

## **Borrowed Time**

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Rating: NC-17 / P18

Summary: My entry for VAMB's Secret Santa exchange 2011. My task was to write a JC Resolutions fix that would prevent an early rescue from New Earth and definitely bring Kath and Chak together.

Disclaimer: If they were mine, I would have written them a script according to my story and sent them away to New Earth... unfortunately, they belong to some very, very unromantic people - Paramount and co.

Complete request: *J/C Resolutions story. No early rescue from the planet, but definitely bring them together. Can even make KJ (after some introspection) pursue Chakotay (who plays hard to get lol) versus the other way around. At least one strong R-ish or smutty scene with them. (more is ok if you can or want to) Also, a pregnancy and/or birth if you're able is ok as well.*

Author's Note: I decided to go into that story with a rewritten "Angry Warrior" scene that follows Jeri Taylor's original script (to some extent), and then start at the "I can build this boat" scene.

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*When she emerged from behind her partition not even an hour later, there was a hint of anxiety in her features. Still, she strode resolutely to the table and sat down across from him.*

*"We have talk about this," she said; it was a clear statement, no doubt in her voice evident, contrary to what he saw in her eyes, what she tried to hide behind the captain's mask. He put aside the PADD he was working on, slowly so, all the while watching her thoughtfully.*

*"All right..." He folded his hands in front of him, leaning forward towards her, looking her straight in the eye.*

*"We know that we are going to be here the rest of our lives. The question is... what is our relationship going to be, exactly? I think we need to define some parameters." His left eyebrow twitched, as if contemplating rising, but then thinking the better of it; instead he regarded her with something she recognized as determination in his expression.*

*"I don't think I can tell you - exactly. And I'm not sure I can define parameters. But I can tell you a story... An ancient legend among my people." He allowed himself a tiny smile to pull on the corners of his mouth, before he went on. "It's about an angry warrior... who lived his life in conflict with the rest of his tribe... a man who couldn't find peace, even with the help of his spirit guide. For years he struggled with the demons inside him, but the only satisfaction he ever knew came when he was in battle. This made him a hero in his tribe, but the warrior still longed for inner peace."*

*He rose and started to slowly stride through the room, followed by her eyes. He had spent the evening thinking about how to tell her, whether to tell her now at all, and still he needed to find the courage to go through with this story.*

*"One day he and his war party were captured by a neighboring tribe, led by a warrior princess. She called on him to join them, for her tribe was too small and weak to defend themselves from all their enemies. The warrior princess was brave, and beautiful. And very wise. The angry warrior swore to himself that he would stay by her side, doing whatever he could to make her burden lighter. From that point, her needs would come first. And in that way, the warrior began to know the true meaning of peace."*

*He stopped his pacing and turned to her, who was still watching him with a mixture of expectation and confusion. He took a deep breath, holding her eyes with his for his next words.*

*"He didn't realize for long time that what he was feeling was love - because he had never known love before."*

*Tears were unstoppable rolling down her cheeks when the full meaning of his words hit her. Of course she knew exactly what he was saying; and for some reason it didn't even surprise her. Still, her heart beat so wildly like she had just run a marathon. With great effort she managed to keep her voice as steady as possible for her next words: "Is that really... an ancient legend?" Her heart warmed when he began to smile widely, and blushed a bit, like realizing only now what he had just revealed to her.*

*"No. But that made it easier to tell you." She smiled as well then, her eyes full of affection when she stood up and walked over to him. She came to stand only half a step before him, and looked up at him for long moment. He didn't dare to move even one muscle, anxiously awaiting what she would do. He was more than mildly surprised when suddenly, she lifted her arms and wound them around his neck, pulling him to her in a tight embrace.*

*It was the most intimate gesture they had ever shared. Was it promising something? Neither of them knew. But one thing they knew for sure. A man and a woman who had to spend the rest of their lives alone on a planet far away from anyone and anywhere they knew, had ever known, couldn't be 'just friends' forever. And they knew that, as of this moment, something had changed between them; something that was worth exploring.*

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It resembled a warm day in May on good old Earth, that world outside their little cabin on an alien planet far away from their home quadrant they now had to call their new home. *New Earth*. Warm rays of the system's solar star greeted the morning hours and embraced Kathryn Janeway, former captain of the Starship Voyager, when she stepped out of the door. She would never have thought it possible, but life in the wilderness didn't seem all that unappealing to her anymore. The air was fresh, and she took a deep breath, turning her face to the light breeze playing around the house and inhaling the scent of wet earth and dew-covered plants emanating from the woods.

"Good morning," a voice from behind her greeted her, and she smiled when she turned around.

"And to you," she replied, her voice gentle, and gladly accepted a cup of coffee he was giving her. Chakotay, the man who used to be her second-in-command and would now be her company for the rest of her life, laughed when she hummed after taking a long sip.

"You know, we won't have coffee forever. Maybe you should try and get used to something else. Tea really isn't that bad. And we certainly won't run out of herbs." He winked at her, and she rolled her eyes.

"Before that happens, I rather find myself some substitute. They has to be some kind of... 'New Earth' coffee here. We could make a fortune with it," she smirked, and he returned the gesture.

"Say that just a bit louder and Neelix will be back here in no time," Chakotay deadpanned, critically eyeing his surroundings like looking for the Talaxian they had met shortly after their arrival in the Delta Quadrant and who had become a worthy member of Voyager's crew.

"Yes... plus every Ferengi that ever was," she added and they stared ahead in seemingly contemplating silence, only broken by the sounds of both of them drinking their respective beverages. Seconds passed, maybe a few minutes. Then Janeway couldn't hold back a giggle anymore - and they both erupted in laughter. It took them a moment to regain their composure, gasping for air and hiccupping even when they had calmed down again.

"That's how I like my days to start," Chakotay said and then walked back into the cabin. "Do you have a moment for me?" she heard him calling from the inside a moment later, "I'd like your opinion on something."

"Well, you've come to the right person. I always have an opinion," she stated, the smile as evident in her voice as it was on her face when she joined him in front of his computer. Immediately, she recognized the 3d sketch she saw on it, and her eyes lit up. "A boat!"

"You said you wanted to explore the river. I think I could build this."

"We could go on a camping trip," she suggested enthusiastically, and he quirked an eyebrow at that.

"I'm not sure we could fit the bathtub in the boat," he quipped and then smiled cheekily, at which she responded by laughing happily.

"Well, that's all right, I'll have the river." Kathryn loved the idea already; although she wasn't that much of an admirer of camping trips of any sort, she couldn't wait for their expedition down the river by boat and not just foot. This world held some surprises, she was sure, and if the rest was even half as beautiful and earth-like as the area they had already covered with their explorations...

"Do you hear that?" Chakotay brought her back from her musings, and she looked up at him, at once listening intently.

"No, what?" He nodded towards the door.

"Listen. I think your little friend is back." Now she heard it, too; the distinctive low squealing and the suspicious rustling sounds that were so familiar by now. Quickly they made their way outside, only to be indeed greeted by the small ape-like being Janeway had become so fond of. And obviously those feelings were reciprocated. The animal wasn't standing at the edge of the forest anymore, but had come close to the house this time, taking a curious look at the plant bed with the Talaxian tomatoes - Janeway had planted them a few days back after discovering her love for gardening - before his attention was drawn by the two humans walking out of the cabin.

"Well, hello there," Kathryn greeted him, her voice soft as to not to disturb him or scare him away. The little primate squeaked again, and pointed insistently into the river's opposite direction; the part of their surrounding area they hadn't yet explored more thoroughly. Janeway crouched down, intently looking at the animal and asking, "You want us to go this way?"

Chakotay smiled fondly at this "exchange". Kathryn's encounters with the creature were adorable, to say at least. He had no idea how trustful the rest of this species was, but if it was for him to judge, he would say that her way to treat the ape had given her some advantage in gaining his trust. Something told him that sometime soon his companion's favorite pet would change from dog to monkey. He just hoped that there weren't any ten-times-as-big parents around missing and searching for their little one.

The animal squeaked again, his arms still stretched out and pointing away from their camp, like he wanted to give some extra emphasis to his recommendation. Chakotay saw Janeway nodding and then rise, while their visitor retreated back behind the tree line.

Before she could say anything, Chakotay was already speaking. "So, are we going to follow his tip?"

"It's not like we had much else to do... for the rest of our lives. Or that we wouldn't have covered that area anyways," was her answer; then she patted him on the shoulder and went back into the house.

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The ship was flying at high warp; there was no need to waste any time. Elegantly it was maneuvered through space as it raced towards its destination. It longed to get back to sheep lost, to its heart and soul abandoned by unfortunate circumstances.

"Long-range scanners are now detecting the planet, sir. Estimated time of arrival in approximately thirty-five hours."

"Thank you, Mr. Kim." Lieutenant Commander and acting captain Tuvok rose from the commanding officer's chair in the middle of Voyager's bridge and came to stand before the view screen, hands clasped behind his back. "Are we in communications range yet, ensign?" He then continued, looking shortly over his shoulder to OPS station.

"We are, but there seem to be some inferences. I can't get a signal through yet." Harry Kim's fingers moved quickly over his controls, frantically trying to open a channel, but it was to no use. They would have to wait until they got closer to the planet to contact their crewmates.

