

Provocation

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Provocation

by [nostalgia](#)

Summary

"You're spoiling for a fight."

Kathryn Janeway can't afford to lose her edge.

Chakotay argues quietly. It's the sort of thing they recommend on conflict-resolution courses, and it comes to him naturally as well. Even when he shouts he barely raises his voice. And it works, he's popular with the crew.

Kathryn hates it.

He prefers to be alone when they argue, to hide their disunity, as it could ever be concealed. (As she follows him to the briefing-room she sees Tom glance back at them worriedly as though he were watching his parents divorce again.)

The door hisses closed behind her and he turns to face her.

She prompts him: "Well?"

"We can't help the Umadi and not the Nadera. It would change the balance of power."

"I know," she says, "that's why I suggested it."

He seems surprised. "Isn't that exactly the type of situation we usually try to avoid?"

"The Nadera have a long history of territorial aggression, the rest of the region could do with an advantage over them, in case they start conquering neighbouring planets again."

"It's not our place to interfere with Delta Quadrant politics."

"Isn't it?" *Fight me*, she thinks, *I could use the adrenaline*.

Once they were lovers, and that was a mistake – he stopped arguing even quietly, started phrasing his objections more delicately. But Kathryn likes opposition and losing the conflict cooled her desire. Chakotay doesn't seem to know that's why she ended it. He doesn't seem to know that's why she's started sleeping with Seven of Nine.

The argument is invigorating and when she's had enough she lets him win. If he realises that she proposed an absurd course of action just to start a fight he doesn't show it. She rewards him with her hand on his chest to push him away and draw him closer. *Good work*, she thinks, *this is what you're here for*.

Back on the bridge Harry looks worried, but there's no fun in provoking an ensign. She smiles tightly to reassure him and returns to her seat. She looks around, checks that everyone is in their proper place.

She feels good.

The Borg don't argue with each other, and they don't take resistance from others. (How dull.) But Seven is no longer a drone and the culture-shock makes her argumentative.

Kathryn finds imaginary faults in Seven's planned updates to the astrometrics lab, aims to infuriate with her own suggestions. It's not much but it keeps her entertained.

"You are in a confrontational mood," observes Seven.

"Oh, you noticed?"

"Have I offended you in some way?"

"No more than usual."

Seven stands tall and straight as ever, doesn't so much as blink. "I must return to my duties."

She eyes her with intent – Seven is intelligent, beautiful, and annoyed. "Not yet," says Kathryn, with a twinkle in her eye. "Keep me company for a while."

Seven hesitates, but she says, "Of course."

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Kathryn stays on the bridge with a bleeding wound on her forehead to see if anyone will stand up to her about it.

Seven is the first to voice concern. "You are damaged," she says, but Kathryn waves her away.

"I'll worry about that later." The ship shakes again as another torpedo hits. She wipes blood away from her eyes. "Target their weapons."

She feels rather than hears Chakotay appearing at her side. "Captain, you need to go to sickbay."

"Later," she repeats.

"Now," he counters, and suddenly she longs for him again.

She stares at his mouth, licks her lips. "You have the bridge."

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She sits impatiently in sickbay, the EMH fluttering around her with a medical tricorder.

"Is it serious?" she asks.

"Almost."

"'Almost' is a light-year away, Doctor." She hops down off the biobed. "I need to get back to the bridge."

He steps in front of her to block her retreat. "Would you like me to relieve you of duty?" he asks, dryly.

Go on, she thinks, *try it*. "You said it isn't serious."

"There is a vast array of possibilities between 'serious' and 'fine,'" he says. "I won't risk you worsening your condition. You can stay here until I'm satisfied that you're going to be all right."

She almost smiles. She may be the only person on the ship who delights in his brusqueness and lack of patience. She's glad she never let B'Elanna reprogram his bedside manner.

He sighs. "Captain, I don't want to fight you."

Too bad. "Then work faster."

"Are all ships captains this impossible?"

Now she lets herself smile. "I do my best."

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“And if the Vadcury do not accept this deal?”

She lifts a hand, gestures casually. “Then we fight our way through.”

The changes in Tuvok’s expression would be imperceptible to most but she has worked with him for years. “You disapprove,” she says.

“Navigating around Vadcury space would add only three months to our journey. It is not logical to risk the safety of the crew for such a minor inconvenience.”

“Tell that to whoever dies two months before we reach the Alpha Quadrant.”

He raises an eyebrow (*oh, he’s upset!*) and Kathryn waits for what passes for an argument with a Vulcan.

“I believe you are attempting to mislead me.”

She feigns surprise. “What do you mean?”

“It is not the Vadcury you wish to provoke, but rather myself.”

“I never knew you studied psychology, Tuvok,” she quips.

“I did not. However, I am familiar with both your personality and your usual behaviour.”

“Get to the point.”

He tilts his head, just slightly. She knows it means he’s worried. “Captain, is there anything you wish to discuss?”

She considers her options. He really does know her far too well. She retreats: “We’ll go the long way round.”

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It’s tiring, having to be right all the time. She can’t relax for a moment. Even when she sleeps she dreams of a faster route home. Maybe there’s a wormhole, maybe there’s something else they can steal from the Borg.

She can’t afford to lose her edge.

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“Dismissed,” she says, turning away from Chakotay.

She doesn’t hear him move. *Interesting*. She turns back to look at him. “Is there something else?”

“Captain,” he says, and then, “Kathryn.” (*Make up your mind, Chakotay, I can’t be both.*)

She waits, forces him to fill the silence. “It’s a bad plan,” he says, bluntly. “But I think you know that.”

“That’s quite the accusation,” she says quietly, hands on hips. “Do you think I want to get us all killed?”

He shakes his head. “No,” he says, “I think you’re spoiling for a fight.”

So, her men have talked.

Chakotay will have planned his half of this conversation in advance, he’ll have worried over the wording and thought up his replies to her responses. This could be quite the spectacular argument, but it’s not one she’s looking forward to.

“Is something wrong?” he asks.

She could laugh. “Everything’s wrong, Chakotay. We’re thousands of light-years from home and we won’t all make it back. We ration out our resources. I have a pet Borg.”

“Which makes it all the more important that we don’t fight amongst ourselves.”

She shrugs. “It keeps me on my toes.”

“It’s not just that.”

He’s right. “I enjoy it.”

He draws a breath, exasperated. “So you’ll just keep antagonising everyone until you find a new hobby? That’s not healthy, for any of us.”

She says, very calmly, “Do you think I’m unfit to lead this crew?”

He should lie, but he won’t. He gaze flicks downwards. “No.”

“Then get used to it.” She wants coffee, as strong as the replicator can make it. “Dismissed,” she says again, and this time he obeys.

When she’s alone again she takes her coffee to the window and stares out at the unfamiliar stars.

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