It had been exactly four weeks after Voyager arrived home from the Delta Quadrant, when Kathryn Janeway found herself in an ancient looking pub in Dublin, more than a little drunk, with her sister.

Phoebe had picked her up from the front door of Starfleet Headquarters after the final day of her debriefing, telling her their mother didn't expect them home that night, or indeed the night after.

At least Phoebe had allowed her to change out of her uniform. Which was just as well because the pair had, by Janeway's reckoning, consumed more than their own body weight in beer in the last few hours and she was pretty sure she didn't want anyone seeing a Starfleet officer in her state. In fact, Janeway couldn't remember when she'd ever felt this drunk. A fine figure of a Starship Captain she would appear to be at this point.

Her sister was dragging a tall, impressively handsome man with dark hair and dimples towards the small stage to take a turn at a singalong. The sight of the man's broad shoulders and arm around Phoebe's waist caused her heart to skip a beat. His olive skin and dimples had almost made her heart *stop*.

It wasn't *him*, of course. In the last month, she'd barely seen *him*. Which in a way was fine with her, the last thing she wanted was to see Chakotay in Seven's arms. That didn't mean she didn't miss him though. In seven years they had never been apart this long. It hurt, and she was surprised at just how much.

Her musings about her unlucky love life were interrupted by the raucous noise that was coming from the stage. Phoebe and her new friend, whose name Janeway couldn't recall, were belting out an enthusiastic version of a usually soft sentimental Bajoran ballad. In their hands, it had turned into a rousing dance tune and the crowd in the pub were cheering them on to even greater crimes against music lovers everywhere.

Janeway smiled. The only thing that Janeway was better at than her younger sister was singing and even then 'better' was a relative term. The older sister's singing voice was once described by their father as 'distinctive' but Phoebe's as 'excruciating'. Not that anyone in the pub seemed to care. The pair were doing some serious emoting and playing against one and other, and the effect was hilarious.

###

Janeway awoke the next morning in the fetal position, curled up in the bottom of a strange bed. At first she'd only assumed it was a bed because it had taken her quite some time to figure out not only which way was out, but also which was up. When her head finally cleared the covers, she discovered that she was still fully clothed, though her shoes were beside the bed.

Moving her head as carefully as she could manage, she looked around the room. It was quite rustic and she guessed that she was probably in the rented rooms in part of the pub, as the hotel she and Phoebe had booked into was more modern. What she assumed was morning sunlight was streaming through the window.

Suddenly, the door burst opened and Phoebe, in her usual whirlwind style, rushed in.

"Kathryn, aren't you up yet? Your first official full day of freedom in seven years and time's a-wasting!"

"Phoebe," Janeway's voice was gravelly, "shut up, or I will be forced to kill you. It's obvious I've been poisoned and I think my head is going to explode. And why did someone sandpaper my eyes?"

“Oh, I almost forgot. Try this,” and she pressed a hypospray against her sister’s neck. “You should feel better soon.”

“Thanks, I’ll spare your life *for now* and I won’t even ask where you got that.” The effect of the drug was almost instant and her headache and nausea was gone. “Where’s whatisname?”

“Steve.”

“Steve. *Right*. Where’s *Steve*, Phoebe?”

“He had to go back on duty. He’s in Starfleet.”

Janeway groaned.

“Great.” She let her head fall back onto the pillow and closed her eyes.

“We put you into bed when you just about passed out. Poor Steve was so in awe of you. Seemed to think you were some kind of god or something.” Phoebe snorted and looked at her sister with disdain.

“If he only knew.” Janeway groaned again. “I’m sure I was a completely awe inspiring sight last night.”

Phoebe ignored her.

“Anyway we tucked you in and then we took a room. Do you want to hear about *my* night?”

“No.”

“The sex was sensational.”

“Too much detail, Phoebes. Way too much.”

“You’re getting old, Kathryn. Anyway, I had our things sent over from the other place. Have a shower and let’s get going. We’ve got lots to do, so get your butt into gear, Captain.”

When Janeway had, as Phoebe had insisted, got her butt into gear, the pair had a wonderful couple of days in Ireland before joining their mother in Italy.

This was where the trio had really enjoyed themselves, visiting museums and art galleries, soaking up the atmosphere and generally relaxing.

Phoebe had felt ill a few times later in the trip, but it hadn’t stopped them seeing all that they had always wanted to see. Phoebe had discovered she was pregnant while they were in Florence. Their mother was absolutely delighted, Phoebe was a bit shocked and Kathryn had been almost envious. Almost.

###

Though back at work, Janeway still saw most of the senior staff every few weeks or so at a place not unlike Sandrine’s in, of all places, Geneva. It was intimate enough to allow for a couple of people to share a drink in relative privacy, but big enough to cope if a greater number of people attended.

Tom and B’Elanna had settled into their new life on Earth with Miral. They had immediately been

offered lucrative positions with a shuttle craft manufacturer and were living happily in France.

Tuvok's plaktow had been successfully resolved and he had retired to spend time with his wife and considerable number of grand children back on Vulcan.

Harry, newly promoted, was having a wonderful time. He had met a delightful young woman at a concert in London and was in love. Again. That the object of his affections turned out to be a Starfleet commander working in the diplomatic corps at Federation headquarters and an accomplished musician in her own right had caused Tom to remark that Harry, finally, had hit the jackpot.

Hardly anyone saw Seven anymore. She was heavily involved in secret research, but Janeway still kept in touch as well as she could. She found that despite Seven's liaison with Chakotay, she still missed the young woman intensely.

No one saw Chakotay at all. His relationship with Seven had, not so much as broken up, but rather had apparently dissolved within weeks of their finishing debriefing, although nobody had known for some time. Chakotay had never talked about it and Seven thinking it wasn't relevant, and didn't bring it up at all.

Chakotay's debrief had been a little shorter than Janeway's. While relieved that he'd not only been released with no charges but offered a commission, Janeway had been devastated when she found out that he had left to start his leave without saying goodbye. He'd been gone for three days when she'd discovered he'd left for, it was assumed, Trebus and Dorvan.

Janeway had found out from Tom and B'Elanna where he'd gone. They'd thought that he'd spoken to Janeway before he'd left and she was too humiliated and hurt to admit that it hadn't happened.

At first she'd tried to figure out what she might have said or done that had upset him, but eventually she decided that she had read more into their friendship than he had.

At their periodic get togethers at the pub, Janeway always made sure that she received all the news she could glean about her former crew. About half of the Voyager crew had attended the pub at one time or another. Chakotay had never attended, mainly because he hadn't been on Earth for months. All the information she had about him she got second hand from B'Elanna telling one of the other crew of his whereabouts and activities.

"So, Captain, how is your sister?"

"*Kathryn,* please Tom."

"Right. Sorry, Kathryn, but how is Phoebe?" he topped up her wine from the bottle on the table.

"Thriving! Honestly, impending motherhood hasn't slowed her down at all, I don't know how she does it. I mean, she's over six months pregnant! Mom is joining her on Percassa for the last few weeks or so, and I've arranged some leave for about the time of the birth."

"So, it's definitely twins?"

"Yes. We don't know the sexes yet. I'm going to visit her in a couple weeks for a few days. I don't think I've been this excited since Miral. And just how long *are* you going to steal her away from her grandparents?" Tom and B'Elanna were taking Miral and visiting Q'onoS.

“Only a few months, hopefully. I want to look into some information about my mother and we’re going to make a holiday of it.”

“That’s a great idea. It’ll be lovely to just have some time for yourselves.”

“We might be out of contact around the time that Phoebe has the babies,” B’Elanna said, “but can you can comm us through the Embassy and we’ll get the message eventually. We’ll be back for the first anniversary though.”

“Just as well. Don’t make me come looking for you.”

Harry joined them at their table.

“Has anyone heard from Chakotay?” Harry took a sip of his beer.

“Still at Deep Space Nine. Been working there since the end of his leave.” B’Elanna pushed away the basket of potato chips that Tom had bought and put on their table. “He’s still got another few months to go.” She pulled the basket back, grabbed a handful of chips and then pushed it away again. “Can someone else please eat these?”

Janeway was relieved when the conversation then veered to funny stories about Neelix’s usually unsuccessful attempts to make potato chips from his beloved leola root for Tom.

###

Due to a request for help from a transwarp drive research facility nearby, Janeway was able to visit her sister on Percassa a few weeks early. The pair had just finished getting Phoebe’s apartment ready for some dinner party guests.

It was when Phoebe was being Phoebe that Janeway was so glad she was home. Her sister could always make her laugh at herself, at Starfleet and at just about anything else that may’ve bothered her.

People always assumed that the oldest sister was the strongest in will and intellect, but Janeway always knew that it was actually Phoebe. Phoebe stood her ground and became an artist in the family of a mathematician mother and a career engineer Starfleet Admiral father.

Janeway had just finished explaining to her sister about her next mission.

“So when are you going to tell Mom?”

“I’ve already mentioned it to her.”

“And?”

“Well, she was less than impressed, of course.”

“But you really want to go?”

“Phoebes, it’s a once in a life time opportunity for someone like me. To be commanding the ship that is sent to observe and record a stellar phenomena that has only been hypothesized. Well, hopefully to observe and record,” she smiled ruefully at her sister, “if all the calculations and theorizing are correct. The *really* good thing is having Harry Kim as my first officer.”

“But you’ve only just got back.”

“That’s exactly what Mom said.” Janeway sighed and fidgeted with her coffee cup. “But I won’t be going for another few weeks,” she gazed at her very pregnant sister’s stomach with a calculating look, “you should’ve popped by then. You look ready to blow now.”

“Popped? Blow? Are they Starfleet terms?”

“You can’t blame Starfleet for everything Phoebes.”

“No, I guess not.” Phoebe laughed, “*Pity*. But it’s just so good to have you back. I’m selfish. And I want you in *this* quadrant for a little while. Actually, I feel like I’m ready to ‘blow’ now.”

Janeway glanced uncertainly at her sister. “You don’t mean that do you Phoebes? Should I call the doctor?”

“God, Kathryn. *Chill*. I’m only having a couple of babies. And no, not right now. Don’t change the subject, anyway.”

“I promise not to get thrown across the galaxy again. It’s only two months. And I’ll be here for the Phoeblings to be hatched before I leave.”

“If I could actually move, I’d hit you for that. Phoeblings?”

“How about Phoebles?” Janeway pretended to think, “Or ‘Flingers’?”

Her younger sister’s dalliances had been termed “Phoebe flings” by their mother.