Back on their way to the planet where they had left their captain and commander, the Federation starship was taking a big detour of around seventy light years by flying in the exact opposite direction of where their ultimate destination - Alpha Quadrant and Earth - lay. Every single crewmember knew that their former captain wouldn't approve of the dangers they'd taken up on to get an antidote from the Vidiians, and that they were now losing precious time on their journey to the M class planet they'd left their commanding duo on. After all, they were ignoring a direct order.

And still, they couldn't have cared less about any possible, though not very probable, consequences. Kim and the rest of the crew had done their best to convince Lieutenant Commander Tuvok to take the risk and ask the Vidiians for their help. When the Vulcan man had finally agreed, they had worked without pause to get the cure, all of them eager to bring the pair they all held so dear in their hearts back aboard.

"Did you hear that Neelix is planning a big 'Welcome Home!' party on holodeck two for tomorrow night?" Even highly concentrated on flying the spaceship, skilled pilot Tom Paris still was able to enjoy some small talk with his crewmates - much to Tuvok's disapproval.

"I think, Mr. Paris, you should keep your mind concentrated on the task at hand so there will be persons to celebrate tomorrow night," the Vulcan commented in his usual stoic demeanor, and Tom rolled, facing his console and thus unseen by his commanding officer, his eyes.

"Really, Tuvok, leave that bit of anticipatory joy to the people. Trust me, it will motivate them."

"Plus," Harry piped in, "there's no reason to assume that this mission will fail. The hardest part already lies behind us."

"I think there is a saying among humans that advises not to 'count the chicken before they are hatched'," Tuvok surprised them with a rather usual argument, effectively muting Harry and Tom, both of them staring at him open-mouthed. If Tom hadn't known better, he would have been sure that there was the resemblance of a smug grin on the Vulcan's face.

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Chakotay had immediately gone to work as soon as the computer had finished all necessary calculations and announced the blueprint as finished. By that time, both he and Janeway had brought logs and pre-cut planks to a clearing halfway between the river and their house. But actually building the boat proved to be not as easy as assumed by the man who was otherwise an adept craftsman. It even went as far as bringing him to curse under his breath, much to his female company's amusement.

Janeway was working some smaller logs and planks according to Chakotay's instructions, trying to give him a hand as good as she was able to, but still, they were only making slow progress. And when it began to rain heavily in the early evening, they had to surrender for the day, hastily covering their work before running back over muddy ground and under dripping trees to their shelter.

"A kingdom for a starship," Kathryn sighed when she thankfully accepted the towel from her fellow sufferer who was just as soaked through to the bones as her. "No rain, no wind, no *weather*, no insects, but steady temperatures--"

"... hostile aliens, firefights, unknown diseases..."

"Touché."

They smiled at each other before retreating to their private areas to get rid of their dripping wet clothes; the last thing they needed now was to catch a cold.

"Do you mind if I take a shower first?" Janeway asked loudly while putting on her dressing gown.

"Not at all, I wanted to suggest that you go first anyways." He appeared from behind his partition just the moment she did as well, and grinned at her when he added, "You know, I'm more used to this rough kind of life." Kathryn resisted the sudden, quite unfamiliar urge to stick out her tongue, but instead only rolled her eyes and headed for the bathroom, ignoring his snickering as she did so.

It took her around twenty minutes to finish - and when she left the bathroom, wrapped only in a towel so big it seemed to wear her and not the other way around, he had a strong feeling of déjà-vu. Her hair was hidden beneath a towel-turban, leaving her neck and shoulders deliciously free of anything that could have obstructed his view. He would have needed to be dead to not stare at her.

The light tapping of her bare feet was the only sound in the room when she walked back to her sleeping area. Just before she vanished behind her partition, she stopped, and, without turning to him, whispered, "Chakotay, stop staring!". Then she was gone from his sight.

His brain, only slow at thinking at this moment, took a few seconds to send a "Widen!" command to his eyes, and a "Blush!" one to his face. However, something inside him also noticed that she hadn't ignored him or shied away from his longing gaze, but had instead acknowledged it in a rather untypical and, as far as he saw it, flirtatious way. A smile crept onto his face. Maybe there was still hope.

Right now, he had to banish those thoughts from his head for the time being. There was a boat to build, and some other ideas to bring into visible plans they could work with; everything else would take its own time, just like their relationship did. But if there was anything they had enough of, it was time.

Satisfied with the prospect of what was yet to come, he turned his attention back to the computer in front of him that showed Voyager's surface readings and mappings. The river led into a valley with a big lake, and went on from there in smaller streams, at the foot of the surrounding mountains vanishing into these. However, no water came from them on the other side of the hills. The same construction found itself in the opposite direction of their camp, away from the river - mountains into which water disappeared, but here from the side that was not facing them. He wondered whether one could enter the mountains from Janeway's and his side of them.

When Kathryn accompanied him at the table a few minutes later, he was busily at work, thinking everything through, and then suggesting the idea he had come up with: If the river was not yet an option to explore, since building the boat would take some additional time, maybe they should indeed try out the primate's recommendation and take a closer look at the mountains they lay in the other direction.

His female companion was enthusiastic about the idea, and so postponing their boat trip - or working on the vessel - to not be stuck on the small lands they had claimed for too long, the decision was made.

Early the next morning, given the weather had improved, they would leave.

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Voyager's bridge was busily quiet, with everyone dutifully working at their stations while the ship flew with a steady speed towards Janeway and Chakotay's location. Tuvok had once again taken place in the captain's chair, reading a report and occasionally checking in with Harry for any changes.

"Did you find a solution for the problems with communication yet, Ensign Kim?" he asked once more when Paris announced that they would arrive in about seventeen hours.

"I'm sorry, sir, but I can't just explain what causes them. There's no apparent reason. Nothing on the sensors indicates where these disturbances come from. To be honest, I'm running out of ideas." There was a note of desperation in his voice, and he earned himself a sympathetic look from his friend Tom.

"Then it will be a surprise for them; I don't think they will mind, given the fact that it brings them back aboard," the pilot commented, deliberately ignoring Tuvok's expected protest. That, however, never came. The acting captain knew better than to give the younger man a lesson in discipline; he had spent enough time around humans to be able to at least sometimes tolerate certain inappropriate traits.

"Then maybe you should consult with engineering. This very well could also be a yet undetected problem in the ship's systems."

"Yes, sir," the ensign acknowledged, immediately returning his attention to the task.

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After the heavy rain the evening before, Kathryn and Chakotay had feared their hiking plans would literally be rained off. But when they poked their heads out of their cabin early this morning, dawn accompanied by the first rays of sunlight invited them to go through with their plans. The still-cool air made the prospect of wandering and roaming the lands they hadn't yet explored even more appealing, and so breakfast was a quick affair, as was packing their backpacks.

In no time, they were on their way, choosing the general direction of the mountains and therefore the destination their little ape-like friend had pointed out to them. Equipped with sleeping bags, food and every other necessary utensils, they were planning to stay overnight if the environment would allow it. It was about time to get away from their cabin for a while; change was always welcomed, especially to explorers and scientists.

A good twenty minutes into their hike to the mountains, Janeway suddenly stopped, her hand on Chakotay's arm bringing him to a halt as well. When he looked at her, he was met by a fearful expression that scared him to no end.

"Kathryn? What is it?" he wanted to know, his hands grabbing her shoulders and forcing her to look at him.

"Chakotay..." she began, her voice only a whisper, "did you... did you-"

"Dear Heavens, Kathryn, please tell me what the matter is with you!" He was close to panicking. Whatever it was, it frightened Kathryn Janeway. And that was reason enough for him to be *seriously* worried.

"Did you... lock the door?" He stared at her dumbfounded for a moment, his mind needing a moment to process her words.

"Did I... wha-" he began to stammer, but then the sounds from his throat died, leaving his mouth standing agape - and him speechless. Kathryn held her frightened expression, though he recognized the first tell-tale signs of an enormous fit of laughter coming on in the way her eyes started to twinkle, and the corners of her mouth to twitch. And then of course there was this very faint chuckling gurgle from somewhere in her throat; if not belly, because she was working so hard on suppressing it.

When the panic in his features began to vanish and was replaced by a deep, puzzled frown, the woman lost it.

"Oh Chakotay... I'm sorry, but you should have seen your face," she burst out laughing, shaking and bending over, holding her stomach. The man in front of her stared at her incredulously.

"Not even remotely funny, Kathryn. Not even a bit. Do you know how scared I just was?!" Always calm and well-composed Chakotay felt anger bubbling inside him, and only the part of him who adored Kathryn so much - and a happy, joyfully laughing Kathryn even more - kept the part that wanted to scold, really scold her, in check.

"I guess I got too much fresh air," Janeway smiled and shrugged; then she resumed her way to the mountains, the hint of a bounce in her step. Voyager's former first officer shook his head and couldn't help but sigh. He loved this new side of her, but he definitely still needed to get used to it.

He followed her wordlessly, and they didn't talk anymore while hiking through this jungle-like nature of the planet towards the mountain range that was a good three-hour-walk away from their cabin. Their tricorders led their way and acted as map and compass equally. Smaller rock formations dotted the wayside, almost like someone had placed them there to offer some grey contrast to the lush green surrounding them in the forest.

