

# ~ There is none so blind... ~

by romansilence  
([romansilence@yahoo.de](mailto:romansilence@yahoo.de))

---

Disclaimer: You all know it, the characters and background story don't belong to me but to Paramount, unfortunately. No copyright infringement is intended, no profit will be made.

Language Disclaimer: English is not my first language. So, please be lenient.

Also, there's some Klingon in this story. If the context is not self-evident, a translation in [...] is added. At the end you'll find a list of all the terms used in order of appearance with a few notes to cultural specifics.

Sexual Disclaimer: This story deals among others with a loving relationship between two consenting adult women, though there will be no graphic descriptions because nothing but sexual tension happens; a first time story without a first time, so to speak. However, please go away if you're not old enough or you don't like stuff like this, and if it's illegal where you live, order a U-haul and move!

Timeline: This story is basically situated in the first and the first half of the second season of "Star Trek: Voyager". I tweaked the characters a bit, especially Kathryn Janeway. Just imagine her a few years younger than she appears to be in the show, and forget all about her largely inadequate fiancé Mark, **no Mark or any other male**. I also made her a bit fiercer. Just think of her still drinking coffee but replacing whiskey and soda with blood wine.

Violence Disclaimer: Some remembered violence and holodeck fights with the safeties off, nothing too horrible.

Thanks: Go as usual to my valiant beta-reader Pam; this time she has really outdone herself. So, if there are still grammar or spelling errors, it's my fault not hers.

---

## Chapter One

Captain Kathryn Janeway was walking the corridors of Voyager, Starfleet's unplanned and only representative in the Delta Quadrant. Now, months after they had been brought to the other end of the Galaxy by the Caretaker's array, they had begun to settle into some sort of routine. The former Maquis rebels and the Starfleet personnel sent out to arrest them were beginning to form one crew with one goal. Only recently had it stopped being a marriage of convenience, but they still had a long way to go to all join in a marriage of love. They still thought about each other as either 'Starfleet' or 'Maquis', and the different insignia Starfleet protocol had forced her to use didn't help matter any.

Janeway's evening strolls had become a routine that helped her to keep a finger on the pulse of the ship and its crew. It also served to help her unwind after a stressful duty shift. This evening it

wasn't working. She still was angry with her chief engineer for pulling this stunt with the Sikari's trajectory matrix.

If she was honest with herself she would have to admit that she also was quite proud of the young academy drop-out. B'Elanna had stood up for her people and had taken full responsibility for the incident. That's why Janeway had refrained from sending her to the brig for breaking the Prime Directive. Instead she would be confined to quarters to think about the chain of command and the responsibilities of a senior officer. It was only light house arrest, which meant that she would work as usual but had to spend her off-duty hours in her quarters for the next twelve days.

Janeway rounded the corner to the quarters of the senior staff when the Human-Klingon-hybrid's voice brought her out of her musings. "Get out of here, Chakotay. You're no longer my captain. I refuse to put up with your sick sense of discipline and this Klingon crap any longer."

At this moment the bulky form of Voyager's first officer crashed against the bulkhead facing the entrance to B'Elanna Torres' quarters. Janeway hastened her steps.

"Belanna be sensible, for once in your life. You need this kind of discipline. You'll only get into more trouble with Captain Janeway."

There was a distinct growl coming from the room and moments later the Captain froze in mid-step. A very naked and visibly angry young woman stood in the door frame.

Chakotay stretched his hand out, trying to touch her shoulder. "Serving me is good for you, Bella. You need the lajQo' quvHa'ghamtaj."

B'Elanna's reaction was immediate. She grabbed the fingers of his outstretched hand and twisted them until he was forced to his knees. Janeway chose this moment to intervene.

"I'm sure the word you meant was lajQo' quvHa'ghachtay, Commander Chakotay. Lieutenant Torres, let him go! Put a robe on and wait for me in your quarters."

The young woman immediately obeyed and the door swished shut.

"Care to fill me in on what I just interrupted, Commander, and why you apparently mess around with Klingon rituals you obviously know nothing about?!" Janeway's force ten glare belied the calm of her voice.

"Captain, this is all just a misunderstanding. Belanna and I had a disagreement. It happens among friends, even when they are as close as we are."

"Do you want to press charges against Lieutenant Torres for attacking you?"

"No, Captain, as I said. It was just a quarrel. If you don't mind I'll tell her that she won't be in further trouble." The big man made a step towards the door.

"I do mind. You have done enough for one night, Commander. I'll deal with B'E... Lieutenant Torres. Dismissed."

"Captain, I..."

"Dismissed Commander!"

The tattooed man turned reluctantly towards his own quarters, and the Captain waited until he had disappeared behind a bend in the corridor before asking entrance to her chief engineer's quarters.

-x-x-x-

The young woman was wearing a blood red robe and did her best to stand at attention when Janeway entered her quarters a couple of minutes later. She looked straight ahead, not daring to meet her commanding officer's eyes.

"Lieutenant Torres, that's the second time in less than twenty-four hours that I've had reason to reprimand you. What do you have to say in your defence?"

"Nothing, ma'am".

"I just witnessed my chief engineer attack my second in command, but Commander Chakotay insinuated that it was nothing more than a lover's quarrel. Is this what happened?"

"No, ma'am." The answer came surprisingly quickly and this time she looked the captain in the eyes, and there was so much pain in her brown orbs that all the other woman wanted to do was take her in her comforting arms.

"Sit down and tell me what really happened. Tell me about the lajQo' quvHa'ghachtay, the whole story."

Kathryn Janeway held the younger woman captive with her pale blue orbs and haltingly the dark haired engineer began to speak.

"You know that I can have quite a temper, and even while we still were with the Maquis it often got the better of me, but even a Maquis ship does not work without discipline. Chakotay must have found this 'Rite to reject dishonour' in a database with cultural information we took from an abandoned Cardassian research facility. He told me it would be a good way for me to learn self-control but when he detailed what would be expected of me I refused.

"A couple of weeks later the scouting party I was leading was almost captured because I became impatient. I told him I would do it.

"In a strange way it worked because I loathed his so-called sessions so much I tried to control myself simply to keep him out of my cabin."

"Tell me more about this ritual. What did he tell you about it?"

"Whenever I did something he did not approve, Chakotay usually came to my room and ordered me to strip. I had to kneel in front of him with my knees spread and listen to his lecture about my shortcomings. I had to thank him for his words and ask him to correct my flaws. He would then order me to stand against a wall and whip me until he drew blood."

B'Elanna's eyes dropped to the floor and the older woman made her look up again by putting a hand under her chin. "There's no reason for shame, B'Elanna. Please, continue."

The eyes of her captain seemed to reassure the young woman.

"I had to thank him for disciplining me and ask him to be allowed to show my gratitude. He then would order me to serve him dinner or order me to kneel in front of his seat on all fours and he... he used my back to rest his feet on. Sometimes he ordered me to repeat a few key sentences. Sometimes he made me eat things he knew I hate like gagh, replicated gagh and paluccas and targh flesh."

The young woman fell silent and looked to the floor. "I need to know all of it, B'Elanna Torres; between us there is no shame."

"He ordered me to say that I was just a lowly female and would accept him as my better. He had me say that I was a prime example of Klingon rashness and that Humans are far superior to Klingons in every aspect. There was more but I'd really prefer not having to repeat it."

As a rule Kathryn Janeway was not easy to anger but now she had a hard time to keep her temper from showing, for more than one reason. "B'Elanna, did he ever ask more of you, something sexual?"

"No, he said that it was about teaching me patience and humility, nothing more. He said that I had yet not earned to be treated as a sexual being."

Kathryn Janeway studied B'Elanna's posture and eyes, but decided that she really had told her the whole truth. "Did you ever read the rules of the *lajQo' quvHa'ghachtay* yourself?"

"No, I ... I trusted him."

The auburn haired captain rose and walked over to B'Elanna's work station. The screen remained black; confinement to quarters also meant no computer access.

"Computer, reactivate the terminal in Lieutenant Torres' quarters. Authorization: Janeway delta phi three. Limit access to cultural databases, subsection: Klingon Empire. Load Klingon dictionary and disable translation program."

A few clicks brought up the texts relating to the lajQo' quvHa'ghachtay, the "Rite to reject dishonour".

"B'Elanna, I know that your Klingon heritage makes you feel uneasy but I think it's time for you to reclaim at least part of it. I want you to read and translate the texts I just called up as part of your punishment for attacking your commanding officer. Your house arrest will be doubled to twenty-four days. Both punishments will stay off record. - Apart from tonight, has Chakotay ever done this since we joined forces?"

"After I attacked Lieutenant Carey in Engineering, Captain," was the softly spoken answer.

"I see. I want you to send me a message as soon as your translation is complete. Then we will talk, and now try to get some sleep."

B'Elanna's eyes stayed riveted to the closed door long after Captain Janeway had left.

Earlier this day she had heard the disappointment in her Captain's voice and it had cut her more deeply than anything Chakotay had ever said or done to her during these so-called training sessions. Twelve days, twenty-four days or even a year of house arrest would never make up for disappointing the woman whose judgement had come to mean so much to her.

Snippets of the lecture popped up in her mind. "...throw you in the brig...I need everyone on this crew...if you ever...even the slightest...you will no longer be an officer on this crew..."

And what had she done?! - She had attacked the first officer - and yet Captain Janeway insisted on keeping the whole incident off the record.

Tonight, for the first time, she had seen Chakotay's arguments for what they always had been: an excuse to see her subdued and subservient. This night his words had not made her shiver as they had done before. The reprimand from Janeway was still too painfully vivid in her mind.