“Stop. You’re only making it worse.” Phoebe glanced at the clock. “Where’s the time gone? People will be here in thirty minutes. Help me up and I’ll check on dinner.”

Janeway helped her sister to her feet and followed her into the kitchen.

“So who’s coming again?”

Phoebe checked various pots on the stove and poked at the contents of the oven with a skewer.

“The Minister for Arts, Culture and Foreign Affairs, a couple of people from his office that I know and the guys from the gallery. But it’s strictly informal. The government people I met through the gallery, believe it or not.”

“Foreign Affairs? Sounds like your kind of portfolio.” Phoebe hit her with a pot holder. “Should I be even here? They sound a bit arty and diplomatic for me. The last party of yours I came to one of your friends told me I was a puppet for the imperialist Federation.”

“Kathryn, it was eight years ago. Get over it. You’ll love Belim. He’s a dish. And his manners are too good to call you a puppet or anything offensive. Pity he’s married, he’d be perfect for you.”

“So, what are we having?” Janeway peered into the pots on the stove, ignoring her sister’s ongoing comments about her personal life. Of lack thereof.

“Well, I thought we’d have a roast. It’s so simple to get ready when there’s no help available.”

Her older sister pretended not to understand the latest jibe about her lack of culinary prowess.

“Sounds wonderful, Phoebes.”

“It’s all just about ready, it just has to be served up.” The doorbell sounded. “That’ll be the first of them. Be a good big sister and go answer it for me.”

Janeway moved to the door and opened it.

“Good heavens! You’re the image of Phoebe!” He pronounced it ‘foobee’.

“I’m Kathryn.” Janeway introduced herself, holding out a hand.

A very animated young Percassan man entered the apartment without further encouragement and ignored her outstretched hand and before Janeway had realized, had kissed her on the cheek.

“Lovely to meet you, Kathryn, where’s the little mother?” she followed him into the main room. “I’m Crap from the gallery. And before you say anything, Phoebe’s told me what it means.” He winked at her. “It means ‘vibrant’ in Percassen but…*darling*! How *are you*?”

Phoebe had entered the room.

“Hiya, Crappy!” she kissed him, “Have you scared my sister yet?”

“I don’t think she’s easily scared, Phoebe…but sweetie, look at you, I’ve only been away for a few months and you’ve got so *fat*.”

“Thanks, Crappy. You sure know the right things to say.”

All the people from the gallery were like Vibrant (Janeway just couldn’t bring herself to think of him as ‘Crap’) but the diplomatic types were completely the opposite.

The group had obviously nothing in common until they started discussing art. Art, it seemed, was their lingua franca and the one thing the ‘gallery’ people, as did most people on Perscassa, took very seriously.

###

Janeway had indeed found the Arts Minister’s manners perfect. In fact all the guests were delightful. The meal was lively and entertaining and she envied her younger sister’s easy going personality and vivaciousness. Janeway had found it relaxing to be involved in an argument about the relative merits of Jovian expressionist art. It was still a novelty to not be discussing everything as a matter of life and death. Although the two curators from the gallery made it sound like it was.

Belim caught her eye and smiled.

“I’m sure you find this all inconsequential after your adventures, Kathryn.”

“On the contrary Belim, I find it very restful,” she replied as one of the combatant’s voice was raised.

“*No! No! The Benata School didn’t use metaphor to convey substantial reality, they were clearly trying to…*” “*…palpable hallucinatory realms…*” “*…traditional figurative parameters…*” The speakers were shouted down by a number of colleagues who all started to give their opinions at once. None were listening to the others.

“Well, you must be very rested,” he said with a wry grin.

“I assure you I am.” she leant towards him in a conspiratorial manner, “Watch when things start to settle, Phoebe will say something to ‘stir the pot’ as my mother says and get them going again.” She spoke with obvious affection for her sister.

And as the conversation seemed to settle, Phoebe did indeed make a comment that ignited the discussion once again.

Belim and Janeway both laughed out loud and Phoebe scowled at them.

“Belim, whatever my sister just told you about me is probably not true.”

Belim had been the only member of the group that knew of Janeway’s experiences. He had been fascinated by their story since Voyager had re-established contact to the Alpha Quadrant by sending the Doctor through the Hirogen array.

“I had been on one of the Federation committees in San Francisco when your Doctor ‘arrived’.” He shared with Janeway over coffee on the sofa, “The affect on the Starfleet representatives was electric. And all of them, when I asked about Voyager, would say that if anyone could get their ship home from across the galaxy, it was Kathryn Janeway. It wasn’t until I met *Phoebe* Janeway that I shared their confidence. If you were anything like your sister, you would do it on willpower alone.”

“Yes, we always think of Phoebe as a force of nature.”

Belim laughed and agreed.

“Have you inherited any artistic talent like that of your sister, Kathryn?”

“Not enough, I’m afraid, Belim.” Janeway laughed “Phoebe is the real genius in the clan. I dabble with watercolors, but my efforts are amateurish beside hers.”

“I’m sure you’re very proficient,” he replied gallantly. “So, are you going on any dangerous secret missions soon, Kathryn?”

“No, Belim. I think my dangerous assignment days are behind me.” Janeway laughed, “Unless you count being an aunt to Phoebe’s kids which will probably have hazards all its own. No, hopefully, my next task will be strictly scientific and even that’ll be my last before I’m put out to pasture.”

“Put out to pasture?”

“I’ll be promoted to Admiral following the next mission. My life will be very dull. But, with the decided advantage of being on hand to spoil my nieces or nephews. That I’m *really* looking forward to.” Janeway gave Belim a wink.

The Foreign Minister was delighted with Kathryn Janeway. Never had he met someone from a military organization so down to earth and easy going. Other Starfleeters he had met had been humorless and two dimensional. He’d certainly never met one that seemed to be disappointed with being promoted.

“Once you are made an Admiral, maybe you could have your own brood.”

She shook her head sadly.

“No, I missed my chance there when I stranded Voyager in the Delta Quadrant. But believe me Belim, I’ll be sharing as much as Phoebe’s kids as she’ll let me get away with. The only downside to

my last mission will be I'll miss two months out of the twin's lives."

"The mission is special? Can you tell me about it?"

"Oh, yes. It's not classified. I'll be captaining the Beagle. We're hoping to observe the T'rath phenomena. You may've heard about it."

"Indeed! You're lucky my scientific colleagues didn't realize who I was meeting this evening or they'd have been stowing away in your luggage."

"It's a wonderful opportunity. It's the mission of a lifetime, that's for sure. It could only be more perfect if Phoebe brought the twins with us." She pretended to consider it. "Hey, Phoebes! Wanna come with me on the Beagle?"

"Gee, let me think Kathryn…spend two boring months looking at black nothingness or go to Indiana and have Mom spoil me and my kids…it's a close run thing, but in about three weeks, my feet will be firmly planted on wonderful Indiana soil."

"Well, Belim, it looks like I'll have to wait until I'm back from the mission before I can start ruining the children."

They discussed many topics during the evening and Janeway had to admit to Phoebe later that she had had a wonderful time.

###

The Janeway sisters decided to clean up after the party before they went to bed but Kathryn insisted she do all the lifting and bending. After finishing in the kitchen, Kathryn joined Phoebe in the living room for a cup of tea before retiring. She had just placed the cup on the coffee table when she noticed her sister's expression. It looked surprised.

"Phoebes?"

"Oh!"

"What? Phoebe are you okay? Is everything alright?"

"I think the babies are coming."

"No. Phoebe, you can't! Mom won't be here until tomorrow."

"Kathryn, that is, without doubt, the stupidest thing you've ever s…oh!" Phoebe clutched her mid section and winced in pain. "Oh my…" she groaned "god…shit." Phoebe hissed between her teeth.

"Right, let's get you to the birthing center." Janeway had finally pulled herself together.

"My bag is on my bed. That's all I need."

"Okay, I'll run and get it and then call for transport. Are you okay, sis?"

"I'm okay." Phoebe made a noise between a squeak and a groan. "Ready to be an auntie?"

Janeway was back with the bag over her shoulder.

“Are you kidding? I can’t wait,” she eyed her sister nervously. “Although, don’t hurry on my part.”

Both sisters were glad that Gretchen Janeway had arrived in time for the birth, however Phoebe readily admitted that she could’ve done without the “kids stalling just so Grandma could be here.”.

Janeway was initially surprised by the number of Phoebe’s friends that were at the birthing center waiting room. When the second twin finally made an appearance ten minutes after his sister, she went out to share the good news with the group.

“A boy and a girl! Both healthy and Phoebe is doing fine! ”

A cheer went up from the group.

“Kathryn, congratulations!” Belim’s wife, Garlia, embraced her and he rubbed her shoulder as was the custom of the local culture. Janeway found it strangely affecting.

“Thank you both, but Phoebe did all the work. It was wonderful and the babies are the most beautiful things I’ve ever seen.”

“It is a wonderful time when babies are born.” Said Garlia.

###

Janeway was truly shocked when Phoebe announced the names of the twins the next day.

“Why do you want to name that poor defenseless infant after me?”

Phoebe looked earnestly at her sister.

“Kathryn, for one thing, you’re my sister and I love you,” Janeway was a bit taken aback, Phoebe was never demonstrative like this. Must be the hormones, she thought, “and for another, you’re strong, fearless and smart. In fact, you’ll probably give her a complex, but I couldn’t think of a better role model. Well, except *me*, of course.”

“Phoebe…” Janeway sniffed and smiled, “Phoebe, I’ve always wanted to be as strong as you.”

###

“Kathryn, I don’t see why you can’t take the promotion early. Someone else could captain that mission. ”

The two sisters exchanged a look.

“It’s the job of a lifetime, Mom, I told you that before. It’s a huge honor. And it’s only two months. Then I’ll be back and nailed down in HQ overseeing the analysis and managing the Horizon Project soon enough. I won’t get lost again, I promise.”

“It’s really all about getting out of babysitting for two months isn’t it?” Phoebe laughed at her older sister.

“The thought never crossed my mind. You know how good I am with children!”

Now both her mother and sister were laughing at her.

“What?”

“Kathryn, you’ve always scared the crap out of children. Almost as much as they scare you.” Phoebe said.

“Naomi Wildman adored me!”

“Ktarians are noted for being courageous.” Gretchen was laughing even harder than Phoebe now.

“Okay, let’s test this hypothesis. You’re the scientist, Kathryn.” Phoebe handed Janeway a baby. “Hold Rich for twenty minutes while I get Katie settled.”