"I wonder if there is some kind of pattern to these rocks," Janeway voiced her thoughts after a while. But her companion only gave a grumbled response. She looked at him irritated. "Really, Chakotay? Are you going to pout for the next days?"

"I am not pouting, Kathryn. I'm just... that was unnecessary and...", he sighed deeply and shook his head, "inappropriate, immature behavior." When he faced her then, his expression was serious - and for the first time she realized that she really had acted like a little child who wasn't able to grab the significance of their situation. She had always been the responsible one, safe for those moments in her youth when she had given in to her curiosity and risked something, against better knowledge and judgment. But that had only happened a very few times, something every young person had to experience, and other than that, she had usually showed just how much a good leader and commanding officer she would make later. And proven it, too.

Here, on New Earth, there was only the two of them; no one to help when something happened, no back-up or rescue teams. They had to rely completely on themselves and the respective other. They had to trust each other without even the hint of a doubt. There was no room for pranks and practical jokes, for pulling each other's leg. At least not if it would scare the hell out of the other.

Heavily sitting down on one of the rocks at the side of the path they were just passing, Janeway slowly nodded, acknowledging his words, the expression on her face solemn and thoughtful.

"You're right, Chakotay. I'm sorry. I feel like... I don't know what it is. I haven't been myself in these past weeks. Maybe it's this environment, the new planet, the new *home*, the prospect of spending the rest of our lives here. Maybe I'm just going insane because I fear solitude." Her last words were only a mere whisper and her eyes got lost in the distance. Only the gentle touch of his finger under her chin brought her focus back to him who was now crouching before her.

"You're not alone here, Kathryn. I know this is difficult, being confined to this unfamiliar planet in an even more unknown region of space. But I promise that I will do everything in my power to make us have a good life here." He smiled at her. "The warrior princess' needs will always come first for the angry warrior, remember?"

For the second time since they had come to this world, her heart was overflowing with love and affection for him. His words touched her as deeply as his little tale he had told her a while ago and was now referring to. She knew better than to deny that she was falling in love with him, if she hadn't already. And those little moments, apart from everything else in general, time and again reminded her why. Even if this planet had been crowded, stuffed with billions of people, he would still have been the most wonderful, kindest person, and man, of them all.

"I know. And I can't begin to tell you how grateful I am." She sighed - something she did far too often recently in her opinion - and cupped his face with her hands, her thumbs brushing his cheeks gently. He lifted a hand himself and covered one of hers with it, leaning into the touch while closing his eyes. Then he loosened her hand, lacing it with his, and looked up at her again.

"Come on, I want to reach the mountains before noon; the area scans Voyager made showed a stretch of some sort of dry and level land between the forest and the mountain range. We won't have any protection from the sun there."

The last hour of their walk passed surprisingly fast, and finally the entrances into what they hoped would be caves came into view. Choosing one of them suggested by their tricorder readings, they cautiously went inside, their wrist beacons providing them with enough light to explore the insides the mountain.

"It never ceases to amaze me how nature can form such structures," Janeway commented when she looked around, the tunnels seeming to stretch endlessly through the mountainside.

"I'm sure you'll be even more amazed when you see this," Chakotay called from a bit farther away; their voices echoed so effectively through the tunnels that they probably could have heard each other even if they had been several kilometers away from the other. Following the sound of his voice, she walked up to him, only to stop dead in her tracks when she saw what he had discovered - the archway to a cave that could only be described as gigantic. As could the lake in its midst.

"I think you've just found my bathtub," she declared and grinned at her companion.

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The door chime to the ready room made Tuvok look up from the PADD he was reading. Just another report he dutifully reviewed while Tom Paris took care of bridge business as long as they hadn't reached the planet yet.

"Come in," he said, as toneless as always, and waited for who the opening door would reveal. "Ensign Kim," the Vulcan acknowledged when he recognized his visitor, and motioned for him to take a seat while he put down the reading device.

But the young man was too anxious to sit. "Sir, I'm afraid I've disturbing news," he instead immediately began, and Tuvok rose an eyebrow, waiting for Harry continue, who did so hastily. "Lieutenant Torres and I found what may be the reason for our communication problems. There is a subspace rupture that seems to have..." he stopped, searching for the right word, "swallowed the planet Captain Janeway and Commander Chakotay are on. We can't determine whether the planet is still there at all, or was..." Harry trailed off and took a deep breath, then finished with "destroyed."

Tuvok considered the other man's words for a moment, before he stood and replied, "I strongly recommend to not rely on quickly made conclusions. For all we know, this may be a periodically occurring phenomenon. As you may recall, we scanned the planet and surrounding space thoroughly. We should wait until we're closer to it; this certainly will give us new or at least improved results."

Harry looked like he was about to protest, but then thought the better of it, and simply replied, "Yes, sir."

"In the meantime, you and Lieutenant Torres should continue to monitor the readings and inform me as soon as you get any new or additional results."

"Of course, sir." Tuvok nodded and dismissed Kim by sitting back down and turning his attention to his PADD again. The Asian man sighed inwardly and slowly retreated towards the room's door that led to the bridge; but, just before he reached it and it could slide open, he heard the lieutenant commander's voice once again.

"Ensign, you should not... worry too much. I am sure we will find the captain and the commander alive and well, and will be able to continue our journey with them on board soon."

His mouth pulled into a half-smile, Harry looked back at Tuvok who was still reading his PADD.

"Thank you, sir." With that, he left the room.

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Janeway and Chakotay had taken their time to explore the caves and tunnel system; out of scientific curiosity and to assure that there weren't any bad and dangerous surprises waiting for them. However, the structure looked like it had been naturally formed over the course of centuries, if not millennia, and the only signs of life inside this stony world were some exotic flowers and plants.

Only a few meters away from the main entrance into the mountains they had found a small cave that could almost be described as cozy; especially since it was surprisingly warm inside it. In silent agreement the two humans chose this cave as their campsite, and while Janeway unpacked their bags, Chakotay collected some stones, assembled them to a kind-of fireplace and heated them with a shot from his phaser.

They shared a light supper, having eaten something on their way already, and talked a bit about trivial things, both of them tired after their hike. Eventually, Janeway decided to make a good use of the water-filled cavern Chakotay had found earlier.

"You know how I was taught never to break with traditions?" she asked while pulling a towel from her backpack, and her former first officer looked at her questioningly. She chuckled. "I love a good bath before going to bed." With that, she stood up from her sleeping bag she had been sitting on, and walked out of their campsite cave, adding, "I'll be back in half an hour."

Chakotay only smiled and shook his head, but checked his chronometer to make sure he could follow her if she stayed away for too long.

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Expecting the big cave to be as dark as they had first discovered it, Janeway had taken a flashlight with her that was bright enough so she wouldn't have to second-guess every step. But when she entered the cave, it proved her precautions unnecessary - lights literally hanging in the air close to the ceiling provided enough brightness to see into every last edge of the holey structure. Quickly scanning the new addition to the cavern that hadn't been there during their earlier explorations, the tricorder cleared the phenomenon's safety, allowing Janeway to hold to her plan of taking a swim.

Minutes later, after getting rid of all her clothes - of course she hadn't thought of bringing a swimsuit, but then, she also hadn't thought she would need one, in any way - she dove into the clear, cool water. Coming up again and shoving back her hair, she took a moment to enjoy the refreshing feeling that woke her from their hike tired and exhausted body - and became ensnared by the curious appearance above her.

In pure astonishment she looked up at the dancing lights shining down upon her, illuminating the cave and its surreal flora with their silvery and golden lights. Kathryn was sure that, if there was actually a paradise, they had found it on this planet. The beauty surrounding her was breathtaking, and she was so spellbound by it that she didn't even notice the part of her body not in the waist-deep water slowly cooling off, or that she shivered slightly.

She just stood there - fascinated, trapped in her own mind, and unmoving.

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Chakotay had become worried when Kathryn didn't come back after the promised half hour like she had told him. They still couldn't be sure whether there really wasn't any humanoid population or even another kind of hostile alien species on this world, and even though she wasn't that far away, he wasn't about take the risk. Getting his tricorder and his phaser, he walked the short distance through the tunnel that led to the cave.

But what he discovered there threatened to make his heart stop.

Where there had been a stunning view before, was now an undeniable magnificence to.

The water of the small lagoon looked black, and yet it was glittering magically - in the bright light of glowing globes floating high in the air under the ceiling. The rock face surrounding the underground pond appeared so smooth like it had been artificially formed and polished, and the flowers surrounding the water place that might have been an explosion of color in normal daylight appeared in faint pastels dotting the grays of the cavern. But the Indian man couldn't have cared less about this beauty surrounding him - for there was only one beauty catching his eye: his friend and former captain standing amidst the lake, her back to him, perfectly still. And completely naked.

An undeniable, irresistible desire engulfed him, making him undress himself, before it pulled him towards her, like a puppet on a string, farther and farther into the pool. It was trance-like state that controlled him, as he noted somewhere in his suppressed conscious mind, and as much effort as he put into it, he couldn't free himself of this strange influence. When he approached her, she didn't move, didn't acknowledge him; she remained as she was, like his statue of porcelain in the dark waters of an alien planet's lagoon. Like she didn't have any control either.