The older woman had not reacted as she had expected when telling her about the lajQo'quvHa'ghachtay. She had expected the Starfleet captain to accuse her of not defending herself against what in her eyes must have been abuse. She had expected to see disappointment in her Captain's eyes but instead, for the flicker of a moment, she had seen anger, anger on her behalf.

Perhaps Janeway had at least some idea that for the half-Klingon this ritual was literally a question of honour. B'Elanna quickly dismissed the thought; Janeway was just too Starfleet. But was she really?

The lajQo' quvHa'ghachtay... how could she have known about it? How could she have found it this quickly in the not translated part of the cultural database on Klingons?

lajQo' quvHa'ghachtay... It should have been evident for her from the beginning. What Chakotay

had said made no sense at all, "the rite to reject the honour of an animal leg"? Damn, she had been so stupid. But how could Captain Janeway have known about it? It just made no sense.

The young woman stopped her musings, sat down in front of her view screen and stared at the Klingon text in front of her. Her mother had made sure that she knew the language fluently and learned about their most important customs but over the years she had deliberately renounced her non-human heritage. She had tried to forget all about it, and considering how she had let herself be fooled by Chakotay, she had been successful.

-x-x-x-

Meanwhile, Kathryn Janeway was in Holodeck II trying to quench her anger at her first officer by running one of her workout programs at the highest setting. Over the last few months she had come to appreciate and trust the former renegade. She had seen him as an honourable man with integrity and steadfast morals.

B'Elanna's quietly spoken words, the pain in her brown eyes and the dishonourable use of the lajQhHa'ghachtay had taught her better. What he had done to B'Elanna not only had crossed the line; it had shown his callousness and egotism in bright colours.

Her anger on behalf of the young woman was, she was well aware, more intense than she should feel for an ordinary member of her staff.

~\*~

Two and a half hours later she was calm enough to consider her options and found that she didn't have that many. She could bring him up on charges of harassment and abuse, but she was not ready to let the young woman suffer a public trial. And then there was that part of her that longed to push her dishonourable first officer out of the next airlock.

Her steps led Janeway unconsciously to Tuvok's quarters. For a moment she hesitated to interrupt his meditation and burden him with what she saw as her emotional quandaries. Parts of her lecture from earlier this day flashed through her mind.

"You are one of my most valued officers and you are my friend... You are my counsel, the one I turn to when I need my moral compass checked... From now on bring your logic to me; don't act on it behind my back."

All in all this was no private business; it was ship's business. This was not about her unreasonable need to protect her chief engineer; it was about a man she had trusted and who now had turned out to be a danger to her ship.

Not only that; he had shown that he had to be kept under constant surveillance. This certainly would fall into the realm of the chief of Security and having something to stay off record did not mean to try to keep it secret from her oldest friend and confidant - but the truth was that she simply did not want to be alone for the rest of this night, and the dark skinned Vulcan was possibly the only living humanoid in the universe with whom she could share silence without getting antsy. He also might have answers to some of her questions from the time he had spent undercover with the Maquis, she rationalised.

The door chime sounded and Tuvok asked her in as if he had expected her visit. She took a seat on the low couch running under the view port and asked without preamble, "Tuvok, when you were with the Maquis, what was the relationship between Commander Chakotay and Lieutenant Torres?"

"Clarify please." The fact that he had not added a "Captain" or the only very rarely used "Kathryn" told her two things: Tuvok's logical Vulcan mind had correctly picked up on her unexpressed romantic feelings for her chief of engineering some time ago, she presumed, and he was not entirely sure if the woman or the captain was asking the question.

Kathryn smiled; the dark skinned Vulcan just knew her too well, always had and probably always would.

"What I will tell you now will not leave this room. There will be no official record, not even in your private logs."

The Vulcan's elegantly arched eyebrow rose considerably, but now she was sure that he would treat what she would tell him just as a Catholic Priest should treat what he had learned during confession. In the two hours she had just spent beating her holographic opponents to a pulp, she had developed a plan but in any case she would need him as her ally. So, Kathryn gave him a detailed report of the scene she had witnessed in the corridor of the crew quarters and of her conversation with the Human-Klingon-Hybrid.

She also gave him a short overview of about what the misleadingly named IajQo' quvHa'ghachtay was really. Chakotay had used it to subdue a proud individual, someone with integrity and honour, but from the days of Kahless the "rite to reject dishonour" had been about helping young warriors to find their way. It had been about teaching them to deal with difficult situations, and sometimes that meant that they also had to learn humility but it never had been aimed to humiliate. It had been about teaching them to respect the chain of command but not about keeping them subservient.

When she had finished both of Tuvok's eyebrows had almost reached the hairline. "I'll send a security team to arrest Commander Chakotay."

"No, you won't, Tuvok. I told you, nothing official."

"But Captain, this has the potential of a security risk of massive proportions. Someone capable of doing what he did, and not only once, should never have been accepted at Starfleet Academy or

risen in rank like he has before resigning his commission. He can not be trusted.

"And aside from that: Lieutenant Torres has come a long way to control her volatile temper, but this fragile balance now is threatened. She could do something rather ill advised as soon as she begins to understand how much Commander Chakotay dishonoured her."

"I'm not worried about the commander being attacked; I'm worried about B'El... Lieutenant Torres blaming herself, my friend. He used a Klingon ritual to degrade and abuse her, knowing how sensitive she is to all things Klingon."

"I will increase my vigilance concerning both of them, Captain." For everyone else the answer would have sounded completely detached and even disinterested but Kathryn Janeway heard deep concern.

"Concerning your initial question, Captain. For the most part they gave no indication to be anything else but friends but there were moments when I saw wariness in Lieutenant Torres' eyes but I put it down to too much work. I should have looked closer."

"You had no way to know, my friend. - I want you to send Commander Chakotay to my Ready Room as soon as he starts his shift tomorrow morning."

"You might want a security officer present, Captain."

"No, not this time, my friend. This time I can't do it the Starfleet way. I don't want this whole thing to become public knowledge, but Chakotay crossed the line and he will have to pay for it. If he does not leave me a choice, none of us would like the publicity, but I won't hesitate. What will happen will entirely depend on him, but justice will be satisfied; one way or the other."

"Do you think it wise to make this so personal, Captain?"

"Probably not, Tuvok, but it's what I have to do. Starfleet Regulations be damned. By misusing the lajQo' quvHa'ghachtay the way he did, Chakotay not only dishonoured Lieutenant Torres but also Klingon culture, Klingon history, and Klingon spirituality. You know that that's something I can't allow to go."

The dark skinned chief of Security knew her probably better than anyone else, including her mother and younger sister, and they long ago had dispensed with the need for words, despite her passionate words earlier this day when she had been forced to reprimand her old friend, sentencing him to the same twelve days of house arrest that she had the young woman. For him it would barely make a difference to his usual routine, she knew, but she was the Captain and had to enforce discipline, no matter who it was.

"Will you have some tea?" he asked.

They had spent many nights like this, sharing tea and silence.



-X-X-X-

"Come."

"You wanted to see me, Captain?"

"Yes, Commander, stand at ease!"

The big man's body stiffened at her words - until this day they had had a rather informal relationship, at least in the captain's Ready Room. Her voice left no doubt that this would not be one of those times.

"Consider this an unofficial conversation, Commander. There will be no log entries about it. It'll stay completely off record. Do I make myself clear?"

"Yes, Captain."

"You had one night to think about it. Do you have anything to add or retract about yesterday evening and your 'altercation' with Lieutenant Torres, Commander?"

Kathryn Janeway was sitting behind her desk, looking relaxed and well rested, ready to take on the universe. No one would suspect that she spent a considerable part of the night punching holographic opponents in order to fight the dark cloud of anger her first officer's behaviour had awakened, and that she had ended the night sipping tea with Tuvok.

The tall man put his most friendly smile on his face and answered. "I already told you, Captain. It was just a misunderstanding between friends, very good friends - if you get my drift. As soon as I'll get the chance I'll clear things up with Belanna."

"First of all, her first name is B'Elanna not Belanna. Even a first year cadet should know this. It's as if everyone would call you Chak'tay." He involuntarily once again straightened his posture. "Now, tell me about this lajQo' quvHa'ghachtay."

The expression on his face did not change but his body unconsciously shifted to attention.

"It's just a game we play from time to time, Captain. It's completely harmless, just a way to spend an agreeable evening every once in a while."

Kathryn Janeway's command mask was firmly in place; so, Chakotay didn't know that he had just made his second crucial mistake. She slowly rose from her seat and though the former Maquis topped her by at least half a head, he certainly was not the one dominating the room.

"You just blew your last chance to regain my trust, Commander, by making two grave errors. You assumed that I would put more credence in your words than in those of Lieutenant Torres,

and you presumed that I'm as unfamiliar with Klingon culture as the average Starfleet officer."

Janeway let her words sink in while looking the tattooed man right in the eyes. Chakotay still stood ramrod straight but nevertheless gave the impression of slumped shoulders and even seemed to pale slightly.

Kathryn kept her voice calm but cold. "You betrayed Lieutenant Torres' trust. I had expected better of you, Commander, much better. Over the past couple of months I learned to trust you, but now I'm forced to review my initial judgement of your character.

"According to Federation Law I should send you to the brig and have you court-marshalled for conduct unbecoming of an officer, for sexual harassment - no, don't even try to tell me that you never touched the lieutenant in a sexual way; we both know better - for bodily injury and abuse."

Without even knowing he took half a step backwards. His voice, however, showed much more self-confidence. "But Kathryn, last night, it was private, between me and Torres..."

"That's enough! Private? Even a Ferengi would be ashamed of your behaviour, Commander." The last word held enough venom to poison half the quadrant but still Kathryn's voice had been as calm as if they were going over departmental reports, and once again his body reacted and returned to stiff attention, like a first year cadet in front of an admiral.

