

This was for my VAMB Secret Santa recipient Pook, who asked for:

"I would like a story preferably but I'm flex, would like J/C with a 'action' Janeway. No wussy Janeways please. Prixin and New Year stuff is fine but being an Orthodox Atheist - nothing overly religious"

The bright sunlight from the beautiful winter day poured into the waiting room window making bright stripes on the tiled floor.

Only a matter of a few meters away were the closed doors of the Starfleet medical intensive care unit.

Gretchen Janeway stared intently at the doors.

She was sitting in the same room that she had been in the last time her eldest daughter had been here, years ago. The then young Kathryn Janeway had been the sole survivor of the shuttle crash that had claimed her husband's life as well that of Kathryn's fiancé.

Now she was her because her daughter had been the only serious injury caused by the destruction of the *USS Jane Goodall*.

Gretchen was unsure if she had been in the waiting room minutes or hours. It seemed like weeks. As yet, no one had come to give her any information, although there had been plenty of activity going in and out of the doors. Voyager's EMH had hurried in, not even giving her a glance as he went passed. His face looked somber.

But Kathryn had to be all right, she thought, nothing could be so cruel as to take her daughter away from her when she'd been home for such a short time.

Gretchen Janeway stared intently at the doors.

###

50 weeks earlier...

Barely six hours after Voyager had burst through the Borg conduit, Kathryn Janeway was sitting in her mother's living room drinking the best coffee she had had in over seven years. It was such a surreal experience, several times she was tempted to pinch herself, so convinced she was that it must've been all a dream.

At first she vaguely wondered if everyone from the crew was all right, but she could remember being assured that everyone would be taken care of before being unceremoniously beamed home to Indiana.

Janeway, her sister Phoebe and their mother had just held each other and cried when she'd first arrived at the house. They weren't sure how long they'd just stood holding each other but they were finally interrupted by the sound of someone clearing his throat.

After she'd been introduced to her 'new' brother-in-law and twelve month old nephew, Janeway finally started to properly register her surroundings. It wasn't until she saw the decorations around the room, that she remembered that it was only a few days until Christmas.

The four had spent the rest of the evening reacquainting themselves with each other, with the two sisters going most of the talking and their mother content to just listen and hold her returned daughter's hand as if to prevent her leaving.

Janeway had another three days, including a magical Christmas day, with her family before having to return to Starfleet.

###

Accommodation for the whole crew had been arranged and the debriefing was conducted as a residential, although full communication access with family and friends was permitted.

There had been no indication which way the Federation would jump about either the fate of the Maquis or even the Equinox crew. Although not under guard, it was close enough for the Maquis to be nerve wracking for everyone. Even the lowest crewmen had been debriefed for the whole two weeks.

Janeway was a formidable advocate for all her crew and she had spent the whole time explaining, extolling their virtues and demanding the freedom of the Maquis and Equinox crew.

Her battle had been so fierce that she was surprised and a little nonplussed when the Federation and Star Fleet acquiesced to all her 'demands' (she had called them strong recommendations).

The Maquis had been pardoned, the surviving Equinox crew had been permitted to resign their commissions without further prosecution and the crew had been given generous leave time to reacclimatize.

The following debriefings had been a doddle and she actually reveled in the boredom of the bureaucratic process and wasn't at all troubled by the seemingly endless examination of each decision she had made over the last seven years. There had been a small amount of concern about incidents such as the Equinox, but it seemed that Starfleet was not prepared to prosecute the returning hero, especially on her own evidence. There had been no other official reports by either Voyager or Equinox crews which had reported any wrongdoing. A fact which, now they were home, she was grateful and she had made a point of thanking Chakotay, Noah Lessing and others for their poor reporting skills.

So, at the end of the first two weeks, most of the general crew's sessions had been completed and they were free to go. The 'Fleeters to start their leave, the Maquis to restart their lives. The senior staff's debriefing times were longer. Harry, B'Elanna and Tom spent a further four weeks, six for Chakotay and Tuvok and eight weeks for Janeway.

However, despite the assurances from the EMH, Starfleet Security were most concerned about Seven's Borg history, and though requiring her to remain at Headquarters for about six weeks, they had treated her with the utmost respect and sensitivity.

Thankfully, there had only been a very small number of less than happy returns for some of the crew. Some partners had moved on or relatives had died, but she was grateful that none had expressed to her that they either had not wished to return or worse, they blamed her for their seven year exile.

###

After finally getting the all clear, Seven went straight to Sweden. Chakotay followed her there about

two days later at the conclusion of his debriefing.

Neither Chakotay or Seven had much contact with the crew since arriving home and they had clung to each other when they first arrived back. Both faced uncertain futures.

To be fair, Janeway thought, this was mainly due to Seven discovering her 'lost' family. She had found not only a aunt, but also a grandmother, uncles and a not inconsiderable number of cousins in Sweden, who were all delighted with her return and not the slightest bit phased with her Borg history.

Tom and B'Elanna had become Janeway's fast friends during this time. Somehow the three (four if you counted Miral) had gravitated together. Tom, she suspected, just needed a buffer from his father. B'Elanna on the other hand was more difficult to read. She thought that B'Elanna had felt a little betrayed by Chakotay's relationship with Seven.

Tom, B'Elanna and Miral had been welcomed home with open arms. Janeway still smiled when she thought of the look on Owen Paris' face when introduced to his son's wife and baby.

Harry had been promoted and had surprisingly had begun a relationship with Tal Celes, both having returned to find their significant others had moved on. Both had been eventually assigned to Utopia Planetia and were very happy.

Tuvok had taken early retirement and returned to Vulcan. He had completely recovered after his fal-tor-voh but had decided that he would prefer to mentor his children and especially his grandchildren, some of whom he had only just met.

Chakotay had been offered a six month position at Oxford. He accepted immediately, teaching being his first love and he had a wealth of information to share, accumulated during his time in the Delta Quadrant.

Much to everyone's surprise, Seven was feted on her arrival. Her rescue and recovery from the Borg being a good news event and the Federation needed good news. It was still reeling from the war with the Dominion. The timing of their return was extremely fortuitous. Whereas Chakotay had taken up his position and started working at Oxford less than four weeks after completion of his debriefing, saying that it was just as good as a holiday for him, Seven was reluctant to commit to any of the hundreds of offers she had received, content to mainly stay at home and talk to her family.

The Doctor, who still hadn't chosen a name, had become a pin-up boy for holograms. He had joined with Dr Zimmerman, working on implementing the enhancements of his own program into the next version of the EMH.

If the others were welcomed, Janeway was adored. She was famous. She was quoted, photographed and followed. For the first few weeks she was unable to walk around even Starfleet Headquarters without being approached, even mobbed by Starfleet personnel.

It was unsettling and not what she expected. Which was a court martial.

But Starfleet and the Federation were unwilling to countenance any negative aspects to the hero's return and they did everything but throw rose petals in her path wherever she went.

But, it was to Sweden that Chakotay went with Seven when the initial debriefings were over. They were requested to return to answer questions as they might arise but largely they were free to move on. Janeway barely saw either of them in person over the next few months. She was happy for Seven,

who had become so much more than a protégé over the years.

Janeway did her best not to be jealous but despite having weeks to get used to it, she always felt a stinging dismay whenever she saw Chakotay and Seven together.

###

At the completion of her debriefing, Janeway returned home to her delighted mother and spent lazy days getting to know everyone again. Whenever they could, Phoebe and her family would join them. Phoebe, the tear-away free spirit had, not exactly settled down, that was never likely to happen, but she did project an aura of peace that Janeway would never have thought possible. She admitted to herself in quiet moments that she was a tiny bit jealous of her younger sister and her family.

