

Where No One Can Hear You Scream

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Where No One Can Hear You Scream

by [nostalgia](#)

Summary

Kathryn Janeway versus the Delta Quadrant.

Notes

Rating is for Themes rather than Content as such. Timeline is vague, happening during S4... somewhere. In the gaps, mostly.

Pls heed the tags -- this deals with mental illness (depression) and there are some thoughts of self-harm involved. Best avoided if that's going to upset you, x. Also I do mean it about there being a lot of angst.

When they reach Borg space Kathryn stops sleeping as much, knocks an hour off her usual nightly quota simply by changing the timing of her alarm. No problem. She stays up later too, trying to think of ways to get past the hive.

Kathryn is tired in Borg space, always.

She finds herself swaying on her feet, barely aware of the movement. She has to stay awake, she has to stay alert. She thinks about the Borg, and it quickly becomes a waking nightmare. There are millions of them, billions, swarming around her, ready to sting. They whirr and they buzz, half machine and half horror, and they will never stop coming for her.

She feels a hand on her shoulder and she is suddenly back on the bridge. "You need to sleep," says Chakotay, very softly, keeping her failure from the ears of the crew. She mentally shakes herself, lets him push her towards her ready-room, subtle but determined. She can rest there for a while, she can let herself close her eyes for a time. She doesn't thank him, because that would mean admitting that she has been defeated by human weakness.

Her eyelids feel heavy. She really does need some sleep.

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He also keeps her up-to-date with all the latest gossip (nobody else gossips around the captain) – "Tom and B'Elanna?"

He nods. "Tom and B'Elanna."

"That sounds like quite the powder-keg."

"Perhaps they'll cancel each other out."

She laughs. "They'll fight constantly."

"And then they'll make up."

She knows what that implies and she feels guilty for thinking about it. Gossip always makes people think about these things, and now she

wonders what people say about *her*. Without meaning to she glances at Chakotay. Do people think she... or that they... Do people *assume*? Has anyone guessed that she *wants*? That she *wishes*?

Does *he* know how much she has to repress?

She changes the subject.

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She isn't careful enough about touch. She feels him, solid and warm under her hand, and each time she tells herself that she won't do it again. She won't let herself be tempted. But she has always been a tactile person, and surely it would look worse if she *stopped* touching him. Another thing for the crew to notice, to spread rumours about (he'll hear them, she won't).

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The Delta Quadrant is far too deadly. She has already lost too many of her crew here – if she loses another she might just break, and then the rest of them will be lost as well.

She does her her best to keep them all safe, but space has always been dangerous, and it always will be. There's only so much she can do against the universe itself.

And so she does, inevitably, lose another.

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The ship is still intact but her appearance is not. There is soot on her skin and on her uniform, and her hair has fallen down around her face. It gets in her way, and once again she thinks that long hair is an unacceptable indulgence, something else that she should give up in the name of practicality.

"It's more trouble than it's worth," she complains, pinning it back together.

"I like it," he tells her. He touches a loose strand, pushes it behind her ear with far too intimate a gesture. "It suits you." He smiles at her and she feels herself starting to melt.

She gets her hair cut the next day.

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He built her a bathtub once, a fact that she has tried very hard to forget. It was too thoughtful. Full of thought. He thought about her, too much. She does her best not to have her own thoughts about those days, the far-away never-was of New Earth and everything that *did not* happen between them there. *Did not*, because the alternative is painful – that she set something (someone) aside for the good of her crew and that she will never get it (him) back.

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In da Vinci's workshop she works by holographic candlelight, reading reports in the most tranquil place available. The light from the candles is just a fraction too dim – it might be bad for her eyes, she should ask the Doctor. (She won't.)

She looks up and her gaze fixes on the flickering flame. There's something strangely erotic about it, the way it writhes as it burns. She wants to touch it. She reaches out and is disappointed by the lack of blistering heat – it isn't real, she should have remembered that. She thinks about turning off the safeties, about letting it harm her. She holds her palm over the cold flame, daydreams about the potential for pain.

Maestro Leonardo interrupts: "Catarina! You'll be hurt!"

She pulls her hand away, caught. "It's alright," she says, "I'm okay."

She hasn't been okay for a long time. So many things have burned her over the past few years, have left her charred and smoking. She is ashes.

She is never going to get home, even if she gets ship and remaining crew back in one piece. She belongs here now, has become part of the Delta Quadrant.

She should probably tell someone, so that they know where to bury her. (She won't.)

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Chakotay is a metre away from her and it's not far enough. She could cross that space in a moment, in the blink of an eye. She could be on him in an instant. Distance reduces temptation, so she takes a step back. It's hardly any extra separation but it reminds her to stay where she is. She needs to stand still, for once in her life. She needs to stand still on a ship that is constantly moving, taking them homewards, back to other lives. Back, in her case, to Mark. She still loves him, after all. She would be content with him. She would be happy. Happier. Happiest.

She would be happiest of all if Chakotay wasn't standing so close to her. It bothers her. He bothers her. He puts ideas in her head without meaning to, simply by being nearby. She is well-practised at ignoring those ideas, but pushing them away takes time, distracts her from more important matters. She can't afford this kind of weakness, but she doesn't know how to cut it from her heart. She would if she could, oh, she most certainly would. She'd take the whole heart out if that would help. It's not like she really needs it.

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She knows the ship perfectly, could walk it blind, end-to-end without stumbling. It is *hers*, and so little else is.

Chakotay is hers, but he is also emphatically *not* hers – loyal to a fault, but not her lover. Never her lover, even if she dreams about it sometimes. Almost remembers it, even, as though it happened in another life.