"Last night I learned that you can't be trusted, not as an officer and not as a human being. The Klingon 'rite to reject dishonour' though rarely used in the last couple of centuries is a sacred ritual. What you used it for was an insult to the whole Klingon Empire. Every Klingon, everywhere in the universe would be in his or her right to kill you on the spot. And you can be sure that had I not given my oath to hold up the principles of the Federation and Starfleet, I personally would have tossed you out of an airlock last night."

The captain let her words sink in. She had hoped that there would be at least some remnant of the former Starfleet officer left in the man, the Starfleet officer he had appeared to be over the last few months. His posture, however, seemed to relax and his words proved that at least some of his earlier bravado had come back.

"No, you won't. That's not who you are."

"You have no idea who I am and what I'm capable of, Commander." This time his rank was pronounced with disdain.

"I tell you what will happen now. As of now you are relieved of duty. Consider yourself under house arrest for the next nine months. Your command codes will be disabled as well as your computer access. Commander Tuvok will make sure that your replicator is programmed with severe restrictions, allowing only the necessary amount of food and clothes to be created. In nine months you will return to your place as my second-in-command, not because I think that you are worthy of the position but simply because right at my side you will be easier to control. For anyone who might ask, you will tell them that you need some time out, a spiritual retreat of

sorts."

"And if I don't accept this punishment?"

"I told Lieutenant Torres that what happened yesterday evening would stay off record, but if you leave me no choice there will be a trial; and you can be sure that the jury will consist of women only.

"Besides, do you really think your Maquis friends will still trust you, confide in you when they learn what and who you are? Do you want everyone to know that you are an ignorant, abusive, manipulative bastard who even does not stop to take advantage of his best friends? Or do you want to appear as the calm, spiritual man you certainly are not? It's up to you."

There it was again. He was standing ramrod straight but with a pale hue to his darkened skin.

"On a personal note: Not too long ago you fought me tooth and nail over naming Lieutenant Torres our chief of engineering. You helped me see that she's the right choice for the job - and she has more than validated that choice. How could you stand up for her as you did and at the same time treat her as you did? That's beyond comprehension."

Moments of silence stretched into minutes. Janeway held the taller man captive with her eyes and finally he said, "Do you really want an honest answer, Captain?"

She didn't answer but just waited for him to speak openly.

The tall man took a deep breath and hesitatingly said. "When I first brought the idea with this Klingon ritual up, I had been joking. I just wanted to taunt her but she took me seriously. And when she later said that she wanted to try it, I couldn't resist the temptation.

"I know you probably don't want to hear this but Torres is so strong and passionate, there was something addictive about seeing her so humble, so devout. I never before had felt this powerful." He didn't dare to look at her, only too aware that she probably would favour him with her trademark force-ten-glare.

"Are you really aware of what you just said, Chakotay? Your behaviour not only violated the rules of conduct of a Starfleet Officer, it's a shame for every decent human being."

Once again the silence stretched between them, and the former Maquis Renegade once again had to accept that he had met more than just his match in Kathryn Janeway. He had met his better in more than one aspect. So, he tried to get out of this inherently embarrassing situation by outwardly giving in.

"I'm sorry, Captain. I'll make sure that it will never happen again. I'll talk to my spiritual guide."

"All I want to know is: Will you accept the punishment or will you rather stand trial and spend the rest of our journey behind a force field?"

After a few more seconds of looking into the unflinching eyes of his commanding officer and being subjected to her almost palatable cold rage, he gave in.

"I accept the punishment, Captain Janeway."

"Wise decision. Go directly to your quarters. The nine months begin now. Dismissed." She turned her head towards her view screen and sent her new orders to Commander Tuvok's station with the official header 'Request for spiritual leave approved'.

-X-X-X-

Kathryn ran her right hand through her auburn hair in a gesture of exasperation as soon as the door had closed behind her first officer.

The punishment Chakotay just had reluctantly agreed to, was far from what she thought he deserved. Tuvok, of course, never would say it, but she knew him well enough to be sure that he also would not be content with the unofficial sentence, but at least he would make sure that the conditions she had imposed on her former first officer would be enforced at all times, and that he never would get another chance at acting this inappropriately - no, that was too weak a word for it; there was really no Starfleet sanctioned word to categorise his behaviour. Though for the time being the problem had been solved, at the moment she really wished that this was not a Starfleet ship - neither the Klingons nor most other species would have had a problem with spacing him after what he did; even the Romulans and Cardassians would have found anything else unacceptable.

Kathryn retook her seat to fight the urge to pace, and even this early in the day she knew that she would need at least another couple of hours of exercise to get rid of the aggressive energy the conversation with Chakotay had created; especially if she considered that she yet had to deal with the fall-out of B'Elanna finding out about the true nature of the ritual to which her then commanding officer had subjected her.

But first she had some paperwork to get out of the way. With a sigh she drew one of the data pads over to her and entered a few notes in her own unit but before she could really concentrate on her paperwork the door chime made her head snap up and she automatically answered, "Come in."

Tuvok stepped in and before he could say anything she asked, "Lieutenant Torres?"

"I just received a message from Engineering. Lieutenant Torres did not report to duty this morning. Mister Carey tried to call her but didn't get an answer. I took the liberty to search for her life signs. She's in Holodeck I; the safeties are disabled as well as the voice command overrides. There also is an encryption code sealing the door."

"She doesn't make it easy, does she? Which program is running?"

"It's one of your programs, Captain; Sub zero-four."

"Of all the times to embrace her Klingon side, and of course she has to choose one of the most difficult of the training programs." Straightening up she said, "Computer, log Lieutenant Torres and Captain Janeway off duty for personal reasons."

"So logged," answered the dispassionate computer voice.

Kathryn left her Ready Room, and Tuvok followed her to the turbolift. As soon as the doors were closed he said, "Captain, as your chief of Security I must object."

"I don't expect any less of you, Tuvok. That's why it will be your job to keep an eye on our life signs while we're in the holodeck. You will be our life line, so to speak."

In answer to his raised eyebrow she added, "There's a subroutine that will allow me to beam into the active scenario. It will change the parameters of the program, but for now it's the only way. I don't know how skilled B'Elanna is in hand-to-hand combat and won't risk her life unnecessarily."

Tuvok once again raised his eyebrow but didn't say anything. The turbolift stopped at deck three and the captain walked into her quarters where she disappeared into the bedroom. Less than two minutes later she was back, still in her uniform trousers, with her comm badge fixed to a black sleeve-less T-shirt, carrying a bat'leth.

Tuvok silently followed her back to the turbolift. As soon as the door had closed she said. "The program is designed for advanced battle training. It consists of seven levels and can be started anywhere between level one and four. With the voice commands disabled, it can't be stopped before it has run through all seven levels."

"Why don't we just cut off the program from the outside, Captain?"

"This is not a Starfleet program, Tuvok. She by now must be at level five, and from there on, there's nothing that can be done from the outside. It simply has to run its course."

The tall Vulcan just looked at her, not even a raised eyebrow, apparently resigned to her very human irrationalities.

"It's important that I do this my way, Tuvok. Monitor the life signs and should you be in doubt consult with the Doctor - though I would prefer to keep him out of it."

"Understood Captain."

The auburn haired woman keyed in a couple of manual commands at the holodeck's control panel. "Wish me luck, my friend."

"Vulcans don't believe in luck, Captain, but over the years I learned to never underestimate your resolve or your resourcefulness."

With the last syllable the typical hum of a transporter sounded and moments later the computer panel at the door indicated two life signs.

Back on the Bridge the tall Vulcan transferred the transporter control to his console and instructed the computer to alert him should one of the life signs become unstable.

The area of space around the Sikarian home world seemed particularly calm and though Vulcans are not prone to day dreaming his mind brought him back to the day he first made the acquaintance of the then newly minted Lieutenant Kathryn Janeway, sporting the cyan blue of a Starfleet science officer.

The years and the demands of her career had changed her, but from time to time her former unmitigated joy of living, her impish sense of humour and her sense for adventure and exploration made themselves felt. It had been these qualities that had drawn him to the young officer because before and even after her prolonged stay on the Klingon home world, they had been tempered by a sound judgement, surprisingly logic reasoning and a great respect for the beliefs and approaches of other cultures.

His years of experience with Kathryn Janeway and her way of thinking, close to one and a half decade if he thought about it, gave him a good idea of what his commanding officer intended to do, given her nature she could do nothing else and he was determined to help her as best as he could.

-X-X-X-X-X-

## **Chapter Two**

The cave walls around her showed the captain that they really were well into level five of the training's program. She followed the sound of metal hitting metal and saw her chief engineer locked in a fight against two opponents. She knew that she didn't have long before the program would adapt to her presence and increase the level of difficulty.

The tip of a mek'leth grazed B'Elanna's shoulder without injuring her. It made her stumble back but she regained her balance in time and used the distance to slice one of them open, his guts spilling out of him. He was replaced quickly with two other fighters. The young woman's look of surprise was evident and she barely avoided being cut in half. Her initial opponent meanwhile came at her from the side and Kathryn decided to interfere.

B'Elanna growled at her. "What are you doing here? I don't need a babysitter, Captain."

Janeway could have answered in a lot of ways but now was not the time to talk, so she simply said, "Let's just say that I need the exercise." A quick combination move disarmed her opponent and cut his throat.

They fought their way through the cave side by side and from time to time also back to back - and so quickly reached the other end and the next level.

Starfleet training programs had rest periods built in, this one didn't and so they stepped from the semi darkness of the caves into the blinding light of the midday sun somewhere in the mountains of Qo'nos. They would have to get past a wild targh and then would have to face a group of thieves armed with energy weapons - at least that had been the scenario when she last had run the program.

