

# Seldom Kings Enjoy

*My crown is in my heart, not on my head;  
Not decked with diamonds and Indian stones,  
Nor to be seen: my crown is called content:  
A crown it is that seldom kings enjoy.*  
Henry VI Part 3 by William Shakespeare

This story isn't beta'd. Still. I forgot to get that done as well. Rated PG

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"Captain Janeway?"

"I'm sorry, sir, I didn't catch that last question."

"Captain," the admiral took a deep breath, clearly annoyed at her inattentiveness. "The question was, how was the risk status of the Maquis members assessed?"

"Oh, yes sir. We determined that..." And she managed to put together an almost coherent answer, despite her thoughts being somewhere else, mainly Indiana.

Her one daily permitted call had been from Phoebe this morning and her sister wasn't her usual ebullient self. She was evasive and almost cagey. Janeway was convinced that it meant that something was wrong at home and Phoebe was trying to keep the news away from her, just like she and her mother had done for the previous two calls. It could only be about Gretchen's health, she reasoned to herself. She tried not to be disappointed when Phoebe's face appeared on the comm screen, as she was expecting and *hoping* for their mother. But Gretchen Janeway had mentioned something last week about 'feeling a little off' and now instead of her call, she'd got a somewhat uncommunicative sister instead.

"Mom's feeling the strain." Was what Phoebe *actually* said.

Those words were tormenting her now. Her mother was elderly. Perhaps not well. As these weeks had crawled by, she became more convinced that her mother's illness was serious and her fault. All she had ever managed to do was screw things up. It was probably due to one of her mistakes that her own father and fiancé had perished on Tau Ceti, just because she wasn't quick or smart enough to get that transporter working after the crash. Then Gretchen had experienced the torment of thinking that she and her ship had been lost and all the crew killed, only to pop up again but be decades away from her. Then, Voyager finally makes it back to the Alpha Quadrant but investigations into her questionable performances had only added to the worry and grief that her mother must be feeling.

The rest of the session was just as bad as the beginning. Janeway couldn't concentrate and she was pretty sure that the people in the meeting hadn't been impressed.

As she once again made a vague stab at answering the increasingly petty and almost pointless questions, her thoughts began to wander once more.

She tried telling herself that it was the frustration with the continued isolation that was causing her worries and concerns to escalate but damn it, her mother *had said* she was feeling poorly the other day and there was Phoebe avoiding questions and continually changing the subject.

“Captain!”

Voyager’s return had been, of course, unexpected for the Federation and Starfleet and they hadn’t quite known what to do with them all. A few frenzied hours of comm calls later and the whole crew had been beamed to New Zealand. Not, thankfully, the Auckland correctional facility, but rather a semi-abandoned ‘Fleet training and conference facility in the outskirts of Dunedin.

The authority’s surprise at their return to the Alpha Quadrant was only surpassed by her own. In those last frantic few minutes she had fully expected that the ship would either sustain a mortal blow from the Borg or she would have to set the self destruct. When neither outcome eventuated, she was relieved and more than a little nonplussed and eventually delighted. Once she got over the shock.

But that was weeks ago and the euphoria had well and truly worn off and now it was December 23rd. Nearly Christmas and she couldn’t see anything changing in her situation anytime soon. A five second transport from home and it never seemed so far away. It would be snowing in Indiana. Gretchen Janeway, assuming she was well enough, would be baking in preparation for Christmas and the house would smell...*fantastic*.

She remembered discussing the season with Chakotay a couple of years ago. Before their relationship had fallen apart.

*Janeway had tried to explain the celebration to Chakotay after Tom had announced a Christmas party to be held in the holodeck.*

*“I always thought Christmas had some religious connection,” said a puzzled Chakotay as Janeway handed him the PADD with her approval of the event.*

*“Well, I guess it still has for some Earth communities, but in the Janeway household, and I imagine the Paris one as well,” she motioned for Chakotay to take a seat and handed him the tea she had just replicated. “It was a special family time. Usually because my father would be home, my mom would make special seasonal food, friends and relatives would drop by and, of course, the presents!” Janeway looked into her coffee cup. “But Phoebe and I were happy just to have Dad home.” She laughed and added. “Not that the gifts weren’t good too.”*

*“Sounds wonderful.”*

*“It was...magical.”*

*“You’ll get us home, Kathryn.”*

*She looked at him, touched yet again by his never ending faith in her.*

*“Thanks, Chakotay. Our first one back, you have to come to Indiana and experience it yourself.” She gave him a sly smile. “My mother will love you.”*

*“I’d like that very much.”*

Except of course, that wasn’t going to happen. She hadn’t seen him in weeks and he was barely talking to her anyway. Their friendship had been shaky at best during the last few months but she had stupidly raised his relationship with Seven during the final few hours on board the ship - before everything went *totally* to hell - and it hadn’t gone well.

She hoped to herself that it hadn’t been jealousy that made her bring the situation up, especially at

that particularly emotional time, but now with solid reflection on all her screw ups over the last months and years, she wasn't so sure. There was no one in two quadrants that she trusted as much as Chakotay and if she had her time over, letting their friendship falter was on her list of things she needed to fix.

It was a long list.

*"Captain Janeway!"*

At first the sessions had addressed her Delta Quadrant experiences and dubious decisions in chronological order. They had started with the Caretaker and she initially had taken some comfort in the fact that they debated among themselves about whether or not her actions had violated the Prime Directive.

However, things had gone steadily downhill from there.

Her only consolation was that they had yet to inform her of the outcome of the inquiry in to her appalling behavior during the Equinox fiasco. That alone should get her a nice vacation at the place she'd taken Tom from seven years ago. She wondered whether she'd get a chance to ask him for any tips about surviving there before she was sent down. Or up. For a few seconds she tried to remember enough New Zealand geography to remember where Auckland was in relation to Dunedin. She hoped it was north, so that it would at least *seem* a little warmer.

They had just spent an inordinate amount of time on discussing the brainwashing of the majority of crew on Quarra, so she hoped that end of her debrief was close. She wondered vaguely if she should ask for a lawyer.

*"Captain Janeway! Please pay attention."*

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The meeting finally ended and Janeway picked up her PADDs and made her way to the next one. She wondered how many more transgressions she could be questioned and reprimanded about.

The dressing down could have been worse, she thought, but the lack of *individual assessment* plans for the crew had been deemed to be worse than a violation of the Prime Directive. Who knew?

If the hearing with the Federation's Administrative Personnel and Development Strategy committee had been a few weeks earlier, she may have mustered up enough enthusiasm or indignation to question whether she should have done the reports before or during battles with the Kazon.

As it was, she just could not be bothered with the blowhard moron who was in charge of the so called strategy for developing personnel. The pompous little weasel. She had ceased to be shocked by her own, albeit mental at this stage, insubordination.

Janeway entered the room and looked at the panel of officers sitting at the main desk trying to recall what the topic was. Luckily she remembered before they got underway - the first contact and away mission protocol review committee. One of the things she was grateful for she realized, after sitting through the first few meetings with this group, was that Chakotay was meticulous in keeping his records and followed procedure almost perfectly, although she had never had occasion to check his records. Which was another of the misdemeanours that upset the committee so.