Sometimes she pretends that her own hands are his, allows herself to feel something. In the dark, alone, she has what she isn't allowed in the waking hours. It's a poor substitute for reality, but it'll do. She can't ask for more, certainly can't expect it. She entertains fantasies of weakness, of giving in to temptation. In her daydreams she can be flawed, imperfect, human, and nobody will suffer as a result.

She can't seduce him without courting disaster as well. One way or another it would lead them both to ruin. Fraternisation is frowned upon for a reason, especially for someone in her position.

She thinks – she knows – that he would kiss if her she'd let him. This means she has to be the strong one, the one to say no. The one to stop it starting.

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She's the one who starts it. Not even accidentally. She touches him, like she always does, and this time she doesn't move her hand away until he looks at her, confused, and sees the intent in her eyes. She narrows the gap between them until it's nothing, and then she kisses him. He follows her lead, responds in kind. She's the one who starts everything, one way or another.

She's also the one who ends it. She moves her mouth from his, just a centimetre or two – she can't bear to move further – and she whispers, "No."

He freezes in place for a moment, and then he lifts his hands from her waist, releases her. He steps back.

When she judges that there is sufficient space between them to prevent further mistakes, she speaks again. "I'm sorry," she says.

He says, "Kathryn -" and she holds up a hand to silence him.

"This isn't something that can happen. It's an impossible step."

"We're good at the impossible," he counters. "We made it this far."

"Luck," she says, though she doesn't really believe in it. "Which always runs out, sooner or later."

He's hurt and she's numb, and she isn't sure which is the better part of the deal. She sends him away before she can change her mind about luck. Maybe it could work. Maybe it would make them stronger. Maybe...

There is always a 'maybe,' and a lack of certainty is of no use to anyone.

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Mark is not waiting for her. When they reach home she will disembark alone, to meet no one.

She can't really blame him – he thought she was dead, after all. Everyone thought she was dead. The only people who thought of her as alive are here, around her, cradled within the fragile hull of this ship. There are so many of them, and so few. They seem more real than the people back home, who for the most part may as well not exist. All they really have is each other. It's probably enough, at least for now.

Her abandoned coffee sits on her desk, now cold. Since when has she been too distracted for coffee? It keeps her going, it fuels her. It used to, anyway. She runs on an empty tank now, nothing can fill the space where her heart used to be. Perhaps she shouldn't have ripped it out.

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There is a different kind of tension between them now. The air that surrounds them is loaded with something oppressive and forbidden, it is heavy and thick.

The bridge becomes a battleground of pointed silences and occasional passive-aggressive remarks. He irritates her, and it irritates her even more that she still wants him despite it all. That's what makes her so cruel.

She doesn't touch him any more, and she doesn't need to hear the associated rumours to know that they exist.

They avoid making eye contact, and when he has to look in her direction he looks right through her. She does the same. It's safer that way.

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The Doctor is as charming as ever: "Physically, you're in perfect health. Mentally, you're a wreck."

"Is it really that bad?"

He shrugs. "You're stranded in space thousands of light-years from home and you're directly responsible for a starship with 147 people on board. Frankly, I'd be more worried if you *weren't* suffering from the effects of severe stress."

"I just need..." She stops. She doesn't know what she needs. She knows what she *wants*, but none of those things would fix her. She closes her eyes, pinches the bridge of her nose. "I have to stay in control."

"I can give you an antidepressant," he says, "but I can't make the Delta Quadrant more appealing or less dangerous."

"I'm used to it," she lies, and she knows that she isn't convincing either of them. "We could be home in six months," is her next attempt, and it's equally implausible. She gives up.

He puts a hand on her shoulder, but he doesn't say anything else – apparently nobody thought to program him with comforting lies.

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Seven of Nine is the only one who is willing to risk raising the topic: "Commander Chakotay has offended you," she says, with the certainty of a drone set to a task.

"Where did you hear that?"

"It's common knowledge."

Kathryn is amused despite everything. "Seven, have you been listening to gossip?"

"Unaddressed tensions within the command structure will weaken your collective and jeopardise this vessel."

"There are... issues between us," says Kathryn, carefully.

"Resolve them."

"That's easier said than done. We'd have to talk to each other."

"Then talk," says Seven, as though it were simple.

Perhaps it is.

-

She summons him to her ready-room. He looks wary, and she can't blame him for that.

"I've prepared a speech," she tells him. "About duty and the common good. Regulations. The integrity of the chain of command."

"I'm sure it's compelling," he says, too politely. He stands straight, hands clasped in front of him.

"I don't want to patronise you."

"But you're going to."

She sighs. "Probably," she admits.

"Then go ahead."

"I have to stay aloof," she begins. "I can't just enter into a relationship with... with anyone. I have to stand alone."

"For the rest of your life?"

"Yes," she says, "if need be."

"That doesn't sound fair."

"It isn't. The regulations weren't written for our predicament."

"And the rest of the crew?"

She shrugs. "I'll turn a blind eye. They didn't sign up for a lifetime."

"Neither did you," he reminds her.

She sighs again. "I'm trying to fix things here. This is the best I can do. Take it or leave it."

He relents. "I'll take it. But I don't like it."

"Nobody said you had to. I don't like it either, I just accept it."

"That's depressing," he says.

Kathryn nods. "Yes, it is. But isn't everything?"

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She lies awake and listens to her ship, to the omnipresent hum of the technology that keeps them all alive. She doesn't know if she could sleep without that noise now. It comforts her.

She touches the wall by her bed, feels the vibrations in the bulkhead. The engines are running, they are on their way home. Everything is as it should be.

She feels sure now that she'll die with her ship. They will go down together, in flames. Part of her looks forward to it.

On the other side of the wall sleeps Chakotay, and the barrier is welcome. She will never give in, will never go to him and ask for love. They will spend every night apart, and this is good.

Things could be worse. Things could be a lot worse. It's important to remember that.

She won't let herself forget.

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