“Um, I don’t know if this is a good idea.” Janeway was looking flustered. “Mom?”

“Oh, for heaven’s sakes Kathryn, they’re just babies. And you’re so *good* with children.” Her mother and sister were almost helpless with laughter at her expense.

“You two are just *so* damned funny.”

“Sorry, sis. We promise not to scare you anymore.” Phoebe paused before adding, “Today.”

###

They had been packing Phoebe’s things to be transported home when Janeway had received a call from Star Fleet.

“Phoebe, I just got a call from headquarters. They’ve asked if I can go sort out some engineering issue they’re having on Lyros II. It’s only for two nights. Do you mind?”

“Of course not. You’ll be back for our last day though? We’ve got to be on the first transport.”

“Oh yes, it’s not a huge emergency, it’s just that they’ve got problems with some apparatus and their chief engineer and head scientist are both away dealing with another glitch that came up a few days ago.”

Her mother gave Janeway a serious stare.

“It’s nothing dangerous, Mom. I promise. I’ll be back in three days. I guarantee it.”

###

She smiled at the easy friendliness of the people of Percassa, called colloquially as “Picasso” because it was a haven for artists, with stunning scenery and liberal, even by normal Federation standards, attitudes to many things.

Such as the easy going manner in which Janeway was greeted by border officials at the Interplanetary Space Port.

As she had only hand luggage, Janeway walked straight toward the transport station, looking forward to seeing the twins. When she saw who was making their way towards her, she felt a sense of dread, but when she saw the look on his face, she stopped walking and felt if she was going to pass out.

Janeway could hear him speaking, something about an ‘accident’ and that Katie and Rich being

slightly hurt but recovering. She managed to walk with Belim to the transporter station but only kept her control until they reached the hospital, where she cried silently for hours when they entered the twin's room.

###

Belim solemnly entered the room. He could see Janeway sitting in between the children's cots. Quietly he moved over to her and gently rubbed her shoulder. The first time he had done that had been a joyful occasion, today was not. She didn't seem to be aware of his presence.

"Kathryn, it's Belim."

Her eyes reluctantly moved from the twins to meet his. He couldn't remember ever seeing someone look so shattered.

"Kathryn, is there any family that I could contact for you?"

"Thank you for the offer, Belim, but we don't…didn't have anyone but ourselves."

"I understand." He hesitated, not knowing how to proceed. "Kathryn, would you allow me to help with the arrangements? I don't want to intrude, but…"

"Belim, thank you. I know I should be…" she searched for words but couldn't find them, "…I just feel so lost. I would be grateful for any help."

"Of course. I will attempt to ease your burden," he heard her sob, "I will deal with all the, um, issues on your behalf." He rubbed her shoulder again and he could see that her grief was overwhelming her, "I may have to ask you about some details." He didn't want to go into what those details would be as he wasn't sure she could cope with the implications of some of them at this time, but he plunged on, "Kathryn, may I organize a Percassan service for you?"

"That would be lovely, thank you Belim. Phoebe has…had so many friends here. Mom…" her voice trailed off as if she was completely confused and at a loss as to what else to say.

"The formal adoption should go through within a week."

Formal adoption? For the first time, Janeway realized that she would be now responsible for Phoebe's children. How was she going to cope? What would it mean?

Two days later, Janeway attended a beautiful traditional Percassan funeral for her mother and sister. Phoebe's friends had all created a piece of artwork in their memory. Belim and his wife, Garlia had supported her throughout the ceremony.

When the twins were to be released from hospital two days after the funeral, Janeway realized she didn't have the slightest idea what she was to do. Phoebe's lease had expired the day of the accident and all the contents had already been shipped back to Earth. She hadn't even thought of how or when she was to return home.

Just as she was struggling to come up with a solution, Belim appeared.

"Are you all ready, Kathryn?"

"Ready?"

“I thought you and the children could be my guests for a couple of days.” He reached down and picked up the baby bag and Rich in his travel basket. “There are still a few outstanding issues regarding your formal adoption proceedings,”

Janeway, just emerging from a fog of grief, tried to understand what he was saying. He continued. “…and you’ll need somewhere to stay while they’re settled. Garlia is very excited about you staying. We have three grown up children and I think she misses them.” His wife was also a volunteer counselor for one of the local non-governmental aid organizations, and he was sure that she would be good for both the children and especially, Janeway.

He was now propelling the group towards his vehicle.

###

Janeway spent only two days with Belim and Garlia. It only took that long for the paperwork to go through to allow Janeway to leave Percassa and return to Earth with the children. They both had been concerned that Janeway was still in shock from the deaths of her sister and mother, but she had assured them that she would be fine and that she wanted to return home.

###

It wasn’t until the woman from the child protection board left was she truly terrified.

Home. Alone. *Completely* alone with two three week old babies. In a farm house in Indiana.

It has been had been a few years now, but she was fairly certain that she hadn’t been this terrified when Voyager had first been stranded in the Delta Quadrant. Until the moment the front door closed behind Mrs Duq, she had felt reasonably confident.

Weeks later, she couldn’t remember how she had got through the first few days. She hadn’t had time to properly prepare the nursery. It was a very different homecoming that her sister and mother had planned.

Mrs Duq, a child welfare official from Percassa, had accompanied her back to Earth, indeed even Indiana, and the woman has spent the whole time she was in the Janeway home making delighted exclamations about the house, nursery, kitchen and backyard. All Janeway wanted initially was for Mrs Duq to leave. She wanted to be alone and have some peace.

They had arrived home in the late afternoon. While Mrs Duq checked out the rest of the house, Janeway put her bag in her room and got then got the baby’s room ready for them. Luckily, all the bed clothes had been unpacked and easily found.

Janeway made her way to the living room, where she could hear Mrs Duq unpacking some groceries in the kitchen.

Mrs Duq checked every room in the house it seemed, spending quite a bit of time in the nursery.

While the other woman checked every nook and cranny of the Janeway residence, Janeway herself sat with the sleeping children. Mrs Duq kept up a constant commentary that Janeway could hear but was not really listening to.

“And so, that’s it, my dear.” Suddenly, she was in the living room. “Here’s a nice cup of tea for you.” she placed a mug in front of Janeway, who was still not quite paying attention. “I’ve checked and

you'll have everything you'll need for the next week or so," the woman was now gathering up her things. "I've contacted your EMH…is that right dear?" Janeway managed to nod, "…and he said he'd drop by in a few days to see how you're getting along. I'm sure you'll be fine."

Mrs Duq made her way to the front door. "Good luck, Ms Janeway. If you've get a free moment," she laughed and Janeway felt that there was a joke she wasn't getting, "drop me a line and let me know how you're coping."

Suddenly, Janeway realized that she was about to be left alone for the first time, with the two children and now she didn't want the woman to go. Although wanting desperately wanting to scream "don't leave me!" Janeway managed to eke out a sincere "thank you."

When she woke on the first morning back in Indiana, Janeway wondered if it all had been a very bad dream.

A small mewing sound from across the hall put paid to that thought. Glancing at the clock next to her bed, she realized that it had only been two hours since she'd last been awake to feed them. They would require feeding and changing soon, if not now.

In the back of her mind, she thought that the staff at the Percassan hospital, and indeed Mrs Duq's agency, had underestimated the difficulties she would face, on her own, caring for the children.

Three hours later, she knew they had.

Fourteen hours later, she wondered how anyone survived the experience at all.

She found herself still dressed in her Academy sweats, no shower and smelling very strongly of baby. And not all good baby. And ravenously hungry. She had a vague recollection of *thinking* about breakfast after they'd got up, but nothing after that.

She would recall later several days when she hadn't manage to change out of her nightdress and on more than one occasion she hadn't managed to change out of her sweat suit at all and she rather thought the previous week she'd worn to same outfit for more than 48 hours.

However, she couldn't pin down the moment when she first started to worry incessantly about the children, but she discovered that she could have even shorter showers than she had on a Voyager yellow alert, drink tea while walking and that it didn't really matter if she didn't clean the kitchen. Janeway had no idea who had unpacked all the infant paraphernalia that had been provided to her as an "adoptive carer" but she assumed it was Mrs Duq. There was also a great deal of stuff that her mother and sister had purchased as well. Some of it was still in boxes. Janeway would go through it whenever she discovered that she needed something in particular.

So far, the only really useful items she had discovered were several dozen towel squares. She had discovered how useful, even essential, they were very early in her time home. They were truly multifunctional for wiping, soaking up wet things, picking up 'stuff'. At the end of a fruitless search for the 'natural diapers' that Phoebe had bought, she realized that was what the towel squares were.

It was on the third day that Janeway realized that she'd never fully appreciated how Samantha Wildman had coped on Voyager. She may've had Kes and the Doctor to help, but the amount of time it took to do the simplest of tasks staggered Janeway.

On this day she found that it was after 1100, she was still in her night dress, hadn't eaten or showered since rising and most surprisingly of all, hadn't had any coffee.

By the fourth day, she was in a parlous enough state to admit that she needed help. Trouble was, she hadn't the slightest idea of who to ask.

Mark and his wife were two weeks away in the Bento system at a conference for at least another two weeks. Tom and B'Elanna, her first option, were still on Q'onoS, Seven was immersed in some top secret project on Utopia Planetia, the Doctor thought she was joking every time she even mentioned she was tired, she had absolutely no idea where Chakotay was or even how to contact him. Harry was commanding the *Beagle*. Every time she thought about that, it brought a smile to her face. Tuvok, well, she didn't even consider Tuvok, his recovery was going well, but slowly. Sam and Naomi had left for K'Taria a few weeks ago.

"We're on our own, it seems." she said to the now thankfully sleeping infants.

###

It was sometime in the first week, which felt like a month, that Janeway discovered the comm message from Starfleet requesting her acceptance or otherwise for the captaincy of the *Beagle*. The *Beagle* was scheduled to leave the next day. Only a few weeks ago she believed that the mission would be important to her. She hadn't even thought about it since arriving at the spaceport on Percassa. Janeway wasn't even sure she knew when that was.

Janeway had sent her refusal of the position along with a request for an extension of her leave for another two months.

Admiral Burke had contacted her almost as she'd hit the 'send' button, such was the shock that her refusal had caused at Headquarters. She had explained her situation and, as the start date was so close, suggested they should consider her First Officer, Harry Kim, for Captain of the mission. He had both the training and experience for the job, citing his work on Astrometrics project on Voyager.