He saw her shivering in the cool air of the cave when he was still a few steps away, and instinctively began to move faster, an eagerness to reach her, to *warm* her, befalling him. He even began to use his arms to help him go faster, parting the water forcefully, until finally he came up behind her, his hands finding her shoulders and coming to rest on them, pulling her to him so that she rested against him. But already the moment his hands touched her skin, the longing, the arousal he felt threatened to overpower him.

She still wasn't reacting; it was as if she was completely entranced by the lights floating above their heads, and he was equally mesmerized by the view, as he was by the woman in front of him.

His naked body pressed against her from behind, his hands slowly beginning to descend down her front. One of them stopped at her chest, caressing and gently kneading her breasts, teasing her nipples already hard from the coolness of the water; his other hand, however, soon vanished beneath the surface of the clear water, gliding deeper yet, over her stomach, until his fingers reached the soft curls at the apex of her thighs and then dipped between her legs, where they were greeted with a heat that stood in harsh contrast to the water they were standing in. Hesitantly, reverentially almost, his fingertips worked slowly onwards, slipping between her folds, until one finger could enter her.

Her sharp cry, filled with pure lust and pleasure, nearly sent him over the edge. She leaned into him, squeezing his erection between them, and he deftly fondled her sex, adding another finger to her heat, finding just the right spots to tease, to bring...

"No!" she suddenly exclaimed, breaking free from the spell that had held her, and withdrew from his embrace. She turned around, looked at him for moment in shock, panic almost, before she dove into the water and swam with forceful strokes back to the shoreline. Chakotay had his back still to her, staring at the blank, glistening walls surrounding the underground lake, his head empty, his mind confused, while she retreated quickly, running back to their camp.

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The moment Voyager finally entered the periphery of the planet system that included the class M with their commanding duo on it, the crew discerned with much relief that the planet was there as they had left it, and everything looked absolutely normal. Even sensors didn't pick up anything unusual anymore, and although Harry

couldn't help but have his doubts about this peaceful impression, he gave in to the general atmosphere of happiness.

Unfortunately, this atmosphere abandoned the bridge quickly when the ship began to shake violently.

"Report!" Tuvok demanded, an unusual undertone in his otherwise calm voice.

"I don't get any readings, sir. There's no apparent reason for the problems," Harry Kim yelled from his station, the noise on the ship making it hard to understand each other. "My best guess would be that this is the subspace distortion," the young man went on after re-checking his readings, "and... I can't explain how, but it is-"

"Pulling us in!" Tom finished for his friend, desperately trying to keep the ship from being engulfed by the invisible phenomenon. His efforts proved to be fruitless. The bridge crew tumbled and staggered as the ship was thrown around. A full five minutes they were played by the disruption in subspace like puppets, rolling and falling despite their holding on to everything they could reach and grab.

When the tremors finally subsided, the crew tried to get back to their feet as fast as possible, and Harry was the one who announced what everyone had already assumed to be the case when they got a look of the view screen.

"We're not... We are... The planet's gone. Or more correctly, we are. We were obviously thrown into a to the computer entirely unknown region of space."

"Anyone else has a déjà vu?" Tom commented dryly, and hissed when he moved his shoulder.

"You should go to sick bay, Mr. Paris," his commanding officer instantly recognized the situation, but the pilot only shook his head.

"It's not that bad. I get some readings, and I think I could get us out o-" He couldn't even finish the sentence, when the ship rocked again, like someone was grabbing it and violently throwing it aside. Against a wall, no less. It was as if artificial gravity had never been invented; again the crew practically flew across the bridge, and soon Harry announced that reports of wounded crewmen came from all over the ship... and that structural integrity was decreasing.

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Chakotay himself needed a bit longer to break the enchantment that was still in control over his body and mind. Only when the light from the globes began to dim, he collapsed, feeling as if his body all of a sudden had lost all of its strength. He was barely able to hold himself upright and swim-walk back to the shoreline before slumping to the stony ground, his eyelids so heavy that he couldn't keep them open any longer.

For a full ten minutes, Chakotay remained in a state not awake, but also not asleep; it was more of battle for consciousness he was fighting with his own mind. When he finally regained his senses, he got up slowly, groaning when he detached himself from the stony bed he had been lying on and which had dug painfully into his skin.

He dragged himself, covered in his clothes again, back to the small campsite they had set up earlier, and found Kathryn sitting against a rock at the main entrance through which they had entered the tunnel system. She was staring into the sky and didn't seem to notice him arriving or walking over to her, but only looked up at him when he came to stand right beside her. And yet her gaze was empty, as though her thoughts were far away. Hesitantly he took his place beside her, ignoring her stare, but instead fixating the full moon. Only after what seemed like half an eternity, she began to speak, her voice only a hoarse whisper.

"What did we just do? Oh God, Chakotay, what did we just do?!" she wanted an answer from him he didn't have. This time, she was scared in earnest. This time, the fear and anguish in her face were real. She was visibly upset, under shock.

He understood only too well how she felt. This uncanny and disturbing incident had left him with a strange numbness he couldn't explain even to himself. Whatever this phenomenon did to people - or any life form entering the cavern, who could possibly know - wasn't pleasant. Even though it was probably meant to be. Under any other circumstances, with a clear, *unpossessed* mind, he no doubt would have enjoyed such an episode more than he was able to tell, or admit. But this was nothing he, they, had done voluntarily and because they wanted to.

"I think we should leave here. Who knows what else awaits us when we stay." He had to actually check whether it was really Kathryn Janeway still sitting beside him when she spoke again, her voice now so calm and composed and in complete contrast to her state only shortly before. When he stole a side glance at her, he knew what had happened - the captain's mask he hadn't seen in a good while had slipped back into place. It was her armor, her sanctuary, it wasn't surprising that it came back now - and yet, or maybe because, it troubled him a lot.

But even though he would have done everything to help her, to make her comfortable and this mask needless again, he had to shake his head at her words. "No, we shouldn't go back. It's almost dark outside and we don't know what to expect on this way through the jungle. There may very well be dangerous animals that are only active at night." He saw how she slowly nodded and momentarily looked down in an unconscious gesture of disappointment, the captain's mask weakened, it seemed.

"You're right." She grew silent for a while, her gaze again fixated on the sky and the brightly shining moon, and he sat beside her, his eyes lost somewhere between the black outline of forests and mountains. It could have been hours that had passed, but it were only a few minutes when Chakotay heard her quietly asked question: "Would you... would you mind leaving me alone for a while?"

Instead of answering, he simply got up silently and left. He returned to the camp; since it was only a few steps and around an edge away from the entrance where she was sitting, he would be alarmed immediately if something unexpected occurred.

Janeway herself waited another while, a thousand thoughts whirring and racing through her head. Only now and then her subconsciousness called her thoughts to order and their attention to a moment of regretting her loss coming from not being able to travel space anymore. She had been living and working her whole life to explore and see what was yet unknown; surely she had never imagined that one day she, being only in her late 30's, would be stuck on a planet on the other side of the universe.

A biting cold wind suddenly setting in forced her to return back inside their stony shelter as well. When she walked back into the with their campsite occupied cavern, she found Chakotay lying on his back in his sleeping bag next to the fireplace, his eyes closed, his breathing even - he had fallen asleep. She looked at him for a long moment; at his relaxed features, and how young his face appeared in the shadows playing across it, in the warm orange glow from the heated rocks.

Earlier, when she had sent him away to be alone, it hadn't been because she couldn't stand his presence, but because she needed time to process what had happened - and she sincerely hoped he knew that. Of course the events in the lagoon first and foremost shocked her so much because she hadn't had any control over herself anymore. Her suppressed consciousness had screamed to be allowed to react, in any way, but she had merely been a prisoner of her own body, and actions. Or non-actions. It wasn't that she resented or feared Chakotay's touch; after nearly three months on the planet she was more than willing to change her mind when it came to their relationship; certainly her heart was ready to, even if her head wasn't entirely yet. Sooner or later it had to happen; it was only natural. But only at the right time and in the right place.

Here, some alien spell or whatever one would call it had reduced them to empty hulls - and robbed them of their chance to explore a possible new chapter in their relationship at their own accord and speed. At their own, *free* will. She mourned this stolen chance, and she was angry at herself for not double-checking the cave and lagoon before indulging in her personal weakness for a nice bath.

She vaguely remembered that she had been bewitched by the globes the moment she had laid eyes on them. They were the real danger - and obviously, no one was able to escape their influence as soon as one saw them. It was the most logical apology to provide her own guilty consciousness with. But the reality was, even if there was a logical explanation, even if she - perhaps - couldn't have done anything to prevent it, she still felt that it was her fault. She hated the thought that this lack of responsibility she had shown too often for her taste in the past weeks was now causing harm to both of them, and could possibly damage that fragile romance that was beginning to blossom between them.

Sighing, she sat down on her sleeping back, her eyes remaining on her companion.

He was doing so much for her, tried to make their life on this planet better, tried to read her every wish from her eyes, sometimes before she herself even knew she wanted it. He was attentive and kind and a gentleman in every way. He was the best friend one could imagine, and certainly the best person to be stranded with on a far-off world - or anywhere else, for that matter.