Janeway had also been delighted to discover that her mother had not been able to bring herself to sell her house in San Francisco when Voyager had been declared lost.

“You kept my house?”

“To sell it would’ve been admitting that you weren’t coming home.” Her mother said simply. “When the Doctor arrived a few years ago, Phoebe and I went and spring cleaned it. I don’t think I was ever so happy doing housework.”

Though it had been wonderful to find out she still had her own home, she was in no hurry to move into it, waiting until the week before returning to Starfleet before leaving her mother’s.

Janeway received her latest communication from Sweden and yet again marveled at how well Seven was adapting to her new environment. Since her stay with her relatives had started, Janeway could see in each message changes, some subtle, some major and all seemed positive.

Her first messages were punctuated with requests for advice on everything from what to do in certain situations, to etiquette to just reassurance. Now her chats were more about her relatives and people she was meeting. If Janeway thought it was odd that Seven wasn’t asking Chakotay these questions, she never let on, as she was only too glad to hear from her. She found that she missed them both enormously and looked forward to Seven’s calls.

Lately, Seven’s calls were mostly about responding to overtures of a more intimate nature. Although it pained Janeway to give Seven advice in this regard, she couldn’t in all conscience not help. If Chakotay and Seven were happy, then that was the main thing.

Janeway also thought it odd that Chakotay featured less and less in Seven’s reports, as Seven herself called them. And she generally called everyday.

Chakotay never called.

She was more than a little surprised at how much she missed seeing Seven. Janeway wasn’t at all surprised at how much she missed Chakotay and she felt his lack of contact since joining Seven in Sweden keenly.

###

Chakotay couldn’t get used to the snow and the cold. It was more alien to him than some of the worlds they visited in the Delta Quadrant. Actually, he didn’t mind the snow so much. It was beautiful but it made him think of Indiana.

He desperately wanted to go for a long walk but just couldn't rouse the enthusiasm to leave the warmth of the house. The Hansen's home was cozy and comfortable and always seemed to be filled with people. There was a constant stream of visitors and Seven was in high demand.

It seemed that he'd seen less and less of her over the last few days and weeks but that wasn't actually true. She was with him, but they were apart. Seven was changing more and more every day.

When they'd first arrived 'home', she relied heavily on him. She was nervous and shy when he wasn't around. But now...now he doubted that many of their friends from Voyager would recognize Seven. She had become Annika. More and more she was becoming the woman that she would've been had she not been assimilated when a child.

She was outgoing, vivacious and funny. And he resented it and was ashamed of his feelings.

The more Seven relaxed and became outgoing, Chakotay became morose and solitary.

He had tried a number of times to get her to consider a place of their own but she was unwilling to leave the family she had just discovered. He, of all people, should understand the importance of family, he thought to himself bitterly.

Maybe he could approach the subject again at the party tonight. *Another* party. He hoped that somewhere in the next few days he would be able to broach the subject of their future.

Though he was enjoying his work at Oxford, he found that he had little in common with most of the other faculty. He longed for the closeness of Voyager's senior staff. Seven kept in almost constant contact with Janeway, kept fairly regular communications with the Doctor and Harry and even Tom and B'Elanna. Chakotay, perversely, spoke with his friends very infrequently and avoided Janeway wherever he could. He didn't even understand himself why he didn't talk to them more and why he was strangely almost angry with his supposed best friend. He knew that she always sent her regards to him with her conversations with Seven.

Even though it was well into spring, it was still cold and snowing outside. He wondered, not for the first time that day, what the weather was like in Indiana.

###

The comm unit indicated an incoming call. Glancing at the clock, Janeway thought that someone contacting her at this late hour indicated it may be important. Her heart lifted when she saw who was calling. Chakotay had remembered her birthday after all.

"Kathryn."

She gave him her sunniest smile.

"Chakotay, good to hear from you," and then she noticed was his disheveled appearance, "is everything all right?"

"I just can't believe it, Kathryn." He ran his hand through his hair, something judging by the state it was in, he had done quite a lot of recently.

"Sorry, Chakotay, I'm not following you. Is Seven okay?" She relaxed a little, he seemed more angry or annoyed rather than upset. Perhaps something at the University was bothering him.

"A body builder. A *body builder*, can you credit that? I mean, how *superficial* can a person be?"

He stared at Janeway with such a look of bewilderment that she was reminded of watching a ten year old struggling with fractions.

"Oh, sure, I know he's smart" he almost spat the words out, "oh, yes, he's *smart*. But an ethnomusicologist, for god sakes, like, *who cares?* A tuneful muscle boy. Fantastic."

"Chakotay, I haven't the slightest clue what you're talking about."

"Seven broke up with me. Me! She 'terminated our relationship'."

"Oh, Chakotay, I'm so sorry."

"I never realized how shallow she is, I mean, a *body builder!*"

"Um..."

"I just can't believe it Kathryn. I've got an image here," he looked away to his desk, "I'm sending it through. Get a load of this guy. And she says I'm boring."

The image appeared on her viewer. Oh no, she couldn't believe it, Seven had found herself a Norse god! Blonde hair, piercing blue eyes, broad shoulders, devastatingly handsome but with an open smiling, yet somehow almost shy look about him. The image, obviously taken at the Hansen home, also showed him to be tall as he stood at least twenty centimeters higher than Seven. The guy was drop dead gorgeous.

She smiled, first because the two looked so perfect together and then because an unfortunate, but amusing, thought had just popped into her head.

"You think this is *funny?*"

"Of course not, Chakotay." She attempted to divert her own thinking. "Who is he?"

"Friend of the family. From Stockholm University. Damned child prodigy. Women always gawking at him for some reason. His name's 'Sven'."

Sven. Oh dear. That was all it took to bring the laughter bubbling out. Seven and Sven. They were just so damned perfect and so much alike. A snow prince and princess.

"You *do* think this is funny," he accused.

"Sorry, Chakotay. He is very attractive and does have some, um, obvious, er, attractions." Janeway was now almost lost for words.

"So even you think he's better than me and now you're even laughing at me. I just can't believe today."

"No, please, Chakotay, I'm really not." But it was plain to see that his pride was hurt more than his heart, but she decided not to point this out to him.

"I've had it with women. And I've really had it with *you*. Glad I was able to give you a good laugh. Forget that I called."

"Please, I'm sorry, Chak-"

The call ended.

Janeway hadn't heard from him since that night. She knew he would be finishing at Oxford in a month or two, but apart from that, she didn't have any other information. With B'Elanna and Tom away for a few months on the Klingon home world, her updates had pretty well dried up. She had tried to contact him for a few weeks after their disastrous last conversation, but he never replied to her calls. He hadn't even wished her a happy birthday. For the first time in seven years.

###

The snow prince & princess had visited Janeway at her home in San Francisco about four weeks after her last contact with Chakotay.

They were obviously in love and very happy. Seven was relaxed in a way Janeway had never even let herself hope for when they'd very first tried to integrate her into Voyager's crew. It was Sven that seemed shy and nervous. She didn't believe she had ever met a more charming couple.

Once seated on Janeway's sofa, with coffee and cookies, Seven shared her news. Sven had, it seemed, asked Seven to marry him. They were visiting for Seven to formally ask Janeway's permission.

"Oh, Seven, Sven! That's wonderful news. How lovely." Janeway was delighted, "But Seven, you don't have to ask my permission to do anything anymore."