The women rolled out of the way when an energy blast exploded the packed ground to their right. They sought cover behind a boulder and quickly found out that they were surrounded.

B'Elanna left their hiding place and slowly raised her bat'leth high over her head. Kathryn mimicked her movements, curious about the young woman's strategy. Three Klingon males appeared; wearing dirty, improvised armour, each of them sporting a few scars and aiming their disruptors steadily at the women.

Without moving her lips B'Elanna whispered, "Make a show of putting your weapon down when they come closer. That should draw their attention. I'll take out the one facing me and grab his weapon."

As far as improvised plans went it was a good one, Kathryn thought. Surrender one's weapon was not something a Klingon would ever do or expect someone else to do, so, it certainly would attract their attention. The only question remaining was, however, if it would be enough.

The first part of the plan ran like clockwork but the dead man's weapon was now buried under his body and both promptly blinked out of existence. Kathryn saw it happen and instantly acted; she tucked herself in a ball and rolled through the spread legs of one of the other men, came up behind them before they had a chance to turn around and killed them with their own mek'leths which they had been wearing in sheaths on their backs. They also were immediately reabsorbed by the system but their weapons stayed in the captain's hands.

Moments later, B'Elanna tackled her to the ground and the disruptor blast that would have torn open her stomach or at least her side hit the engineer's lower leg. They landed in a pile on the ground and Kathryn instinctively threw one of the small swords towards the possible origin of the blast. To her own surprise she heard it hit its intended target and another opponent fizzled out of existence.

Kathryn grabbed her bat'leth and made B'Elanna use hers as a crutch as she dragged her over to a cave opening half hidden behind two man-sized boulders. On this level caves always held some possible danger but it was also less than probable that these four had been all there would be waiting for them.

B'Elanna sank down in the shadow of one of the boulders. "Damn it; that hurts!"

The auburn haired woman swallowed her instinctive response about how such things tended to happen if one was stupid enough to disable the safeties of the holodeck. But the younger woman had saved her life and Tuvok would undoubtedly point out that voluntarily walking into such a holodeck scenario was also no sign of higher intelligence, especially with this holo program.

Had the safeties still been on, the program would end should the player sustain a normally critical injury. With the safeties off, it could only be stopped by completing all seven levels. The Klingon Defence Force used this setting during the finals of their equivalent of Starfleet Academy. Whoever made it through the whole scenario without getting seriously injured was supposed to have great potential as a warrior and even a potential leader.

So, instead of answering Kathryn ripped her black shirt and cut off the lower half. She silently applied a field dressing to the injured leg but there was nothing more she could do at the moment.

"Thank you, Captain."

"You're welcome. It's the least I could do after you saved my life, B'Elanna."

"I also endangered it in the first place. I'm sorry, Captain."

"Your disregard for protocol is one of the things we'll have to talk about later, Lieutenant. For now, we have a program to finish. Stand up and see if you can put some weight on your leg. We have to make our way to the other side of the mountain to reach the next level. It might be easier to take the scenic route and walk around the mountain ..."

Kathryn was interrupted by a loud growl emanating from the darkness of the cave. She barely had the time to turn around and ready her remaining mek'leth when the beast attacked. The weapon slid along the ribcage of the big animal and embedded itself in its abdomen but that didn't stop its assault. Four-inch-long teeth snapped close just a fraction of an inch from her throat, claws raked both her upper arms and suddenly the whole weight of the massive creature dropped heavily on top of her. She was quickly covered in blood gushing from a wound at the animal's muscular neck. Before she had the chance to begin to feel squashed the animal and the mek'leth dissolved.

The predatory creature was roughly one and a half times the size of a very big lion. The patterns of its fur closely resembled a Tika cat, together with targs the favourite pets in Klingon families. Of course they were considerably smaller, about the size of an Irish setter.

The sound of tearing fabric made the captain turn her head. B'Elanna was in the process of shredding her own shirt and only when she began to wrap it around her upper right arm, the auburn haired woman remembered her own injury.



"Wait, please; let it bleed a bit longer. I know the dirt is holographic but I still don't want to risk an infection."

"Why are you here, Captain? Putting yourself in danger."

Kathryn smiled. "I already told you. We'll talk about it later - as soon as the Doctor has patched us up and we got through his lecture about irresponsible behaviour and Starfleet hotheads. We first have to get to the last level of the program."

The young woman nodded though she obviously still had more questions than she cared to admit.

"I'm really sorry that I did this to you, Captain."

Kathryn's eyes sparkled but her voice didn't change. "I think you can wrap these scratches now, and then let's go, Lieutenant. We still have to get to the other side of the mountain."

As soon as they began to round the boulders at least three disruptor blasts coming from about a one hundred degree angle tried to cut them down. They missed but without any energy weapons at their disposal they now were stuck between a rock and a hard place, literally, with the threat of energy weapons on one side and the unknown dangers of the cave on the other. They decided to brave the dangers of the unknown, well aware of the fact that they could encounter the mate of the dead animal - or maybe something worse. There also was a high probability of their attackers following them into the cave but they both knew that this was a chance they would have to take.

B'Elanna set the pace and Kathryn kept her ears open for possible signs of pursuit. Their nerves were taut like bowstrings; suddenly B'Elanna felt more than heard a presence in front of them and at the same time the fiery Starfleet Captain quickly drew her into a small side tunnel of the cave system. Three heavily muscled and visibly angry Klingons ran past them, their weapons drawn but oblivious to the danger ahead. They didn't have to wait long to hear the first disruptor blast but it was also the only one. The sounds that then were reflected back to them were all too easy to interpret - and now they once again had to choose.

The logical choice would be to head back to the cave entrance and trust that there would be no other armed thieves waiting for them. However, the logical, Vulcan way to do things more often than not didn't conform with the Klingon or Human way of thinking. So, they followed their former pursuers into the darkness. They didn't expect to find any corpses and so almost stumbled over the lifeless forms of two of them. Kathryn bent down and checked them for signs of life. They were dead but luckily the program had yet to reabsorb their bodies. Kathryn decided to check the integrity of the program's matrix the first chance she got. It was usually only on the last level that the holographic corpses were not instantly absorbed back into the system. For now, however, she decided to take advantage of the apparent fluke and handed B'Elanna one of their disruptor pistols and took the other one for herself.

They cautiously rounded the next bend where they found the mangled body of the third man. There was no sign of the animal but the tracks they found indicated that it was of the same race

as the one they had had to kill earlier.

They walked on.

The claw marks on Janeway's upper arms began to burn and her chief engineer's limp was getting more pronounced. It seemed as if they had been following the winding main tunnel for hours. There still was no sign of the predator.

After five more minutes they suddenly hit a dead end. B'Elanna wearily leaned with her back against the wall to take her weight off her injured leg. Kathryn kicked the wall in an unexpected show of frustration and a chunk of rock landed on the cave floor, creating a small opening that let some light in. She repeated the kick and the hole got slightly bigger, disproportional to the force of the kick but beggars can't be choosers. One exchanged look was enough to synchronise their efforts.

B'Elanna stepped away from the rock wall and they both readied their disruptors. "Be prepared to run. I don't trust the structural integrity of these tunnels," the captain said.

They fired the disruptors and the next moment they found themselves in a great hall and armed only with their bat'leths. They had reached the last level.

-x-x-x-

Kathryn knew from experience that they now would have to re-enact one or the other of the historical Klingon battles. The last time it had been the battle of Klach D'Kel Brakt, but she didn't immediately recognise the setting of this one.

"That looks like the pictures of the Great Hall on Kronos I have seen when I was young but the columns are different and where are all the statues?" B'Elanna asked.

Suddenly Kathryn understood; yes, this was indeed to be a great battle - and part of one of the most romantic Klingon love stories. She once again promised herself to check the program's subroutines as soon as this was over. "Qam Chee!"

"You're kidding. Qam Chee? Where Kahless and Lukara fought five hundred enemies after the warriors of the garrison had fled."

"The one and only, Lieutenant. We have to secure the door. We soon will have more company than we ever wanted."

At the other end of the long hall they found two sets of doors. The main entrance had been bolted down with a solid metal bar the length of a grown man and further barricaded. Opened it would allow four armed warriors to enter side by side. It would be difficult to hold the gate with only two fighters and two bat'leths.

The sound of marching feet reached their ears and the small side door burst open. Luckily it only allowed in one warrior at a time. The women took turns in dispatching the intruders but the main entrance would soon give under the continued assault from outside. It was only a question of time when they would break through.

The metal bar began to give and they barely managed to retreat further into the hall before the door was completely broken down and the main force of the enemy flooded the room. The two officers took position about fifty paces inside the big room, standing loosely back to back. They both knew that it wouldn't be enough to only defend themselves; they had to defeat every single one of their opponents to end the program.

B'Elanna took stock of their reserves; her leg wound sent waves of pain through her whole body with every movement. Kathryn's right arm was bleeding through the bandage though she fought with considerable skill, in fact better than anyone the young Hybrid had ever seen.

Legend had it that Kahless and Lukara fought side by side for twelve hours to overcome their enemies. The young engineer knew that she never would hold out that long. They had to find another way to get rid of their opponents, a faster way, but nothing came to mind.

Luckily for the women their greater numbers turned out to be more of a hindrance than an asset for their enemies. Kathryn cut open the throat of one of them. Before he had even hit the ground two other took his place, one of them slicing through the bandage on her left arm while she ducked the overhead sweep of the other. She fought off a bout of dizziness; they had to finish this as soon as possible.