For the past few weeks since their arrival, she had constantly been complaining, and even though it had become much less from back on their first days here, she still couldn't fully accept their fate. Sometimes it annoyed her that he had, in her opinion, given up so quickly; deep inside, however, she knew that if it wasn't for him and his unwavering enthusiasm and optimism, she hadn't survived that long with the knowledge that there lay a whole life like this still ahead. He was her anchor; he had been on Voyager, and he was now here.

While before she had just been *not denying* her love for him to grow, at this point, there was not even the hint of a doubt in her left what she felt for this man who once had been claimed her enemy and who she had been supposed to capture and hand over to the authorities. If everything had went as planned, he would be in a Federation prison by now, and she would be on her way with Voyager again - a thought she found now, after two years working side by side, disturbing, to say at least.

When all was said and done, he was the one person she needed in her life; and sometimes, just sometimes, she wondered how she'd done without him for so long.

Now she could only hope that this encounter in the cave wouldn't destroy everything they'd formed and grown the past two years - and even more so in the past few weeks.

Her mind still wrapped up in thoughts she lay down and fell into a fitful slumber, dreaming of light - and darkness.

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Silence. Gut-wrenching silence. Silence that shouldn't have been on a space ship that had just barely escaped extinction by some phenomenon that otherwise would have been more than appealing to explorers and scientists - to those people on board the ship.

It seemed that no one even dared to breath, much less speak. Those who weren't injured and unconscious stared at the view screen, at the sight presenting itself to them instead of the planet - the sight of an enormous globe brightly glowing with blinding white light.

*What is that...?*, Tom Paris wondered and therefore formulated a question in his mind everyone else must have been thinking as well. No one, however, voiced it - or gave an answer. Not even Harry, who the pilot assumed was already standing at his station again and analyzing his controls. Or Tuvok, whom he could see from the corner of his eye-

From the *corner of his eye*.

Only now the pilot realized that he couldn't move. And so anyone else didn't seem to be able to. The silence engulfing the bridge came from people staring ahead, period. No one talked, no one checked sensor readings and informed their commanding officer, no one gave any orders as to what to do next. No one was flying the ship.

A ship that, added to every other weird occurrence, was literally rooted to the spot. They had stopped dead in space and weren't even drifting, if what they saw on the view screen was any indication.

Tom was half lying, half sitting on the ground a few steps away from helm, the pain in his arm that undoubtedly was broken a continuous, uncomfortable throbbing. His every effort to manage even the tiniest move was unsuccessful; he wanted to groan in frustration, but even that seemed impossible. All muscles in his body felt paralyzed, and his mind - his mind was slowly slipping into a state of hypnosis. The worst thing was, Paris could feel it, like he was watching himself from the outside of his worldly existence; his consciousness and control over it ran through his fingers like fine sand...

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The sun had just risen enough to lift her rays over the treetops when Chakotay and Janeway started their way back to their base camp. Apart from some necessary communication they barely talked on their hike back, both lost in their own thoughts, their own musing about and pondering of their situation - and how to go on from there.

Their arrival back at their house was equally wordless. Janeway almost right away retreated to the bathroom, in desperate need of a long, hot shower - for once finding the idea of a bath not all that appealing. Chakotay, on the other hand, found himself walking down to the riverbank, cooling his face and hands in the fresh stream.

One thing both of them had in common - what they did cleared their minds and made them realize what they had to do. The only problem was that their minds sent them in opposite directions; and so Chakotay saw it as his purpose to give her space and time to rebuild her trust in him, while Kathryn...

Kathryn knew something like that in the cave mustn't ever happen again.

She was confused and worried when she left the bathroom and didn't find him in the house, or outside. Usually, when they left, they informed the other; and if only for security reasons. This time, however, he hadn't said anything, and hadn't left a note either.

"Chakotay?!" she called out from their cabin's main entrance, but unsurprisingly got no answer except for nature's background soundtrack. She resisted her instinctive impulse to run out, clad only in her towel, and look for him in the surrounding woods; he probably needed a few moments to himself, and she would never deny him this, not after what had happened between them. So she took her time to dress and then tidy up her personal area, sorting her things, and her thoughts.

And then, just as she decided to go and look for him, he entered the house.

They looked at each other for agonizingly long minutes, both feeling that right then and there, there was so much more at stake than maybe either one of them was able to assess - until Chakotay rose to speak, using words that didn't just sound to her ears like the worst possible cliché that was: "We should talk about it."

In that moment, Kathryn knew how she had to transform her earlier decision into an action. Sometimes, one simply had to jump to learn to fly.

"No," she contradicted, making him regard her with shock and confusion. "We should resolve *it*." It was all he got as an explanation before she approached him and, resting one hand at the back of his head, pulled him down to lean her forehead against his. She heard his intake of breath, a sign that he readied himself to protest - but she was quicker.

"Shh..." Kathryn pressed a finger against his lips and waited for him to breathe out, release the air he had supplied his lungs with to allow him to speak, before she replaced her finger with her own lips, not doing anything else than letting them touch his lightly for a while. Only then she began to move them, opened her mouth and teased his with her tongue, asking him to give in - and he did. His mouth opened, welcoming her tongue and kiss, and allowed them and himself to melt into this first kiss that grew from tender and shy to more and more passionate by the second. Chakotay wrapped his arms around her small form and she sighed at the feel of his skilled touches and the warmth surrounding her, completely losing herself in an encounter that told of every repressed feeling they may have harbored in the past weeks, and even back on Voyager already.

But Chakotay, despite having his heart dance with joy, was soon overtaken by his rational mind again, and gently pushed her away, ending the kiss.

"I can't, Kathryn. I..." He trailed off when she shook her head, affectionately smiling at him and stroking his cheek.

"Whatever happened isn't your fault. I don't blame you for anything, so you shouldn't either. Please don't let this be our memory - us giving in to something we both know we feel while not being able to control our actions." She stole another sweet kiss. "I want a new memory." And another soft touch of lips. "A real one." Her voice was a mere whisper, her breath caressing his face as she showered it with kisses.

Nimble fingers found the hem of his shirt and slipped beneath it, then pulled the piece of clothing upwards - and he complied with her wordless request. Lifting his arms, he helped her get the shirt off him. It was thrown to the ground carelessly; there were other, more important tasks at hand than to care about clothes. He watched her attentively when she began to explore his now bare chest with her fingers first, then with her mouth as well, the whole time not moving. He was simply too struck by her, and too fascinated to do anything.

The buttons of his pants were her hands' next aim as they wandered deeper, and skillfully she opened fastener and fly, pushing the leg wear over his hips so that they fell down to end as a puddle around his feet. He actually found himself groaning when she got into a crouching position in front of him and helped him get rid of his shoes, followed by the pants that met the same fate as his shirt.

Slowly rising up again, she roamed his body with her hands and mouth, touching and caressing, kneading and scratching, kissing and licking whatever inch of his skin she could reach - only sparing the area in his middle where her touch was anticipated most.

His impatience got the better of him when she was standing before him, and he reached out to touch her, to start an exploration of his own, but she stopped his hand by meeting them with hers and holding them fast in the air between them.

"Let me be the one in control. That way we can at least prevent we're getting even." He knew she wasn't serious, could see it in the twinkle in her eyes, but still he knew that somewhere, subconsciously, she maybe didn't mean it that way, but surely felt like this. He nodded, but then loosened one of his hands and with a 'just one thing' gesture, he cupped her cheek and pulled her into a tender, loving kiss. She let it happen for the moment, but soon detached herself from him smiled at him when he lifted his hands, signaling her that it was her game from now.

Only one piece of clothing remained on his body. Save the best for last, they said, she thought to herself, and rested her hands on his hipbones, her thumbs lightly stroking his skin before slipping beneath the waistband of his briefs. Bit by bit she pulled them down, eventually letting his straining hardness spring free from its tight confines, which elicited a relieved sigh from Chakotay. The rest of his briefs' way he only noticed through the haze he found himself in when she wrapped her hand around his erection, carefully yet confidently moving her fingers along the rigid shaft.

He didn't offer any resistance when she pushed him backwards until he felt his legs hitting a chair, forcing him to sit down. That she then would step away from him and slowly start to undress herself in front of him he wouldn't even have dreamed of in his wildest fantasies. One piece of clothing by another fell from her body, revealing more and

more of her smooth, white skin, her curves, the perfect beauty she was. What before his mind had only been able to register in his hypnotized state, and his eyes had only seen from behind, was now presented to him unobstructed, and it cost him everything of self-control and self-restraint he possessed to not sweep her up and love her in every way he knew.

Blood rushed in his ears, so loud it was almost deafening, when she, now entirely naked, approached him again and, with her hands on his shoulders, straddled his lap. His own hands clasped the underside of the chair's seat, still trying to respect her wish and grant her sole control.

Leaning in, she brushed her lips against his for a moment, and traced the lines of his tattoo with her forefinger, learning and memorizing the dark lines thoroughly - something she had wanted to do for a long time. Then she let her mouth wander to one side of his head, breathing into his ear what he longed to hear so much: "Now touch me."