"It is, I believe, traditional to ask a parent's permission before marriage." Seven looked uncertain for the first time during their visit. "And I would very much like your blessing."

Janeway couldn't speak. She was almost overcome by emotion.

"Thank you, Seven. That's the loveliest thing anyone has ever asked me. Of course you have my blessing."

The couple then explained that they would be leaving Earth for a few months to work on a project in the Behg sector to research the relationship between the Behgair ethnic groups and music with other cultural anthropologists, sociologists and ethnographers.

"We shall return for the first anniversary celebrations and hope to have the wedding early in the new year." Seven grasped Sven's hand. "You will be available to attend, won't you Captain?"

"I'm looking forward to it already. Congratulations to you both."

###

Janeway had decided to have a kind of house warming party before she returned to work, knowing that it was unlikely she see many of them until the first anniversary reunion that would take place in December.

It was the first time in months that even this few members of Voyager's senior staff had managed to get together for anything other than official Starfleet business.

"Chakotay not here yet?" Tom asked as he entered the living room of Janeway's house.

Janeway was spared having to answer the question by Harry also greeting them once they were inside. He immediately enlisted Tom's help outside with the barbeque.

"You were right B'Elanna, how did you know they'd all be out there?"

They laughed about an earlier conversation about barbeques, B'Elanna indicating that the men would congregate outside around the barbeque and the women inside.

"Tom's mother explained it to me. I don't think she understood either, but she said it never fails."

"It's a mystery. Even the Doctor and Vorik are out there 'helping'."

"Is Chakotay coming?"

"No. I haven't spoken to him for weeks. He might be on a field trip."

"Really? I only spoke to him the other day." B'Elanna eyed Janeway closely. "Has Seven been in contact with you?"

"Yes, I saw both her and Sven just the other day."

"What's he like?" B'Elanna hadn't known what to make of Chakotay's somewhat colored impression of Seven's new love interest.

"I have an image of them here." She handed a framed photo to B'Elanna. "I took this when they visited here."

"God, he's a hunk!"

"Yes, I said much the same thing when I first saw him." Janeway laughed, "But you know what this really means, don't you?"

A little uncertain, Torres only managed "No."

"It means Chakotay's been thrown over for a blonde!"

The two women locked eyes. Understanding and amusement showed in both.

Then they both started to laugh. Slowly disintegrating into hysterics. Tears of mirth ran down both their faces. Tears of amusement turned into tears of sadness for one of them, at the sound of Tal returning from the kitchen with some salads, Janeway hastily wiped at her face and suggested they go outside and see what the men were up to.

###

Returning to Voyager after her leave was completed wasn't possible. Though initially scheduled for only a major overhaul, engineers had discovered a number of critical problems and the last update she had received had not been positive. Voyager may have been destined to be a museum after all.

Towards the end of Janeway's leave, Starfleet had started dropping not so subtle hints about her being promoted to Admiral, which she had studiously ignored.

So, after a initially spending a few months of sorting through technical data collected in the Delta Quadrant and with Voyager's future still uncertain, Starfleet had offered her the opportunity to

captain the *Jane Goodall*, a strictly science vessel.

The *Goodall* would be leaving on a four week tour of twelve planets within the Federation. She had accepted quickly, excited at the prospect of returning to space. All the *Goodall's* visits would coincide with scientific, astronomical or astrophysics related conferences being held in each location. Janeway would be representing Voyager, sharing many of their discoveries, as well as presenting papers written by Seven of Nine, herself, Mortimer Harren and Harry Kim.

Life on the *Jane Goodall* was very different to Voyager. There were no restrictions on replicator use, she was able to call someone at home every night and each planet visited and race met were friendly.

It was relaxing to measure success by feedback on her presentations rather than casualty reports.

###

Rounding out the smallish crew of seventy officers was Admiral Cholmondley. Although Janeway was in command of the mission, the Admiral was responsible for diplomatic negotiations that were to take place at a number of the planets they were to visit.

The Admiral Cholmondley was a character. Funny and charming, with a plummy English accent that she imagined would not have seemed out of place in one of her favorite gothic romance novels.

It seemed strange for Janeway not to know every crew member by their given as well as family name. She was almost getting used to young ensigns leaping to attention as she passed, even remotely closely, by their tables in the mess hall. Missing the easy going camaraderie of Voyager and the sunny personality of Neelix, she now took her meals mainly in her quarters or with the Admiral.

Cholmondley was such a good natured chatterbox. He had so many stories and anecdotes of diplomatic encounters that it was no hardship to spend so much time with him.

The only thing she truly found annoying about the Admiral was his calling her 'Skipper'. However, on reflection, it wasn't as bad as what he called her first officer. Poor Commander Harrison was continually referred to as 'X'. After two weeks Janeway wouldn't have minded being called 'Sir'. She confided to Phoebe on one of their subspace chats, that he made her feel like a beagle.

But both the Skipper and X agreed neither sobriquet was as bad as the poor chief conn officer, who Cholmondley constantly called 'Biggles'. As yet, no one had asked why.

"You know, Skipper," Janeway winced, "you should consider Starfleet's proposal for your promotion. You'll still be able to continue your work in science, but you'd have more control and say in what you do."

"I'm happy doing just what I am, thank you, David." Janeway refused to call him by his preferred nickname which was 'Chummy'. He had told her about it when they'd been introduced.

"Well, if this is your version of 'happy', I hate to see you sad." Cholmondley ignored her raised eyebrow. "But really, it'd all be at your feet Kathryn. You'd be the smartest Admiral in Starfleet."

"And the one with the most miles on my clock. Why are you so keen about me taking a promotion?"

"It's terribly dull at the moment." He sighed. "You'd be decorative as well as functional. Honestly,

they're such a drab lot, I can see you would bring a bit of spark to Starfleet."

"Thanks, although you make it sound *so* attractive, I think I'll pass at this stage."

"Well, all right, but I won't give in."

He had entertained Janeway her first officer during dinners with stories about his 'exploits' in the diplomatic arena with Starfleet.

At first Janeway wondered why he hadn't pursued an acting career, he was so animated and funny, but she soon realized that underneath the affable and almost buffoonish exterior, Cholmondley had an enormous intellect and an amazing talent for getting along with people. His skills had really come into their own during their final visit on Tarat.

His capacity to charm even the most ornery of people had impressed her. The research he had obviously done regarding not only the cultures the *Jane Goodall* had visited but the likes, dislikes and predilections of not an inconsiderable number of political leaders or monarchs they had met.

The Abattan First Minister was putty in his hands after a simple question about the sporting prowess of the Minister's children. A well timed comment about the wondrous qualities of the polyrhythmical characteristics of Zustian folk music had charmed their President and a seemingly innocuous offhand observation about the faithfulness of a certain breed of pet to the Qertwn Ambassador had apparently gained Cholmondley a friend for life.

The Taratians themselves were open and interested in all that the *Jane Goodall* had come to share, but the political situation on Tarat was volatile. The tension between the government and the opposition was running high and the added instability of a rogue faction trying to force change had finally resulted in the *Jane Goodall* leaving early.

Cholmondley however had made it seem like leaving early was the last thing Starfleet had wanted to happen, despite the non-interference policy though required their departure. He had met with all parties before casting off and had charmed them one last time before they left. He was amazing in action. The Taratians were extremely disappointed, but the Admiral smoothed over any ruffled feathers. Literally. The Taratians were an avian species.

"How do you get 'Chumley' out of the spelling 'Cholmondley, Admiral?" asked Janet Harrison.