The irony of Chakotay's perfect records was that her own, somewhat unconventional approach was

starkly highlighted. She almost smiled when they reviewed a mission where she'd insisted on being part of the away team over Chakotay's advice. His logs reflected that this had been in contradiction of protocol and the committee agreed, but Janeway could tell from Chakotay's voice that he was truly angry with her over her decision. However, the mission itself was so unremarkable that she couldn't even recall the details.

Looking back, she probably had only included herself due to cabin fever, which, she knew, was hardly a good excuse and she must apologize to Chakotay one day. If she ever got the chance, she'd add it to the list.

The admiral moderator had interrupted her explanation about the mission concerning the Vaadwaur to abruptly end the session and the rest of the committee just picked up their PADDs and left.

As usual there was no feedback at all from the panel besides pointing out where she had gone wrong, they had just asked questions, she'd answered and they'd moved on. Slowly.

She had given up asking about the crew about a week or so ago. There was no news at all about the Maquis and only the vaguest details about the 'real' crew, as one of the supervising panel had called them. At that comment, she had firmly replied that they were *all* her crew and she was concerned about every one of them.

Kathryn Janeway stormed down the corridor towards her temporary quarters. She had to get there before she said or did something that would land her in the brig. Ahead of the obvious schedule, anyway.

It was getting harder for Janeway to keep the faith; not so much the faith in her crew because that she knew was absolute, but certainly her faith in Starfleet, herself and the damned system.

Since Voyager had returned home, or what she had previously *thought* was home, Kathryn Janeway reflected that her world had seemed to just about fall apart.

Seven and Icheb had been taken into some kind of custody, supposedly to ensure that they didn't pose any threat to the Federation, but Janeway had a sinking feeling that they were considered high tech lab rats. The thought made her feel sick. Her many protests and requests for access or information about their status had been consistently denied.

The Maquis had all been separated from the rest of the crew as soon as they had been sequestered in this place. She had been able to glean tiny bits of information suggesting that the majority would be released, but her informant hadn't been able to give her any such assurance about Chakotay or even B'Elanna. There was to be a 'hearing' she had managed to find out from someone a while back. It could have already happened for all she knew. Janeway knew what that meant - they would find him guilty. Her panicked thoughts wavered between him being exiled, to him being jailed for a long time. Again, she had pleaded for information but had been firmly, if *usually* politely, turned down.

It hadn't helped when the person who was feeding her the meager tidbits of information had been transferred to DS4. She had heard nothing for over two weeks.

Initially she had dismissed these negative thoughts from her mind, but as her isolation continued, her pessimism grew. She had to concentrate to remember how long Voyager had been home. Nearly six weeks. Forty days of not seeing or being even allowed to talk to any of her crew, apart from Tal Celes.

Tal had been appointed her aide for the duration of her stay so far after the crewman's debrief had

only been a few days and although she had been well treated, Tal hadn't been informed about the status of any of the other crew either. Tal had also tried to find out information but had been effectively shut down and told to concentrate on her duties as assistant to her Captain. Janeway thanked Tal for her efforts but as the young officer had a spotless record on Voyager, she didn't want her to also get into trouble.

When Janeway cared enough about herself to give the situation any thought at all, she wondered if the whole isolated debrief setup wasn't designed to wear her down, erode her confidence and make her easier to handle. If so, it was working. But then, she couldn't think of a valid reason they would need to do that, and she returned to thinking that she just probably didn't fit in to this Star Fleet anymore. It was difficult to even muster concern or care for what she'd do if court martialed, being unable to rouse herself to give a damn one way or the other.

At least Starfleet had permitted Tuvok to return to Vulcan to start his treatment. Only it seemed it wasn't going very well. There were complications. T'Pol's last message hadn't said much but the little that was included wasn't encouraging.

Not being even able to talk to her mother was hard too. Of course, it was nothing compared to what the Maquis and her ex-Borg crew were probably going through but after the initial, yet all too brief, contact with her mother the first day, family contact was only permitted by letter or recorded message.

Before being transferred, her contact had told her that the Maquis had been moved to another facility and Janeway had immediately assumed the worst. Her imagination had come up with increasingly dire reasons why this had occurred, with the worst having them sent to a penal colony. Her only, albeit small, consolation was that she had ascertained that it was no longer procedure to send Maquis to Cardassia. It was only a small comfort.

The memory of the former Equinox crew being removed from the ship in restraints was another huge concern. Not for the first time did she regret, not only her own disgraceful behavior at that time, but also her first angry report on the incident.

Now it seemed all of her many mistakes, errors of judgement, crimes and dubious command decisions were coming home to roost.

After all she had put the crew through, all the lives lost for which she was responsible, it really looked to her as though those people were likely to suffer the biggest consequences.

Tuvok insane because she didn't get him home quickly enough, Chakotay sent to prison along with the other Maquis and Equinox crew. Seven and Icheb subjected to who knew what.

How had it all gone so wrong?

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Janeway had two hours before the next briefing, which was...slowing her pace a little as she walked to her quarters, she tried to recall... about the alliance she brokered with the Borg against Species 8472. She suppressed a sigh. This would be the third time she had discussed this portion of the journey, so at least her notes were all prepared. After the gruelling morning dissecting some of her worst administrative decisions, she wanted to at least *appear* fresh. A shower would definitely help.

Her eyes downcast and her shoulders slumped, she reflected that she probably bore very little resemblance to the Captain of Voyager while in the Delta Quadrant. No wonder that Star Fleet was

concentrating on her screw ups - they must be trying to figure out how the hell she'd managed to get the ship home at all without getting everyone killed, instead of just the unacceptable number of deaths she *was* responsible for.

"Captain, are you all right?" Tal Celes appeared from somewhere to be walking by her side.

At her crewman's question, Janeway stood up straight and tried to present a confident appearance.

"Just a bit tired, Celes. Thank you." Janeway reached over and patted the young woman's arm.

"Yes, Captain." Tal didn't look persuaded. "Do you need anything done for this afternoon's appointments?"

"No, I was just going back to my quarters for a PADD and a coffee."

"And some food, right?"

It hadn't taken long for Tal to turn into a Chakotay-like mother hen, Janeway reflected. Thoughts of Chakotay and his, and the other Maquis' fate, bought on yet another avalanche of worry and misery.

"I'll replicate a sandwich."

Tal looked unconvinced, but nodded.

"Yes, ma'am. Is there anything I can do to help with...anything?"

Janeway smiled, appreciating her crewman's concern. "Thanks, Celes, but I'll be fine. Take the rest of the day off."

They had reached Janeway's door. Tal hesitated, not wanting to leave.

"Really, Celes. I'll have something to eat and freshen up and take advantage of the unlimited replicator access again."

"Yes, Captain. But please call me if you need me."

"Of course. Have a nice afternoon. Shoo."

The young woman turned and somewhat reluctantly walked away.