He thanked her and told her he'd approved her leave request as well. If she needed anything in the meantime, to please contact him. Voyager's crew, and especially her captain, were still very much on the Starfleet A-list it seemed

###

"Good morning, Captain." The Doctor took the baby out of her arms at the front door "How's the new mother getting along?" He didn't notice her pallid complexion or the lines around her eyes. His attention was totally on Rich as he followed her into the living room.

"I'm not their mother, Doctor. And I'm not coping at all."

He laughed as he placed the baby onto the sofa and started to scan him. Janeway had picked up Katie and had practically fallen into another comfortable chair. She absently rubbed the baby's back and reflected glumly that whenever anyone came to the house, they stopped crying. She had to be doing something wrong.

"Oh, Captain. Your sense of humor." The Doctor hummed and made funny noises at Rich. "Have I told you about my submission to the Federation Medical Academy regarding the application and synthesis of nanoprobes in treating…Captain, are you listening to me?"

"I'm sorry, Doctor, I don't seem to get enough sleep. I can't…"

"Captain, you'll have to get more sleep," she looked at him with undisguised disbelief, "you know

you have to be on your toes for these little ones."

He switched babies, putting Rich into her arms as he took Katie.

"You need to eat balanced and healthy meals, get plenty of sleep, of course, and exercise regularly." He uttered the instructions as though by rote and didn't bother to check whether Janeway thought any of the points were even remotely attainable. "My thesis has been very well received. It's currently with the review committee but they've intimated that…"

"I think Rich smiled at me this morning." Such was the depths she had reached, Janeway reflected. A baby smiling at her was the highlight of her day.

"At their age it's more likely gas."

"Oh." The disappointment took her by surprise. Those depths now seemed a little deeper.

He continued to prattle on while he finished scanning Katie.

"Doctor, I'm not sure I'm cut out for this, I can't seem to…"

But he wasn't listening.

"Captain, someone who beat the Borg shouldn't have too many problems with two little angels."

And so, like every other time he had visited to check on Katie and Rich in the last two weeks, he scoffed at whatever she said or thought she was joking. Janeway wondered where he had got the impression she was such a comedian.

###

The kitchen was a disaster area. Visitors had always commented that the Janeway house was a wonderful period piece and the kitchen was especially "charming". They had obviously never hand washed dishes or cooked meals from scratch. It was also obvious that Professor Simpkins, whose book on attaining domestic and baby bliss "the natural way" Janeway was reading, was a fiction writer. Janeway thought it was more likely he was just an idiot. His breathy writing style was more than she could take at the moment, as were his suggestions for preparing a 'rich emotional environment', whatever the hell that was.

As she placed his book on the bench top she notice that they were almost out of cutlery and crockery again. It was time to wash some dishes.

Janeway carefully lifted the rack with the dozens of clean bottles and teats and then scanned the room for somewhere suitable to put it. There were very few spare spaces in the whole kitchen area, deciding eventually to rest them on top of Professor Simpkin's book. The man was obviously unhinged and the book wouldn't lose anything by having water drip into it.

The kitchen needed a good clean and she mentally added it to the list of things to do around the house. The boxes containing her mother and sister's belongings sent from Percassa hadn't been attended to, the replicator and recycler still needed to be installed and she was also down to her last clean pair of track pants. With a bit of luck, she'd manage one of these tasks tomorrow. Or maybe the next day.

Deciding she was also hungry, she opened the refrigerator to see what was still available to eat. Mr

Harrison would deliver her grocery order the next day but right now she was famished. Peering inside the fridge, she spied some cheese. It was only a little past it's prime, she decided, as she scraped a few blue spots from it.

The cheese also had the advantage of already being on a plate. No need to find something clean to put it on. Just add crackers and her meal was ready. If she wasn't too embarrassed to ask, she'd get some pre-prepared meals added to her weekly order. The Harrisons had twelve grandchildren, all being brought up in a traditional way, so she left the list to them. The only thing she'd added to the order had been coffee. Apparently, her mother had stopped drinking it for the whole time she had been lost in the Delta Quadrant.

Her infant care technique had changed since the first couple of days.

At first, her biggest concern had been not getting any of 'it' on her hands when changing diapers. This had proved extremely difficult, if not impossible, and she was now content to just hold her breath through the process. Her best time so far had been just under a minute and a half.

The ninety second incident, as she now remembered it by, was particularly nasty and she had since changed both babies to a different type of formula.

Of course, there had been one day when she'd changed clothes three times and had two extra showers.

She began to measure success by how few times she gagged during diaper changing.

And who would've thought that caring for two tiny people could be so damned time consuming?

The instructions on the formula container were sketchy at best and trying to achieve the right temperature was incredibly difficult using the pot of warm water.

Janeway glared at the large box sitting on the floor at the end of the bench. Less than two weeks after she had returned to Indiana, she ordered both a large replicator and a kitchen recycling unit. After being told that as this was currently "peak time", it would be at least a further four weeks until they could be installed, she had promptly burst into tears. This in turn had caused both babies to join her and it was over an hour before none of the three were crying.

Her mother had never once in her memory ever expressed the need or desire for a replicator and it just reinforced to Janeway how inadequate she was compared to either Gretchen or Phoebe.

If she had a spare couple of hours, she could probably install the replicator herself. She wished that she had asked the delivery man to at least unpack it and put it in place, as she was unable to even lift it. And getting a couple of 'free' hours to install it was something she could fantasize about but it was unlikely to happen.

A little cry bought he back to reality. She peered into the crib. They were starting to remind her of two baby birds squawking to be fed.

"Hey, I'm doing my best here, people."

Taking the bottles out of the water and drying them off for what seemed like the hundredth time, she tested the temperature by squirting some into the crook of her arm.

"At last!" she tried the second bottle and was finally satisfied. "Okay team, let's do it."

###

What was really difficult to cope with was the conflicting advice in the various books and manuals that she had downloaded. Should she use cotton or synthetic bed clothing, clothes and towels? After making up the twin's cots with Academy corners, she had remade them twice each according to the book, "How to keep you and your baby relaxed". Was it best to keep the house noisy? Would it be better if the twins slept in the same room or should they sleep in her room, should she have them in her bed at all (which she did more often than she would admit to the Doctor)? She wasn't concerned a great deal about the twin's sleeping habits until she read the 'Guide to a Happy Baby'. Its advice had directly contradicted that of 'It's only Natural". This book was in turn at odds with 'My Baby won't Sleep'. How could three books about the same problem have three different solutions? Janeway's first reaction was to use the baby monitors that Phoebe had bought. She spent whole nights just listening to them breathe.

How should they be bathed, clothed and powdered? She had read an article that suggested that she should be using a different formula. It had hinted darkly that a different brand was less likely to contribute to problems. She had asked Mr Harrison to get a few different types, just in case.

The first really scary thing she discovered was bathing and dressing the babies. It had all seemed so straightforward when the nurse at the hospital and Garlia had shown her. Now that she was doing it herself, it was a whole new thing. It took quite a few baths before she was sure she wouldn't drown either or both of the twins. Getting them dressed was equally traumatic at first, as suddenly all their clothes seemed very small. Janeway was convinced that she was going to dislocate an arm, or worse, trying to get their little jumpsuits on. It was a few days before she remembered a conversation between her mother and Phoebe, where Gretchen had said that she felt the same way when she had Kathryn, but someone had said it was like dressing a boneless chicken. After they stopped laughing, she said it was true.

As she carried the twins upstairs, she wondered if she would ever have the luxury of a thirty minute hot water shower again. She was fairly sure that they'd be at school before she ever got time for a bath. It felt as though she had been on 'red alert' since returning home. Her own new bathing routine consisted of extremely quick showers, keeping the twins in sight the whole time.

Janeway was amazed that there just didn't seem to be enough hours in the day to get anything done. She had decided to tackle the problem as she would've on Voyager, with a schedule. By her own estimation, the schedule had lasted less than five minutes because Rich had thrown up on it, closely followed by her spilling a whole container of formula concentrate. After those incidents, she had visions of the children's first word being 'shit'.

###

It was three weeks after they'd arrived home that Janeway received a call from Belim. He was on Earth and he wondered if he could call on her. She agreed and then wildly looked around the kitchen. What on earth was she going to feed him? Well, maybe he'd just want tea.

Belim arrived at the front door with a picnic basket.

"Garlia told me that the thing you would most appreciate was a meal you didn't have to prepare yourself."

"Garlia is an exceptionally brilliant woman. Is she with you?"

She ushered Belim into the living room where the twins were lying on a big rug in the middle of the

room.

“Oh, yes. I know, she’s brilliant. Unfortunately, I’m only here for two days, so Garlia stayed home.” His face lit up at the sight of Katie and Rich. “Can I hold one?”

“Of course. Actually, it’s about feeding time at the Janeway zoo. Would you like to help with Rich?”

Belim looked delighted and he reached out eagerly for the offered baby.

“Kathryn, I know you’ll find this hard to believe, but Garlia and I miss this now that our little ones aren’t so little anymore.”

“Well, it’s not always this straightforward, but even when it’s been the hardest, I just think about how their eyes look at me when they’re feeding. It’s the most amazing thing I’ve ever seen and believe me, I’ve seen some amazing things.”

“Oh yes, I know exactly what you mean. Garlia says it’s addictive.”

Belim explained all the legal steps that had been taken on her behalf in Percassa as they sat on a blanket under her ‘thinking’ tree. The twins had settled to sleep in their baskets with them and Janeway again wondered why they were exceptionally well behaved around company.

“You should take these documents to your lawyer. It’s all finalized from the Percassan end and as we’re part of the Federation, there shouldn’t be any issues here with your local authorities.”

“Belim, I didn’t really thank you and Garlia properly in those first few days and weeks. I don’t know what would’ve become of us if not for the both of you.”

“We were happy to be able to help you. I’ll be back on Earth in a few months, may I visit again? Garlia will be with me and I know she’d like to see the twins.”

“Oh, yes, please come and see us. And the house is enormous, you’d be very welcome to stay here if you’d like.”

“That sounds wonderful, thank you Kathryn.”

“We’ll look forward to it.”

###

The last thing she actually wanted to do was to visit the family law office in town, but Belim had pointed out she would have to lodge the papers he’d bought with her lawyer to finalize everything. Of course, it also meant that she would need to deal with the settlement of her mother’s, as well as Phoebe’s, estates.

