the haze, enough for Janeway and Chakotay to break apart. At least an inch apart. “Really, I think perhaps you should separate—”

“No,” Chakotay insists. “We’re—at least we’re—”

“Some of the functions—might require two sets of command codes—” Janeway has been rubbing his cock through his pants this entire time, and he keeps hitching his hips up a little, arching into her hand, to encourage her. The Doctor clears his throat loudly and Janeway pulls her hand away. “No, Doctor. We’ll go together. Keep each other on track.”

“If you’ll forgive my saying so, Captain, that seems less than likely.”

Janeway shakes her head like she’s trying to wake herself and climbs down from the bio-bed. Chakotay is—useless right now, sliding his hand over the curve of her ass and squeezing a little, trying to memorize the shape. “Chakotay,” she says, and there’s enough steel in her voice that he snatches his own hand away. “We know what we need to do, Doctor.” She lifts the bandolier of antidote vials, slings it around her chest, and passes the other one to Chakotay.

“You’ll have to inject a bio-neural gel pack on every deck, ideally more,” the Doctor reminds them. He frowns. “I would prefer to wait until the antidote has taken effect for you two, but I’m starting to think we don’t have that long.”

Janeway has been dragging her nails lightly across his bare chest since she handed him his bandolier, but she says, “We’ll be fine, Doctor. I’m sure the antidote will start taking effect soon.”

“Hmph.” The Doctor attaches a small cortical stimulator to Chakotay’s neck. “I’ve programmed it to give you a small electric shock every five minutes. If the two of you get—distracted, it should help snap you out of it.” The cortical stimulator shocks Chakotay and he yelps in surprise; Janeway steps away from him. “Good, it works. Now get going.”

They make their way out into the hallway, slowly. Everyone is reacting differently to the dexametic gas leak. The mess hall is crowded with people gorging themselves on whatever they can find. A brawl has broken out in one of the turbolifts. Tom and B’Elanna are half-naked and seem to be slamming each other up against walls between vicious kisses.

Janeway opens the first panel to inject the gel pack and Chakotay crowds up against her body, so that when she finishes and turns back around, she’s in his arms. She kisses like she’s drinking him in, hands roaming across the bare skin of his chest, and he can’t get close enough, especially when she starts to slide one hand into the front of his pants and he’s hard, feels like he’s been hard forever—

The cortical stimulator shocks them both. He swears and Janeway pulls her hand out of his pants. “How many more of these gel packs are there?” he asks.

“There are forty-seven gel packs in total,” she gasps. “Three on every deck, two redundancies. But if we get one on every deck, that should be enough.”

“Up or down?” He’s trying not to let himself touch her again. Maybe the Doctor should’ve set the shocks for every three minutes. Or every minute.

“Up. I don’t want to have to climb fourteen decks to get to the bridge at the end of this.” Janeway looks longingly at the turbolift for a minute.

“Captain,” he says. “I don’t think we’ll do well in a turbolift.”

She meets his eyes and he *feels* it, the weight of that particular memory. “No,” she says. “Jefferies tubes it is. We’ll go to back to the bridge and work our way down.”

It’s easier to keep their hands off each other climbing four decks up in a Jefferies tube, if only because she’s climbing quickly and Chakotay can make himself stay a few feet behind at all times. It doesn’t stop him from admiring her from below, though. When he exits the Jefferies tube behind her, Janeway has already made her way to the bridge where one of the gel packs lives.

The bridge is empty but for Harry Kim, whose nose is pressed so close to a control station that his breath is fogging it up. He appears completely unaware of what’s happening, which means that when Janeway unzips Chakotay’s pants and shoves him down into the captain’s chair, Harry is blissfully oblivious. Chakotay loses himself in the sensations as Janeway pulls his cock out and climbs atop him, slides down slowly until her face is pressed against his neck and she’s panting hot breaths against his skin. They find the right rhythm fast, too fast—maybe she remembers they only have five minutes before the next shock—and he kisses her, messy, too overwhelmed to do more than lick into her mouth.

The cortical stimulator goes off again but it doesn’t matter, an entire Borg fleet could drop out of warp and it couldn’t make him think of anything but the feeling of Janeway, Janeway, Janeway, as she clenches hot and tight around him—

He comes as the shock stings again—that’s probably crossing some wires in his brain. Janeway climbs off of him and pulls her pants up and says, “Come on, we have a ship to save.” Her lips are red and a little swollen, her hair a knotted mess, her undershirt pulled so far to the side that the edge of her nipple is showing. He wants to live in this moment with her forever. But she’s right, they have a ship to save and what they just did provided some minimal relief, so he straightens her shirt, tries to set himself to rights and follows her back to the Jefferies tube, down a level.

“Both of our quarters are on this deck,” she observes. As if they need quarters to do what they’ve been doing. He can see a bruise forming on her neck where he must have bitten her. When she opens the next panel, he presses close behind her—she arches back against him. Chakotay laces his fingers in her hair and pulls her head to the side so that he can kiss the spot. At the noise she makes, he bites just a little, just the slightest pressure of his teeth against the bruise, and she gasps and moans and rubs back against him. He keeps his mouth there, teeth and tongue, and slides one hand down the front of her pants to find her clit, the other hand beneath her shirt. There are few things he wants more than to feel her come against him. Chakotay works his fingers until he can tell she’s close, rubs his cock against her ass—he shouldn’t be getting hard again but he is, he blames the gas—and says “Come for me, Kathryn.” She does, her entire body tensing in a single instant before she sags against him, and he leaves another biting wet kiss on that bruise to hear the high-pitched noise in her throat. The Doctor will erase everything when this is over, every scratch and bruise, but until then—

Deck three. Somehow Tom and B’Elanna have made it all the way up here only to stop in B’Elanna’s open doorway. Tom has her up against the doorframe, fucking her as she yells and digs her nails into his back and the doors keep trying to close but can’t. B’Elanna sees Chakotay and Janeway and raises an eyebrow—

Electric shock. Right. This time he’s the one to find the panel. He has to crouch down to open it and inject the gel pack. He feels the heat at his back and when he turns a little, Janeway is right there, grabbing his hair and holding his head just there, forehead just against the waist of her pants. Chakotay brings his hand up and rubs along the seam of her pants—the dampness is leaking through, of course, she was already dripping wet and then he came inside her and none of it matters, he wants to feel her clench tight around his fingers again, wants her to pull his hair hard because she can’t help it—

Electric shock. Damn the Doctor. He stands up and grabs Janeway's hand, drags her back past Tom and B'Elanna, back to the Jefferies tube and the ladder down to deck four. The energy grid is down here, three gel packs clustered together, and he injects all three in the hope that maybe it'll help whatever ship-wide antidote move faster. Whatever the Doctor gave the two of them doesn't seem to be having much effect.