Entering her quarters, Janeway shrugged off her jacket just inside the door and made straight for the replicator and ordered a coffee. Extra strong. At least the coffee was good. Taking a mouthful of the rich liquid, she placed it on the table in the middle of the room and walked to the one window in the room and blinked back tears of frustration as she stared at the bleak, gray and frigid ocean that was half a kilometer away. Resting her forehead against the cold glass for a few seconds, she then stood up straight, turned and picked up the mug, taking it with her to her bedroom.

Draining the last of the coffee, she turned back to the door of her quarters and picked up her just discarded jacket. She had changed her mind. A walk on the beach would be more refreshing than a shower anyway. Anything to get away from the building that had become her prison since they'd been back.

Her stride was purposeful walking towards the shore, but once she had reached the beach, it slowed as she once more started to brood about the status of her crew and even herself.

It was just so hard to judge how her sessions were going. Early in their incarceration, she thought things went pretty well. But as the days and weeks passed, the positive outlook she had initially held had slowly eroded. The only episodes they seemed to want to concentrate on were, she was the first to admit, her less than stellar performances.

After about two weeks, that seemed to Janeway like years, she stopped debating the committee member's assertions about her decisions. Now, the only time she bothered to argue any point was when anything negative was implied or stated that reflected negatively on the crew. She would accept no criticism of any of her crew, be they Starfleet, Maquis, Borg or Equinox members.

Of course, no one had actually come out and said that she would face court martial, but going by the topics of the sessions she had attended so far, she thought it only a matter of course.

As she meandered down the beach, she reflected that her last seven years of command had created a checklist of ways and means to not just break but to *demolish* the Prime Directive.

But, she couldn't honestly say that even now as she figured she was facing spending the rest of her life in prison, that she would compromise either the safety of her crew, or indeed the continued existence of a whole people in the case of the Ocampa, for her own freedom. Her conscience wouldn't allow it.

Only that she recognized the night skies, she couldn't believe that they were being held on Earth's southern hemisphere, in their *summer*. It was bitterly cold with the breeze whipping off the ocean and there seemed to be a constant dampness or drizzle in the air, despite the season. Even the beach, which was not sandy but covered in little stones, seemed more alien than some of the planets they had visited in the Delta Quadrant. Admiral Parkins made a joke about the weather being like San Francisco all year around at the start of every session he attended. The last time he'd said it yesterday morning she'd had to clench her fist and concentrate on the pain her fingernails cutting into her palm rather than shout at him to get a new joke. She vaguely wondered if she'd manage to show enough self control next meeting.

For the umpteenth time, she reflected that she was probably going to miss another Christmas. Then she pulled herself up short, suddenly feeling very selfish. Her crew had a lot more to lose than a vacation. The Maquis could be losing their freedom and the Equinox surviving crew as well. She couldn't even contemplate what Seven and Icheb were going through. Even the Doctor's status and future was uncertain.

The not knowing was driving her mad.

Distracted, she tripped and fell on the beach of stones that were all shiny and slippery due to the ceaseless drizzle that she finally became aware she was falling. Breaking her fall with an outstretched hand, Janeway noticed in a somewhat detached fashion, that she had managed to cut her palm open on probably the only sharp jagged rock on the whole beach. As she watched the small cut ooze blood, she reflected that this accident pretty much summed up her experiences since Voyager's return.

She looked down at her palm and blood from the cut. There was no pain. Maybe it was the cold.

As if responding to her dour mood, the mist had turned into a persistent rain, accompanied by a cold breeze.

Janeway thought it almost appropriate.

Taking a seat on a convenient boulder and indifferent to the wet, the nagging concerns for the crew again gripped her. Neither the rain penetrating her clothing, her bleeding hand or the chill due to the icy breeze troubled her as much as the nagging worry for the crew.

Although admittedly not put in restraints, the Maquis had been ushered to another area. Where that was, she wasn't told and despite repeated attempts for information, she was still no wiser. What did it mean? She tried at first to put a positive spin on this development, but as the days went mercilessly by, her thoughts got more and more dark. In the last few days she had convinced herself that they had been taken straight to prison.

The thought of B'Elanna and Miral being not only separated from Tom but actually imprisoned ate away at her. When she considered that Miral could be taken from her mother *and* Tom, Janeway felt physically ill.

And what of Tom? Had his parole been honored?

The Maquis imprisoned. The Equinox members too. Tom and B'Elanna's family split up. Seven and Icheb being subjected to god knew what. The Doctor and his mobile emitter - if they took that away from him, he was effectively imprisoned too. Gretchen Janeway worn down with worry and disappointment.

The list of her own mistakes constantly examined and her results were consistently coming up short of satisfactory. What a mess she'd made of everything.

How had she managed to screw up the lives of so many people?

Perhaps it would be better for all concerned if she had never taken the command of Voyager.

"Really, Aunt Kathy? Do you think so?"

Janeway didn't even look at the young...man now in front of her. "Please, Q. This isn't a good time." Her head fell into her one good non-bleeding hand. To be tormented by Q Junior at this right now was just the straw to break the camel's back. "Go play somewhere else. *Please.*"

She didn't even feel the icy rain running down the back of her uniform, soaking her through.

"But Aunt Kathy, I want to help," He sat next to her, his hand hesitantly going out in comfort to her shoulder, until she glared at him and he snatched it back. He just looked at her. His expression one of sympathy and apprehension.

"You want to help?" He nodded solemnly. "Free my crew, make sure they're safe and happy. Cure Tuvok."

Q just half shrugged and looked miserable.

"Oh, that's right, you can't *interfere*," her voice was laced with sarcasm and scorn. "Please, just go away, I don't want to play,"

"I could give you your wish,"

"But you just..."

"Not the crew one. The first one."



She just looked indifferent. "I can't be bothered with your antics right now, Q," she said with a sigh.

"Do you honestly wish you had never been on Voyager, Aunt Kathy? *Really?*"

"Let's face it Q, there are a hell of a lot of people who would be better off if I hadn't."

"Okay."

"Okay what?" she asked wearily.

"You didn't take command of Voyager." Q smiled.

Janeway blinked at him.

"Do you feel better now, Aunt Kathy?" he beamed at her and looked quite pleased with himself.

"Q? I'm really not in the mood for your games right now." She glanced at her PADD which had her briefing notes and reports. It was blank. She also noticed that her cut hand was no longer bleeding.

Only ten minutes until the next session and no report to present. Late to her final appointment and chewing out of the week and now it was starting to rain heavily as well.

The perfect end to a *perfect* day.

She looked up and Q was gone. She reflected that it was just as well, because she wasn't sure of the ramifications of trying to strangle a Q but she was fairly certain it wouldn't end well. Just like everything else she had touched in the last seven years.

Janeway moved quickly back into the building, which was surprisingly quiet for this time of the afternoon. She couldn't believe that Q had picked this moment to torment her, reflecting that whatever she might need at this time, babysitting the Q offspring again *wasn't* on the top of her list. Not even his father was this insensitive.

Automatically swinging into the meeting room, she stopped just inside the doorway and regarded the empty space. A glance to the clock on the wall indicated that she was only one minute late.

"Where the hell is everyone? Have I got the wrong room?" she asked of no one in particular.

"There is no debriefing, my darling Kathy, because Voyager has... because it's already happened."