A roundhouse kick propelled a warrior who had been coming at her from the side straight at one of the central columns supporting the ceiling of the hall. Out of the corner of her eyes she saw how he sank to the ground and a tiny crack appeared. During the next few minutes she tried to get a better idea about the structural integrity of the hall's ceiling, and tentatively a plan began to form.

Between two breaths she said, "We have to get over to that central column, B'Elanna."

"To take it down and bring down the ceiling? Great idea, Captain."

A few minutes later the two women were standing with their backs to the cracked column, fending off their opponents and making sure that their weapons time and again struck the pillar. It was an arduous process and also progressively becoming more difficult to hold their own. The cracks were becoming more evident; the column only needed one more decisive push.

Suddenly B'Elanna's bat'leth was swept aside and she had to drop to the ground to avoid being cut in half. The massive weapon of her opponent instead slammed against the battered column. The young engineer rolled out of the way and everything seemed to shift into slow motion. The mountain of a man aimed again, this time with the captain as his target. Kathryn also ducked in time and simultaneously brought some distance between herself, the column, and the bulk of

their opponents.

His bat'leth was stuck. He yanked it out of the stone with Herculean strength. When it came free it knocked out three of his henchmen, the column finally crumbled and took a good deal of the ceiling down. As soon as the stone pillar began to collapse the two women scrambled to their feet. They knew that they had to get out before the whole hall came down on top of them.

The sound of falling stones mixed with the cries of dying men. With a bit of luck they had taken all of them out, but when they had almost reached the entrance a ghIntaq, an ancient Klingon battle spear sped past their heads and embedded itself in the wall ahead.

They once again had a choice: run or face their enemies.

Without hesitation they turned around. The giant warrior who had almost taken both of them down stepped out of a massive cloud of dust, his black armour was covered with a white layer, interspersed by patches of what appeared to be blood. Behind him appeared four more warriors, all of them visibly wounded.

Kathryn took a battle ready stance and only then became aware that the younger woman had lost her own weapon. B'Elanna proceeded to the wall and yanked the still quivering spear out of the wall. She held the spear as if it were a fighting staff. Her balance was a bit off but when the first of their remaining opponents attacked she was ready.

B'Elanna put the pain out of her conscious mind and deflected the bat'leth thrusts aimed at her by one of the others. The opening she was waiting for came surprisingly quick. She changed her hold on the weapon and thrust the pointed tip at her opponent's chest. It penetrated both of his hearts and tore open his chest cavity when she abruptly withdrew it. A cry of outrage announced her next opponent.

Meanwhile Kathryn thanked her lucky star that these warriors obviously were intent on fighting them one-on-one instead of attacking all at once. The first one had quickly fallen for the false opening she had left in her defences. It had almost been too easy. Her next opponent proved to be more of a challenge. He was fairly young and his reflexes were fast - but not fast enough.

Finally only the big man was left. His bat'leth alone was almost as long as Kathryn was tall. He undoubtedly was the biggest Klingon either of them had ever seen - just as if one of the larger than life statues in the Great Hall of Honour on Qo'nos had suddenly come to life.

If their lives had not been at stake, Kathryn would have been utterly fascinated. The program never before had created a character with his appearance and it didn't fit in with what she knew, or at least thought to know about the battle of Qam Chee. She made a mental note to read up on the legend.

He swirled his weapon as if he were out for a practice bout, his body language seemed almost relaxed; his eyes, however, spoke a totally different language. They were filled with cruelty and anger.

"You fight like warriors but a woman's place is in the bedroom. You betrayed your natural destiny. But I'll give you a chance: bljehbe'chugh voj blHegh! [Surrender or die!]" He growled.

B'Elanna's answer was immediate and heated, "ghe'torvo' narghDI' qu'pu, you p'taQ [When spirits escape from Grethor]."

Kathryn was a bit more formal, "Heghlu'meH QaQ jajvam. [Today is a good day to die.]"

He attacked, bringing down his bat'leth with all his might. It took them all of their combined strength to shove him back. He grinned and renewed his attack.

B'Elanna got out of his reach by jumping back but lost her balance, putting too much pressure on her injured leg. Kathryn ducked his reverse sweep with centimetres to spare. She got down to her knee and slammed her weapon against his armoured shin. He didn't go down completely but he stumbled towards the young engineer; she instinctively readied the spear. The auburn haired woman, meanwhile, had gotten back on her feet. She swung the bat'leth, aiming for the neck just above his armour.

Spear and sword penetrated their opponent at the same time; and just before he would have squashed B'Elanna the program ended and they found themselves on the hologrid, alone. Both women sighed in relief.

The bloodstains from their holographic opponents had disappeared but somehow it made both of them more aware of the scent of their own and each other's blood.

The half-Klingon had a hard time reining in her reaction; her own blood was boiling. It was calling to the woman standing next to her. She tried to control her breathing and looked up to her captain.

The other woman's eyes were slightly dilated, her breathing was accelerated and B'Elanna's sensitive nose picked up the scent of her arousal. She watched in fascination how the lids closed over the blue-grey orbs. Kathryn seemed to centre herself. When she reopened her eyes they had returned to their normal colour and her breathing was calm and measured.

"Lieutenant, please unseal the holodeck doors."

"Yes Captain. Computer, deactivate the seal to holodeck I, authorisation: Torres epsilon four delta two."

"Acknowledged, the door to holodeck I can now be opened."

As soon as the computer voice had stopped the captain's comm badge chirped. "Do you require any assistance, Captain?"

"Tuvok, as always, impeccable timing. Could you make sure that my bat'leth gets back to my

quarters? And a site-to-site transport to Sickbay would be nice. We are both a bit bang..."

-x-x-x-x-x-

### **Chapter Three**

"...banged up."

They reappeared in Sickbay. The Doctor guided them to the nearest two biobeds, for once without a fuss.

"Commander Tuvok told me that there was a problem with the holodeck. How do you feel, Captain?"

"Just a few scratches, Doctor," she answered and internally smiled at the blatant lie her chief of Security had told him. "Lieutenant Torres was hit by a Klingon disruptor. See to her first. Kes can tend to me."

Instead of his usual diatribe of patients trying to diagnose themselves he only nodded and turned to the other bed.

B'Elanna tried to look relaxed but now that the adrenaline rush from the fight and the strong wave of battle haze induced arousal had washed over her, she felt wearier than she cared to admit. She stifled a cry by biting her lips when searing pain shot through the injured leg. She knew the Doctor was only doing what was necessary; plasma burns from energy weapons were tricky, almost as tricky as burns from engine plasma.

She tried to keep her mind off the treatment and turned her head towards the other bed. Captain Janeway had her eyes closed while Kes was moving a dermal regenerator over her arms, and she used the rare chance to study her.

With the long hair in a ponytail and the tank-top showing off well developed muscles she looked much younger than in her uniform with her hair in a tight bun. The woman opened her eyes and smiled at her. She smiled back but before any one of them could say anything Tuvok entered Sickbay.

"Report, Doctor."

"Ah, Mister Tuvok. They both will make a full recovery though I want to keep them both under observation for the next couple of hours. The Captain lost a lot of blood and the good Lieutenant had two broken ribs. The plasma burn from the disruptor had already begun to eat away her shinbone. I'll limit her to light duty for the next three days; the same goes for Captain Janeway." The bald Hologram answered, ignoring the angry glances both women gave him.

"Understood. Please let me know when you release them."

"With pleasure, Mister Tuvok."

The tall Vulcan began to turn around when he was called back by B'Elanna. "Lieutenant Commander, a word please."

"Lieutenant Torres?"

"Commander Tuvok, I'm turning myself in for..."

"Lieutenant Torres, I suggest you keep what you do in your time off to yourself - and for any other concerns you'd do better to talk to Captain Janeway. Did I make myself understood?"

"Yes, Sir," she answered though she did not understand, not really. His tone of voice, however, was something she had learned to respect during the hand-to-hand combat lessons under Commander Lomok, a very imposing Vulcan female. With the Commander it had been a sure indicator that her patience with the emotional beings all around her was about to run out - and the young Hybrid had learned her lesson well.

Tuvok slightly bent his head towards the captain and left. Janeway laughed softly as soon as the door had closed behind him. "With yesterday and today, I think we tried his Vulcan patience a bit too much, B'E... Lieutenant."

"Captain, did you know that apart from Commander Tuvok you are the only person on board able to pronounce my name correctly." The young woman knew she should not even have started saying what she was about to say. It bordered on insubordination. "I like the way it sounds when you say it."

"Then I'll have to say it more often, B'Elanna," Kathryn answered.

The Starfleet Captain knew that she had just crossed a line, a line a captain should never cross; they were supposed to be detached. Her chief of engineering could have died in this holo program; so, it had been her duty to go after her but deep down she knew that this was nothing more but a rationalisation.

Kathryn Janeway had been fascinated and attracted by the fiery Klingon-Human-Hybrid since she had first appeared on her bridge and had immediately challenged her decisions like only an enraged Klingon would dare. The young woman's passion had captivated her; perhaps that's why she had been so reluctant to name her chief engineer. Pure passion could be as much of an advantage then an obstacle, especially in engineering but B'Elanna had proven herself.

As a captain she had to keep her distance but Kathryn also knew that she was possibly the only person on board who could help the other woman to balance her Klingon and her Human side.

"B'Elanna, why did you disable the voice commands?"

The dark-haired woman propped herself up on an elbow and looked towards the captain. Her eyes held no judgement, just honest curiosity; so B'Elanna answered honestly, "I wanted to make sure that I saw it through to the end. I wanted to take away the chance of me chickening out."

"Your way of fighting might be a bit unconventional, B'Elanna, but you never would run away from a fight."

"Unconventional?"

"Don't get me wrong, you're good and you have the heart of a warrior but the way you move showed me that you probably taught yourself how to wield a bat'leth."