Electric shock, just as he's starting to lose himself looking at Janeway. They go down past deck five, then have to crawl through a horizontal tube to get to the energy grid on deck six. Janeway stops short partway through and Chakotay bumps into her and somehow he ends up on top of her in the tube, bracing himself on his elbows. "I want," he says, and then leans down to kiss her. It's slower this time, here in the close dimness of the tube, just the feeling of her lips on his own, her soft slick tongue stroking against his. His brain dimly registers one, and then two shocks, which means they've been lying here just kissing for more than five minutes. It's enough to separate them, and Chakotay slides past her slowly, tortuously, to take the lead in the tube.

There are all kinds of noises coming from the holodeck and he's glad that the safety protocols are hard-wired in. He doesn't know if it's an orgy or a Klingon battle or both and he feels entirely justified not investigating. They're closest to the leak here. The dreximetic gas floats low and thick in the air below the energy grid and it makes his skin tingle, like he's been stripped naked and—like the time on C'Nihua, when Janeway painted every inch of him except his cock, when she claimed him with her red handprint. When Janeway has injected the pack, he lifts her and pushes her against the wall—her legs wrap around his waist almost automatically—and rubs against her, like trying to scratch an itch he can't quite reach. He buries his face against her neck, whispers something that she'd never let him say in real life, marches kisses along her neck up until her ear and then can't stop himself from saying it into her ear. "I love you," he whispers, and he would think she hadn't heard except for the way her entire body jolts, the way she wraps her legs tighter around him—

The electric shock feels sharper now and he releases her, pulling away slowly. They should get away from the concentrated gas, back to the relative safety of the Jefferies tube, maybe even a turbolift. He doesn't know which will be worse, when it comes to being in proximity to Janeway. She's opted for the turbolift. They stumble into it and she gasps, "Deck seven."

The turbolift has barely begun to move when he feels the shock—five minutes before the next one—and says, "Halt turbolift."

"Chakotay—" she starts, but it's more of a plea than a warning.

"Four and a half minutes," he says, and he drags her pants down just enough that he can pull her underwear to the side and slide three fingers inside her all at once.

She moans long and low. She's slick and almost painfully tight around his fingers. She lets her head fall back against the wall, spreads her legs wider and says "Come on" as he pumps his fingers in and out, curls them inside her until she says "Please, please" and grabs his wrist to force him deeper. He finds her clit with his other hand and she comes on his fingers, crying out and clenching so tightly that his fingers are almost numb with it. The cortical stimulator delivers its shock just as he's slowly pulling his fingers out and he feels her jerk and spasm as it hits.

"Resume turbolift," he croaks.

Deck seven is crew quarters, mostly. The gas is heavier down here; he can almost feel the weight of it in his lungs. They stumble through the hallway to the nearest gel pack and Chakotay is losing all sense of time and distance. His fingers are slippery and he almost fumbles the vial when Janeway, standing behind him, sticks her hands into the back of his pants and grips his ass tight. She squeezes almost experimentally, throwing him off-balance, and then spreads him open, just enough that she can slide one slick finger back and forth across his hole, and he would let her, he would let her do— "Anything," he chokes out. "Anything." He pushes back against her and she starts to press her finger just inside and then there's the electric shock again.

Janeway pulls her hand out of his pants and slaps his ass, hard. "We have to—go," she says. "We're—only halfway."

"We're not going to make it like—this," Chakotay says. He turns and looks at Janeway—eyes wild, bruises from his teeth set into her neck, the curves of her breasts showing through the thin cloth of her undershirt. He knows what he must look like, bare chest heaving, pants riding low on his hips from all the abuse they've taken. They could give up. He wants to give up. He would never say it to Janeway, but they could give up, toss the bandoliers aside, strip naked and do everything to each other that they haven't managed yet until eventually the gas kills the entire crew— "Maybe the doctor was right."

She looks at him sharply. "About what?"

Every part of him howls at what he's about to say. "Maybe it would go faster—if we split up."

Janeway knows he's right, as much as she hates it. "We are distracting each other, I suppose."

"I want to touch you every minute that I can see you," he says. "And when I can't. It's taking twenty minutes for every level because we can't stop ourselves." Even now, they're inching closer together.

She catches herself, stops, and then takes a determined step backward. "We have to," she agrees. "I'll take decks eight through eleven, you do twelve through fifteen. We'll meet on fifteen to confirm."

"All right." It was Chakotay's idea but he finds it almost impossible to take the first step away. Janeway returns and kisses him again, long and sweet, like two lovers saying goodbye before going into battle, and he holds her against him for a long time. When the cortical stimulator goes off, he pulls himself away. "I'll take the turbolift first," he tells her. "I don't think we can risk being in one together."

"No," she agrees. He makes it back to the turbolift and watches Janeway as the doors close.

It's a good thing that they separated, because the gas is billowing through the hallways of deck twelve. Without Janeway there in person, he's able to stumble his way all the way to environmental controls and inject two of the three gel packs there. He taps his comm badge. "Captain, I've completed deck twelve."

"I'm done with deck eight," she says. "Heading to deck nine. Leave the channel open."