Thankfully, all the family had used the same law firm for years. She had known Bob Ngyuen all her life and was looking forward to seeing him but the thought of traveling to Bloomington with the twins was daunting. She really needed to sort out the paperwork but she wasn’t sure she was ready to venture outside the house just yet.

“How come I can bring a ship back from the Delta Quadrant, but I’m scared to take you guys on an outing?” she asked Rich, who didn’t reply, but she took the gurgling noises as a baby shrug.

All the equipment and supplies for the trip were on hand thanks to a wonderful day with her mother

and Phoebe before the twins birth, buying the stroller, high chairs, beds, bags and other equipment they had been assured by the salesperson that were essential. She figured that she didn't have any real excuse for not going.

Once the task was started she concentrated on getting everything needed packed and ready. She started planning the 'Bloomington Operation', as it had already been unconsciously been termed in her head. Equipment, contingency plans, supplies and provisions. Okay, she could do this. She picked up a padd and started a list and put the stroller as the first item.

After completing the list, she started packing. Once all the items were packed and ticked off to her satisfaction, she changed into some clothes more suitable for visiting town.

Closing the front door, she negotiated the front steps carefully with the stroller, making a mental note to get Bobby Simpkins to add a ramp both front, as well as the back, of the house.

She was half way to the front gate before she realized that she'd forgotten something very important. Katie and Rich.

Leaving the stroller on the path, she turned and ran back towards the house. Rushing through the door and running into the living room, she found the children sound asleep in the bassinettes where she'd left them not more than a minute ago.

In her mind, that sixty seconds had seemed to have lasted a month.

The feeling of relief had now been replaced with scorching guilt. What sort of a carer was she? Damn, she couldn't even take them on an outing without misplacing them. Her eyes stung with unshed tears. She wouldn't allow herself to cry as she wasn't at all sure she'd be able to stop.

Gathering up the children, she kissed both of them while apologizing profusely. For the second time that day, she went out the now wide open front door, pulling it closed with her foot.

"You guys sure got a raw deal in the auntie department."

The official part of the meeting with the lawyer hadn't taken long. All the details of moving the house to her name had gone through without a hitch and even the Percassen adoption had been recognized by the relevant Earth authorities with no difficulties. Janeway hadn't realized how worried she had been that the babies would be taken away from her until he had confirmed it.

It had been wonderful to see Bob again after so many years and he had a wad of his own baby photos to show her.

###

Just as Janeway carefully negotiated the stroller back onto the sidewalk outside Bob's office, a voice and a vaguely familiar face came to her attention.

"Hello, Kathryn dear, do you remember me?"

"Um, I'm sorry…Mrs …?"

"Robards, dear. I'm president of the Rural Ladies Guild here in Bloomington."

Oh yes. *Now* she remembered. Her mother called the group the 'gingham guerillas'. They were against everything. "Conservative, prissy stickybeaks." Gretchen always said. And that was when she

was in a good mood.

“Mrs Robards. Of course.”

“I’ve been wanting to see how you were getting on.”

I just bet you did, Janeway thought to herself.

“Are you living in your mother’s house?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“I’ve never been inside, but I’m sure it’s lovely.” This pointless observation was followed with a vapid girlish laugh.

Janeway was already taking a strong dislike to Mrs Robards, who was talking again. She wondered whether the vacuous woman needed to breathe.

“…and I don’t understand why it took you so long to get home, but I’m sure you thought it was very exciting.” Another giggle. Could anyone in the 24th century be this stupid?

Janeway said something non-committal.

“Have you enrolled them at St Xavier’s yet?”

The question caught Janeway completely by surprise. A school? They were barely two months old. And St Xavier’s? It was the very conservative semi-religious school just outside Bloomington.

“Um, er, no ma’am.” Janeway was still a bit off balance. “We’re not really church goers.”

At this Mrs Robards pressed her lips together in obvious disapproval, while still managing an insincere sickly smile.

“I’d thought I’d wait and see what they want to do.” Janeway nodded towards the stroller, “I’m not sure what sort of curriculum they offer anyway.” Thinking it might not be good enough should either twin want to be in Starfleet. From memory, the school was big on repressing students, but light on academic achievements.

Mrs Robards laughed a tinkling, yet simpering girlish laugh.

“How funny of you.” She said obviously thinking Janeway was making a mistake. “I don’t know anything about curriculums, I just know it’s a *proper* school, especially for children like these.” Another stupid guffaw from the woman distracted Janeway from the ‘children like these’ comment.

“Poor Phoebe, though it was always likely to happen with her lifestyle, I suppose.” Janeway watched the older woman’s lips purse and was diverted enough by thoughts of her mother’s comments so as not to take a swing at the dreadful female. “Poor little mites. To lose their mother at such an early age, it’s just so wrong.” Mrs Robards sighed dramatically and cooed over the twins. “Orphaned, unloved and not even breastfed. How on earth are they going to thrive?”

“I love them, Mrs Robards.” Said Janeway quietly with barely suppressed anger.

“Of course you do, dear.”

Never had five little words so devastated Janeway. Mrs Robards managed to convey her total belief that Janeway was just as unfit a carer as Phoebe would've been a mother. Mrs Robards had pierced her heart with her first utterances but the last had totally smashed it to pieces.

Mrs Robards, totally oblivious or uncaring to the hurt and damage she was wreaking, continued.

"…I can think of a number of *deserving* couples who would give these sweeties a proper home and really not be concerned with their dubious heritage."

It was the final two words that finally snapped Janeway out of her reverie. She had to get away from this poisonous creature or she was sure that she might actually physically attack her.

"Good day, Mrs Rabid."

"It's Robards, dear."

"Yes, I know."

Janeway raged all the way home. Dubious heritage? *Dubious*? It was the judgmental, narrow minded and downright rudeness of the ghastly woman that had staggered her. How could anyone of a sane mind infer that either Phoebe or the twins had been punished?

"Prissy, sanctimonious, stupid cow!" hissed Janeway to herself. "You're both Janeways!" she told the twins as they rounded the corner before the transport station. "Don't let anyone ever tell you any different." Katie regarded her with her usual solemn look. Rich had slept through the whole thing.

But was she giving the twins what they needed? Was she even competent? The episode this morning had shaken her confidence completely. The original feeling of inadequacy that had plagued her when she'd first bought the children home now revisited her with a vengeance.

Completely unaware of the carnage she had caused in her wake, Mrs Robards stood still on the sidewalk, no doubt looking for another victim, while Janeway walked quickly towards home, struggling not to dissolve into tears.

###

"You really should get that step fixed Kathryn. It looks ready to break." Jake Harrison bought the last of the groceries into the kitchen.

"I will, Mr Harrison. I'll get Bobby Simpkins to come over and fix it. I've got a few other jobs that need doing as well. He'll be back from Denver at the end of the week. I'm going to get some ramps put in as well."

Mr Harrison nodded his approval with her plans.

"Do you need anything else, my dear?"

"No, thank you, Mr Harrison."

They were moving to the back door. Neighbors always used the Janeway's back door, especially the Harrisons as they lived on the property behind the Janeways. Her mother always said that you could tell a stranger was visiting when there was a knock on the front door.

"Okay, well call us if you need us, Kathryn."

“You’re already helping me so much, Mr Harrison. And please thank Mrs Harrison for the pie. I’m really looking forward to a piece later.”

“I will indeed. And Norma said to tell you that we’re babysitting for you for Voyager’s first reunion ball.” He caught the uncertain look in her eye. “Don’t argue with me young lady. The twins will be fine with us for one night. Norma has it all planned.”

“Yes, sir.” She had replied meekly. She had completely forgotten the ball but supposed it must’ve been on the news. Luckily it was dress uniforms, because she had no idea how she’d get anything else to wear.

“And Kathryn?”

“Yes, sir?”

“You’ve got upchuck down your back.” he laughed, “It seemed like either me or Norma were always changing one bit of clothing or the other when we were raising our brood. Believe it or not, we missed it when they were all grown up. Probably why we volunteered to help with Stan’s kids.” He was laughing again when he saw her trying to look over her shoulder. “Don’t worry, it’s not too bad. Just don’t sit on your mother’s good sofa.”

Janeway was laughing with him. It was good to talk to someone who didn’t feel sorry for her or the children and didn’t make comments about the situation. She was still seething about Mrs Robards.

She watched the old man carefully negotiate the broken bottom step and returned to the kitchen. As she surveyed the week’s groceries, she wondered why she needed so much stuff considering there was only herself and two babies that only drank formula.

Laughing as she unpacked the vegetables, she realized that the grocery delivery was another highlight of her week. She had been eating the vegetables raw, so she eyed the selection with suspicion. The Harrisons had been trying to give her a variety each week but she was sure that most of the vegetables could be ‘saladized’. The meat was a different proposition. Eventually, she’d just told the Harrisons that she was becoming a vegetarian, as she was too embarrassed to admit she couldn’t cook.

Her delight had been profound, however, when she’d discovered she could in fact boil an egg.

What sort of a mother couldn’t cook? Would the kids be malnourished? The thought and Mrs Robards’ comments from yesterday rocked her.

###

She hadn’t made her bed all week. The only time it was in any semblance of order was when she changed it. A vague feeling of unease came over her when she suddenly realized that she couldn’t remember when she last changed it. It shouldn’t be too bad however, as most nights lately she slept in Phoebe’s room with the twins, room making sure they were still breathing. Now she thought about it, that bed probably needed changing too. Mentally, she added that chore to her task list for today. She scooped up various items around her room and made her way to the laundry.

After the third load of washing for the day, she again reflected on how she never appreciated how her mother had been able to cope with her and Phoebe and still work at as a lecturer at the University.

One of the first thing she noticed when she'd first gone to the academy was that her clothes didn't smell as fresh and that the food, though made with a state of the art 24th Century replicator, was a pale imitation of her mother's wonderful 'old fashioned' meals. She'd especially missed the family dinners, with her father and mother and even Phoebe, surreptitiously kicking her leg under the table. They'd all be talking and laughing, sharing their news of the day.

Trying not to cry, when she cried, the babies cried, she picked up the twins baskets and put them in the shade on the back porch, figuring if she needed fresh air, so would they.

"Want to watch me put out the washing, little ones?" they didn't answer, "You guys sure to generate a lot of laundry."

Richard had finally gone to sleep. Maybe he liked the backyard. Katie was just lying there, her eyes trying to follow Janeway as she moved about the porch.

"Four loads. *Four* loads for just your stuff. Can you believe that?" Katie however, still wasn't commenting.