"Oh my god," Janeway looked appalled. "They finished and they didn't tell me?" She slumped into the convener's chair, aghast at the implications of being excluded and then she eyed the older Q suspiciously. "What are you doing here? Come to collect your progeny, I hope."

"Ah, not exactly. Q just managed to snap himself out of existence." He sounded impressed. "I'm not sure any Q has ever done that before. If I wasn't so appalled, I'd be proud." She just stared at him. "Look, if you hadn't gone to the Delta Quadrant then we wouldn't have met and formed this overwhelming attraction between us..."

She glowered at him and wondered about killing *two* Q.

Q prattled on, oblivious to her reaction. "...and made Q jealous, thereby creating the opportunity to create Q in the first place. So nice work, Kathy. You have no idea how much paperwork this will cause me in the Continuum to get Junior back."

Janeway stared at him. For the first time in years, she felt that she just wanted to sit down and cry.

“Please. Q. I’m begging you. Leave me the *hell* alone.”

“Well, pardon us for helping.”

“*Helping?* Q, I swear...”

“Look, you were miserable, and Q tried to help. Admittedly, there may have been a few unforeseen side effects, but you’ve got your wish. You didn’t command Voyager.” Q crossed his arms. “You’d better be happy now, because I’m in for an administrative nightmare over this, the review meetings alone will...”

Janeway resigned herself to humoring, once again, an omnipotent being. “So, I never commanded Voyager?” she asked with a weary sigh. Might as well get this over with. She knew he wouldn’t let her alone until he’d done what he wanted to, whatever the hell that was.

“That’s what I’m trying to *tell* you, Kathy. You weren’t in command of the ship. Voyager got home seven years ago, so they’ve already had the debriefing.”

“Seven years ago?” Janeway’s tone was icy. “That can’t be right, because I had to destroy the array. How did we get home?”

“You didn’t. Because you decided not to leave the philosopher, which was stupid *and pointless* in retrospect. You weren’t the Captain of Voyager.” Q looked distracted and bored. “Try and keep up, Kathy.”

“If I’m not Voyager’s captain, why do I have such a big headache?” She rubbed her eyes in frustration, somehow not believing that she was in any way playing along. Pulling her hand away from her face, she stared at it, noticing that not only was it dry, but it wasn’t bleeding or even cut.

Q just sat next to her, silently and surprisingly for him, patiently, waiting. It took her a few moments to speak.

“Okay, I’ll bite. Who *was* Voyager’s captain?”

Q pursed his lips and eyed Janeway warily, “Captain Allan,” he mumbled.

“*Spencer* Allan?” Q nodded. “They gave my ship to that...that *martinet?*” Janeway spluttered.

“Well, you didn’t take the job and therefore...” Q shrugged, “not your ship.” He added in a small voice as she narrowed her gaze at him.

She stopped and thought about what he had just said. “Wait, back up there. Why was it stupid to stay with Mark?” Leaving on missions was becoming a real issue between them when she took Voyager, even a supposedly short, three week only mission. They had talked seriously of her staying Earth-side more. Mark would’ve been delighted that she declined the post.

Q sighed. “Because after you cancelled yet another dinner date to check on some useless bit of data, he met that same woman at the same conference who he eventually married in the reality where you were in the Delta Quadrant. His affair ended your relationship anyway. Of course, on the bright side, you did get a litter of rather adorable puppies.”

Janeway stopped moving and blinked at him. Then, shaking herself out of her reverie, she slapped

the table next to her chair.

"I've had enough of this. Janeway to Admiral Paris,"

There was no reply, not even an annoying chirp from the computer. Spying a terminal on the wall, she made her way to it.

"Computer recognise user Janeway, Captain K."

Silence.

"Oh, for... Q?"

"Well, it's not going to talk to someone..." he said quietly and Janeway missed the apprehension on his face.

Janeway sat quietly and considered the man before her. Deciding the sooner she placated him the sooner she could get back to trying to help her crew, she decided to play along.

"All right," she said, sounding defeated, "if Voyager, *minus me*, got home seven years ago, it's got to be a good thing, right?"

Q's eyes lit up and he smiled at her, "I'll show you the memorial!"

"The *wh...*"

But he had clicked his fingers before she had even fully formed the question.

"...at?"

Janeway recognized the location almost immediately. They were in the gardens tended so lovingly by Mr Boothby. Initially happy not to see Q, she half turned and realized that he was standing next to a simple wall that seemed to be covered in a lot of information. As she got closer, she could make out the title USS Voyager and what appeared to be a list of names. The list was considerably longer than it should be.

Voyager had lost an unacceptable number of people when thrown into the Delta Quadrant, but there had to be over *twice* the number of names on the wall. Inching closer, she started to read.

"No. No, this is *wrong*."

"I'm afraid it's right, Kathy." Q's voice came from behind her.

"But how did they..." she could not finish the question.

"The Caretaker sent them back. It was a pretty wild ride. It was his last act."

"That's definitely wrong. We destroyed the array to help protect the Ocampo."

"You might have, *if* you were in charge. But Captain Allan didn't want to take a chance he might even dent your Prime Directive, or upset the Kazon, so he got the Caretaker to send them home."

"But the Kazon..."

"The Kazon got the water and killed all the Ocampa. Well, except for the ones that got taken as slaves, that is."

He stopped talking as her eyes fell on the list of names again but now started reading: Joe Carey, Mortimer Harren, Susan Nicoletti, William Telfer, Megan Delaney, Samantha Wildman, Harry Kim. Tuvok. *Tuvok?* Blindly, she felt behind her and finding a bench, fell heavily onto it.

"There are no names of any of the Maquis on this."

"It only lists from Voyager's original crew. The Maquis were never integrated. Captain Allan arrested the remaining members after their ship was destroyed. Only five of them made it back to the Alpha Quadrant alive."

Janeway finished for him. "I get the picture. So, because Voyager wasn't stranded in the Delta Quadrant..."

"Species 8472 practically wiped out the Borg, including your tame ones, until the Borg assimilated a people who were already using biogenic weapons. The Equinox was destroyed, losing all hands. Unimatrix Zero was destroyed too. We won't even discuss the damage the Omega particle fall out caused."

"I was going to say that things may have happened a little differently, but we'll go with your version."

"You're convinced?"

Janeway rubbed her eyes. She was tired, worried about her mother, her crew, her friends and now this. It was as close to breaking down as she had been for years.

"I don't *want* to be convinced, Q. I just want my crew and family not to suffer for my mistakes."

"They're not, Kathy. They weren't your crew, so you're not responsible." Q looked smug. "Win win."

Janeway felt off balance and bewildered. She wanted comfort. She wanted to be told that everything really was okay, not Q's increasingly disturbing version that was certainly *not* okay so far. She wanted...

"Q, take me home," Kathryn whispered, managing to not actually say, "Take me to my mother," which would've been pathetic, even for her at this stage. "I want to see my home." At least her mother would comfort her.

"Well, it's not exactly..."

"Q!"

He snapped his fingers and they were instantly surrounded by snow. She recognized, *sort of*, the road and a few of the houses that were peeking out of the gray and white landscape but the Janeway family home wasn't distinguishable. Once more she tried to get her bearings, looking left and right and then back towards the hill that was usually visible from their front door. It was the right place but she didn't recognize the house in front of her. It was of ugly modern construction and it even covered the location of where her mother's prized rose bushes would be. Phoebe would have a conniption at the design.