Even the sound of her voice makes him want to go to her. "All right." He means to start walking, but he finds himself unbuttoning his pants, discovers that his hand has already made its way onto his cock and he's thrusting into his fist there in the hallway. "Kathryn—"

"Wait until I'm there with you." Of course she knows what he's doing. He likes to think she knows because she was touching herself too. "Wait until we're on deck fifteen, Chakotay."

"Yes, Captain." If he injected himself with one of these vials, would it make the antidote work faster? Does he want the antidote to work? The cortical stimulator shocks him. Damn the Doctor.

Decks thirteen and fourteen pass in a blur. The doors to the holodeck on deck fourteen are open and he carefully avoids seeing inside. He doesn't want to know any more of the crew's deepest desires than he already does. "On my way to deck fifteen," he tells her, his voice thick.

"Confirmed." She sounds as wrecked as he does, and when she steps off the turbolift, she looks it. "Have you found the gel pack?"

The gel pack. That's why they're there. "I was waiting for you," he admits. Another electrical shock. "Over here, I think." He finds the panel, stands beside her as she injects it, and then they're done, they're free, he curls himself around her and starts to shove her pants down. Janeway turns in his arms, strips her undershirt off over her head so he can see her breasts in the dim light. They're right out in the corridor, only a few meters from the turbolift, but it doesn't matter. She wraps her fingers around the cortical stimulator and pulls it off his neck, which stings almost as much as one of the shocks. Then she leans in and licks the spot. At first it's gentle and then she sets her lips and teeth to the spot and it hurts, oh it hurts, and he wants to tell her to stop but he's harder than he's ever been and it's the best feeling. He wants to be inside her, around her, pressed as close together as every cell of their bodies can get, wants her to mark him everywhere. She pulls his cock out and breaks away long enough to step out of her pants. In that momentary break, Chakotay turns her around and tugs her underwear out of the way so that he can pull her back onto his cock.

Janeway almost *growls* at it, reaches behind her to dig her nails into his hips and pull him harder into her, spreads her legs wider and arches against him so he can thrust as deep as they both want him. He reaches for her breasts, finds her nipples and pinches lightly at first and then harder when she keens, and he's half-crazy with the feeling of her bucking back against him. That's when she says "Stop, get on your knees," and turns around, and he has his own hand tight on his cock even as she's pushing him down onto his knees in front of her. "You'd better not come yet," she tells him.

"Yes, Captain," he breathes, and he knows what she wants, drags her underwear down entirely, finds her clit with his lips and tongue and teeth as she pulls him so hard against her that it's almost difficult to breathe. Janeway hooks one leg over his shoulder, then the other, until he's the only thing supporting her, one hand under her and three fingers on his other hand pumping in and out as she thrusts against his face. Maybe she's being inconsiderate but he loves it, loves the way she squeezes tight around his fingers, the little noises she makes when he scrapes his teeth very lightly against her clit, the way she's unraveling all because of him. He feels her come, feels her body seize and clench around him and then relax.

Carefully, awkwardly, he stands with Janeway still draped over him like that, ankles behind his neck, her legs spread wide open to him. He grips her ass to hold her in place and then slides back in—he tries not to think of it as one last time—and fucks her hard, feels her shuddering around his cock. She cries out and grabs his hair, pulls his head to the side so she can set her teeth back into the bruise she's left where the cortical stimulator was. It hurts, bleeds into the white-hot feeling crawling up his spine until he's certain that the only way it will stop—if he wants it to stop—is if he comes, if he loses himself entirely in her. He does, his entire body shaking, her name emerging strangled from his throat. Even when the aftershocks have stopped pulsing through him, he doesn't pull away; Janeway leans her forehead against his own and clenches down on him over and over, like she's trying to come again on his cock, and it shakes little shivers of pleasure out of him.

Chakotay doesn't want to let her go. His head is clearing, which means the antidote must be working at last—and if it's working on him, it's working on her. Worse, his back and his legs are reminding him in no uncertain terms that he's forty-two years old and that very shortly he's going to feel like he's fallen down a Jefferies tube. Still, he doesn't begin to disentangle them until Janeway lifts her forehead away from his and meets his eyes. Then he can't hold her gaze and he has to awkwardly put her down. Her legs don't hold her at first and she has to take a deep breath.

In the long silence that follows, Janeway retrieves her badge and says, "Doctor, I need a full set of my own clothing and a full set of Commander Chakotay's clothing transported to deck fifteen. At your earliest convenience, Doctor."

For once, the Doctor doesn't argue. Two full uniforms materialize in the corridor. They dress quietly and Chakotay dumps their old clothing into a recycling unit. "Captain," he says, with no real thought for what he'll say next.

"Chakotay." Her eyes light high on his neck, and he touches the place that she's staring at. It's where the cortical stimulator used to sit, where she's left a mean messy bruise that's already throbbing. "You should get that—fixed."

"So should you, Captain."

"I have...an illicit dermal regenerator in my quarters," she admits.

He can't help smiling at that, even in all the absurdity of the situation. "Of course you do. You would never go to sickbay for something that could be fixed by a dermal regenerator."

"I'd appreciate it if you didn't report it." She's smiling too, her lips a little swollen from kissing. "You know how the authorities on this ship can be."

"Real disciplinarians," he agrees. "I won't report you, on one condition."

"What's that?"

“I get to borrow it after you. I don’t need the Doctor commenting on every little mark left on my body.”

Janeway laughs. It feels like they’re in a brief perfect bubble right now. “Come back to my quarters. We can help each other regenerate our dermis.”

“That probably shouldn’t sound as appealing as it does,” he says recklessly, and she doesn’t even resist it, doesn’t try to put the distance back between them. In the turbolift, Janeway tells the computer, “Deck two, direct.” Then she looks at Chakotay and raises an eyebrow. “What do you think are the odds that the antidote will have caused the rest of the crew to forget everything they did and saw?”

“In the case of Tom and B’Elanna, I suspect that the amnesia will have taken hold as soon as they were physically separated.” Chakotay shakes his head. “If there’s one thing I’ve observed in my time on starships, it’s that people have an amazing ability to selectively forget the side effects of just about anything.”