"Stay here." Janeway ordered, "I'm just going in to get the last lot, and then you can watch me hang it up, okay?"

Janeway practically sprinted between the laundry and the porch. The thought of leaving the twins alone for even ten seconds filled her with fear. After Operation Bloomington she was worried that she would misplace them again.

Returning with the last basketful of wet clothes, she paused to inspect the baskets and Katie was still watching her.

There was a lovely gentle breeze and not a cloud in the sky. All the washing would be dry by this afternoon. Yep, she thought to herself, worrying about getting the washing dry was another depth she had reached.

"I used to be a Starship Captain," she informed Katie, stopping long enough to tickle the infant, "don't give me that look, squirt, I used to be *intimidating*."

For the first time in what seemed like months, she thought of her life on Voyager and her friends. They would be shocked to know that not only did she not have a 24th Century clothes 'fresher' but she didn't even have an old fashioned clothes *dryer*.

She laughed to herself as she pegged the last of the bed sheets on the line and stood back to examine her work. The sound of all the washing flapping in the breeze bought back more childhood memories of herself and Phoebe chasing each other and her mother admonishing them both with a mouthful of pegs.

A small squawk from Katie returned Janeway to the present and she turned back to the house.

"I'm coming, Katie. It's not time for anything to eat, so don't tell me you're hungry."

She stumbled as she started up the steps, at first not registering what had happened. The intense pain from her ankle surprised her and it was not until she was lurching sideways, towards the handrail, that she realized that she had put her foot through the broken step. It was the last thought she managed before her head impacted the baluster and she knew no more.

###

The serenity of the place was what he noticed most as he walked down the street from the transport station. The peacefulness and the wonderful fresh, clean air. It was like coming home. People waved and smiled to him as they passed by. A surge of nostalgia for Trebus hit him. It was all so familiar. The easy and open country town friendliness.

As he turned into the gate to the Janeway house, an old fashioned pick up truck drove passed. The driver waved to him and smiled. Chakotay waved back. If he could stay here, he would be happy. He'd seen a 'for sale' sign on one of the properties a while back. He would definitely investigate that later.

The Janeway house was exactly as Chakotay had always imagined it. It was large and rambling with an old fashioned porch and swing at the front. He was willing to bet it would have a sunny veranda at the back as well. The orientation was right to get the morning sun at this time of year.

As he got closer, he noticed the wonderful homely touches. The decorative garden at the front and continuing around the side of the house. The path leading to the house had a border on both sides of little colored flowers. He'd have to ask Mrs Janeway what they were. They reminded him of the ones his mother had planted around their house on Trebus.

It was the only house in the street that had a mailbox. An ancient one with 'Janeway' painted on the side. He wondered if it had any use, as that sort of mail hadn't been used in nearly two hundred years.

He walked up the three wooden steps to the front door. The main door was open, but the screen door was closed. He knocked tentatively on the door frame, not being able to see a door bell button.

There was no reply but he thought he could hear a baby's cry from deep within the house. He remembered that B'Elanna had told him that Phoebe Janeway had been expecting a child.

"Hello, Mrs Janeway?" he knocked again, this time louder. He realized that he didn't know if Phoebe was married or whether or not her surname was still Janeway. "Kathryn? Um…*Phoebe*? Hello?"

The baby's cry now seemed quite distressed. He tried the screen door and found it unlocked. He opened it and rapped again on the inside of the inside woodwork and listened. Were there two babies crying now?

Chakotay walked slowly down the hall and poked his head into a doorway of what revealed itself to be the living room. He smiled when he saw, among many others, a photo of an obviously very young Kathryn Janeway with pigtails and a book in one hand and the other on her hip. She was looking directly at the camera and laughing. There was a small terrier dog looking up at her.

The crying bought his attention back to the present.

"Hello? Is anyone home?"

Fear was starting to gnaw at him now, as he started moving along the hallway toward the now almost hysterical wailing.

He was moving through the kitchen. It seemed to be almost covered in baby feeding bottles and teats. And cups. This was definitely a Janeway house.

The crying was very close. The source seemed to be from the directions of the back porch. He opened the back door and peered outside.

There were two babies in bassinets on the veranda, thankfully in the shade, but no sign of any other adult. Something *was* wrong.

“Hello?” he purposely shouted quite loudly. No answer. He glanced towards the line with billowing white sheets, clothes and diapers. Someone must be around here, but where were they?

First things first, though. He moved to the baby baskets and made sure the children were okay.

The children had to be twins, they were so much alike. They were both the image of Kathryn Janeway but with slightly darker coloring. They must be Phoebe’s, but where was their mother, or *anyone* for that matter?

“Who have we here? Where’s your mommy, beautiful ones?”

His voice seemed to sooth the babies somewhat and they both quietened down considerably but still whimpered.

He checked both and discovered that only one was wet. Whoever should be around hadn’t been gone for very long. He would move them indoors, call someone and start a proper search.

As he bent down over one of the baskets, he was startled by a loud, if shaky, voice behind him.

“Get away from my kids. Who the hell are you?”

Chakotay spun around and faced her. She looked like hell. Her right side was coated in dirt and she was bleeding profusely from a head wound near her hair line.

“*Chakotay*?”

Total shock registered on her face and she swiped some blood away that was dripping from her eye. Shock was replaced with relief and she moved to take a step towards him.

“What…” as soon as she put the weight on her right foot, pain registered for the first time and she stopped suddenly. Her eyes rolled back in her head and she dropped heavily on the steps.

As quickly as he could, Chakotay lowered the baby in his arms back into their basket and rushed to the side of Janeway.

He almost tripped on the broken bottom step and after checking the remaining steps, he scooped the unconscious woman up and took her inside. As he picked her up, he could see that her foot was pointing at an unnatural angle. A broken ankle, no wonder she passed out, he thought.

Carefully placing her on the sofa in the living room, he quickly returned to the back porch to gather the infants and brought them into the same room.

He spied the vid machine in an adjoining room, quickly placing a call to Starfleet Headquarters and asking to be placed in contact with Voyager’s EMH.

###

It was the eerie quiet that made Janeway’s eyes pop open. The twins were letting her sleep in today.

After a lazy stretch, she realized that she couldn't remember going to bed last night. The last thing she remembered was doing the laundry and…"Katie! Rich!"

Throwing the covers off and bouncing out of bed, she flew to Phoebe's room and was almost physically ill when she saw the cots empty. Where could they be?

She was down the stairs in practically one stride. Running into the living room, she found it empty. Spinning on her heel, she bolted across the hall and burst into the kitchen and was greeted by the sight of her former first officer sitting at the kitchen table, feeding Rich.

Somewhat relieved, she still was frantic enough to bark out "Where's Katie?"

"Over there," he nodded towards the bassinette on the other side of the room, "but she's just gone to sleep."

Her knees seemed to buckle with the flood of relief she was suddenly feeling. She dropped into a chair and realized that her ankle hurt in a vague way, her head was pounding and she felt a little nauseous.

Where did he come from? How did he get here?

Seeing her struggle with the situation, Chakotay explained.

"I got back to Earth yesterday and decided to come visit. At first I thought no one was home, but when I knocked the front door was open. I could hear a baby crying, so I thought I'd better check."

He noticed that her expression had softened somewhat and she appeared mesmerized by the sight of him feeding the baby. She no longer had that scary, but scared, look when she first had entered the kitchen.

"Anyway, I followed the sound of the crying and it lead me out here and finally out to the back porch. I found Katie and Rich, but there was no sign of anyone else. I called out. Maybe you heard me because the next thing I knew, you'd appeared out of nowhere and were telling me to get away from them. Do you remember any of this?"

"Not really. I remember moving them out to the porch. I was doing the laundry."

"You looked like you'd gone a couple of rounds with a Klingon. When you recognized me, I think you felt the weight you'd put on your ankle and you passed out again. It was broken, by the way."

She looked at her ankle and noticed for the first time since she'd woken this morning that she was wearing pajamas.

"It seems that you went through the step, breaking it and giving your head a nasty bump on the way down. I checked it all out. Somehow you'd managed to roll underneath, which is why I couldn't see you at first."

"Were the twins okay?"

"They were fine. I had the Doctor come over for you, of course, and while he was here he checked them both over. He also explained your situation. Kathryn, I'm so very sorry."

"Thank you, Chakotay".

“Now, if you can finish the little guy here,” he carefully handed over the baby to her. “I’ll contact the Doctor and let him know you’ve surfaced. Then I’ll be back to make you some breakfast.”

“Chakotay?”

He paused at the doorway.

“Yes?”

“Thank you for looking after us all. And it’s so good to see you.”

“I’ve got lots of experience looking after Janeways. It was my pleasure. And it’s good to see you too.”

The Doctor appeared within minutes, and checked on his patient. He administered an analgesic for her headache and requested that she rest the ankle as much as possible. “Although I realize that a certain pair will keep you on the hop. Literally.”

“Thank you, Doctor, are you sure they’re all right? How long were they on their own? Come to think of it, when did all this happen?”

“I arrived around ten yesterday morning. We don’t think you’d been out for more than thirty minutes or so. Probably less.”

Janeway nodded in agreement.

“Had the Commander not been here, I would have taken all of you back to Starfleet Medical, due to the severity of your injuries,” the Doctor chimed in, “but Chakotay had everything under control.” He gathered up all his paraphernalia. “I’ll leave you in his capable hands.”

“And you’re sure the twins are all right? Did you check them?”

“Captain, I promise you, they’re fine.” He turned, shook Chakotay’s hand and chucked the twins under their chins, “I’m off to Utopia Planetia this afternoon to meet with Seven.” At Janeway’s alarmed look he added in a wry tone, “I will, of course, leave instructions for any communication from you to be relayed to me as soon as it’s received.”

###

It was wonderful to have an extra pair of hands to settle the twins that night. Janeway looked after Rich and Chakotay, Katie.

For the first time that Janeway could remember, she was able to sit and have a quiet cup of tea and just relax in the evening.

“Chakotay, thank you so much again for looking after us. That was the quickest bedtime we’ve had since we’ve been home.”

“It’s my pleasure. They’re fantastic kids, Kathryn.”

“They are, aren’t they? The three or four hour feedings through the night strained our friendship a bit, but they’re sleeping much better now. I confess that some nights I have them in bed with me.” She looked ashamed. “All the books say I shouldn’t.”

“My parents didn’t get their instructions from books, Kathryn, and I’ll wager that neither did yours.”

He smiled over the rim of his cup. “And Kathryn, when did you start drinking tea?”