"My mother insisted that I learn to fight like a Klingon but she was only able to teach me the basics of hand-to-hand combat and staff fighting. Shortly after I joined the Maquis, before I met Chakotay, we freed a Cardassian labour camp in the DMZ. Among the captives were Bajorans and Humans and a small group of Klingons, four children and a warrior. I think if not to keep the children safe he would have killed himself. The Cardassian commander initiated a self-destruct but I was able to stop it while he protected my back. When they left for Kronos he gave his bat'leth to me and I found that fighting with it suited me - and it was disconcerting for the Cardies."

B'Elanna fell silent and then asked, "Why did you ask about the voice commands and not the disabled safeties, Captain?"

"Because I usually don't ask questions to which I already know the answer. Without the risk of getting hurt or killed you would not have been able to really vent your anger. But I think it would be better," Kathryn continued after a short look towards the Holo-Doctor standing not too far away and apparently busy with something, "if we tabled this conversation until we're in a more private setting. Try to get some rest now."

B'Elanna obediently settled back on the biobed and closed her eyes. She was exhausted but she also was confused, extremely confused. Captain Janeway had definitively thrown her for a loop today and the night before.

At the beginning she had thought that the woman was nothing but a stuck-up Starfleet busy-body, with regulations running through her veins instead of blood and procedures and protocols instead of brains and guts; but then the damned woman had made her chief engineer, though Lieutenant Carey would have been the more appropriate choice. The Starfleet engineer had quickly gotten over his resentment when they had started to really work together and after she had apologised for hitting him and disregarding procedure. She was not in the habit of apologising, so, it had been hard but at least the Starfleet part of her crew had regarded her with a new kind of respect.

The next surprise had been when she found out that she didn't mind following the captain's orders, even in situations she would have started arguing with Chakotay. Perhaps it had to do



with the discovery that the woman was unwaveringly loyal to her crew and would move Earth and Universe for them despite being Starfleet to the core. She also seemed to understand her thought patterns better than anyone else before and didn't seem disturbed by her sometimes rather unconventional solutions.

Janeway was a Starfleet officer; there was no way around it; Starfleet to the core. But was she really? An ordinary Starfleet Captain would have thrown her in the brig after attacking his First Officer, no questions asked. An ordinary Starfleet Captain would not have followed her into a holoprogram with safeties and voice commands off-line. An ordinary Starfleet Captain would not have been able to fight the way she did, to fight like a Klingon warrior. Where did she learn how to wield a bat'leth? It definitively was not taught at Starfleet Academy. Her easy and smooth movements showed precision and a great familiarity with the traditional weapon.

That alone would have been puzzling but there was more. The captain had known about the lajQo' quvHa'ghachtay; she even had corrected Chakotay's pronunciation. A new wave of anger washed through her when she thought of what she had allowed to happen, now that she knew what this ritual really was about.

She wanted to blame Chakotay but deep down she also knew that she alone was responsible. She had dishonoured herself. There was no doubt about it and no way around it.

While B'Elanna was still berating herself, the cheerful voice of the Doctor told the women that they were as good as new and free to go.

"Lieutenant, grab a shower and get something to eat. I'll come by in about thirty minutes. We have a lot to talk about."

"Yes, Captain."

-x-x-x-

The young woman was too nervous to eat, much too nervous. An ordinary captain would have ordered her to the Ready Room; this definitively was not standard operation procedure. The sonic shower did nothing to ease her mind and she paced the length of the living room until the door chimed. She froze and her voice refused to work. The chime was repeated and she finally was able to open the door manually.

"Captain, please come in. Can I offer you something to drink?"

"Not at the moment, thank you. Commander Chakotay told me that he will not defend himself should you decide to press charges for assault and rape."

"Charges? No, it was my fault. I didn't even think of stopping him. I thought he really did what was best for me."

"B'Elanna, Chakotay misused your trust. You're allowed to be angry."

"I am angry. I'm angry at myself. I allowed him to dishonour me - and only because my damn Klingon temper more often than not gets the better of me."

"I know a lot of Humans with a very volatile temper, Lieutenant. Klingon or no Klingon you can learn how to control yourself and how to channel your aggressive tendencies into something more productive."

"I took some lessons with Tuvok, after you made me Chief but I think I really tested his patience. I'm not good at meditating, Captain."

"Vulcan meditation techniques are not for everyone. They certainly don't work for me. See, Lieutenant, Vulcans developed their techniques and their philosophy to overcome their violent past, a past ruled by nothing but emotion. From an early age they learn how to suppress their emotions because they simply are too strong to be contained or controlled. Humans and Klingons on the other hand need their emotions, in everyday life as well as in battle."

"Let me give you an example: Earlier this day, in the holodeck cave with this predator, we had the chance to backtrack after the men had run past us. Neither you nor I even considered it. Why?"

"Going deeper into the cave just felt like the right thing to do, Captain - though now that I think about it, it would have been more logical to go back and take the long way around."

"Yes, it would have been more logical, but would it have been the right decision? Let's have a look."

Kathryn rose from the couch and B'Elanna followed her to the work station. "Computer, deactivate all restrictions on this station except for the translation program. Access the protocol tape for holodeck program Sub-Zero-Four, level six, show infrared overview. Authorisation Janeway Sub Zero Delta Seven."

The monitor came to life and showed six red dots concentrated in one part of the screen, four others about five hundred paces away and another dot much too big to be Human or Klingon in the proximity of their exit point.

The younger woman stared at the screen with widening eyes and then turned her head towards the captain. "We would have walked right into an ambush had we turned around. How did you know? And why can we see what happened while the program was running? I thought holodeck programs were supposed to be private."

"Usually they are. It's easy to monitor them but it's also considered bad taste. This, however, is a Klingon training program; so slightly different rules apply. And I didn't know, B'Elanna, I followed my heart and my experience. With your words, it just didn't feel right to turn around. I

learned to listen to my emotions as long as they don't try to overwhelm me."

"That's what they always do with me. I don't have any control and I end up hurting everyone. I'm so tired of always fighting with myself," the engineer said dejectedly.

"Why did you cover up for Seska and Carey?"

The young woman was a bit surprised that the captain knew who had been in on the plan with the Sikarian matrix but she took it in stride. "I knew they were determined to get their hands on the matrix and they needed my help to make it work. They are my friends and both of them want to go home desperately. I also was curious; I wanted to see how it works."

Kathryn smiled at the answer but was surprised at the other woman's next words.

"I knew I would disappoint you, regardless of the outcome. Even if the damned thing would have brought us four decades closer to home, I still would have betrayed your trust, Captain. That's what made the whole thing so hard."

"Last night," she continued hesitantly, "when Chakotay came to me, I only stopped him because I suddenly understood that nothing he could say or do to me could possibly have the impact your words in the Ready Room had on me. Your anger and disappointment cut deeper than anything else because you kept yourself so damned calm and quiet."

Deep brown eyes looked into Kathryn's pale blue orbs and the captain's heart skipped a beat when she saw how young, open, and vulnerable her chief engineer allowed herself to be seen. For the fraction of a second she understood to what her first officer had fallen prey, and she had to sternly remind herself that for both of their sakes she could not afford to give into her baser instincts.

"You're right. I would have been disappointed even if it had worked but that's in the past. Let's get to the matter at hand. First of all, as of this morning, Chakotay is under house arrest for the next nine months. Without making the whole thing public, it was all I could do - except for spacing him. His actions not only violated you, they also revealed a severe flaw in his character, well to put it mildly. I don't trust him any longer and will keep him under close observation, but all in all he is not my main concern. He's not the first second in command I ever had I had to keep under tight control.

"You, however, are my concern. That stunt you pulled with the holodeck; I don't want something like this to ever happen again. You let yourself be governed by fear and anger. Tell me, why do you treat your Klingon half as if it were your enemy?"

"Because it is. It, she... she always gets me into trouble. Violence is the only answer she has to problems and if something does not work immediately she lashes out. My mother tried to make a Klingon out of me, someone proud of their heritage but I'm not a Klingon. I'm Human with a damn inconvenient Klingon temper. I never wanted to be anything but a Human."

"It's just speculation, B'Elanna, but I think you both were wrong. You're not a Klingon and you're not a Human."

"Then what am I?" the young woman asked, anger beginning to spark in her eyes.

"You are B'Elanna Torres, Human-Klingon-Hybrid, and Chief of Engineering on board of the Starfleet vessel Voyager of the United Federation of Planets. It's up to you to find out what that means for you personally and for the people around you. By allowing yourself to be only half of what you are, you never had a chance to reach your full potential. You can have the best of both worlds. You just have to claim it."

To her own surprise the young woman answered, "You don't know how it is, always having to fight yourself. But I'll think about it, Captain. - Captain, why do you know so much about Klingons?"

"It's a long story, B'Elanna, and I'll tell you when the time is right. Did you have a chance to finish the translation I asked you to do?"

"No, Captain. It took me a lot of time to just read and understand the documents you called up. My Klingon is rusty to say the least. And when I was done I was just too angry to do anything productive. I'm sorry, Captain."

"That's alright; it's understandable. I want you to translate these texts, send them to me and then we'll talk. And make sure that it does not interfere with your duties. Be on time tomorrow."

B'Elanna snapped to attention, "Yes Captain."

The older woman turned to go, "Captain, what will be my punishment for disregarding your orders and Holodeck protocols?"

Kathryn smiled at her, "I consider your injuries punishment enough, Lieutenant. And that's not open to discussion."