"But...where..."

"The house was sold about two years ago."

"Oh no, Mom loves her house," It was a weak protest. Janeway was reeling and again she looked around, trying to convince herself that she had mistaken the location. "Okay, they moved," her voice was stronger, "so where are they living now? Where's Phoebe?"

"Ah," was all the reply Q offered.

"Okay, so they don't live in Indiana now, but Mom's here somewhere, right?" The silence from the young Q suddenly struck her. "Q? Where are my family?"

"Well..." he hedged.

She thought about his statement. "Where is my sister, Q? What about my mother?" Met with silence from him, she tried reason, "Okay, I can accept that Mom moved house even though I can't see how me not taking Voyager had that result. But where the hell is Phoebe?"

"I'm afraid Phoebe and your mother are both dead, Kathy."

"That's crazy. I was just got a communication from Phoebe, and Mom is..."

"No, not really. They were killed just over two years ago in the Breen attacks on San Francisco."

"But Phoebe isn't in Starfleet and Mom...that doesn't make any sense." Janeway tried to work through his statement. "No. No, but...well, then, where am I? I didn't leave on Voyager, but I would've got another ship."

"Dead too. You were with them. You weren't killed defending Earth, Kathy. You were all drinking coffee together at the Night Owl Café." Q smiled. "At least you went out doing what you thought was important."

"That's not funny, Q."

"No, I guess not." Q took a deep breath. "So, the Federation lost three Janeways in one single day. Personally, I don't think it'll ever recover."

Janeway felt numb. They couldn't be dead, she tried to convince herself. Unable to speak to Admiral Paris or her family, she tried to think of someone to make sense of all of this.

"What about Tom Paris? Did they take him on the mission?"

"Ah, that would be a no. Allen couldn't be convinced and was confident that they wouldn't need him."

"I want to see him."

"Kathy, I don't think..."

"Q. Please."

She didn't even notice his click of the fingers. It took a moment for her to notice her surroundings, which were dirty and run down. Snow was falling but unlike Indiana's, it was brown and oily and

even colder. There was loud discordant music blaring from several buildings.

“Where the hell are we?”

“It’s a mining planet. I’m not sure it’s even got a name. Actually, very few people use names here.” He grimaced in distaste. “Obviously, hygiene isn’t high on anyone’s list either.”

“Tom is *here*?”

“He left Earth looking for...work.” He motioned towards one of the buildings.

The lighting was dim inside and it seemed to be a bar of some sort. Janeway wasn’t sure what it was. It was crowded and the smell was disturbing. It wasn’t any warmer than outside.

“Where is...*Tom*? Is that you?”

She made her way towards the familiar figure of Tom Paris. He was sitting slouched in a chair at a table that was covered in plates, bottles and things that she wasn’t even sure of.

Tom slowly turned his attention to her and blinked sleepily.

“Might be. Who wants to know?”

“It’s me, Tom. Kathryn Janeway.” She looked around for something to sit on but he was using the only chair. “I need your help, Tom.”

“Kathryn Janeway, eh? You look pretty good for a corpse.”

“Tom, please.”

“I was at your funeral. My fath...family wanted me there. Wasn’t a dry eye in the house. My old man was quite cut up about you. Thanks for that, by the way. It stopped him shouting at me, at least for a day.

“Tom.”

“Who are you really? Another do-gooder?” He smiled at that and let his head fall back. “Don’t need any help, lady. Although, I’d be willing to help *you* out if you need an itch scratched, maybe.” He leered at her and reached over to grab her arm.

“Tom, what’s happened to you? You need to help me, Tom. Q is showing me things and I need to get back to the crew.”

“Sure. Whatever you say. A looker like you, I’ll even do for free.” His hand dropped down to her thigh.

“What? No, Tom. What are you doing? This is crazy. I need your help.”

“Sure. No problem. I’m trying to help you, baby. Relax.” Tom tried to grab her again and she recoiled bumping into a man behind her.

“Hey, watch it!” The man hit her across the face and pushed her down to the ground. Tom laughed and barely gave her a second look as he resumed his staring into space.

Suddenly, the bar erupted into chaos. Fists and chairs started flying and no one made any attempt to let her get out of the way. Managing to get to her feet after being knocked down more than once, Janeway made for the only visible door in the establishment and ran out, hoping to get away from the fighting and the terrible dead eyes of Tom Paris as he watched the fight erupting around him.

As she ran out the door, she emerged into a muddy, cold laneway. It was still snowing and the temperature was frigid. Holding a hand to her throbbing face, she turned back to peer into the melee inside the bar. The only person not moving was Tom Paris, oblivious and seemingly not caring about the fight raging around him.

The sight of Paris caused sob to rise in her throat and the shiver that went through Janeway was only partially due to the biting cold in the lane.

She didn't even notice when Q snapped them back to the memorial. "Sorry, it was a bit chilly and I've been battling a sniffle," he said. Janeway didn't react other than to fall back onto the seat in front of the horrible illustration of Voyager's losses.

Janeway sat stunned. Thinking through the awful possibility that not taking command of Voyager could result in the misery and even deaths of so many more of the crew and of her family. And herself. It seemed too much.

Her mind did what it did so many times in the Delta Quadrant, it moved on to another topic so she couldn't dwell on what was before her.

There had to be some kind of positive outcome, she reasoned. The fates couldn't be so cruel. The other person who was most important to her in her life sprung to mind.

"Where is he?"

"Where's who?"

"Q *don't*. You know who I mean."

"You're not going to like it."

"I *already* don't like it, Q. Tell me anyway. Please."

"Captain Allan didn't want to upset the Kazon. Chakotay was going to make an attempt to rescue Torres and Kim. Except someone on board the Val Jean let Voyager know what was planned. Allan alerted the Kazon. Chakotay was killed repelling boarders."

"But Tuvok would never..."

"It wasn't Tuvok. He was killed helping Chakotay."

Janeway was reeling. It was all too much and yet, all too believable. Q waited patiently while she processed this awful news.

"Then who..." she couldn't finish the question. Horrified at the prospect of the answer. And then she understood. "*Seska*."

"When Voyager returned to the Alpha Quadrant, Seska was declared an official hero of Cardassia."

"She murdered Chakotay." It wasn't a question. Her voice was flat as she absently rubbed her still

throbbing cheek.

Q didn't bother to deny it or quibble with the facts. Effectively, Seska had indeed killed Chakotay, even though he was her lover at the time.

"A totally unpleasant being. She also managed to get a large proportion of the Maquis killed as well, realizing that the Federation wouldn't extradite them to Cardassia. Revenge and spite were her motivators, that's for sure."

Janeway turned away from Q and tried to unobtrusively wipe her eyes. He pretended he didn't see. He waited a few minutes before speaking again.

"I think you made a pretty good captain after all, don't you?"

The slightest shrug of Janeway's shoulder was the only answer he received.