“I read in one of my child care books that drinking coffee sometimes makes babies colicky and irritable. So, I changed over to tea.”

Chakotay nearly choked on his drink and finally he’d stopped coughing.

“Kathryn, I think that’s meant for mothers who are breastfeeding.”

The expressions on her face were priceless as she worked through what he’d said. Her eyes widened with surprise, chagrin and then embarrassment.

“Oh. Damn.” She closed her eyes and leant her head on the table. “Dear god, Chakotay, if you tell anyone about this I *will* kill you.”

He ran his fingers across his mouth, indicating his lips were zippered, an action he got from Neelix.

“So, where have you been and what are you doing?” She pushed a piece of Mrs Harrison’s pie at him. “I wanted to contact you so many times, but I didn’t know if you wanted me to.”

“Me too. It was sometime after I broke up with Seven that I realized what an ass I’d been, running off without saying goodbye. I guess I wasn’t sure of my reception. Sorry, Kathryn.”

“I’m always happy to see you Chakotay,” she gave him a stern look, “but don’t do it again.”

“No, ma’am.”

“So what *have* you been doing?”

“I’ve been just drifting around. I went back to Trebus and Dorvan, but there was nothing left there. And no hope of ever getting the ecosystem recovered enough to support life. I requested an extension of leave and tried to find any of my trace of anyone from the tribe or even the Maquis, but I couldn’t find anything or anyone.”

“Oh, Chakotay, I’m so sorry.” Her hand automatically went out to his.

He smiled at her.

“Anyway, while I was out there, Starfleet contacted me and asked me to do some work at DS9. There was some unrest at one of the nearby outposts and they called me in because I was familiar with both the parties. So, in lieu of the work I did out there, I got an extra month’s leave.

“So, I’m back here. My leave runs out in two weeks but Starfleet have already contacted me.” He ducked his head and gave her a shy smile. “I got the captaincy of the Caelum. It’s smaller than Voyager and its main function will be diplomatic.”

“Oh congratulations, Chakotay. Sounds wonderful. I can’t think of anyone more deserving of a captaincy than you.”

Janeway got up from the table and reached down and gave him a hug. She got them both another cup of tea before sitting down.

“Thank you, Kathryn. You’re the first person I’ve told.”

“Really? I’m honored.”

“I was going to contact B’Elanna, but I didn’t know where she was. In fact, I’m completely out of touch.”

“Well, I was up to date with everyone up until…well, you know. I’m afraid that everything’s rather got away from me in the last few months. I’ll give you the full Voyager crew story tomorrow, if you like.”

“Sounds wonderful. So what are you doing now?”

“My wings have been clipped.” There was a wistful tone to her voice.

“Because of Katie and Rich?”

“Only partially. I’ve been promoted. Desk job.” Janeway made it sound slightly distasteful. “When the *Beagle* returns, I’ll be heading up the research group analyzing the data collected.”

“Sounds perfect for you. You’ll be the best Admiral in the fleet.”

“You’re sweet to say so, but I think you’re biased.”

“Totally.” He sipped his tea. “There’s a property for sale just up the road, do you know anything about it?”

“The Hoskin’s place. Sure, what do you want to know?”

“I was thinking of buying something around here and saw it as I was walking from the station.”

“Really? That’d be wonderful to have you so close.” Janeway gave him the history of the house, as only a local could and they talked about the area until they retired for the evening.

###

“Ooooh look, Kathryn! Katie’s got a teensy tiny little death glare!”

“Death glare?”

“Just like her mommy! She’s going to be a star ship captain. She’s a natural.”

“What do you mean…” she stared into the crib, “hey, I do *not* look like that. That look could melt duranium.” She smiled, “It is a bit intimidating, isn’t it?”

“Intimidating? I’ll say. You once scared Harry out of three year’s growth with that look.”

“What utter nonsense, Chakotay. I couldn’t scare Harry, he loves and respects me.”

“Harry was terrified of you for the first six months on Voyager. You once made the whole of Stellar Cartography cry after an inspection, and they were *all guys*.”

Janeway looked horrified.

“I did?” in all the years Chakotay had known her, he had never heard such a note of uncertainty in her voice.

“Kathryn, I was kidding.”

“Chakotay, what sort of a parent am I going to be? Even Mom and Phoebe realized how useless I am. I’m going to be a total tyrant. They probably already hate me.”

“Oh, Kathryn, I’m really sorry.” It was obvious that he’d hit a nerve. “I can’t believe they thought that. I’m sure they were just pulling your leg, like I was.” She looked unconvinced. “Kathryn, you’re a wonderful parent. Your kids adore you.”

“Sure.”

He’d finished with changing Katie’s diaper and her ‘death glare’ was gone.

“Okay, let’s try an experiment. Walk over there but stay in their eye-line.”

She walked to the other side of the room.

“Did you notice anything?”

“No.”

“Their eyes followed you the whole way.” She was still unsure. “Okay, try this. Leave the room for a minute and come back in. Watch what happens.”

“This is silly.”

“No, you thinking these kids don’t love you is silly. Do it.”

Janeway complied.

When she walked into the room, she unconsciously did the same thing she always did when she looked down at the babies. She gave them a big smile and a wave.

Katie and Rich’s faces lit up when she came into sight again.

“There, does that look like they don’t like you? They love you and you obviously adore them.”

She still looked unconvinced.

“Kathryn, the day I arrived, before you knew it was me, what did you think?”

“Well, I guess I thought you were an intruder or something.”

“An intruder near the twins?”

She nodded

“And that scared you?”

“Of course it did.”

“And you were going to protect them?”

“Well,” she looked a little sheepish at his question, “I thought there was a stranger near my kids. I had to take action.”

Action indeed. Chakotay had got the distinct impression that she was prepared to hurt him. Badly.

“What were you going to do with a broken ankle and a concussion?”

“I’d have thought of something.”

And he had no doubt she would’ve. He recognized the look. She had scared off many a hostile alien just by giving them that very expression through the view screen. In person, it was even scarier.

“You heard what you just said?”

“No.” Janeway seemed wary.

“You said ‘my kids’. Twice.”

“I did?”

“You sure did. And Kathryn, they are your kids now.”

“Thanks, Chakotay.” She rubbed her forehead. “I just feel so inadequate.” Janeway then told him about ‘forgetting’ the children when she went to see the lawyer.

She was surprised when Chakotay’s reaction was to laugh.

“My dad did exactly the same thing.”

“He did?” This didn’t seem possible. Chakotay’s respect for his family was extreme. Janeway had always believed them to be model parents.

“Yes, my mother used to joke about it all the time.” It was Chakotay’s turn to lose himself in reminiscence. “It was before my sister was born. I was a toddler and we’d been to a town gathering. My mother left early, reminding my father that I was with the other children. He arrived home without me. A neighbor bought me home only minutes after Father got there. My mother used to say that’s why they had my sister, so Father would have a spare.”

They laughed at the thought.

Suddenly, Janeway felt lighter than she had for some time.

###

Chakotay had joined Janeway and the twins in the living room. He had spent the day with Bobby Simkins putting in the ramps and doing some repairs around the house. He’d also finally installed, much the Janeway’s delight, the replicator.

He handed her a mug of freshly brewed coffee and joined her on the couch to watch the twins, who were on their favorite place, the floor. He gently brought the subject around to what had happened to her since they’d last seen each other.

“Well, I’d just been cut loose after the debriefings and Phoebe decided I, er, *we* needed cheering up.” At Chakotay’s raised eyebrow she added, “Phoebe had just missed out on a commission for something or other. *Anyway*, we ended up in a pub in Dublin drinking copious amounts of something called Guinness, because Phoebe insisted that it was ‘good for you’.” She laughed. “Trust Phoebe to want to drink something that got served in glasses the size of a medium vase.” Janeway smiled at

some private memory and Chakotay waited patiently for her to continue. “Neither of us would ever be considered ‘drinkers’ and we were soon drunk. Not tipsy, we were, as Tom used to say, ‘trashed’. Now, here it gets a bit hazy for me, most of the missing bits were filled in by Phoebes later. It seems we were the life of the party. While participating in some singalongs and dancing, we ‘picked up’ a guy. Luckily he was a Starfleet officer who was sober enough to recognize me and to think I needed to be shown home. So Phoebes and the guy got two rooms in the pub. They deposited me in one room and themselves in another.”

He let her talk at her own pace. Every now and then, she’d pause and her eyes would mist over. Her hand was tapping on the kitchen table in the rhythm of a song she was trying to remember.

“Phoebe and I traveled to Italy after a few days to meet Mom. It was about a week later that Phoebes started to feel unwell, but another couple of weeks before she went and checked with a doctor. When we found out, we were all so happy. I was jealous, of course.” A mixture of regret and nostalgia showed on her face. “I was always so jealous of Phoebe.”

He reached across the table and took her hand. Janeway was quiet for some time. Her eyes had fixed on the ancient clock on the kitchen wall.

“Phoebe contacted him to let him know and tell him that she was keeping the twins. He was very supportive but not interested in being a parent or even taking an active part in the children’s lives, although he did say he would request an Earth assignment if Phoebe wanted him too. He was looking forward to a two year deep space mission that was leaving in a few months. He was such a nice guy and drop dead gorgeous too. Tall, dark and dimpled. But he was killed about three weeks later in an accident at Utopia Planetia. I did check, but he had no family.”

Janeway talked about Percassa and the people there. Phoebe’s work and how their mother had joined them just in time to see the twin’s birth.

“I had come to join them in Percassa but got called away to a nearly planet for two days. We were all going to travel back home at the end of the week. We were so happy.

“And when I arrived back at the space port, Belim was there…” she started to shake, “Belim was there and he told me there had been an accident…” her face crumpled. “I think I knew right then. Chakotay, my beautiful little sister. My mom. Gone.” She was crying hard now but was making an unsuccessful attempt at stopping. “I shouldn’t cry, it upsets Katie and Rich.”

“Kathryn, cry. I’ll look after you all.”

She practically collapsed, sobbing hard, but almost silently. The grief and distress was obviously raw and close to the surface.

The Doctor had told him that she had totally focused on the children and in true Captain Janeway form didn’t show any outward signs of grief besides an aura of sadness. He thought that she had ruthlessly repressed her personal feelings, just as she did on Voyager to cope for seven years.

“Is it me, Chakotay? Do I have to lose everyone I love? Daddy, Justin, Mark, you, Mom, Phoebe…” she hadn’t meant to say that, but it just tumbled out.