-x-x-x-

A few minutes later Janeway changed back into her uniform and returned to duty, despite the Doctor's orders. She intended to tackle some of her never ending paperwork, but she had a hard time to concentrate on the personal records that were only due in two days time. Sometimes the energetic woman asked herself why she even bothered; after all, no one would read them in the next seventy-plus years. It was tempting to simply let the routine slide but whenever the temptation got too strong she remembered the advice Boothsby had given her at Starfleet Academy when she had returned there to attend advanced command training after her stay on Kronos.

*Adhere to the small rules religiously and the brass might forgive you the big infraction every good captain sooner or later will have to commit in the interest of the greater good.*

And getting one's ship stranded on the other side of the galaxy certainly counted as a big infraction.

Kathryn took a deep breath and turned her attention back to the view screen.

Three and a half hours later Janeway relieved Tuvok and took her seat on the Bridge. Beta shift had just started and it promised to be a quiet evening. Commanding the Bridge during Beta shift was something she rarely did, but like her evening strolls through the ship it allowed her to get in contact with a part of her crew with whom she usually had no interaction.

Supervising the routine operations would also keep her from fretting too much about what to tell her chief engineer, because if she were honest with herself she was a bit nervous about revealing this part of herself. She knew that there was no way around it if she really wanted to help the young woman to understand herself better.

At the end of Beta shift the sleepless night before, the fight on the holodeck and the long shift made Kathryn drop on top of her mattress and almost instantly fall asleep.

-x-x-x-x-x-

## **Chapter Four**

Meanwhile B'Elanna was once again pacing her quarters. The first few hours of her translation efforts had been utterly frustrating; she wanted to do a good job and thus had to look up far too many words to make sure that she didn't miss a subtle meaning, but then something somehow seemed to have clicked. The walls she over the years had built around her Klingon heritage and consequently her mastery of the language had simply melted away.

The young engineer quickly understood that she had missed a lot of details during her first read-through. She could have contacted the captain over an hour ago but she didn't and it was not the late hour that held her back.

Chakotay had told her nothing but lies about the *lajQo' quvHa'ghachtay*. The one thing he had not lied about was that the only person authorised to supervise this ritual was the highest ranking officer on any given vessel or base and that the supervisor or spiritual leader had a lot of leeway in how the ritual would be performed. It initially had been a way to give young, impulsive officers a second chance, to teach them to become better officers, better leaders, to teach them that the honour of a warrior is something that has to be earned every day and is not some kind of birth right.

Finally deciding that she needed at least a modicum of rest to do her work, she retired to her

bedroom. Sleep, however, continued to evade her. B'Elanna restlessly rolled from one side to the other and finally returned to her workstation. She only intended to check her translation once again but then began to follow a couple of links from the original files Captain Janeway had pulled up and the first tendrils of an idea began to develop.

When the computer announced one hour to the start of Alpha shift, she sent the translated documents and a request for a meeting at the end of the shift to the captain. She entered Engineering early and immediately was assaulted with a barrage of questions and requests, but despite this having been the second night virtually without sleep she felt remarkably relaxed and rested.

-x-x-x-

The day went smoothly and for once they had the opportunity to do a few key repairs thoroughly instead of only sticking band-aids on her precious engines. She signed off on her last report for the day and sent it to the Bridge the moment Beta shift personnel arrived to take over.

She still had about an hour before she had to be in her quarters to honour the conditions of her house arrest. So, she decided to grab a quick dinner in the Mess Hall. Tom Paris and Harry Kim invited her to sit with them and of course the conversation quickly addressed her punishment.

"... but she can't do this to you. You're not the only one responsible."

"The captain could have sentenced me to up to two months in the brig for deliberately breaking the Prime Directive, Starfleet, and she also would have been within her rights to revoke my commission and reduce me to crewman for good. I looked it up before I decided to do what I did. I don't complain about my punishment and neither should you, Harry."

"Are you sure, Belanna?" Tom asked.

The young woman only nodded while trying to gulp down today's special without gagging. "Argh, I'd rather eat Gagh!"

Then she began to smile but didn't answer when the men asked what that was all about and simply resumed her meal. Before returning to her quarters she made a detour to Sickbay where she questioned the Doctor about anything he knew about Talaxian physiology. Unfortunately the Doctor was unable to provide her with the information she had been really after.

-x-x-x-

B'Elanna entered her quarters twenty minutes late and found the captain sitting on her couch.

"I hope you don't mind that I let myself in. I became worried when you didn't answer the door. The computer located you in Sickbay. Is everything alright with your leg and your ribs?" Kathryn didn't mention that it had taken a considerable part of her willpower not to storm directly to Sickbay.

"Yes Captain, everything's fine. I only passed by to ask the Doctor about Talaxian taste buds but it never occurred to him to include them in his physicals. His words not mine. Earlier during dinner it came to me that Neelix' creations are sometimes this hard to stomach because his taste buds don't work like ours."

"You might have a point, B'Elanna. If we could make him understand how the things he serves taste for us, he might be able to adapt his recipes. What gave you the inspiration?"

"Today's dinner offering. I told the others that I'd rather eat Gagh - and I hate Gagh, all fifty-one variations of it. After my father left it took my mother years to accept that a Klingon sense of taste was not among the things I inherited from her."

"Alright, the house arrest is rescinded for you to work with Neelix after dinner hours."

"Thank you, Captain."

"You did a very good job with the translations, B'Elanna. Are you still sure that you don't want to press charges against Chakotay?"

"Yes Captain, I'm sure," she answered and quickly bent down on her right knee.

"I am Lieutenant B'Elanna Torres, daughter of Miral of the House of Shig'Rai, chief engineer on board of the Starfleet vessel Voyager. I feel that I'm not the officer and the warrior I should be and hereby ask you respectfully to help me develop my whole potential by leading me through the 'Rite to reject dishonour'."

According to one of the files she had read the night before, this for Klingon measures extremely humble request would allow the captain to initiate a lajQo' quvHa'ghachtay without it being seen as a disciplinary procedure.

"What makes you think that I'm qualified to guide you in this ritual?"

"You are the captain."

"What makes you think that you are worthy to receive such attention?"

"In the past I dishonoured myself on more than one occasion and I disappointed a lot of people. Please, help me to regain my honour."

"B'Elanna are you really sure about this? Though the ritual has next to nothing to do with what Chakotay did, it still is very demanding."

For the first time since kneeling down the young woman looked up but the soft voice did not correspond with her captain's command mask.

"Yes Captain, I'm sure that I want this. I know that it won't be easy and I might even question this decision down the line but I'm determined. Please, help me regain my honour, Captain."

The other woman nodded and then answered, "B'Elanna Torres, daughter of Miral, your request is granted. I, Kathryn Janeway, adopted daughter of Rel'Issa of the House of Kahless, accept you as my student during the lajQo' quvHa'ghachtay. Rise and take a seat. There are some things you have to know about me before we can begin."

B'Elanna slowly stood and remembering her manners offered something to drink.

"Blood wine would be nice but the replicators just don't get it right."

"Try mine; I tweaked the replicator a bit. It doesn't come close to the great years but it's better than the standard issue."

"Didn't you just say that you have Human taste buds?" Kathryn asked in a mixture of banter and genuine curiosity.

"Humans stay away from blood wine not because they don't like the taste but because they can't stomach the stuff without getting sick," the young woman answered lightly. She returned from the replicator with two zinc mugs and handed one to her captain who took a tentative sip.

"That's really good, thank you, B'Elanna."

For a few minutes they just drank, then Kathryn began to speak.

"I was in my last year at the Academy when I was assigned to one of the first year cadets as a tutor of sorts. The young man was a real surprise for me. His name was Worf."

"Lieutenant Commander Worf of the USS Enterprise?"

"Yes. You know him?"

"I know of him. He was one of the reasons why I even tried it at Starfleet Academy instead of taking one of the other options."

"Other options?"

The young woman knew that part of the ritual demanded to be absolutely honest with the spiritual guide. She never had spoken about it and she even wasn't sure that her mother knew, but this time there was no hesitation. "After I finished school I had an offer by the Daystrom Institute and one by the Klingon Ministry of Science and Development. I left it out of my application to



Starfleet Academy."

"Why?"

"I knew that the instructors would treat me differently if they knew. This way I was just one among many."

Kathryn slowly nodded her understanding, having been branded a science prodigy herself in the past, but also knowing that it only had been half an answer, at most. So, she just continued.

"Worf and I became friends and he taught me a lot about Klingon culture, but we lost contact when I was sent on my first assignment on the Wellington. A few years later my father and my fiancé died in a shuttle accident. There was an unexpected problem with the new warp coil I had helped developing. I held myself responsible and my work performance began to suffer."

Kathryn's voice was carefully void of any emotion but B'Elanna still was grateful for the amount of trust the older woman showed her by telling her about something this obviously painful.

"Admiral Paris was the head of the research facility and he had been a friend of my father. He decided that I needed a change of scenery to get my priorities straight, as he called it. He knew of my ongoing fascination by Klingon culture; so, that's where he sent me. Officially I was to be the Starfleet observer to the tests of a new propulsion system.

"The initial tests were time and again postponed and the Klingons didn't know what to do with me because I was not part of the official Federation diplomatic team. So, they put me where they thought I could do the least harm; they sent me to the household of the only female priest of the monastery of Boreth."

She paused for effect and B'Elanna blurted out, "Boreth, they really wanted you out of the way."

Kathryn's answering smile could have melted tritanium alloy and the younger woman's heart did a little somersault.

"In the long run, it turned out that the paranoia of the Klingon High Council regarding Starfleet officers was the best thing that ever happened to me, though it also foiled the plans Admiral Paris and my father had had - but I'm getting ahead of myself."

The auburn haired, commanding beauty took a deep breath.

"During the first two weeks of my stay on Qo'nos my romantic conceptions of the Klingon dedication to honour had undergone a radical reality check and I had lost a great deal of my illusions. I expected to die of boredom at the monastery but I should have known that a warrior culture like the Klingons would also have a more vital, a more lively form of spirituality - but I'm digressing again."