"With your leadership, the Ocampa were saved, as well as the majority of yours and Chuckle's crews. You've set the Borg back years and saved more than a few people in the process, including Seven and the Borglets. You actually did a pretty good job, Kathy. Without you on the ship, not only do all those people die, but so did you and your family. And a universe without you is just no fun for me. As I see it, your only real mistake was not mating with me, but even that turned out okay. I got Q and, of course, Q." He trailed off and then cleared his throat.

"But, if you want things to stay this way, I'm sure I'll be able to negotiate with the Continuum, what's left of it - another thing you helped with, I might add, and get Junior put back into existence. *Somehow.*"

"Maybe I should've said I wished I'd never been born at all."

"You think this is bad?" Q waved his hand and scoffed and sounded annoyed. "Well, you could add the deaths of Mark Johnson, assorted crew of the Al-Batani and Billings, a goodly portion of the Federation and the resurgence of the Borg and that's just for starters. Seriously, Kathy, don't even consider it. *Really.*"

"Q, please." It was a plea for mercy.

"Sorry, Kathy. It's almost a reflex. But honestly, the universe is a dull and boring place without Janeways. And it's better off with *all* of them in it, believe me."

Janeway's head dropped into her hands.

"I don't know what to do."

"Of course you do. Kathryn Janeway always has a plan."

"I want my life back, Q. *Please.*" Her head was in her hands, leaning forward, elbows resting on her knees.

It took a few minutes for her to realize that she was cold. And very, very wet. Looking up, she was greeted by gray ocean, sheeting rain and a cold and bleak beach.

It took another few seconds before she noticed that someone was calling her name. Janeway looked up to see the small figure of Tal Celes making her way towards her on the beach. She looked at her hand. It was bleeding. Her cheek wasn't hurting. Which meant...her mother and Phoebe were alive.



Chakotay was alive. Tuvok and the others. *Alive.*

Suddenly, it dawned on her that she'd never been happier to be soaked through and freezing with a cut hand in her life. Looking around, she couldn't see Q. Had she dreamed the whole thing?

Who cared?

The people she loved were alive and needed her, almost as much as she needed them. It was time to stop wallowing and make sure they were allowed to be free and happy. So what if she was sent to Auckland? From this point forward, she would be shouting loud and often to ensure their wellbeing. A captain doesn't abandon her crew.

She stood up and wiped the water of her face with her uninjured hand. She was drenched and icy cold and it felt great. Turning, she started to make her way towards Tal, gathering speed as she went.

"Celes!" Janeway raced up to the startled woman and embraced her. "I'm freezing! I've got a cut on my hand! Isn't it wonderful?"

Tal stopped abruptly and stared at her captain. "Um."

"Sorry, Celes," Janeway was struggling to keep calm. But she was back! "Were you looking for me?"

"Yes, ma'am," Tal was relieved that the Captain was acting more normally, but was still concerned. "Admiral Bailey told me to bring you back for a 1400 meeting. It seemed important this time." Tal added and she understood that the Captain's meetings had been, up to today, rather pointless.

*"Right."*

Tal only knew one person who could lace one word with so much intent. Her heart soared as she'd been so worried about her captain.

"This ends today. They've had my people too long. Let's go storm the citadel."

Tal wasn't sure what that meant, but she faithfully followed Janeway, prepared to go wherever the captain lead her. The conviction of both women grew as they walked back to the center.

---

By the time they reached the main buildings, Janeway had worked up a fair amount of anger at herself and Starfleet. She couldn't believe that she had allowed herself to wallow in so much self pity. Her crew needed her. Her family needed her.

As they approached the facility, Janeway spotted Admiral Paris. Her steps almost faltered, thinking it was bad news or some kind. Squaring her shoulders, she regained her momentum and approached her former mentor.

"Admiral..."

"Kathryn! I've been looking all over for you. Are you ready to..."

"Admiral, I'm very concerned over the treatment of my crew. I want to know..."

"Yes, yes." Paris waved his hand and smiled jovially, "Crewman Tal, are you coming with us?"

Tal stepped closer to Janeway, who took the young woman's arm and stepped slightly ahead of her, as if to shield her.

"Crewman Tal is with me, sir." Janeway wasn't sure what was going on, but she wasn't letting any of the crew out of her sight from this point. Even if it was only one crew member at this stage. "What is..."

"Excellent," Paris clapped his hands together and smiled, calling over his shoulder to an officer at a nearby console. "Ensign, beam us to the coordinates now."

"Wait, I want to make sure..."

Still holding Tal's arm, Janeway and the others all re-materialized. Janeway blinked. It *looked* like her mother's living room.

Was it possible?

"Katie! It's so wonderful to finally have you properly home!" Her mother grabbed her as soon as she materialized in what was indeed the living room of the family home. "Darling, you're soaked!"

Then everyone was talking at once.

She vaguely heard Owen Paris say something about idiots stretching out the debriefing but then Phoebe came running into the room and was shouting something...about something, but it seemed to be happy shouting. Phoebe also mentioned that her sister was soaked. Aunt Martha came in with Harry Kim. She got a hug from her aunt, but Harry merely exclaimed, "She's here!" and ran out of the room. Billy Telfer then ran in, welcomed her home and grabbed Tal and exited in the same direction as Harry. Admiral Paris was still trying to explain something about ridiculous administrators and a few more of the crew came into the room, welcomed her home and left. Janeway wondered how many people could fit into the kitchen and then realized she didn't care as long as they were okay.

It was more than a little surreal and Janeway found herself starting to laugh. In relief. Happiness. Joy. She couldn't stop laughing. Her mother and sister were dragging her towards the stairs, talking about dry clothes and Paris was still rambling, now to Aunt Martha, about the stupid review process. Janeway kept laughing.

"Darling, are you all right?" Gretchen was a little concerned that her returned, but bedraggled, daughter seemed to be almost hysterical.

"Want me to sock her one, Mom?" Phoebe asked with maybe too much relish.

"Phoebe, *hush*. Kathryn?"

"I'm sorry Mom. It's just so..." even Janeway had no idea what it was that she wanted to say.

"Wonderful?"

Janeway continued to laugh. "Exactly!"

"Well, how about you try to calm down," Gretchen looked towards Phoebe, "*without* your sister's help. Get dry and come downstairs?"

"Who's down there?"

"Everyone. The whole crew."

Janeway sobered a little. "Even the Maquis and Equinox members?"

"The whole lot. Plus any family or friends who were with them when..." Phoebe shrugged and didn't provide details.

"Thank goodness. I've been so worried." One more worry entered her head. "What about Seven and Icheb? Are they okay?"

"Both are fine. Icheb has been staying with the Kim's and Seven has been here with us."

Janeway swung on her sister. "You didn't think to tell me?"

"I didn't?" Phoebe shrugged. "Sorry." She didn't *sound* sorry.

Janeway narrowed her eyes at her sister and made a mental note to get back at her at the first opportunity.

With a little push, her mother propelled her into her room.

"You can kill Phoebe anytime, Kathryn." Both Gretchen and Kathryn ignored Phoebe's exclamation of "hey!". "Right now you need to get dry and warm and come back downstairs to see everyone." Gretchen turned to leave but she grabbed Phoebe on the way out the door.