"Damned if I know X." he laughed, "Odd thing the English language. Ironic when you think about it. Everyone can pronounce Betazed or Tallisian names but, no one can manage 'Cholmondley'."

"Why don't you change it?"

"Well I would, but it annoys the tripe out of my partner."

Neither Janeway or Harrison had any trouble believing that.

"I'm actually the umpteenth duke of somewhere or other as well. Comes with the silly name. I'd be in Debretts, if it still existed. Actually, most of my peers are peers." He added candidly.

It was clear that no one had the slightest idea what Debretts was and why he would be in it. No one, however, seemed to care. Janeway thought that she'd never met anyone so suited to diplomacy. Admiral Cholmondley was a complete people person.

Not for the first time, Janeway thought that he would have been a real asset in the Delta Quadrant on Voyager.

###

Sitting on the bridge the next day, Janeway wondered if she wanted to keep doing this. Although the trip had been a success, with the exception of Tarat, she found herself questioning her drive to keep leaving home. She missed her family and her house and she even thought she might like to get another dog. Maybe it was time to consider accepting the promotion to Admiral that Starfleet were offering her on a regular basis.

The *Jane Goodall* would now be arriving back on Earth around three weeks before the ball in honor of the first anniversary of Voyager's return to the Alpha Quadrant.

At the first party, held a few days after their arrival, she had felt physically ill at the sight of Chakotay and Seven arm in arm during the evening. The Doctor had even offered her something, thinking she had a migraine.

Chakotay and Seven wouldn't be a couple at the anniversary ball as a couple but this was hardly a comfort, as Chakotay was barely speaking to her now.

She had almost hoped that the *Jane Goodall* would be delayed at Tarat, but the political problems had put an end to that hope.

It would be wonderful to see everyone from Voyager's crew again and it would be a hundred percent attendance. All the Maquis were not only invited but special arrangements had been made to provide transport for the now more 'far flung' of the crew. When she thought back to the initial briefings the only transport she believed Starfleet were going to provide was one way trips to New Zealand for all of them. Perhaps even herself.

Although the seven years on board Voyager had been hard, before she'd left on this mission she couldn't imagine doing anything but being a star ship captain, especially when she would be able to return to her first love of scientific exploration, with the added bonus of being within hailing distance of home. The main problem she had with promotion is that there was no way she wanted to become the Admiral Janeway that had come back for them. That woman was bitter, cynical and she scared the younger Janeway half to death.

The trip on the *Jane Goodall* hadn't been dull. On the contrary, all the planets they had visited were extremely interested in Voyager's discoveries and each had wanted more detailed discussions on various aspects of their data.

It had been a shame that the visit to Tarat had been cut short. Although last on the visit list, they were relatively close to Earth.

###

Two hours away from Earth, Janeway was on the bridge with the admiral.

"Well, Skipper," Janeway flinched, "we're almost home again. Unfortunately, we're got another four weeks before we have to tread the boards again, what are you going to do with yourself?"

Commit suicide was Janeway's first thought but she managed to respond in a mild tone. "Voyager's first anniversary celebrations, Sir."

"Of course, of course."

"Captain, we had just got a level one alarm from the warp core."

She still couldn't get used to not having Harry at Operations.

"Bridge to Engineering."

"T'Vrek here, Captain."

"What's going on down there Mr T'Vrek?"

"We have a serious situation at the moment, Captain," said the Vulcan engineer. *"There may have been an explosion in the..."* The sound of another sharp blast drowned out his last remark. *"...may indicate sabotage...cascading failures...all systems."*

"Can the damage be contained, Lieutenant?" she could hear alarms going off both in Engineering and now on the bridge.

"Unknown at this stage. If I might suggest that the crew be prepared to abandon ship." Was the reply, in the very same tone she had heard him order his dinner from the replicator the previous night.

"Understood. Give the order to prepare to abandon ship, Commander."

"Captain, we're still within 500,000kms of Utopia."

There was a complication. A community that started out as an experiment and evolved into a isolated society which shunned technology. Utopia was an anachronism, and it would also be defenseless if exposed within a million kilometers of a warp core breach and resulting explosion.

"T'Vrek to Janeway. I estimate a warp core breach in approximately eleven minutes."

"All hands abandon ship."

The bridge crew started moving to their escape pods.

"Commander, get the crew as far away from the ship as you can. I'll follow as soon as I've got her away from Utopia."

Her first officer hesitated and seemed unwilling to leave her Captain.

"An *order*, Janet."

"Yes, Captain." And she was gone.

Janeway took the conn and struggled to maneuver the ship in the right direction.

"What do you need me to do, Skipper?"

Her head snapped around and the Admiral almost winced at the look she gave him.

"What the *hell* are you doing on board, Admiral? I gave the order for *all* crew to abandon ship!"

"What sort of chap doesn't see a lady home properly?"

Her irritation level wasn't given a chance to rise as her attention returned to the conn and he didn't expect a reply anyway. She was struggling to get the ship to respond to her commands.

"Give me warnings every minute," she ordered, "We need to be at least three minutes away when the core explodes."

"Righty-oh!"

Suddenly, the operations console to her left exploded, throwing her from her seat and against the conn. Her arm took the brunt of the blow and she knew from the intense pain and the nausea that followed that she'd broken it. Grasping the arm of her chair she pulled herself up to the level of the conn and she could see that the explosion, whatever it was, had given the ship a small push in the right direction but even with that momentum, hadn't given them the required safety margin between them and the planet.

It did however, give Janeway an idea.

"Janeway to Harrison."

"Harrison here, Captain."

"Janet, I've lost some sensors, how close is the nearest pod?"

"We're the closest at 50,000km, Captain."

"Right, thanks. I'm going to try and use a couple of torpedoes to give us a push, Janet. I need a bigger buffer between the *Goodall* and the planet. Keep everyone as far back as you can."

"Captain, you don't have full shields, I could..."

"How long until the closest ship gets to us?"

"Another twenty minutes. But, Kathryn..."

"Commander, you have your orders. We'll be in our pod as soon as we've established a big enough distance between the ship and Utopia."

There was just a fraction of hesitation before the resigned reply came. *"Aye, Captain."*

"Nine minutes, Skipper!"

She'd forgotten all about Cholmondley, and barely heard his time calls. Janeway worked feverishly to configure the weapons and make the calculations to explode them close enough to push the ship but not close enough to blow them apart. She hoped.

"Okay, hold on. Here we go."

There was a two or three second delay before the explosion rocked the bridge again. Despite being braced for the impact, she again fell against the console on her broken arm. It was a few seconds before her vision cleared enough to assess the situation.

She brushed aside some debris from the console. Relief was her first reaction. The ploy had worked and they now had the required distance between the ship and the planet, with a small safety margin. They even had almost six minutes to get into the escape pod.

"Admiral, let's go." She managed to get fully to her feet using her good arm and saw immediately that the Admiral was lying next to his chair.

She knelt down next to him and tapped his face "Admiral! We've got to get out of here! *Admiral?*"

His eyes opened and he attempted to sit up but failed, slumping back to the deck.

"Sorry, Skipper. Seem to have a bit of a problem. You'd better leave without me."

"Oh, for god's sake, *Chummy*." This was the first time she'd addressed him by his nickname and she managed to make it sound like a curse. "Get your damned aristocratic butt off the ground and help me get you to the pod. And you can save your 'women and children first' routine for someone who cares."

"I don't like your tone, Captain."

"Good, get up, let's get to the pod and you can court martial me."