“Hey, you’ve still got me. I’m right here Kathryn.”

Later, she told him of Phoebe and her mother. About growing up and how much she admired her sister, mother and father. There were stories about school, practical jokes the sisters had played on

each other, how Phoebe had ‘rescued’ her after the death of her father and fiance.

When she finally fell asleep on the sofa, he checked the children and performed their ‘routine maintenance and refueling’ as Kathryn called it, and brought them into the living room with them. He again joined her on the sofa and she barely stirred as he sat down. Checking the twins one more time, he allowed himself to fall asleep as well.

Janeway awoke later that afternoon curled up in Chakotay’s arms. Deciding that this was an opportunity too good to waste, she resolved to make the most of it and stay put. She wasn’t about to wake him and spoil the moment. All too soon one of the twins awoke and demanded attention. She disentangled herself reluctantly and went to prepare their food while Chakotay took them for a diaper check.

###

“Kathryn? Where are you?”

“I’m up here Chakotay. In the kid’s room.”

He entered the room and smiled at what he saw. Kathryn Janeway, Starship captain and soon to be admiral, half sitting up on the double bed, one baby on her lap and one held to her side, with a large book in her free hand. Katie was staring at her with her usual serious look. Rich was asleep on her lap.

“I seem to be covered in children at the moment.” she explained.

“What are you reading them?” he asked, eyeing the large book.

“Galileo’s ‘*Dialogo dei due massimi sistemi del mondo*.'”

“You’re reading them a book about physics? In *Italian*?”

“It’s better in Italian. You get a real feel for the concepts.” Suddenly, Janeway looked uncertain, “Katie seems to like it.”

“I didn’t know you spoke Italian.”

“Well, a smattering. You know…Latin, Greek, Italian. It helps with the classics.” She held up the book as an example. “I suppose I should read them something else more appropriate.”

“How about Newton or Einstein?”

“We’ve already done ‘*Principia*‘.”

Chakotay just looked confused.

“Newton’s ‘*Principia*‘, Mr Smarty.”

“Oh, do you mind if I listen in? I love stories.”

“English or Italian?”

“Let’s stick to Italian.” He gave her a cheeky grin. “It always sounds so romantic.”

“OK, physics for romantics.” But before she started reading again, she looked at Katie and noticed that she, like her brother, was now asleep. “Well, maybe tomorrow night, Chakotay. The crew are at lights out.”

Janeway carefully placed the book on the side table, and with Chakotay’s help, placed them in their cots, checked that both children were tucked in, turned on the monitor that allowed her to listen to them breathing and turned down the lighting in the room.

“Well, if you won’t read me a story, how about buy me a cup of coffee.”

“You’re in luck, Chakotay. You picked the one culinary task that I can successfully achieve.”

As they turned to leave the room, he noticed something against the wall.

“What’s that?” Chakotay motioned to the apparatus in the corner of the room.

“Tom insisted that I look after his television thing. I think he was worried that his mother would throw it out while they were away. It came with a whole raft of what Tom calls ‘soap musicals’. I don’t know why they’re called that, because there’s not much music and no one sings or bathes. Rich’s favorite is something called ‘Ryan’s Hope’. Tom gave me a chip full of episodes.

“Rich’s favorite?”

“He quietens down when it’s on. I’ll show you the next time he’s having a ‘Rich moment’.”

After one more look to check that the twins were fine, they left the room.

“Chakotay, you’re my best friend, right?”

“Yes.”

“I know you’re a vegetarian and everything but…”

“But what?” where the hell was this conversation going?

“But, could you cook me a steak tomorrow for dinner? Apart from eggs, I haven’t really attempted to cook anything since I cremated some lamb chops a few weeks ago.”

“It’d be my pleasure.”

“You’re the best, Chakotay.”

###

“You should be careful, Chakotay, Rich’s got fantastic aim…”

“Aagh!” Chakotay looked aghast, holding the now not very clean diaper in his hand, “He’s peed all over me!”

“I tried to warn you…”

Janeway looked at the expression on his face. He was totally unnerved and didn’t know what to do. In all the years she’d known him, he’d been totally cool in almost any situation, but like her, the kids had managed to completely upset his equilibrium. She could feel the giggle in her throat.

“It’s not *funny,* Kathryn. It’s disgusting.”

That was all it took. Suddenly, she seemed to be convulsing with laughter. Tears were streaming down her face and she was gasping for air.

“Kathryn!”

His outrage was more than she could take and she literally fell to the floor laughing. She couldn’t even speak. Every time she looked at his face, she started howling again.

He was smiling now. Despite being a little soiled, it was a joy to his soul to see Janeway laughing.

“Laugh it up, Kathryn.”

“Thanks, I am.” She was wiping tears from her eyes and trying to control herself, but each time he looked at her, she started again.

Using one hand on the back of his chair, she pulled herself back into hers.

“I can’t wait to explain to the Doctor how I got the bruise on my shoulder just now.”

“Make yourself useful, and get me a clean diaper please.”

“Yes, sir!” she was laughing still.

###

Janeway could hear him getting ready upstairs while she was in the kitchen preparing formula for Katie and Rich’s breakfast, as well as for the day ahead. She had packed what she and Chakotay now referred to as their ‘away mission kit’ the night before, but left the bottles till this morning.

In over twenty years in Starfleet, she had never felt disinclined to go to work but today, she dreaded it. The past two weeks had flown by but now Janeway had to rejoin the real world and indeed, Starfleet.

This would be her first day as an Admiral, though that didn’t faze, or even excite, her at all. It wasn’t even the twin’s first experience of day care.

Today Chakotay would leave on a ten day mission on his new ship. But even the thought of daily comm contact didn’t help. He wouldn’t be in Indiana. In her home. With Katie, Rich and herself.

Then another horrible thought occurred to her. He would be looking for his own place when he got back. Thinking about that made her chest hurt.

She roused herself when she heard his footfall on the stairs. Straightening her shoulders and attempting to project a positive demeanor, she was determined to appear cheerful, if she could.

Chakotay entered the kitchen and greeted her, and as his habit of the last two weeks, he went straight to Katie and Rich and kissed them.

“Good morning, Kathryn.” He bent over the twins, “Morning little sleepyheads”.

“Morning. Did you want coffee or tea?”

“Tea, please.”

Janeway busied herself with breakfast and put his tea and oatmeal in front of him. This was way too hard. Again she concentrated on maintaining her sunny attitude.

“All packed?”

“Yes, all ready.” He laughed, “I’ve actually got more with me than I had on Voyager and I’m only going for two weeks, not seven years this time.”

Seven years. The very thought made her feel faint. Even ten days seemed almost too much to bear.

They were both quiet while they finished their breakfast. He picked up his now empty bowl and placed it in the sink.

“Are you ready to go?” he asked.

“Yes, all ready.” She managed a forced laugh. “I’ve got more stuff than you and I’m only gone until this afternoon.”

Together they packed the last items into the stroller and then strapped in the twins.

Standing up straight, there was an awkward pause.

“Chakotay, your pips aren’t on straight. Let me fix them for you.”

He stood still while she adjusted his collar.

“There,” she patted his shoulder, “perfect.” She looked ready to cry.

Chakotay embraced her and she clung to him, unwilling to let him go. Finally, she released him.

“Good luck today, Admiral.”

“You too, Captain.” She kissed him on the cheek. “Don’t forget to send us a postcard.”

He smiled at her as they gathered up all their things and walked out the front door.

“Kathryn, just *what is* a postcard?”

###

It had been a long first day back at work for Janeway. Chakotay hadn’t called before his ship had left and she was devastated that he hadn’t said one last goodbye. The twins had apparently enjoyed their first foray into day care, but she had only lasted until the early afternoon before she had decided that she’d put in enough hours on her first day. The *Beagle* hadn’t yet returned, so there wasn’t that much for her to do anyway.

So, after a lovely chat with the manager of the center, Janeway had picked up the twins early and started to make her way home.

The front door opened before she’d even got the stroller up the ramp that Chakotay had installed the previous week.

“Hi, you’re all home early.” Chakotay pulled the small group through the front door, kissing a stunned Janeway and then the twins. “Hiya Katie, how’s my other best girl? Richie, have you been keeping your sister out of trouble? Yeah, I *know*, buddy. Mission impossible. I know the feeling.”

He took her briefcase from under her arm.

“How was your first day back at work, Kathryn?”

“Chakotay, what are you doing here? I thought you left with the *Caelum*.”

“Small change in plans.”

“Oh?”

“I resigned my commission today.” She looked stunned. “Remember the other offers I said I’d received?” she nodded, “well, they were offers of book commissions. I signed up today. I’ve been busy with all that this morning, and spent the whole afternoon making dinner. It’s been a full day.”

“But Chakotay, why did…”

“Because I couldn’t bear to be parted from you and the kids. I love them. I love this house. I love Indiana. I’ve always loved you, so the rest are just bonuses really.”

“You what?”

“I’ve got a big dinner planned.” he bustled around the room, “I must admit it’s easier to get things done around here without the twin ‘temporal thieves’ here. But I’ll get used to it.”

Janeway let out an explosive breath. “I couldn’t concentrate all day. I kept wondering what you were doing and where you were,” she admitted, making her soul feel much lighter.

“So, do you think we should get married right away, or make it part of the anniversary celebrations next month?”

“Married?”

“How do you feel about a beach wedding?”

“You…um…beach…great…sounds…my…um, *beach*…?”

“Maybe you’re right. Next month might be better. The whole crew could come. And you might be making whole sentences again by then. You know I love you, but you don’t make much sense for an Admiral.”

She ran to him and buried her face in his chest. “God, Chakotay, I was going to beg you to stay this morning. I can’t imagine being in this house without you now.”

“I’ll be staying here from now on, if you’ll have me, writing best sellers, looking after the kids. And if the books aren’t successful, you can keep me in the manner to which I’m hoping to become accustomed…Kathryn, say something.”

Janeway still was fiercely holding onto him, her arms hugging him to her.

“I thought you’d gone. I didn’t want to come home and you not be here. If it hadn’t been for Katie

and Rich, I would've stayed in my office all night. Thank you for being here for us." She gave him a shy smile. "Chakotay, if we're engaged now, could I have a proper kiss, because I lo…hmphhhhh."

Chakotay crushed her to him and it was only the displeased squawk of Kathryn Janeway the younger, that managed to break them apart.

"You know Chakotay, this could be the start of our most exciting adventure yet."

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I've written some comments, if you're interested…