"Hurry up, Kathryn. We've got a party to start!" Phoebe yelled as she was dragged away.

Janeway, not wanting to take any chances on anyone disappearing before she got to them, had a shower and got changed faster than she would at yellow alert.

When she came out of the bathroom, Phoebe was sitting on the bed, waiting for her.

Phoebe sidled up and embraced her one more time, leaving her arm draped over Janeway's shoulders, her annoyance from minutes ago now forgotten.

"Welcome home, Kathryn. Mom says to hurry. We've been having a wonderful time with all of them, but they seem to be in a hurry to see *you*. I've been learning lots about you from them."

"I'll bet." Janeway laughed. "Believe me, Phoebs, I'm ready to get down there."

"Well, now you've got rid of the drowned rat look, we should join everyone."

"I can't wait," she said as she hooked her arm through her sister's and the pair started downstairs and towards the noise that could be heard from the rear of the house. She wondered how she'd missed that before.

They moved down the hall towards the stairs when Phoebe stopped and grabbed Janeway's arm, facing her.

"You know Chakotay and Seven have broken up?" Phoebe whispered without preamble.

"Oh, no," Janeway couldn't believe it. The admiral had said they would marry. "I hope they're both okay. I should talk to them and make sure there isn't anything I can do to help with..."

"Yeah, right." Phoebe snorted indelicately, stopping and grabbing Janeway's arm to again stop their progress down the stairs. "Look, Katie, they've been apart almost from the beginning and Seven has been on three separate dates in the last two weeks."

"Oh. Poor Chakotay, he must be..."

"Available. Yes. And I swear Katie, I'll give you two days head start. If you haven't tagged and bagged him by then, I'm going after him myself."

"Phoebe..."

"No." Phoebe made an annoyed slashing gesture with her free hand. "I understand why you didn't jump him on board the ship, Katie. I may not be 'fleet but I know how it works. But news flash, sweetie...you're home, you're free and dear god, but he's a catch. Ask him out. I truly think he'd be thrilled."

"Two days?"

"Forty eight hours and then all agreements are off."

"You're an insufferable pain in the butt, Phoebes, but you know I love you, right?"

"2880 minutes, Katie. Your time and the *rest of your life* starts," Phoebe looked up at the large antique clock by the far wall. "Now."

Janeway smiled and leaned over and kissed her sister on the cheek.

"Thanks, Phoebes."

"About 170,000 seconds and change, Katie."

"I hope I only need a fraction of that time, sis."

Phoebe grinned at her. "Good."

As she made her way back down the stairs and towards the noise, laughter again bubbled up inside her.

It was only a matter of seconds before Janeway noticed the tent in the backyard. Considering its size, now she thought of it, a lot of people were going in but not coming out. Where the hell were they going?

"Oh, you've noticed the marquee, darling?" Gretchen leaned into another hug. "Your lovely friends organized it."

"Starfleet?"

"No darling. The Qs. Mrs Q is just delightful and Junior is such a nice young man."

"Are you serious, Mom?" Janeway was wondering if this day could get any more bizarre. Apparently it could. Maybe she'd hit her head when she'd fallen on the beach.

"Oh, yes. How do you think we got all the crew and their families here and fed? Wait until you go into the tent - somehow it's bigger on the inside. Junior said it's like a tardis, whatever that is. He's

quite devoted to you, darling. He's been working so hard since last night. He and his mother have hit it off so well with Phoebe. Mrs Q and Phoebe have been discussing art all morning in between setting up the tables."

At that moment, the Delaney sisters entered the kitchen. Both embraced Janeway before being ordered by Gretchen to help take something down to the tent.

Janeway now wasn't sure she wasn't hallucinating the whole day. She hadn't really understood a thing that had happened in the last...she wasn't sure how long. She was feeling more than a little off balance.

"The Qs?!"

"You called, Kathy?"

"What the hell is going on?"

"It's your welcome home party, Kathy. Junior and Q organized it for you while we've been examining *other, er, options.*"

Janeway was stunned. She felt unequal to speaking and stood staring at Q in front of her, grabbing the nearby table to steady herself.

"I...I...that's," Janeway brought her hand up to wipe her eyes, before she noticed it was still bleeding a little. She stared at it and smiled. "Q, thank you. This...this is wonderful."

Q's expression for once was soft and he smiled. "Kathryn, I really couldn't alter things out there and I'm sorry. But now that you're home, throwing a small party for three or four hundred of your closest friends won't affect the timeline or get the Continuum testy."

"Don't want a testy continuum." Janeway grinned and laughter once more bubbled out.

"Exactly." Q replied.

Janeway reached over and hugged him. They broke apart and he took her injured hand. "Here's something I can fix without causing an intergalactic or temporal incident." And the cut was gone.

"Thank you, again. Now let's join the party."

Q snapped his fingers and they were instantly in the middle of the crew.

Janeway lost all track of what was happening around her. She managed to get to Chakotay several times, only to have him or herself dragged away within seemingly seconds.

She was sure her enduring memory of this night would forever be the overwhelming joy she felt as well as the image of Owen Paris popping up at her elbow at various intervals continuing a story that always seemed to start at a part where he described how he shouted at someone who was an idiot.

One day, not today, she would ask him what the hell he was talking about.

---

The next, she didn't know how long, was a blur. A very loud, joyful blur. The only way she vaguely kept track of time was Phoebe sidling up next to her periodically and giving her a countdown.

As her mother had said, the whole crew were present in the tent or the 'the marquee for the Maquis', Harry had quipped some time earlier this evening. Janeway had stopped trying to track events. She wondered if she'd have to get the Doctor to repair her ribs after being enthusiastically embraced by the whole crew in the space of the first thirty minutes. Rollins had picked her up and spun her around and kissed her on the cheek, which had caused a barrage of whistles and applause.

It was pandemonium. Janeway hadn't been able to follow a conversation in hours and she didn't care. Her crew, plus family and friends (or whoever they were with when the Q shanghaied them to Indiana, although not one person had objected), were together, free and they seemed happy and that was enough for her. There had been a few occasions where she laughed uncontrollably again. Mrs Q and B'Elanna talking about Tom had been hysterical. Phoebe and Icheb were ganging up on Junior and the good natured crowd were cheering them on. Naomi, Harry and Celes had periodically appeared at her side to see if she needed anything before being themselves swallowed up into the crowd once more. She hadn't seen Admiral Paris for a while, as he and Tom's mother had been in charge of Miral during the party but Janeway had managed to get his assurances that all would be well for the crew and she'd finally relaxed and let the atmosphere wash over her. The sight of the ex-Equinox crew dancing with the Delaneys and most of Tuvok's security team had finally sealed it for her.

She had met Naomi's father, listened to the Doctor tell her about his new autonomy, embraced Junior and thanked he and his mother sincerely, just about burst with relief and happiness when Tuvok and T'Pel had appeared on a "snapped up" vid screen to wish everyone season's greetings and assure his captain that he was doing well and, with his wife, would join her in the new year for their vacation in Tuscany.

In hours of circulating the crowd, she had been introduced to parents, grandparents, children, siblings, friends and in one case, an elderly family pet. She'd never had so much fun or laughed as much in her life.