In Janeway’s quarters, she finds the dermal regenerator and offers it to Chakotay. “As the person who liberated this from sickbay in the first place, I’m declaring the right of first use,” she tells him. “Which means I’ll need you to use it.”

“Anywhere in particular?”

Janeway removes the uniform shirt that she very recently put on and lays it across a chair. “I think you can find one or two places.”

“Ah. Yes.” The bruises on her neck, bite marks on her breasts, the back of her neck—he erases each of them, one by one, watching as they fade away like he never put them there. He turns her chin with a very light touch, runs the regenerator down her arm and watches the imprints of his fingers vanish. He hadn’t realized exactly how aggressive everything had been, after those first few drunk-feeling kisses. When he’s done, he passes it to Janeway.

From the beginning, it’s torment. It’s good that his body is so exhausted, because Janeway seems determined to drive him insane. She traces each mark before she heals it, ghosts her fingers across it as though she’s reminding him exactly what she did to leave that particular mark. He has to take off his shirt for a few of them and he could swear that she’s running it across places that were never marked to begin with. His skin pebbles with goosebumps when she brushes the back of her knuckles across his chest, catches the tip of one hard nipple as she lifts her free hand to the messy spot on his neck where the stimulator was. “That was a good idea the Doctor had,” she says, and she runs her thumb in an ever-increasing spiral out to the ragged edges of the bruise.

“You weren’t attached to it.” Chakotay’s voice is rough, rougher than it should be in response to this. “Next time he puts it on you.”

“It got me a few times when I was touching you.” He remembers those times vividly. “It wasn’t even as bad as touching an electric fence.” At his questioning noise, she adds, “When I was growing up, some people still used old-fashioned electric fences to keep their horses in. Once the horse gets shocked once, it stays away from the fence.”

“Well, if that was the doctor’s plan, it didn’t work very well,” Chakotay says. He thinks he can feel a slight hum from the regenerator, which she’s still holding over the same spot. “How’s it going?”

“Almost done.” She looks around her quarters and then says, “Computer, begin filling bathtub.”

Janeway is really testing the limits of his fortitude here. “A bath?”

She steps back from him and turns off the dermal regenerator. “Yes. With water. I find it relaxing. And after today, well, I can already feel my muscles seizing up.” She can probably tell what he’s about to say, so she adds, “The water is filtered and recycled. It’s perfectly drinkable if it becomes necessary.”

“I’m sure. It sounds wonderful.” He can see Janeway teetering on the edge of inviting him to join her. As much as he wants to, he gathers the last tattered vestiges of his self-preservation instinct and says, “I’ll leave you to it. Enjoy.”

Chapter End Notes

I stole drexim from Farscape, of course.

quarters

Chapter Summary

He wants to touch her hand. “You’re the smartest woman I know, and by far the most determined. If you want something enough, you make it happen through sheer force of will. If you tell me you don’t want it—I’ll know that it’ll never happen. And I’ll find a way to give up.”

Janeway does meet his eyes then, and she’s very pale, her eyes bright. There’s still a bruise just under her collar that he must have missed in all the excitement. “I,” she starts. She’s silent for a long time, and her hand closes convulsively on the arm of her chair, but she doesn’t look away. “You know I can’t say it,” she admits eventually. “Or you wouldn’t have asked.”

Chakotay takes a long sonic shower, much longer than necessary, to remove all the various sticky fluids smeared on his body. A hot bath would have been much nicer. He tries to distract himself. He opens the copy of the teachings of Surak that Tuvok gave him, when they were still Maquis, and promptly shuts it again. He stretches, in the hopes that he won’t wake up in too much pain. He looks at a report on the signs of ancient civilization on a planet that they visited recently and stares at it for a good fifteen minutes before he realizes that he’s been reading the same page over and over. He listens for the sound of a person getting out of the bathtub—even through these thin walls, he doesn’t think he would hear it.

He stands, paralyzed, at the door to his own quarters. Finally, he walks out his own door and turns. Then he knocks at the door to her quarters and she calls, “Come in!” She’s curled up in a chair with a gilded book, turning the pages very carefully. Her hair is in a thick braid hanging over one shoulder. When she looks up, he can see the tension starting.

“Don’t worry, we’re cured, remember?”

“I do.” Her voice is very dry. “What do you want, Chakotay?” It’s a jarring change from the woman who was healing his bruises an hour and a half ago.

Chakotay keeps a careful distance from her. “I realize that usually, we just don’t talk about it afterward.”

Janeway closes the book slowly and places it just so on the table next to her. “I don’t know what there is to talk about.”

“You heard the Doctor. He said that the gas didn’t just—make everyone lose control in different ways. That it only intensified pre-existing desires.”

“Thus the state of our food stores and the very public displays.” She’s not wrong about that. “Sit down, Chakotay. You’re making me tense by looming there.” She pushes a chair out a little with her foot, and he sits down next to her. “It’s not exactly a surprise to either of us, that we would gravitate toward each other.” There’s a weighted pause before she adds, “Sexually.”

“I need you to say it to me, Kathryn.”

Her eyes flick away. “Say what?”

“That you don’t—feel the same way. Feel any of it. That if we were two ordinary people, you still wouldn’t want me that way.” Chakotay takes a deep breath. “Look at me and tell me you don’t care and I’ll—get past it.”

“Why do you need me to say that for you to get past it?” Her spine is straight, bladed, her chin held high, and she’s looking just past the side of his face.

He wants to touch her hand. “You’re the smartest woman I know, and by far the most determined. If you want something enough, you make it happen through sheer force of will. If you tell me you don’t want it—I’ll know that it’ll never happen. And I’ll find a way to give up.”

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“You’re giving me a lot of credit,” he says hoarsely. “For knowing how you feel.” His heart is pounding and he reaches over to her hand. She turns it palm-up and squeezes his hand in her own, interlacing their fingers. They sit like that for a moment and then she stands, pulling him with her, until their faces are very close.

“So what am I supposed to do about this through my sheer force of will?” She says it against his neck, her lips almost brushing his pulse point, and even with the gas gone the feeling sends a bolt through his body.