He had sat up and she was trying to pull him to his feet with her functional arm.

"Remember who you're talking to, Captain."

"If you hadn't been so stupid and got into the pods when I ordered it then I wouldn't be using that tone. Spare me the threats and keep walking."

She had got him to the hatch to the escape pod. He was bleeding profusely from a head wound and his legs were starting to buckle.

"And a diet wouldn't be a bad thing either." Janeway snarled, as she adjusted her hold on his waist.

Deciding that if she kept him angry she could probably keep him moving, it only took a couple more insults to get him in his seat. Unfortunately, their progress had been impeded by his lack of mobility and her broken arm. Finally, the pod was launched.

"Could be a bumpy ride, you'd better buckle up, Admiral."

He didn't reply, and she realized he'd passed out again. Reaching over his body, she fastened his safety harness. She glanced at the chronometer and saw that the warp core was going to explode within thirty seconds. They were too close. Bumpy ride, indeed.

Before she had a chance to take her own seat, an alarm sounded indicating a possible hull leak. If she didn't get that sealed and a forcefield set up, they definitely weren't going to make it.

"Captain?"

"Stay in your seat, sir. I've got to get this forcefield operational or we're toast. I've just about got it." Without looking up from her task "Can you see how long we've got."

"Less than ten seconds. You need to be strapped in, Kathryn!" Gone was the anger of his tone. He realized what she had done to get him into the pod.

"Got it!"

As she turned and reached for her chair, the *Jane Goodall* exploded.

###

When Tom and B'Elanna arrived at Starfleet medical they were directed to the Intensive Care Unit where Janeway had been brought. They were directed to a waiting room by the nurse at reception who wouldn't give them any information.

When they turned into the room they saw Gretchen Janeway. She looked old and small somehow.

"Mrs Janeway?" Tom spoke softly, as if speaking in a normal tone would somehow be irreverent.

"Tom, B'Elanna." she sounded confused and scared.

"Do we know how the Captain is?"

"Critical. Serious injuries." She gave a sob. "That's all they've told me. Call me Gretchen."

They sat on the lounge with Gretchen, who took B'Elanna's hand.

"She didn't want to go. Didn't know what else to do. She was so unhappy."

Tom and B'Elanna looked at each other.

Harry entered the room. Gretchen looked up and nodded to him.

"Hello, Harry. We don't know, they haven't told me." She quietly started to cry and B'Elanna instinctively embraced her.

The waiting room started to fill up. Some of the crew of the *Jane Goodall* arrived, as well as more crew from *Voyager*. Eventually, most of them moved to the cafeteria as there was not enough room for everyone.

Finally, the Doctor joined them and his tired smile was enough to tell the gathered group all they needed to know.

###

The quiet murmuring of voices was the first thing that Janeway became aware of. It wasn't easy to make out but she thought someone was calling her name.

Concentrating as much as she could, she tried to open her eyes but they didn't seem to be cooperating at the moment. Someone was holding her hand though, of that she was fairly sure.

"It may take a little while yet, Gretchen, but she's definitely going to join us soon." That sounded like the Doctor.

"Kathryn? Kathryn, honey, open your eyes."

It was her mother. She could smell her perfume and feel her hand gently brushing her hair on her forehead. Something must be wrong for her mother to sound like that. Once more she tried to open her eyes.

"I'll just go and check on the test results, Gretchen. I'll be back in a few minutes."

"Thank you, Doctor."

Finally Janeway managed to open her eyes, but the light in the room was so intense that she quickly closed them again.

"It's okay honey, I've closed the blinds and turned down the lights a bit. You can open your eyes again."

"Mom?"

Her mother placed a gentle kiss on her cheek.

"You're in Starfleet Medical, Kathryn. Do you remember what happened?"

"Um. Not really. I..." She then gasped. "Utopia? The Admiral? My crew?"

"All safe, darling. Please relax." Gretchen tucked a stray lock of hair behind her daughter's ear. "The *Goodall's* crew are waiting outside in the grounds and almost all of *Voyager's* senior staff are in the waiting room. They claimed seniority."

"Kay...all...really okay?"

"All fine, but very worried about you."

"Mom?"

"Yes, honey?"

"I can't feel my legs." There was a hint of uncertainty and fear that Gretchen had not heard in her daughter's voice for a very long time.

"You've been badly injured Kathryn. The Doctor said you needed to be immobilized for a while. You're going to be fine though, don't worry."

"But..."

"Time to rest Kathryn. I'll be here when you wake up."

The Doctor returned and checked on his patient's readings.

"She's sleeping Gretchen. Why don't you get some rest?"

"I'd like to stay with her if I may."

"Of course. May I convey the good news to those in the waiting room?"

"Thank you, Doctor. Please let them know."

###

When Janeway next awoke, the room was very quiet. Looking towards the window that had been so bright previously she could see that it was now dark outside. The louvered blinds that had protected her eyes against the glaring sunlight were now opened and she could see the twinkling lights from nearby buildings. Moving her head slowly to view the other side of the room, she saw her mother fast asleep on the couch against the wall.

At that moment, the EMH entered the room, probably having been alerted by some kind of monitor she surmised, and quietly approached the side of her bed.

"How are you feeling, Captain?" he whispered.

"I haven't decided yet. Not too bad, is my first impression."

The Doctor smiled at her.

"Are my crew okay? Utopia?"

"All fine, I assure you. But let's concentrate on you, if I may," he examined the monitors over her bed, "any discomfort or pain?"

"No."

He did a long slow sweep over her with a tricorder.

"Hmmm."

"So, what's the damage?" Janeway asked, hoping her voice didn't sound as worried as she felt.

"Considerable, actually." The Doctor knew that the Captain would not appreciate anything less than the truth. "There's the usual injuries that you would expect. All very serious but treatable and, to a large extent, repaired."

"But...?"

"But, you have sustained extremely serious spinal and leg injuries, Captain." He snapped closed the instrument. "The good news is that while your recovery may be long, you will recover. I will settle for nothing less."

She looked up at him almost expecting to see the pompous doctor of old, but saw only her caring Chief Medical Officer and perhaps, more importantly, her friend.

"Thank you, Doctor."

He smiled at her with affection and then was back to business.

"You'll have another few days at least until the worst is taken care of and then the hard work starts, I'm afraid."

"How long, Doctor?"

"A few days before you're on your feet at all or able to walk and then a fairly intensive physiotherapy program will begin. You will get back to normal but it may be a few months."

"I see." Despite believing she was prepared, she was shocked at how long the recovery would be.

"Good morning, darling. You look much better this morning." Her mother moved to her side and gently pushed some hair from her daughter's eyes. "How is she, Doctor?"

"Much better, Gretchen. Much better." He smiled down at Janeway. "I'll just go and update your file, Captain. I'll be back shortly."

Both Janeways thanked him and he turned and left the room.

Later that morning, Janeway managed to receive her first visitors, if only for a few minutes.

Tom, B'Elanna, Harry and Janet Harrison had come in but only long enough to check that she was indeed all right and to pass on the well wishes from the rest of the crews.

Admiral Cholmondley also visited and was, as usual, entertaining. He had, however, steadfastly refused to discuss Janeway's behavior during the *Goodall* incident, suggesting she wait 'until she were stronger'. This didn't bode well with Janeway, although he never suggested any serious consequences, which she tried to see as a good sign.

The procession of people into her room was endless. As most of the Voyager crew were reassembling for the reunion, all took the opportunity to check up on her. They seemed to have worked out a roster, coming at regular intervals, three at a time. She was glad of their visits and touched by their thoughtfulness. They had effectively stopped her dwelling on her predicament.