And he complied.

Almost hungrily his hands sought out the feel of her skin, its warmth and softness, of her silky hair falling down her back like a reddish-golden waterfall, her perfectly rounded breasts, her strong and slim thighs, and finally, the heated wetness between them. His thumb stroked her clitoris while his fingers dipped between her folds, parted them and fondled them, making her pant and gasp with wetted lips open and her head thrown back. One hand pressed against her back, he held her to him when his mouth devoured her neck and breasts while his fingers, first one, then two, entered her and his hand's movements brought her to the brink of her orgasm, again and again, only to stop shortly before she could fall over the edge.

It was her who ended the teasing by regaining her senses with much effort and stopping his actions, unwillingly pulling his hand away.

"I want to feel you inside me," she murmured against his lips before kissing him once more, showing him with her tongue exactly what she planned on letting his hips do to her. Then Kathryn's arm snaked down between them, and she took his hardness into her hand, moving it up and down along it, before tightening her grip and positioning the tip of his shaft at her opening.

Slowly she sat back down from where she had been half-standing, letting a bit of his swollen flesh push into her wet heat. They both hissed at this first attempt of a union; the feeling of him stretching her tightness close to being painful, while the narrow space inside her pulled at his self-restraint, in every sense of the word. Chakotay groaned in what only could have been interpreted as protest when she rose again, momentarily losing him - but surely she wasn't about to end it here. Leaning in to claim his lips another time, she meanwhile coated her hand with her own slick fluids and wetted his member's head with them; then she took him in again, moaning into his mouth as she accommodated to his size. Finally she sat in his lap, with him fully sheathed within her, and he ended their leisure kiss to find her shoulder with his teeth instead, lightly biting down to release some of the tension he felt, tension that brought him close to exploding.

Her first movements were careful, tentative. His size was beyond everything she had ever had; that she last had had a man inside her a good while ago didn't help either; her last time had been over two years ago, to be exact. Preparations for Voyager's first mission had kept her too busy to spend much time with Mark, and especially be intimate with him; and certainly she had lived like a nun on Voyager.

Now re-discovering - *re-activating* - her sexuality with a man like Chakotay, with his size and girth, had her muscles and tissue protest; at least for the moment. Already she felt the initial uncomfortable feeling subside and herself accepting the intrusion by his silky steel. Pleasure replaced pain, and slow movements increased in speed and intensity when Kathryn began to rock back and forth, occasionally lifting her hips and sitting down again.

Until then, Chakotay had held back as much as he was capable of; but the friction and rippling of her inner walls around his erection eventually were too much to stand. With one arm locked around her hips while his other, hand

placed on the chair's seat, served as leverage, he began to forcefully thrust up into her, gliding deeper than they both would have thought possible in this position. By now her passion and lust were beyond control, and she met his plunging by grounding down onto him with all her might, not caring about how sore she would be afterwards. The climax that began to boil inside her promised to be stronger than anything she had ever known and experienced, and she headed for it greedily, clamping her inner muscles around him, willing him to let go. He, however, was having none of it; he had plans of his own, and those included her taking him over the edge when she went herself.

And with his fingers finding their joining - and her clit - his goal was a close one to be accomplished. Skillfully he twitched and nudged the swollen pleasure nub with one hand, all the while his teeth nipped at her earlobe and his other hand massaged her buttocks - and soon enough, holding back was no longer an option for Kathryn. With a throaty scream, she forced herself down onto him one last time and clawed her nails into his shoulders while her body convulsed uncontrollably in his arms. The tremors and the vigorous grip her womanhood had on his shaft sealed it for him, and he burst inside her, following her into oblivion when their orgasms washed over them. His hot mass shooting forcefully into her had her shudder over and over again, and she whimpered and clung to him, barely able to bear the sensations ripping through her.

They remained sitting on the chair, a heap of sated flesh and fulfilled minds, until after a while, he stirred. Holding her fast and secure enveloped in his embrace, he stood up and carried her over to his sleeping area where he lay down with her still in his arms. Lazily she shifted so that she came to lie beside him, her head on his shoulder and one arm draped over his stomach.

"I'm thirsty," she murmured sleepily against his chest after a short while, and sighed when she lifted her head to look at him. He chuckled.

"Did I wear you out that much?" he winked, and she slapped his stomach gently. Affectionately smiling at her, he added, "Do you want me to get you something to drink?"

"No, that's all right, I'll take that chance to stretch my limbs a bit. Do you want something, too?" He simply shook his head, so whispering "I'll be right back." into his ear, she left his strong embrace. That she regretted soon; without his warmth cocooning her she suddenly felt very cold. Quickly she tip-toed into the main room and got herself a glass of water, gulped it contents down, then put the receptacle onto the table and almost ran back into his bedroom.

Having been dozing before, Chakotay was fully awake at once when she entered the room. Kathryn Janeway was a very beautiful woman, no doubt - he had always known that, from the moment they had first met. But as she stood there before him, unashamedly naked, hair tousled and cheeks flushed, eyes glittering with happiness and pure fulfillment, and all that because of their lovemaking, he couldn't think of anything more stunning than her. Thousands of butterflies danced in his stomach when she gracefully crawled onto the bed and back into his arms, and he welcomed her, holding her as close as possible, never getting enough of her naked skin against his.

They fell into a light slumber like this, both feeling comfortable and safe in the other one's embrace; both feeling *home*.

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Had there been ships passing the Starfleet vessel called Voyager, probably no one could have withstood the temptation of getting everything off this repository of modern, highly-developed technology. There were enough races in the Delta Quadrant who'd start a war over a transporter or replicator, not to speak of tactical systems or the warp core.

Therefore, Voyager's crew should have felt lucky that they were far away from any other living being in this quadrant. And had they been able to recognize their situation, they might even have considered it. But, one couldn't even have described them as aware of their surroundings. They were still conscious; but only inside their

heads. The picture in front of their eyes was frozen, as was every sound in their ears. All they yet had were their own thoughts.

Lying dead in space, the Alpha Quadrant spaceship showed no signs of any kind of life, inside and out. Where usually lights shone from the quarters' or also the mess hall's windows, there was now only darkness; where normally a blue glow enveloped the warp nacelles, there now was just dull, plain grey. No engines hummed inside, no comm. channels were opened, and no door chimes sounded. Red alert sounds and flashing lights had long since died down. People were standing, sitting or even lying where they'd last been the moment the transformation began, but no one moved, spoke or even, as it appeared, breathed.

As if the ship and all its occupants had been frozen in time, Voyager was like a statue in space, towed to an invisible landing pier.

Only the very slow, and very occasional blink of an eye now and then was evidence that there was still life on the otherwise dead looking starship...

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It was already late evening when the couple awoke again. Having to leave for the bathroom, Janeway slipped out of the bed and vanished from Chakotay's sight into the main area; when she came back, her face looked somewhat contorted by discomfort, if not pain.

"Ow... the thing with muscles you haven't used in a long time...," she laughed and rubbed her thighs. Chakotay smirked.

"You want me to kiss them better? Or massage them?" She raised an eyebrow at him.

"Somehow I doubt that will make it better."

"I'm hurt. You underestimate me. I may just help you train them." The suggestive smile on his face made her roll her eyes.

"*That* I have no doubts about..." She grinned and approached the bed, but when she reached it, he suddenly jumped up and snagged her around her waist and pulled her onto him. She yelped in surprise and reflexively brought up her hands, landing her lower arms on his chest, what he commented with an "oof".

"That's gonna give me some bruises..." he joked lightly and leaned up to plant a kiss on her smiling lips.

"Talking about kissing it better," she purred, and he felt a stirring in his groin. But first, he had a purpose to fulfill. Turning them around quickly so that she came to lie beneath him, he kissed his way down her body and then sat back on his legs, kneeling between her parted ones. But contrary to what she was hoping and longing for, he didn't touch her sex - he put his hands on her thighs and actually started kneading and massaging her muscles. And her arousal grew with every passing second.

Unerringly Chakotay found the right muscular strings to apply pressure to, and to soothe any stretch that was - all the while Kathryn came closer and closer to losing her mind, because his hands never once touched her center, only grazed the outer lines of her glistening folds, while she was sure that her fluids had to be dripping from her by now.

"Cha-Chakotay..." she gave a strangled moan, all she could manage in her state. Her eyes were closed and her consciousness clouded - she never saw his wicked grin and that his hands and mouth closed their distance to her pleasure center. Kathryn shrieked when, without any warning, his thumb brushed her clitoris and his tongue delved into her wet heat, and only his in-forethought placed arms kept her from closing her legs when the sensations rolled over her; overpowered her. "Oh... God," she rasped, and her hands grabbed the sheets.

As suddenly as he had changed from an innocent rub to sexual teasing, he was gone again - at least for the shortest time. Then she felt his lips on hers, tasted herself on him, and realized that he was hovering above her. Kathryn opened her eyes to find his dark orbs looking at her in astonished silence, mesmerized by what he saw - the woman he'd once gotten to know as the always correct and by-the-book Starfleet captain lying beneath him, her face full of unmasked desire.

He moved and brought his hardness to her opening, supporting himself with one arm while using the hand of his other to stroke with his member between her folds, wetting himself. The moment her arms came up to wrap around his neck and pull him into a kiss, he thrust into her with one sure move, and they gasped into each other's mouths.