“Consider the facts, and take the logical course of action.”

He feels her laugh. “Tuvok isn’t the first thing on my mind right now.”

“Facts. There’s no one I’d rather be around than you. There’s no one I trust more than you, even when I think you’re making the wrong choice. After today, half the ship has seen us—together. Including defiling the Captain’s chair.”

“Tuvok said he would delete the security recordings on the bridge.”

“Yes, I’m sure that will stop members of our crew who’ve heard a rumor about sex on the bridge from finding and restoring them.”

“Fact: Starfleet protocol forbids any relationship between a commanding officer and her subordinate.” She punctuates the statement by kissing his neck very lightly.

“I’m frequently insubordinate.” She laughs at that and he braces his other arm around her, pulls her even closer. “A fact that you don’t like and don’t want to believe: the overwhelming odds are that it will be our children who bring Voyager home, not us.”

“Are you going to tell me I have a duty to contribute to the next generation of crew?” Janeway tilts her head back so she can meet his eyes and he sees the smile, the raised eyebrow.

“I was going to say a duty to model a committed relationship,” he says, “but I’m open to the rest of it too. You told me Starfleet tried not to interfere in the personal lives of crew.”

“Except the captain.”

“I mean this sincerely—who will care? Starfleet? I’m not even a member of Starfleet anymore. Whatever field commissions you’ve handed out to the Maquis, Starfleet isn’t going to honor them.” She starts to argue and he puts his finger to her lips very gently. “We can debate that another time. Are you worried you’re somehow—coercing me into this?”

Janeway does laugh. “No, of all things, I’m not worried about that.” A shadow crosses her face. “Chakotay—I have very few things to hold onto out here. Nothing but the principles of Starfleet. If I lose sight of them—”

“We have our entire crew to keep us in line,” Chakotay says. “Kathryn.”

Her face brightens again. “You see, insubordination. I never gave you permission to call me Kathryn.”

“You did. In the shuttle. I just haven’t—exercised the privilege often. Captain.”

“And what if I order you to call me Captain all the time instead?”

He puts his lips to her ear. “I’m happy to say ‘Yes, Captain,’ when you tell me to take the conn, or when you tell me to get on my knees, or when you order me to lead the away team, or when I’m deep inside you and you tell me not to come yet—” He feels her shiver.

“It’s good to know you’ll be so compliant.” Her voice is husky. She breathes in deeply and steps back. “Give me a day,” she says. “A day to think about what you’ve said, to actually—consider the possibility. The implications. I promise I’ll think about it instead of just dismissing it.”

“A day,” he agrees.

“I don’t suppose you’ve had time to—consider.” He almost doesn’t want to hear her answer, he realizes. Until he hears it, at least he can hope.

“I have.” Kathryn takes his hand. “First I want to tell you something. Something about myself. And I need you to—stay calm when I tell you this. Because I need to be able to tell you, and not worry about how you’ll react.”

A day to think turns into five—not, he truly believes, because Kathryn is avoiding giving him a decision, but because life in the Delta quadrant is truly hell sometimes. Some of the crises are internal—a thief has been stealing from Kes’s gardens, two lieutenants are fighting over who gets a particular ensign to work on their pet projects—and some are external, like the Kazon battle cruiser that always seems to be an hour behind them, forcing them to take a corkscrewing path back toward the Alpha quadrant. And after twenty hours awake, neither he nor Kathryn is about to delay the first opportunity for sleep, just to have a complicated discussion about their relationship.

On the fifth day, Chakotay and Kathryn take four ensigns—two Starfleet, two Maquis—by shuttle to the surface of a nearby moon. Tensions have been running high among the four of them, to the point that B’Elanna refused to have all four in engineering together. There’s no time for things like that, not out here, so Kathryn proposes the solution: “A set of five challenges, each of which can only be solved through the cooperation of two people.”

Chakotay raises an eyebrow at that. “They hate each other,” he says. “It would take them weeks to get through a single challenge, let alone five.”

“They’ll be in two mixed teams. I can only hope that their hatred of each other doesn’t outweigh the competitive desire to beat the other team.” She meets his eyes with a very different kind of look. “And once that’s finally settled—”

“Right. Yes, Captain.” He nods and goes to round up the wayward ensigns.

Kathryn has designed the challenges, and she leaves him with the shuttle as she goes to get the miscreants started at the first challenge. Team-building exercises have never been Chakotay’s area of strength. He doesn’t know exactly what goes wrong, only that 30 minutes in, he sees a large explosion and an electrical storm approaching on the horizon and Kathryn comms him and Voyager. “We need immediate transport to sickbay for four people.”

“Captain, we’re in a bit of a—situation here,” the Doctor says. “I don’t think that’s advisable—”

“Unless sickbay is on fire, Doctor, you transport them. They need medical attention that we can’t provide down here.”

“Very well. Please try not to injure yourselves as well. I don’t want anyone else exposed.”

Kathryn crests the hill and runs toward Chakotay. There’s something dark and almost animal-shaped in the cloud of dust that follows her, tongues of electricity crackling out from it up toward the storm overhead. She yells into her comm, “Chakotay—”

He’s already locking onto her with the shuttle’s transporter even as he starts the shuttle, and she’s barely fully materialized before they’re lifting off the ground and racing away from the moon. “What was *that*? One of the challenges gone wrong?”

Kathryn collapses into the seat next to him, gasping for breath. “Something—sensors didn’t detect. It came up out of the earth—like it was summoning the storm.” She coughs hard.

“Voyager, we’ve had to leave the surface of the moon. We’ll be back to you in a few minutes.”

“*No*, Commander.” The Doctor’s voice is emphatic. “There is some kind of—contagion on the ship. It’s causing inexplicable behavior in the crew. I accepted the emergent patients, but I’m afraid the two of you will need to remain on the shuttle and off the ship until things have calmed down.”

“What do you mean, a contagion?” Chakotay and Kathryn exchange glances. He doesn’t think Tom and B’Elanna would be stupid enough to risk the safety of the entire ship, or that the Doctor would pretend there was something when there wasn’t, but he can’t help being suspicious.