---

Janeway was totally losing the thread of every conversation that was happening around her. It was too much and yet, not enough.

Miral had been taken home by her grandparents but Tom and B'Elanna were still dancing and singing.

The party was winding down a little and at about 2635 minutes left on Phoebe's deadline, most of the crew had made their way home, courtesy of the Q's finger snapping. It was testament to all the bizarre things that had happened over the years to the Voyager crew that they took being snapped from one location to another in their stride. Their family and friends were too happy to have them home to care. There were happy promises to have another celebration as soon as possible.

As she took a few minutes to get a coffee in the kitchen, she greedily watched people, *her* people, buzzing around her mother's house and then making their way back out to the amazing tent. All of them obeying instantly her mother's commands now. It wasn't even a dream come true - at her most optimistic, she wouldn't have ever dreamed this.

At that moment, Naomi appeared before them. The child was practically vibrating with excitement. Janeway knew how she felt.

"Captain, isn't it wonderful? I have a present under the tree." The wonders of the Delta Quadrant

were nothing compared to this fact, apparently.

"My mom has a direct line to Santa, Naomi. She had everything sent here last week." Phoebe winked at her sister. "Katie and I still haven't figured out just how she *knows* so much stuff."

"Wow." Naomi didn't really believe in Santa but she was just young enough to be awed by the possibility. And Naomi was certainly awed by Gretchen Janeway.

"Naomi, I need some help."

The young girl instantly snapped to attention.

"Yes, ma'am."

"Naomi, have you seen the Commander in the last few minutes?"

"Yes, Captain. He's in the living room with your mom, talking."

"Thanks, Naomi. You're a superb assistant."

"*Thank you, Captain.*"

"Now, if you both will excuse me, I have something in the living room that needs my attention."

"You go girl," whispered Phoebe in her sister's ear. "Come on, Naomi, let's go find Icheb and stop him picking on Junior."

---

"Kathryn, come in here and relax. You've been on your feet for hours." Chakotay made to get up from the sofa but Gretchen stopped him. "Chakotay, you stay here and make sure Kathryn sits still for a few minutes. I'll go and see how things are going outside."

The pair watched Gretchen bustle out of the room and Chakotay opened his mouth to speak just as they heard from the kitchen, "Tom Paris, what the *hell* do you think you're doing with *that*?" and a loud thud.

Janeway burst out laughing and Chakotay joined her. "Your mother is very scary, Kathryn."

Struggling to get herself under control again, she just replied, "Don't I know it."

Janeway leaned back into the sofa and sighed happily. Then she sat up and cleared her throat. Chakotay was leaning back with his eyes closed with a faint smile.

"Chakotay?"

"Hmm?"

"How *are* you?"

"I haven't been better for years."

"*Really?*"

“Really.”

“That’s good.” She sat up straighter. “Chakotay?”

“Hmm?”

“Are you staying for Christmas? I did promise all those years ago.”

“You did. And your mom asked me yesterday. I hope it’s okay with you. I think you’re going to have a full house.”

“More than okay, Chakotay.” A pause. “Chakotay?”

“Hmm?”

“Do you want to have dinner with me?”

“I *am* having dinner with you, Kathryn. Probably for the next two or three days, at least.”

“Excellent.” Another pause. “Chakotay?”

This time he opened his eyes and looked at her. “Yes?”

“What about New Year’s? Will you have dinner with me on New Year’s?”

“I’d love to.”

“Good. Dancing too? Do you dance?”

“I love to dance.”

“Great.” A pause. “Chakotay?”

“Kathryn are you all right?”

“Depends. What are you doing in February for the official Voyager ball?”

“February? *Kathryn?*”

“Better still, come with me to Tuscany in January.”

Chakotay sat up straight and looked at her. She looked apprehensive, yet determined.

“Kathryn, are you asking me out on a *date?*”

“*Dates.* Yes, but you’re really making me work hard for it, Chakotay, and I’m on a bit of a deadline here.” Her eyes briefly shifted in the direction of the kitchen. “Chakotay would you do me the great honor of allowing me to take you to dinner and dancing next week?”

“Sure, but...” he didn’t get to finish the answer as she launched herself towards him and kissed him. Hard. Then just as quickly she backed off, shocked at her own behavior. He looked shocked too. Her heart fell at his reaction.

Until he leaned over and took her into his arms and kissed her like she hadn’t been kissed for seven long years. Or ever.



---

Deciding she could stay in Chakotay's arms until after Christmas, Janeway was only a little bit disappointed to be interrupted by Naomi, who had been sent in to inform her that the party was finally winding down and the last of the revellers were about to make their way to their homes.

Janeway and Chakotay walked hand in hand through to the kitchen, passed a smug looking Phoebe, who was leaning on a bench with her arms folded.

"Bagged," Janeway said to her sister with a wink.

"Drat," was her sister's reply. "I wonder what Mike Ayala is doing?"

"There you are, darling," her mother appeared, "it's been a long, but wonderful, day but we should let these people get back home. I hope you didn't make these poor folk stay up this late on the ship, Kathryn."

"It's not that late, Mom."

"Kathryn, you're still on New Zealand time. In Indiana, it's after 4am."

"Oh," she started to laugh again. She realized that she had no idea now what day it was. Still the 23rd or Christmas eve? However, she had no doubt that things would only improve even more the next day. Whatever day that was. She sobered when she realized that she didn't know when she would see everyone again.

Sensing her daughter's concern, Gretchen added. "Don't worry, darling. Everyone has agreed to come back on the day after Christmas for a proper celebration and the Q's are letting us use the wonderful tent again. Junior is in charge of the catering."

Tomorrow, or later today, or whenever, she would get all the details of the rest of the crew's debriefings from Chakotay, but right now, she was content to just be able to hold his hand and know that the reasons she had allowed to keep her from the relationship she had long craved with him no longer applied.

They joined the remaining crew in the tent.

"Q, thank you so much for showing me how lucky I am and how lucky I was in the Delta Quadrant."

"Lucky? You think you just were *lucky*?" Tom sounded a little angry at the suggestion.

"Well..."

"Were you lucky when you outsmarted and defeated the Borg three...?"

"*Four*."

"Thanks, Harry, *four* times?"

"More if you count velocity matches." Everyone laughed.

"Thanks Seven, but trying to make a point here." Tom continued. "When you defeated the Borg *quite a few* times?"

"Pretty sure you weren't just lucky when you outsmarted the Devore and saved those Brenari refugees." interrupted B'Elanna before Janeway could reply.

"And we were the lucky ones when you re-took the ship almost single handed from the giant germs."

"Hey, the Doctor helped."

"While I was hiding safely in a shuttle."

Everyone laughed at the Doctor's uncharacteristic modesty.

"Well, I *was* lucky to have such a wonderful crew," she eyed the Q family and added with a wry tone, "and such *interesting* friends."

"Kathy, it's been our pleasure." Q raised his coffee cup. "We'll get everyone home safely in a minute, but first I'd like to propose a toast.

"To Kathryn Janeway, the luckiest Starship captain in two quadrants."

"Kathryn Janeway!"

End