Although the Doctor had assured her she would soon regain feeling in her legs, she couldn't help the little doubts that entered her mind at quiet times.

Most surprising were the visits from the crew of the *Goodall*. Much fewer in number and much more restrained in their greetings, they seemed happy to just see her, however briefly.

B'Elanna had dropped by and gave Janeway a hilarious account of Chakotay and Janet Harrison exchanging 'Janeway stories' in the waiting room, once they'd realized that she was fine. It was hard to reconcile the funny and open Chakotay with the restrained, quiet and almost distant Chakotay who had visited her only once during the last few days. On that occasion he had come with Chell, who had of course, done most of the talking.

###

"Ready to have your legs back, Captain?"

"More than ready, Doctor."

"Good."

He moved close to the side of her bed and spoke quietly. "Now, I must warn you that initially you will experience some discomfort. It may become intense."

"I understand."

"I'm afraid we need ensure that everything is functioning before I can administer anything for the pain. We don't want to mask..."

"I understand, Doctor. Let's get on with it." Janeway left unsaid, "Before you scare me even more."

"Of course, Captain."

The Doctor summoned an assistant, Ensign Morris, and together they began to examine the readings with Morris finally moving to the control panel on the other side of the room.

"Reduce by ten percent, please, Ensign."

At first Janeway felt nothing but with each incremental reduction of the force field surrounding her,

she felt increasingly uncomfortable sensations in her back and legs.

“How are you doing, Captain?”

“Okay.” She described what she was feeling.

“Excellent.” The Doctor turned to Morris. “Another fifteen percent, please, Ensign.”

Janeway reacted instantly and gasped at the sudden transition from discomfort to incredible pain.

“Nearly there, Captain. Only a few more minutes, ten at the most.”

An eternity seemed to pass before the Doctor finally instructed Morris to drop the remaining field. By now the feeling was beyond anything Janeway could remember experiencing.

She heard the Doctor announce she only had about two minutes to go but she had closed her eyes and was now concentrating on not screaming. A single tear trailing from her eye was the only outward sign of distress.

It certainly felt longer than two minutes before she felt the wonderful cold metal pressure of the hypospray on her neck. Several more minutes passed before she felt equal to speaking.

“What’s the verdict, Doctor?”

“Only good news, Captain.” He moved to the side of her bed and pulled up a chair. “Despite the damage and necessary reconstruction, there appears to be no resultant nerve damage or projected loss of mobility. It’ll be all hard work getting you back to one hundred percent but I don’t anticipate any difficulties.”

“Thank you, Doctor.”

“Stage one of your therapy will start this afternoon, after you’ve had a little time to recover.”

###

“You can go home tomorrow. We’ve arranged a special nurse. We had to get someone big and strong and able to put up with your moods.”

“My moods? Mom, I don’t have ‘moods’.”

“Don’t change the subject, darling. It’s just as well Chakotay is on leave and available. He volunteered.”

“What?” Mother and daughter stared at each other. “You mean, Chakotay is coming home with us?”

“That’s what I just said, dear. You know I wouldn’t be able to cope with the physical aspects of your convalescence. Not to mention that Phoebe is going to have her baby any day now, which means she might need me too. It was either Chakotay or you stay in hospital.”

“That’s...that’s wonderful. I didn’t think Chakotay was really speaking to me. We fought the last time we spoke.”

“Oh, Kathryn, I used to fight with your father all the time. It didn’t mean I didn’t love him, or him me.”

"It's not like that with me and Chakotay."

"Well, no. But we're not home yet." Gretchen had a gleam in her eye that used to scare Janeway and her sister when they bought beaus home to visit. At her daughter's doubtful look she added, "I know, I know. You'd think you'd be able to tell when I'm having fun with you. Anyway, you'll be more comfortable in your own home and you've just put in that gym which you're going to need now. Everything you need is on one level, unlike my place, so no one has to carry you up and down stairs."

Janeway was more than a little surprised that Chakotay had agreed to help her when she was to go home the next day. She was staggered to discover from her mother that it was his idea. He had barely spoken to her in the last six months. She was determined to make the most of the opportunity though. Maybe he would accept her apology and they could restore some of their friendship.

###

"B'Elanna, Miral is so much bigger since the last time I saw her. I'm looking forward to being able to spoil her when I'm back on my feet."

"We'll have to keep her away from your mother though, Captain. I think she's going to steal her."

Janeway laughed and agreed that that could be the case.

While they were admiring the baby, Admiral Cholmondley entered the room.

"Admiral Cholmondley," Janeway made the introductions, "may I introduce you to most of my former senior staff on *Voyager*, my first officer Commander Chakotay, pilot Lieutenant Paris and chief engineer Lieutenant Torres." They all shook hands.

"And this is Miral."

"Honored to meet everyone." Cholmondley reached for Miral. "May I?" he cradled the sleeping baby. "Actually, Kathryn, I wanted to see you before Admiral Keats gets to you." He gently rocked Miral, and hummed to her.

Janeway became uncomfortable. Still, if she was going to get a dressing down, there was no one she trusted more in the world than this group.

"Yes, Admiral."

"Yes, been a bit of a to-do about what you deserved after the mission. Been arguing all morning with Keats." Cholmondley handed Miral back to B'Elanna. "Pompous ass and ridiculous name, he doesn't have a poetic bone in his body."

At the questioning glance from Janeway, he continued.

"What? Oh yes, sorry. Well we couldn't agree on what to do with you Captain. I wanted the Medal of Valor, but Keats thought that the Starfleet Cross would be more appropriate. Of course, these are in addition to the civilian award that Utopians intend to bestow on you."

She stared at him.

"Are you all right Kathryn, you look a bit peeked?"

"I didn't expect anything except to be up on charges, sir."

"Don't be silly, Kathryn, people don't get court martialled for saving whole planets. That would be bad form, not to mention shocking manners."

###

"Now, Captain..." The Doctor was in lecture mode it seemed. Janeway hated sentences that started with "Now, Captain". They never failed to make her angry. This was going to be no exception, it seemed.

"...you are not to begin stage two for another three days, so that means the only walking or standing you do is for your exercises."

"Right," said Janeway through clenched teeth.

"You're to use your hover chair until at least the weekend." The Doctor insisted. "Are we clear?"

"As crystal, Doctor."

Janeway had come to detest the hover chair. She confided to her mother that it made her feel weak.

"You are weak, young lady," her mother replied in a tone that wasn't to be argued with. "You'll use the damn chair and I don't want to hear any more arguments. It's only for a few more days." But then her mother's tone softened. "For me, promise?"

"Yes, ma'am. I promise. You fight dirty, Mom."

"You bet I do, darling. I just want you well again."

So Janeway had returned to her home with Chakotay and her mother. He had been attentive when she had been readied for the transport, making sure she was comfortable and not in pain but still somehow managed to stay aloof.

Admiral Cholmondley had arrived just as the group was moving to the transport station to see them off. Chakotay mumbled something about making sure that had all her things and wandered back to the towards her room. Janeway couldn't help but feel that staying with her was an inconvenience for him, knowing he had to arrange new accommodation for himself for his position at the University of Illinois as he started there in less than four weeks.

"Just thought you'd like to know, Kathryn." Cholmondley spoke as he watched Chakotay move off, "The ship *was* sabotaged. Some Taratian faction intended to damage the ship while it was moored. Damn silly of them. They didn't figure on us leaving early. They've apologized."