“It appears that one crew member consumed a substance that made him particularly...amorous, which then attracted others to consume the same substance. Now even people who were not initially affected have begun to show symptoms. There is something of an epidemic at this point. I must advise you to remain in the shuttle until I have found a solution.” The Doctor cuts the comm link.

“Why do we have so many substances on Voyager that produce this kind of effect?”

Kathryn laughs a little at that. “I suppose the engineers worked with what they could find.”

“There’s some irony for you,” Chakotay says. “For once, we avoid the—influence.” Voyager looks scarred and vulnerable from the window of the shuttle. It’s dark inside. He can only imagine how hard it is for Kathryn. “But the Doctor will handle it, and we’ll be back on Voyager soon.”

"I guess that's one way of buying us some time to talk," she says, and coughs again. When he stands up and goes to find the med kit, she asks, "What are you doing?"

Chakotay locates the tri-ox hypospray and offers it to her. "It sounds like you could use it."

Instead of taking the hypospray, she tilts her head to the side and pulls her hair back, exposing her neck. "You could help." The words make something clench around his heart. He carefully holds the hypospray to her neck, administers it with the familiar hiss, and then smooths his thumb over the spot on her neck. She closes her eyes and inhales deeply. "That's much better."

He takes the pilot's seat again. "I don't suppose you've had time to—consider." He almost doesn't want to hear her answer, he realizes. Until he hears it, at least he can hope.

"I have." Kathryn takes his hand. "First I want to tell you something. Something about myself. And I need you to—stay calm when I tell you this. Because I need to be able to tell you, and not worry about how you'll react."

The numbness settles over him. "All right,"

"You seem to think that because I was in Starfleet, I avoided all Cardassian interaction." Not at all where he thought this was going. He starts to object and then remembers he's supposed to be staying calm. "When I was just out of the Academy, I was the junior science officer on the Arias Expedition. It was—more than a scientific mission." He understands from her eyes what she means. "Admiral Paris and I were captured by Cardassians."

He controls the instinctive physical reaction, stops it before it becomes visible. This isn't about him. "I didn't know that." He keeps his voice very even.

Kathryn nods. Her voice has taken on a mechanical tone. "They wanted information. I—refused. Then they made clear that they were going to torture us anyway. Not for information, but for—fun."

That sounds like the Cardassians he's met. "They tortured you."

"No. They injured me. Hit me a few times. Then they locked me in a—cell where I could hear Admiral Paris being tortured for hours, screaming until his voice gave out, and even after that, the sounds of him—struggling." She isn't looking at him anymore, only staring out into the emptiness of space. "Eventually we were rescued." She blinks, but her voice doesn't change. "I fought one as we were escaping. You asked me once if I'd ever killed anyone and I should have told you then—I don't know. I don't know if I killed him." Her shoulders are stiff.

This, he understands. Chakotay puts a very gentle hand on her shoulder. "For you, I think listening to someone else being tortured and not being able to help would be—worse than physical torture." Kathryn turns, her eyes re-focusing. "I'm sorry," he says. "That you felt like you couldn't tell me."

"You have your burdens," she says. "I know they're heavy. I didn't want to add to them."

"I want to share your burdens, Kathryn." She's still holding his hand with her own and he squeezes it, not hard enough to hurt but just before it. "You can share them with me, always."

She squeezes his hand hard, once, and then presses her thumb to the pulse in his wrist. "I've been thinking about it ever since you left my quarters. I thought about who you are. I thought about what it would be like to have you there with me, to lie in bed with your arms wrapped around me, to drag you into the bathtub with me. To face the Kazon or the Vidiians or whoever else comes along and hates us, and know that you're not just always there on the bridge, but that you'll always be there when I go back to my quarters at the end of the night." She smiles. "Or the end of the morning. And I thought about what it would be like to get to touch you without the excuse of—of near-death, or strange paint, or gas leaks." She must be able to feel the way his heart is pounding. "And when I did, everything else—Starfleet protocol—felt nebulous, an apparition that stood in the way of both of our happiness." Kathryn smiles at him and the force of it hits him like a blow. "So—my answer is yes."

"Yes?" He's dazed, barely willing to believe it when she's saying everything she wants to hear. "Really?"

She laughs. "Are you trying to talk me out of it?"

Chakotay tugs her hand and she tumbles into his lap, her face very close to his. "Never," he says. He wraps one arm around her, brings the other up to trace the line of her jaw, touch her lips with his thumb and then he leans in to kiss her. It's slow, sweet. As they kiss he can see it all, see Kathryn trying not to wake him as she climbs into bed next to him, see her pulling him toward the bathtub and insisting "It's relaxing!" even as he grumbles, see the way she'll lean into him and they'll hold each other silently the next time they lose a crew member. He doesn't know how long the kiss lasts, but it feels like he can envision their entire future together, until—

"Captain! I have identified a solution to the contagion! You and Commander Chakotay may now return safely to the ship."

"He really has the worst timing," Kathryn says. She's pulled back just enough that she can look at his face without going cross-eyed. She leans in and kisses him again, a quick press of lips and swipe of tongue that leaves him chasing her mouth as she stands up. "Come to my quarters tonight?" she says, and there's the slightest hint of uncertainty in her eyes.

"I'll be there." Chakotay takes the helm again and steers them back toward Voyager. In the corner of his eye, he can see Kathryn watching him and he can't help the silly smile spreading across his face.

quarters, again

Chapter Summary

“I’ll stay until you get sick of me,” he says honestly. Kathryn smiles a silly little smile and he loves it, loves her, loves that this is what she wants to do.

He’s strangely nervous walking to her quarters that night. After everything they’ve said and done, it should feel like just another evening—but no, he’s lying to himself, of course it isn’t. It’s the first time that there are no secrets between them, no more hesitation.

Chakotay can smell food—surprisingly, uncharred—as he stands outside the doors. “Come in,” Kathryn calls.