Chakotay remained buried inside her while his mouth sought out hers again, devouring it with a breathtakingly passionate kiss that, added to their joining, was almost enough to make them both come.

And before either of them knew what was happening, Chakotay, ending the kiss, whispered against her lips, "I love you, Kathryn." He didn't just shock her with his not-so-surprising confession, but himself as well; but then, he also didn't leave them the chance to give his words any further thought; the moment they entered her mind, they were vaporized, as he chose then to begin to drive in and out of her with long strokes, his pelvis meeting hers every time he imbedded himself inside her completely and stimulating her clit even more.

Kathryn arched her back up, offering him her chest, and he closed his lips around one of her breast's rosy peaks, sucking and twirling it with his tongue while his hips bucked into her with forcefully. She brought up her legs around his waist to let him find a better angle for his thrusting - which he did, gliding even deeper and meeting her lower body and her sex' nerve endings even harder.

Little, short cries escaped her throat every time he filled her to the hilt; the sounds begging him to let her climax, end this pleasurable torture he was putting her through by keeping her at the brink of orgasm. He, however, planned on keeping this up a little longer. Catching her hands when they aimed for where their bodies were joined, he intertwined them with his above her head so that she wouldn't be able to touch herself, all the while his thrusting became harder yet, forcing the air from her lungs.

"Please... too much..." Kathryn pleaded, trying to loosen his hold on her hands, but to no avail. Her head squeezing the pillow under her to an almost flat line, she panted and gasped helplessly when his thrusts became shallower. He pounded into her hot depths with all his might - and finally, *finally* slid one hand down between their bodies. One precisely aimed touch with just the right amount of pressure on the swollen bud that was nestled between her folds, and she was sent to frantic heights moaning and whimpering. She writhed and bucked uncontrollably beneath him, and her walls clamping down on his hardness triggered his release only seconds later.

With one last thrust he emptied himself into her and pressed his body to hers; not even a sheet of paper would have fitted between them at that moment. Her climax lasted longer than it should have been possible, and her womanhood continued gripping his still pulsating shaft, giving him no chance to calm down either.

Only after endless minutes they were able to fight their way back to reality. With his last remaining strength, Chakotay rolled them to the side and cradled Kathryn in his arms, gently kissing her forehead while she was still trying to bring her heartbeat and breathing rhythm back to normal.

He held her for a while; until after some time, he wrapped a blanket around her and left the sleeping area. She heard him rummaging outside, and was sure she made out the distinctive noises of water running. Curiosity almost defeated the weakness she still felt in her legs, her whole body; but before she could get up, he came back - only to pick her up and carry her outside the house. Within seconds she realized where he was headed, and sure enough, he brought her to her bathtub.

Climbing in with her still in his arms, he arranged them so that she was leaning with her back against his chest, and then gently washed her with her sponge. Kathryn let her head fall back and rest on his shoulder while he caressed and cleaned her body, and they both savored the feeling of the hot water surrounding them, revitalizing them. They didn't speak a word, and they also didn't allow the situation turn into a sexual encounter; instead, they relished in the moment, in sharing it with each other, the love and affection between them unspoken, but tangible.

Too soon the water grew cold, and Chakotay got up and lifted his female companion into his arms again, carrying her inside where he wrapped her in a towel and then brought her back to his bed. Being exhausted and relaxed equally, Kathryn was already drifting off to sleep when he laid her down and, after pulling on his pajama pants, he joined her on the bed, spooning up behind her by then sleeping form. With one last tender kiss to her neck he pulled the covers around them, securely wrapped his arms around her, and let sleep claim him as well.

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Time passed by, and Janeway and Chakotay, now happily living and exploring their mutual attraction and whatever else feelings there were between them, slowly began to forget their fate. They had made a wonderful home of their little Starfleet standard cabin, by rearranging the interior, even building a bigger bed and, as Chakotay had originally intended, adding two rooms. They had a whole world to themselves, a paradisiacal landscape of forest-greens and water-blues.

And, most importantly, they had each other. They made love time and again, got to know each other completely anew, learned the other one's body, their likes and dislikes. They talked, sometimes for hours, lying in bed together or sitting outside on a blanket, the topics of their conversations knowing no limits. They even shared some secrets with each other, and revealed where their weaknesses lay. They enjoyed how they never tired of talking to each other; how much they were alike despite entirely different roots.

Sometimes they'd lie in the soft grass close to the river, listen to the soft sounds of the water rushing by, or to their companion's voice when they read to each other. Kathryn loved listening to Chakotay's soothing timbre as much as she delighted in discussing fictional texts and scientific disquisitions with him.

There was just one thing, in those endless hours of conversation, they never talked about: his love confession during their first night of love-making. There was no doubt, to either of them, what they felt for each other, even though they couldn't yet fathom how deep this went; but voicing it again, outside the bedroom where they hadn't the chance to back off and blame passion-clouded minds before fragile feelings could be hurt, didn't seem to be an option yet.

It wasn't that he hadn't revealed his feelings for her before - after all, one could easily consider his 'ancient legend' as a love confession. And still, it hadn't been the same back then, not even three months into their stay. With everything that had developed between them over the following weeks taken into consideration, it suddenly was so different - even to Chakotay, who only now realized that at the time it had been more some kind of admiration he felt, and that the true love had only grown afterwards. So they carefully avoided, if not ignored, even touching the topic.

Aside from that, the way they acted around each other was carefree and light-hearted; they had fallen into the continuous easy banter and teasing between two persons of the same intelligence and humor, and Chakotay discovered a Kathryn Janeway he had never thought could exist beneath coat and mask of a strong, unrelenting woman who walked the ways life presented, life *challenged* her with without batting an eye. Sure, he had known from almost the beginning of their collaboration that what everyone got to see was a mere façade; still, finally being allowed to look behind it, behind this wall she had erected around her, *Kathryn*, protecting the woman with the captain, gave him a completely different insight.

Now she was sitting on the ground in front of the plant bed with her Talaxian tomatoes, pulling out weed, talking to the vegetables, and looking so content with the world he couldn't bring himself to disturb her; he just stood there, a few steps away to her side, and watched her, once again realizing how much he really loved her.

He was so entranced by her and lost in his thoughts that he at first didn't notice her turning around and looking at him.

"Chakotay?" Her voice brought him back to the present. He smiled at her when he started to walk towards her and then crouched down next to her.

"How are they coming?"

"One more day, and we'll have another tomato salad dinner." Letting himself fall down, he sat behind her, sneaked an arm around her waist and nuzzled her neck, to which responded with a sigh. Then he stood up and gently nudged her to do so as well, pulling her into his arms when she complied and rose herself.

"I've been thinking-"

"Oh?" He looked at her incredulously.

"Kathryn Janeway, you are a cheeky woman," he commented and shook his head at her innocent grin.

"Mh, one of my best traits," she said and leaned in to kiss him - but found him avoiding her lips by turning his head away. A loop-sided smirk appeared on his face.

"Oh yes, indeed." With that, he poked her side. She jumped at this touch, and his smirk turned into a wide grin that made those dimples she adored so much more prominent than ever before. Right then, however, she was too distracted to admire them, as it dawned on her what he was about to do. Desperately she tried to free herself from his grip - but he was too strong. Unmercifully he began to tickle her, and she squealed very unlady- and uncaptain-like while bowing and twitching in his arms; she did her best to wound away from his attacks and laughed so hard tears were rolling down her cheeks, and he laughed mirthfully himself, enjoying seeing her like this.

That was until she tested how ticklish *he* was.

Poking and pinching his sides close to his armpits, he was quick to end his own assault on her and defend himself by doing his best to grab her and hold her fast, which was not as easy as he thought. Somehow, he managed to back her up against the cabin's outer wall, and finally caught her arms, keeping her wrists in a vice grip above her head.

They were both breathing heavily, and Janeway pressed her body flat against the wall behind her, while Chakotay was leaning against her, their bodies not yet touching, although they could feel each other's heat consuming them. She felt his hot breath on her face, her lips; felt it mingling with hers, a first connection between their mouths that she hoped promised more.

"Chakotay...", she groaned, "kiss me..." And he did. Just not in the way she wanted him to. He pressed his lips against her cheek, let them linger for what felt like minutes, reveling the feel of her skin, before he let her go and walked back into the house without looking back, leaving her to huff in frustration.

Two could play this game.

She heard him chuckle even from outside the cabin, and attempted to rush inside, when another idea occurred to her. Approaching the door quickly, she stumbled just before the entryway and fell to the ground.

"Ouch," she commented, her voice making it clear that whatever pain there was could have been much worse. Still, Chakotay was immediately at her side.

"What happened?"

"I twisted my ankle," she complained and held her leg, scratching together everything she had learned in her - what was it? Two, three? - acting lessons back in school. Chakotay kneeled down next to her and reached out to her foot, but before he had the chance to examine the supposedly hurt limp, Kathryn suddenly lounged forward and tackled him so that he came to lie beneath her in the soft grass. "Gotcha," she laughed and sealed his lips that were standing open in shock with hers. His hand that came up after his surprise had subsided held her to him when he deepened the kiss, and for a moment, they indulged in the sweet caresses their mouths were exchanging. When they parted again, a smirk appeared on his face.