"Apologized?"

The angry tone of Janeway's voice made even Chakotay turn around. He knew that tone well.

"Anyway, just thought I'd pop over and say cheerio. Don't worry about the Taratian thing. Leave it to the diplomatic types to sort out."

###

Janeway could hear her mother and Chakotay laughing in the kitchen. On her first day home she had listened to them gleefully finding unopened boxes of appliances in the kitchen cupboards. There was lots of humor at her expense that day.

Chakotay and Gretchen were getting on like a house on fire. Chakotay was still barely talking to her though. He was polite in a distant kind of way but he acted more like they were acquaintances rather than friends. She imagined that looking after her was quite a chore for him and he was only doing it for 'old time's sake' and maybe for Gretchen. Janeway was torn between not wanting to see him this way and desperately wanting to see him every day.

###

After a two of days at home Janeway still hadn't had a chance to talk to Chakotay. After a particularly grueling day of exercises, she had gone to bed straight after dinner, falling asleep almost instantly. She awoke to a quiet house a few hours later.

Janeway heard a soft footfall outside her door.

"Mom?"

"No, it's me. Your mom went to bed about an hour ago. She was beat. Do you need anything?" Chakotay looked at her closely. "Are you in pain?"

"A bit."

"Hang on, I'll get your hypospray."

He retrieved the medicine, sat on the bed next to her and gently applied it to her neck.

"Thanks."

There was an awkward silence. Janeway was leaning back on the pillows waiting for the pain killer to take effect and Chakotay was still sitting on the bed but studying the hypospray as if it was the most interesting thing he'd ever seen. In the two days she'd been home, they'd only spoken when he'd helped her up and onto the exercise equipment. He'd spent most of his time with Gretchen, and Janeway had been almost jealous of their easy banter and quiet conversations. Hell, if she was honest, she'd have to admit that she *was* jealous. She had to make this right. He was too important to her to lose.

"Chakotay, I wasn't laughing at you."

"What?"

"When you told me about Seven and Sven, I wasn't laughing at you. I didn't mean to hurt you. I need you to know that I would never want to do that."

"I'm sorry I lashed out at you the way I did. I would've told you sooner but I figured that you wouldn't want to see me after what I said to you."

"Chakotay, I can't imagine any time when I wouldn't want to see you."

"Me too. Are sure you're feeling better now? No pain?"

"Much better, thank you." She rubbed her neck.

"Shoulders bothering you?"

"Just a bit of tension or something."

“Roll over a bit and I’ll give them a massage.”

Janeway carefully rolled onto her side.

“I think that’s about as far as I can go.”

“Good enough.”

His hands gently kneaded her shoulders and neck. They were both silent except for the occasional groan of pleasure from Janeway.

“Kathryn?”

“Hmmm?”

“What *did* you laugh about?”

She explained as tactfully and truthfully as she could, hoping he would see at least a little humor in the situation.

There was silence when she finished talking but he continued to work on her shoulders.

When he finally spoke, she was relieved to hear a lightness to his voice.

“Why does everyone think I have a thing for blondes?”

“Oh, please, Chakotay,” she moaned again in pleasure as he worked just below her shoulder blade, “you don’t know how many times I considered lightening my hair color.” She hadn’t meant to say that, but thankfully, he didn’t seem to have noticed. The sound of his gentle laugh was soothing to her soul.

“Hmmm, thank you, Chakotay,” her voice was sleepy now, “I mean it. For everything.”

“Anytime, Kathryn.”

Janeway fell asleep feeling more comfortable than she had for a very long time.

###

Janeway was just finishing a series of her exercises in the gym room, when her mother burst in.

“Kathryn, I’ve just had a call from Johnny. It looks like this is the one. I’m going to transport there now...” she looked at her other daughter.

Janeway had a distinct antipathy using her hover chair outside the house and both Gretchen and Chakotay were not going to suggest it, although it would be the only way she could join her mother.

“Well, warm up the chair Mom, because there is no way in hell I’m missing another important event in my family’s lives.”

“Wonderful, darling.” Her mother was delighted. “I’ll meet you and Chakotay there.” And with a quick kiss on the cheek, she was gone.

“Trust Phoebe to have the baby before stage two,” grumbled Janeway. “Do you mind, Chakotay?”

“Are you kidding? I’m almost as excited as your mother.” He even looked it. “You couldn’t hurry up could you?”

“This is my best speed at the moment, Commander.” She was muttering under her breath as she made her way to her room to get ready. “Not all of us are hot shot pilots, you know.”

A few minutes later, he was waiting outside her bedroom door.

“I’m ready, Kathryn.” He knocked on the door. “Do you need a hand?”

“All ready, Chakotay. Let’s get going.”

###

“Phoebe, it’s your most impressive art work yet.”

“Thanks, sis. I can recommend the whole process.” Phoebe responded with a wink to Chakotay.

Janeway, however, missed this exchange as she was so intent on looking at the baby.

After a few hours, Gretchen reminded her oldest daughter that she was supposed to be returning home.

“But, Mom...” both sisters whined. Chakotay laughed with Phoebe’s husband at the instantaneous response.

“You can come back tomorrow afternoon, Kathryn. You don’t want to overdo it.” Gretchen turned to Chakotay, “I’ve left plenty of food for you both. Don’t let her have coffee.”

Groans were heard from both sisters.

“Saddle up, Captain.” Was Chakotay’s only response, as she angled the hover chair for Janeway, who was kissing the new parents goodbye.

###

Ten days after the Goodall incident, Janeway was back on her feet. It was good to be able to walk around now, even if it was still for only limited times. Her mother had been sufficiently assured of her daughter’s recovery to have decided to stay with Phoebe for a few days, to help with the new baby.

Chakotay had suggested that maybe he should move on as well but had remained at Janeway’s house only after she insisted. She had plenty of room and she wouldn’t hear of him going to a motel for the remaining couple of weeks before he commenced his new position at the University of Illinois. Due to her injury, he hadn’t had a chance to organize an apartment yet.

Admiral Cholmondley continued to drop by but Chakotay never interrupted their discussions. Janeway couldn’t understand what Chakotay could possibly have against Cholmondley, but she wasn’t going to force the issue for fear of another disagreement.

Still, it was unsettling.

###

“Good morning!”

“Kathryn.” Chakotay moved to get her a cup. “Good morning. How are you feeling?”

“Pretty damn good, actually.”

“Really?” Janeway nodded. “Well, let’s see how good. Time to move to stage three of the exercise program, I think.”

“Did I say good? I meant tired. Sore. Headache. Dizzy. Oh, and breathless.”

“You’re not breathless yet, but you will be cadet.”

Janeway’s head fell onto to the table.

“You sounded just like Nemimbah when you said that.”

“I was his star pupil.”

“Mercy. I’m willing to beg.”

“I’m immune. Fifteen kilometers on the bike first, Janeway.”

“What if I cried?”

“Twenty kilometers”

“I want my mom. She wouldn’t let you bully me like this.”

They were both laughing hard now. The tension that the pair had felt while being around each other had seemed to vanish and they were back to enjoying each other’s company.

Breakfast was consumed while laughing and banter. Chakotay was just tidying up the final bits of debris from the meal as Janeway finished her coffee.

He didn’t offer to help her as she carefully pushed herself up from the table and started to maneuver her way to the gym room.

“Good morning, Skipper! Good morning, Mr Chakotay.”

“Good morning, David. You’ve just saved me from Chakotay’s clutches. He was just about to send me on a forced march.”

“How very gallant of me.”