Maybe it’s just him, but the room feels warm, aglow, Kathryn most of all. Or it could be the candles on the table. He starts to walk to her and she meets him halfway for a long, lingering kiss, stroking his cheek with her hand when they finally separate. “That’s my favorite hello,” he says. There’s a wisp of hair falling across her face; when he goes to tuck it behind her ear, he realizes that her hair is—was—in some kind of more complicated braid before he threaded his hands into it during the kiss. “You look beautiful—I’m sorry about your hair.” She does look beautiful, now that he’s allowed to say it aloud. He always loves her in her uniform, but there’s something special about her now, when she’s in ordinary civilian clothes, this version of her that only he sees.

She kisses him again. “It may be my favorite version of hello too,” she tells him. She tugs at the collar of his shirt. “You dressed up.”

“Well. I suppose I’ve been thinking of this as—a first date,” he admits. “And my mother taught me to dress nicely for a first date.”

“Only the first?” Kathryn laughs and smooths her hand over the cloth covering his shoulder, his chest. “Come on, we shouldn’t let dinner get cold.”

Chakotay looks at the dinner table. “Kathryn, I don’t want to get off on the wrong foot—” she smiles at that “—but you cannot persuade me that you cooked this meal.”

Her eyes are dancing as she sits down. “Why do you say that?”

“It looks edible.” He lifts a few grains of rice on his fork to demonstrate. “This rice hasn’t turned to liquid.”

“That was *once!*”

“Because I never let you make the rice again,” he points out.

“I was never given the opportunity to redeem myself,” she grouses. She lifts a bottle of wine out of its chiller. “Do you want some? If there’s one culinary skill I do have, it’s pouring wine.”

“I’m familiar with that one.” Chakotay smiles at her, and it turns into a silly grin when she smiles back. He offers her his empty glass.

“You’re right, I didn’t cook this. In the replicator or outside of it.” He slides his leg against her bare one under the table and she bobbles the wine a little as she pours, splashes a few drops on his hand. Chakotay brings his hand to his mouth and licks the wine off, slowly, his eyes fixed on her. Kathryn flushes red. “Someone else went to a lot of trouble preparing this meal,” she says. “We should eat it.”

It’s not exactly the first thing on his mind, but it does smell good. “To whoever replicated the meal,” he says, raising his glass. Kathryn toasts with the wine bottle and then fills her glass to take a sip, and he suppresses the laugh. “I don’t know why this feels so strange,” he admits. “We’re the same people we were this morning.”

Kathryn offers her hand across the table. He interlaces his fingers with her own and leans forward to kiss their joined knuckles. “Yes,” she says. “But it does feel different.” She looks down at the food. “I’m not really hungry.”

“No. Neither am I.” He’s not sure which of them moves first, but the food gets pushed to the side, the candle wobbling dangerously, and he lifts Kathryn onto the table so he can stand between her legs. He kisses her, one hand on the back of her head and the other running down her spine to pull her flush against him, and she licks into his mouth greedily. Her tongue is soft against his, tart with wine. He’s ruined her braid entirely now, the curtain of hair tumbling loose down her back as she presses close against him. Chakotay feels her fingers against his chest and realizes that she’s unbuttoning his shirt, or at least trying. He doesn’t want to take his hands off her, though, and breaks away from her lips only long enough to kiss his way down her neck—and what a revelation, to do this without concern for the consequences. Kathryn arches her neck into his kisses, tilts her head to bare her neck so that he can go further, bite a little at the shape of her collarbone before kissing back up her throat to find her mouth again.

A button pops off his shirt and Kathryn shoves the shirt open further, down his shoulders, pulls back and says “Sorry—” before he occupies her mouth. He jolts at the feeling of her hands against his bare chest as she strokes her hands over his skin, roaming from his shoulders across his nipples and one hand along his side. The other hand slides further down, down until her fingers find their way to the skin beneath the waist of his pants. She pulls her hand out, grabs the buckle of his belt and tugs him firmly against her and he feels like he’s going to climb out of his skin with wanting her. When she starts to unbuckle the belt, he gasps in a sharp breath and grabs her thighs through the thin fabric of her dress; she spreads her legs wider as she finishes unbuckling his belt and drags it out of the belt loops. He finds himself pulling her dress higher up her legs, high enough that he can get his hands on her bare skin and feels her react.

“Wait, wait,” he says thickly. “Not on the table.” He sees the understanding in Kathryn’s eyes, that he doesn’t want this to be like the other times they’ve found the nearest flat surface, and somehow he forces himself to step back.

Kathryn slides down from the table and she’s breathing fast. “The bed is this way,” she says, and leads him through the doors to her bedroom. Another time, he might look around to see what she’s chosen to keep closest to her, but not this time, not when she turns her back to him and says, “Help me with the zipper?”

He gathers her hair in one hand, lays it over her shoulder out of the way, and finds the tiny zipper to unfasten her dress. He takes his time, laying a hot kiss on each new inch of exposed skin to make her shiver, undoes the clasp on her bra when he reaches it, until the dress is fully open and it falls away in front of her. When she starts to turn, he pulls her back against his chest and wraps one arm around her, brushes his fingers lightly across a nipple, back and forth, almost teasing. He slides his other hand slowly, so slowly, into the front of her underwear, down through the coarse hair until he can lay a finger softly on her clit and keep it there, unmoving. “Do you know how long I’ve wanted to do this and know you’ll still be here afterward?” He breathes the words into her ear and she shivers again, tries to buck against his finger to get any friction at all. When he moves his finger with her, she rubs back against his cock instead, still trapped in his pants.

“I’ve always wanted it,” she admits, and her voice is very soft. “It just took me a while to accept it.” She takes his fingers from her nipple and sucks them into her mouth the way she did in the kitchen weeks ago, tongue curling around his fingertips and tracing the space between his fingers, and he wants to drag his pants down so that he can feel her hot skin on his cock, but he’s unwilling to take his finger off her clit. He lets her have a little friction—not enough to come, he wants to see her face when she does, but enough that she gasps and sucks harder at his fingers before moving his hand back to her breast and using her own fingers to close his around her nipple, wet and harder than before. “You’re going to kill me.” She reaches back and grips his hips.