"You're not playing very fair, you know." She smiled at him.

"All is fair in love and war, isn't it?"

"So this is war?" he asked and winked at her, then gave the tip of her nose a playful kiss. She grew serious.

"No, Chakotay. This is love." They looked at each other for a long moment, both breathing heavily again, but this time because they were overwhelmed by their feelings - Chakotay by the expectation of what else she might say now, might add and finally voice, and she for what she was now so sure she needed to tell him. She took a deep breath and closed her eyes for a second, before opening them again and locking on to his, and said what he'd longed to hear almost since they'd come here: "I love you."

His hand tenderly brushed back a strand of her hair, before he buried his fingers in the thick wool of this silky auburn-colored mass. Then he pulled her to him once again, and claimed her lips in a lasting, passionate and yet incredibly gentle kiss he poured all his love for her into.

"I love you," he answered after the kiss had ended, and enfolded her in his arms, hugging her close to him.

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Everyone close to a window or view screen was incredibly grateful that they were still able to at least move their eyelids and shut them close when the light globe suddenly seemed to burst in a flash of even brighter light, something that should have been physically impossible, as far as the opinions of the ship's scientists were concerned. It glowed, it burned, it almost blinded everyone, and then...

And then it was gone.

And so was the paralysis that had held them.

All over the ship, people were stumbling and falling, their bodies weakened from the long period of remaining in their quasi-frozen state. The doctor, finally activated again after spending the whole time imprisoned in the ship's sleeping systems, soon identified this curious state as some kind of stasis - minus the usually necessary chambers. Every person's bodily functions had been slowed down to an absolute minimum, while their minds had still been fully intact; purposeful, but nevertheless tormenting. Spending hours, days, weeks, or however long, in an undefined condition with one's mind fully aware of it was disturbing enough to cause some people seek counsel.

What was worse - depending on one's viewpoint anyway - was that the ship obviously had been in stasis as well. No one knew how long; there were no recordings, no data. Just a timeless void.

Those who weren't in need of medical care got to work without losing any *more* time; scanning, analyzing, evaluating. And came up empty. It was as though whatever had held them, whatever had just stolen them an undefined period of time, was nothing more than a figment of their imagination; at least that was what sensors told them with their lack of *any* result. Frustration grew among the crew; they used every trick they knew, and still got no answers. All they knew was that they were somewhere they had never been before.

The bridge crew was doing their best to get everything back in order; to leave the chaos this episode had caused them behind and find back into daily business. If only it would have been that easy. Hours into their work, their attempts to clean the mess the encounter with this unknown phenomenon had left them with, new tremors rocked the ship - though they were distinctively lighter this time, and only led to minor damages. Nevertheless, it had the crew's frustration grow; it was as though they were running in circles.

Until one announcement - and one activated main view screen - changed everything.

"Sir, we're back in normal space," Harry Kim raised his voice, out of the blue, "at exactly the same coordinates we were when the disturbance pulled us in." The OPS officer didn't need to add that the planet was back as well - that everyone could see on the screen.

"Do you get any life signs from the planet, Mr. Kim?" Forehead in a deep frown, Harry tapped his console a few times, reading and checking the proposed data - and then smiled.

"Affirmative, sir. Two humanoid life forms, just where we have left them."

And for once, Tuvok could almost empathize with the relieved sigh and the following clapping that could be heard all over the bridge.

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For weeks, New Earth's two human occupants had meticulously ignored that there was still a boat that waited to be built. Too busy they had been with other building work and explorations, busying themselves with turning their cabin into something that really deserved the name 'house', and starting a small agriculture to see which food they could grow here when they ran out of supplies.

But after a while, and with an almost guilty conscience, they remembered their original plans to explore the river. Reworking the plans Chakotay had drafted, they chose a temperate morning to resume their work on the water vessel.

However, just as they were about to leave for the building site, a faint crackling noise sounded in the main room.

"Do you hear that?" Janeway asked, her hand on his arm.

"What is that?" They both looked around and followed the sound until they arrived in front of a shelf with some instruments - instruments that by now had gathered a fine layer of dust atop of them. Chakotay pushed away some of the things and revealed to communicators behind them. It was them the sounds came from.

"Someone's calling us?" Janeway wondered aloud, taking one of the devices. Just in that moment a familiar voice rang from them.

"This ... To-" The transmission stopped momentarily, only to go on much clearer after a few seconds. "This is Tom Paris. Captain Janeway, Commander Chakotay, do you read me?"

For the fraction of a second, they both hesitated. In the past months, they had built themselves a life on New Earth; and while there barely anything could have been more appealing than resuming their journey home, by now they also felt a pierce in their hearts at the thought of leaving. Because the only reason Voyager was back could be that they had found an antidote to cure their commanding duo.

With a carefully guarded voice Chakotay, knowing her well enough, still heard a weak note in, Kathryn activated the communicator.

"This is Janeway," she answered, her eyes holding her lover's.

"Captain! It's good to hear your voice," Paris said, "and I think you will be happy to hear that we have an antidote for you. We'll beam you back aboard in approximately six hours; we had some problems and B'Elanna needs to adjust the transporter's first."

The captain breathed in deeply. "Thank you, Mr. Paris, we will be ready by then. Janeway out."

Chakotay gaze was lowered to the ground when he murmured, "So, this is it?"; only then he looked up again and at her, and in his eyes showed the fear and anxiety of yet another rejection by her; that she would end what had grown between them now that they would be back to being commanding and first officer. One of her hands cupped his cheek, and she gave him a gentle kiss. Hope grew within him when she shook her head.

"I won't allow what we've found here to be left behind," she started and smothered this line of thought his mind was about to take. "I want us to fight for it. It won't be easy, and I will need you to have patience with me, and to remind me from time to time that I'm more than just the captain." She took a shuddering breath. "I want this, Chakotay. I want you in my life, and not just as my first officer. I love you. I meant what I said, and trust me, I don't say this easily. But *I love you*. I don't promise an even road, and I don't promise we'll always walk it together, because there will come a time, one day or another, when our professional life as captain and commander will interfere with our private life as Chakotay and Kathryn." Her thumb gently stroked his cheek, and he leaned into her touch, his arms winding around her body."But I'm ready to face every difficulty and argument, to overcome every difference, and do everything to keep our love alive - if you are as well."

He didn't even need to think about it. "I am. Believe me, now that I have you, I won't let you go again. I love you too much to survive without you. You're in my heart, Kathryn. You *are* my heart." He caressed his lips with hers, and she deepened the kiss, passion claiming them. When they parted again, Chakotay added in a low voice, "My warrior princess." They both smiled at this; all too well remembering this evening that had marked the beginning of a change in their relationship.

"Come on, we still have to pack." Janeway unwillingly broke the moment and slipped from his embrace - not without stealing another kiss from him he gave with much pleasure - and they got to work. Sometime during their sorting and packing, their dismantling and stowing away, they became aware of a sound that was well-known, but hadn't been heard in a long time.

"Someone obviously wants to say goodbye," Chakotay commented when he saw the small ape standing next to the tomato plant bed.

"Hello, friend," Janeway greeted the animal, and held out her hand to him, curiously watched by the man standing behind her. To their surprise, the primate closed the distance to them and almost touched the woman's hand, but then thought the better of it and flew into the woods, climbing the closest tree he could reach. Still, he rose on his legs and stood to full height, lifting one arm high, as though he was waving at the two humans still watching him.

Janeway mimicked the movement, raising her hand and waving as well.

"Goodbye to you, too, little one."

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The transporter room still looked a bit scrambled, like so many other parts of the ship; but right now the only important thing anyway was that it was possible to beam up the two they had left behind.

"Tuvok to Captain Janeway," the Vulcan man spoke after tapping his communicator. It took the captain several seconds to answer the call, something that didn't go unnoticed - to no one in the room.

"Janeway here."

"We are ready to beam you aboard."

"Acknowledged. Two to beam up on my command." Another good two minutes passed, before the comm. system sounded again. "Janeway to Voyager. Energize."

Shortly before Kathryn had given the order to transport them to the ship, she and Chakotay had shared a last intimate moment in their personal solitude that had become their paradise; sharing another kiss and an encouraging touch of hand. Only then they straightened and did their best to give a professional picture.

Nevertheless, a sickening feeling went through both of them when the by now so familiar view vanished from sight and was replaced by the ship's transporter room. It didn't seem right to be there; it didn't seem right to leave what they had created on New Earth, despite their promise to hold on to their relationship and feelings.

At least Janeway had a bit of a distraction the moment she noticed the tired, disheveled appearance of their welcome committee. Putting her personal feelings aside, she immediately asked what had happened, her voice showing deep concern.

"It's a very long story, captain... though I'm sure yours will be considerably more interesting," Tom Paris, who had accompanied Tuvok in the transporter room to welcome back their commanding duo, answered, even managing a weak but honest smile.

Janeway looked curiously from one to another, before finally focusing on Chakotay, who only shrugged. There was the hint of a smile in his eyes, and she knew that he thought exactly the same as her. A long story?

It certainly was.

END