Chakotay politely greeted Cholmondley but his smile didn’t reach his eyes.

“I’ll go and get the machines set up, Kathryn and then I’ve got to go into town for an hour or two. I’ll see you later, Admiral. Fifteen kilometers, Kathryn.” Chakotay abruptly left the kitchen.

“You know, Kathryn, except that I’m so lovable, I could almost believe he doesn’t like me.”

“I’m sorry, David. I’m not sure what’s wrong with him.”

“Don’t worry about it, Kathryn. I’m sure we’ll be pals eventually.”

###

A week later, Janeway and Chakotay readied themselves for the first anniversary ball. Having trouble with her stiff dress uniform, Janeway called for her friend's help.

"What's the problem?"

She looked up as he entered the room.

"My god, Chakotay." She gaped at him. "You look sensational in a tuxedo."

"You look pretty good yourself. What's the problem?"

"Problem?" she continued to stare at him.

"You called me."

"Oh, right." Shaking herself she managed to reply. "Can you help me with the jacket, please? I'm not up to wrestling quite yet."

"Here, let me." He helped her with the jacket and handed her her walking stick. "Ready to go."

"Thanks. Yep, let's go."

###

Janeway had received a standing ovation as she entered the ballroom. She had almost toppled over from the shock but she felt Chakotay's strong hand at her back, gently and discreetly giving her support. Just as he had for years.

They had argued all the way to the function about whether or not she would use her walking stick. She hadn't wanted to, but he had insisted, finally using a tone of voice with her that had caused her to pause and quietly acquiesce. He sure was getting uppity now that he wasn't under her command.

Now, she was glad she had let him 'convince' her. It would've been difficult to remain standing while shaking innumerable hands of admirals and visiting politicians.

Chakotay stood a short distance away from Janeway but close enough to give her any assistance she might need. So far, she was doing fairly well and he noted with satisfaction that she was leaning on her stick as she talked to a group of dignitaries. He was joined by Cholmondley who greeted him with his usual bluff cheerfulness. They both watched Janeway with obvious admiration.

"Stunning woman, isn't she? I mean, she's rather extraordinary." Cholmondley could see that Janeway's former first officer was not impressed by the Admiral's praise of his ex-Captain. Judging by the man's reactions, it was almost as if Chakotay was jealous.

Of course. That had to be it. Well, this could be interesting. May as well have some fun. And perhaps do the Skipper a favor.

"You know, it was just brilliant being able to spend so much time with the Skipper. There's something so intimate about life on a starship don't you think, Mr Chakotay?"

Chakotay didn't answer.

"And you get to know some people *awfully* well. The best thing about being alone on the ship was, one didn't have to compete against all the chaps who are lining up to meet her all the time. I mean, one is able to monopolize her time, especially when one is an Admiral. Rank has it's privileges, eh?" He laughed heartily and clapped Chakotay on the back, while giving him an appraising glance. Chakotay just about looked ready to tear him limb from limb.

Chakotay was seething. If that buffoon called her 'Skipper' one more time, he may have to hit him. It made her sound like a collie. And who the hell talked like that anyway?

"I heard from one of the chaps that some idiot from Voyager had actually practically thrown her over for someone else just as they returned home. The bloke would've had to have been mad as a hatter, don't you agree? Absolutely *barking*, really." Cholmondley tried not to smile at the reaction he was causing. "Oh, please excuse me. There's someone I have to talk to." And with that parting shot, the admiral moved away.

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Some time later, Gretchen and Chakotay sat together watching Janeway laughing with some of the crew that had joined her at the table, as well as Cholmondley

"It's wonderful to see her up and about. She looks like she's having a wonderful time, doesn't she?"

"Yes, they make a lovely couple." Chakotay replied through clenched teeth. "I hope they'll be happy together."

"Chakotay, I don't think that David is ever going to have a romantic relationship with Kathryn, if that's what you're thinking."

"You're kidding, right? Have you seen him Gretchen? He's charming, good looking, intelligent and he's even an Admiral. And he gets on so well with her."

"Well, yes. He is all those things, of course."

"I know." Chakotay stared down at the table glumly.

"He's also gay.'

"What?"

"Been in a relationship with his partner for over twenty five years."

"You're kidding?"

"No. Not this time. I guess this means that Kathryn is back in circulation. Not that she was actually out of it."

The music started up again and most of the people on Janeway's table got up to dance. When Chakotay sat next to her, the remaining people excused themselves and joined the others on the dance floor.

"Kathryn?"

"Yes?"

"You didn't tell me that David was gay. Gretchen just told me."

"Er, no. I guess I didn't," she looked perplexed, "should I have?"

"Yes. It put a crimp in my plans."

"A crimp?"

"I've been so jealous of him, I couldn't bear to be in the same room when he was with you."

"Jealous? You?" She liked the sound of that. Very much. She also reflected that she'd never be angry with her mother for meddling again.

He nodded and they just stared at each other. Finally, Janeway reached out for his hand.

"Chakotay, dance with me?"

"I'd love to, but how are you going to manage?"

"You'll think of something."

A few minutes later, the couple found themselves on the dance floor with the crew of Voyager surrounding them. They weren't so much as dancing as standing swaying to the gentle music, Chakotay's strong arms supporting most of her weight and holding her closely to him.

When they returned to their table, Cholmondley was waiting for them.

"Thank goodness you've sorted yourselves out. Jeremy was getting miffed with me, not to mention confused."

"You know, I haven't understood any conversations I've had for the last half hour," said Janeway.

"A more perfect recommendation for an admiral, I've never heard." Cholmondley looked at her with affection.

"Are you in the market for slightly confused admirals with bum legs, David?"

"Oh, yes. I'll go and order your desk and pot plant now." He kissed her on the cheek and gave Chakotay a saucy wink. "Have a lovely Christmas, Kathryn, it looks like you got what you asked Santa for."

As the celebration reached its end, a very obviously happy Janeway was bidding goodnight to the crew. More casual get-togethers had been planned for after Christmas, so it would only be a few days before they would all be together again.

"I'm ready to go if you are, Chakotay." Janeway was leaning on a table. "I'm exhausted."

"Just give me a minute, would you?"

Chakotay almost ran to where the Doctor was standing and practically dragged him to a quiet corner of the room.

Janeway watched with curiosity as they began talking and both simultaneously turned and looked at her. The Doctor had the strangest look on his face but the pair were having a very intense

conversation. Finally, the Doctor nodded and shook Chakotay's hand.

Chakotay practically ran back to her side.

"Okay, let's go. We've got an early start tomorrow."

"Why?"

"Time to start on stage five of your exercise program."

Janeway's good humor almost evaporated.

"You're kidding me."

"Nope. Just got them from the Doctor. Special aerobic exercises."

"What sort of aerobic exercises?" Janeway felt suddenly even more tired.

Chakotay leant across and whispered into her ear.

"Oh, those kind." She blushed. Well, this night just took a turn for the better.

He bustled around Janeway, making sure she had her coat and other belongings. Gretchen appeared just as they were standing up.

"We'll see you tomorrow, Mom."

"Make sure you're nice and early. I've been getting ready for a full Janeway Christmas celebration. I think we've got plenty to celebrate this year, don't you?"

"Indeed we do, Mom." Janeway glanced at Chakotay at her side. "But don't bother getting the guest room ready, Chakotay's with me." At her mother's delighted expression, she added "We'll be there in around ten."

"But not too early, Gretchen." Chakotay added mysteriously. "I'm unwrapping my first Christmas present first thing in the morning."