“Kathryn,” and it’s almost a plea now. She hooks her fingers in his waistband and works his pants and underwear down in short tugs, just low enough to free his cock. He jerks forward almost automatically at the sudden change, the head of his cock slipping against her underwear just where he would want to be. It would be easy, so easy, to pull her underwear to the side and push inside her—he knows how wet she is, can feel her trembling with want against him. “On the bed,” he says, and releases her. The loss of contact is worth it for the sight of her sprawled on the bed, underwear skimmed off and thrown to one side. “Tell me what you want,” he says, and it was never the gas or the pollen or the paint that made him offer her anything, anything she wants.

“Come here.” They tangle together on the bed for a moment, skin on skin, him seeking her mouth with his own, until she wins and pushes him onto his back. “Stay here,” she says, and her smile is blinding, wicked, as though he could ever disobey her. Kathryn slides down his body slowly until she reaches his hips. His cock bumps against her lips and her tongue darts out to lick the little bit of wetness that he’s left there. Chakotay groans and before he can move, Kathryn has pinned his hips to the bed. That’s when she sucks his cock into her mouth and it’s good that she’s holding him down because the only thing in his mind is to get deeper into that wet heat as she bobs her head up and down. He fists his hands in the sheets to keep from grabbing her hair, especially when she takes his cock deep and then stops moving, looks up his body and sees him watching her; she holds his gaze and flutters her tongue under the head of his cock.

His entire body tightens and he gasps, “Not going to—last if—” Kathryn holds his cock in place as she pulls off, mouths wetly at the head a few more time until he gasps again and very nearly comes, and then she stops. “Please—”

She climbs up his body again and kisses him, deep and hard, as she positions herself above his cock. He’s desperate to be back inside her, but she lowers herself only enough to take the tip of his cock inside, then lift up, over and over, and he won’t come from this but how he wants to. He thrusts up almost frantically every time, until without warning she does slide all the way down on his cock. Kathryn throws her head back and moans at the feeling and he’s losing all conscious thought but he wants her to come like this, when he’s buried inside her. She rides him like that, hips rolling, taking him as deep as she can get him, and he’s so close to coming when she says “Don’t you dare come without me” and he has to reach down to grip the base of his cock tightly. Now every stroke rubs her clit against his knuckles and she’s gasping, he can feel her tightening around him. He lets go just as she comes hard around him, grabs her hips to hold her in place as she draws it out of him and he comes with her.

Kathryn stays like that, keeps him inside her. He has barely enough coherence to press his fingers to her clit again, work at it until she contracts around him again and cries out and then more or less collapses on his chest. They breathe together, hearts beating, for a long time. Then Kathryn mouths what might be a kiss on his chest and rolls off him onto the nearby space on the sheets. “At least we made it most of the way onto the bed,” she says. The blood is still pounding through Chakotay—he feels like he’s been running for hours—but he’s aware enough to realize that they’re lying perpendicular to the bed.

“Next time.” That’s about as much as he can manage to say right now.

“Do you want the first shower?”

It’s a mystery to Chakotay how she can string together this many words. “You go,” he says. He loses track of time lying there and is startled when Kathryn reappears, clean and in some kind of nightgown. He nods, gets up, and stumbles to the sonic shower, has to turn it down to its lowest setting because every inch of his skin feels hyper-sensitive right now. When he comes out of the shower, Kathryn has stripped the bed and is holding a stack of clean sheets. “Were we that bad?”

She looks a little embarrassed. “Only a little. But I thought it would be—nice. To make the bed together. If you’re going to stay here.”

“I’ll stay until you get sick of me,” he says honestly. Kathryn smiles a silly little smile and he loves it, loves her, loves that this is what she wants to do. She unfolds the bottom sheet and flaps it a little at him until he catches one side and stretches it out across the bed. “I should warn you, I used to get in trouble at the Academy for how I made my bed.”

“Oh?” She’s already tucking the corners perfectly into place. “That’s how my father insisted I make my bed when I was growing up.”

“I thought it was a waste of time, worrying about how I made my bed, whether my boots were polished, that kind of thing. I was very resentful.” He matches her corners anyway, and she unfolds the flat sheet. “I collected a lot of demerits before I learned to stop fighting every

little thing so hard.” He helps her arrange it properly and then spread the top blanket across the bed.

Kathryn picks up one of the pillows and plumps it a little, then drops it back into place. “Do you have a side?”

It takes him a minute to realize she means of the bed. “Not really. I usually just sleep in the center.” He tries to remember which side he preferred a long time ago, the last time he regularly shared a bed with someone. “Left, I think. You?”

She smiles wryly. “Left.”

“Ah, then I’ve just realized, I always preferred the right side.” It’s an easy thing to say and it makes her laugh. They get into bed on the sides they’ve claimed and he finds that she’s lying on her side just looking at him. He rolls to face her. “You’re smiling an awful lot for someone trapped in a quadrant full of people and—and space oddities trying to kill us.”

Kathryn makes a show of trying to look more solemn before her face breaks into a smile again. “I blame my first officer,” she says.

“Oh?”

“Well, I’m in love with him.”

There’s an entirely pleasant ringing in his ears. He moves closer, until their foreheads are almost touching. “He’s in love with you too.” He’s smiling so broadly that it’s hard to shape his lips properly for a kiss. Somehow he manages it.

Kathryn snuggles closer to him and tucks her head under his chin. “I should warn you, I’m not a morning person.”

He can feel her breath as she says it, and he wraps his arm around her to hold her close. “I’ll have the coffee ready.”

Chakotay has almost drifted off to sleep when Kathryn says, “Oh no!” Before he can leap out of bed and try to find a phaser, she adds, “I forgot about dinner!”

He laughs against her hair. “From now on, I’m in charge of the meals.”

Kathryn murmurs, “For the rest of our *lives* you’re in charge of the meals.”

“For the rest of our lives,” he agrees. “Hopefully a very long time.”

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