"Like many of the more traditional Klingon households, Priestess Rel'Issa's was surrounded by a

big wall and closed off with a massive door. When I stepped through the door for the first time I quickly found myself on my backside looking up into the pale eyes of an enormous targh, opening two rows of large, sharp teeth, pausing a bit, and licking my face enthusiastically. That was the first taste of a world I had only begun to understand when I started to let go of my Starfleet prejudices. In the household of Rel'Issa I learned that the Klingon culture Worf had told me about was not dead."

"Rel'Issa had a daughter, about three years my senior. She had served five years in the Defence Force and now was a priest in training. Her name was L'Larrela. She was as curious about Human culture as I was about Klingon. We became friends, we..." Kathryn fell silent.

"I understand, Captain. You don't have to tell me."

There was that smile again but this time there was so much sadness in the blue eyes that all B'Elanna wanted to do was to take the other woman in her arms and keep her safe.

"Yes, I do, B'Elanna, and no, Lar was not my lover. I loved her and a part of me always will. In my heart she was my parmaqay but at her level of initiation celibacy was expected of the trainees and so we decided to wait. In the evenings we often went for runs or long walks. One night, after an especially hot day, we were attacked by four armed Klingons without any house insignia on their battle dresses. We tried to defend ourselves. Lar wanted me to run to safety. At the time I didn't have any formal battle training and my Starfleet techniques did not fare well against the viciousness of the attack."

"One of them aimed a disruptor at Lar's back while she held most of the others off only armed with her mek'leth. I didn't think when I threw myself forwards to cover her and the next thing I remember is waking up in the infirmary of the monastery. Lor's mother was sitting at my bed and told me that they had found us right after and that," Kathryn's voice abruptly changed to an almost inaudible whisper, "that they had cut off the head of her daughter and taken it with them."

Long minutes of silence followed and finally the younger woman asked softly, "How did you survive, Captain?"

"I didn't," was the toneless answer. "What I had taken for a disruptor had been a cellular destabilisor, set low. He had aimed for L'Larrela's spine to incapacitate her but instead had hit my heart. The monks and priests brought me back to life... My heart was severely damaged but they didn't have any Human replacement organs and it would have taken too long to get me to the Federation Embassy; so, they... I'm sorry, I can't talk about it."

"Computer, open medical file of Captain Kathryn Janeway, medical history, classified file; authorisation Janeway alpha phi eight zero. Go and have a look, B'Elanna."

"Yes Captain. Would you like a refill?" The engineer gestured towards the empty mug of blood wine.

"Yes but I'll take a glass of water instead."

"Of course, Captain."

The dark haired woman took a seat in front of her workstation and began to read. She didn't know much about medical procedures but it was enough to understand that what the healers at the monastery had done was unprecedented.

They had removed Kathryn's damaged heart and replaced it with L'Larrela's. A bone marrow transplant had stopped the derogatory effects of the destabilisator and the damage already done was halted by the introduction of Klingon neural pathways and muscle tissue. To the healer's surprise there had been no sign of her body rejecting the foreign tissue. Instead they noted a considerable change in her genetic structure.

According to the DNA sequence dancing before her eyes, Kathryn Janeway was as much of a half-Klingon as she was.

To say that the young woman was shocked would have been an understatement. When she closed the file and returned to the couch, she knew that she had made the right decision with the *lajQo' quvHa'ghachtay*. The captain would lead her successfully and honourably through the ritual; there no longer was even the tiniest doubt about it.

So, she found the other woman's eyes and said, "You know, Captain, most people on the lower decks are convinced that you are more than Human. It's a shame that they'll never know how right they are."

"You could tell them. Everyone running a medical scan on me can find out easily."

B'Elanna's eyes widened and then she carefully answered, "I suppose the file is classified for a reason, Captain. Some narrow minded people could see you as a Klingon spy or something. I'm honoured that you shared this knowledge with me."

The sudden smile on the other woman's face told the young engineer that for once she had said the right thing,

"I never thought that I would meet someone who is even remotely like me but in a strange way you're as Klingon as I am. How do you always keep this temper in check, Captain?"

"I don't have your redundant organs and if push comes to shove I'm not as strong as you are. But from my point of view this has nothing to do with physiology. All of us have to fight against our tempers at one point or the other. And for controlling your temper, that's what the *lajQo' quvha'ghachtay* is for - among other things.

"When the healers at the monastery first had told me what they had done and that I would be stronger and faster than most other humans I was not really grateful.

"In my mind they had cut the woman I loved to pieces to save the life of someone not worthy to

breathe. In my mind I did not deserve to live because I had not been able to protect her.

"The monks tried to teach me but I didn't want to listen and when they finally let me go I fled to the capital. I spent my days drinking blood wine like it was water and getting into bar brawls. One evening I picked a fight at the wrong bar and landed in prison. I refused to call anyone and was sentenced to one week of solitary confinement."

"For a Klingon it would have been a hard sentence but for me it turned out to be a blessing. The alcohol induced haze in my head faded slowly and I took a hard look at myself. L'Larrela would have been disappointed in me but I still didn't know what to do, so I returned to her mother's household. And she greeted me at the ...."

-x-x-x-

"When I heard that you had not immediately run back to the comforting arms of the Federation I knew that sooner or later you would be back. It didn't take as long as I expected, but you really look like targh shit." The Klingon woman's command presence was astonishing, to say the least.

The young Starfleet Officer racked her brain for something appropriate to say but the only thing she came up with was totally incompatible with her training. She lowered herself, somewhat unsteadily, on her right knee and said, "Please help me, teach me to carry her legacy with honour."

"I knew my daughter would not have chosen a complete p'taQ as her mate. Stand up; you need a bath and something to eat. Then we will talk."

Before Kathryn could thank her the woman was gone and one of the servants led her to the bathing area, the hot springs just behind the public part. Another servant joined the first woman and together they removed her soiled clothing. She didn't know what to say; so, she stayed silent and the two Klingons seemed not inclined to engage in conversation.

They led her to a small, almost bare room at the east side of the main house. It held a bed, a small table, a chair and a knee-high chest. On the table a pitcher of water, a glass, a few slices of bread and fresh cut fruits were waiting for her. She devoured the offerings ravenously as if she had not eaten in weeks.

As soon as she had finished one of Rel'Issa's warriors told her to follow him and led her through winding corridors to the Lady's study. She sat behind a massive wooden desk that was completely bare, except for a roll of thick paper.

"Take it and read."

Kathryn opened the scroll. She had made good progress in learning the intricacies of the language but still had a hard time to find her way through the long sentences. This was taking too

long but when she glanced up, the older woman showed no sign of impatience. The impassivity of her face would probably have made a Vulcan envious. Kathryn repressed a smile at the thought and returned her attention to the scroll. Almost three quarters of an hour later she closed it and put it back on the desk.

"Will you do it?"

"Yes Rel'Issa joHwI'. Thank you for the honour of assisting me."

-x-x-x-

"I'm not sure I understand, Captain?"

"Really, or do you just not want to understand?"

"I..., I...", B'Elanna fell silent. "I'm sorry, Captain."

"Don't apologise, just improve."

The engineer studied the face of her commanding officer. She easily recognised the core of steel behind the polished façade that in her eyes characterised all Starfleet officers, at least the ones she had learned to respect.

But there was more, a current of energy she never had wanted to see before, seriousness and passion combined. Her first instinct had told her to snort at the offhanded remark, just loud enough for it not to be seen as insubordination but she curbed her reaction because this was about more than her own prickly sense of honour.

Yes, she had understood; she just had wanted the woman to tell her directly. Janeway had been open and honest with her and she had answered that with a clumsy attempt at manipulation. The captain had honoured her with her story and the least B'Elanna could do was to treat this gift with respect. She was determined to prove to her that she deserved such trust. When she finally found the other woman's eyes her decision was made.

"I'll try my best, DevwI' SeQ [spiritual guide]."

The captain slowly and almost imperceptibly inclined her head and stood up. "I'll see you tomorrow afternoon for your first lesson. I expect you to be in your quarters not later than ten minutes after the end of your shift. And see that you have memorised the rules for the lajQo' quvHa'ghachtay by then. Thank you for the refreshments, B'Elanna."

"You're welcome, Ca... DevwI' SeQ."

-x-x-x-

B'Elanna slumped back on her couch as soon as the door had closed behind the older woman. Her surprising revelation had answered a lot of questions and brought up others.

For the first time Janeway's decision to destroy the caretaker's array began to make sense. From a purely formal interpretation of the Prime Directive the Ocampa were a pre-warp civilisation; so, Captain Janeway would have been in her right not to concern herself with their problems - but to do so would have been dishonourable.

A couple of other decisions the captain had made these last few months suddenly also appeared in a different light and Starfleet rules and regulations had less to do with it than questions of integrity and honour. In a way Kathryn Janeway was a perfect blend between a Human and a Klingon, just like she had said the night before - the best of both worlds.

And now she, B'Elanna Torres, the angry child from Kessik IV, had a chance to become the same. The young woman was a bit overwhelmed by that thought and the promises and possibilities it held. She could only hope that she would not blow this chance.

An hour later she sat in front of her view screen and memorised the rules of the ritual, just like the Cap... her DevwI' SeQ had ordered.

-x-x-x-

It didn't take the ship's scuttlebutt long to find out about their captain spending a lot of time in the quarters of the chief engineer. It even quickly replaced the speculations about Chakotay's sudden need for a spiritual retreat.

They added two and two - and came up with six.

A few of her former Maquis' friends gave B'Elanna the evil eye for her perceived betrayal, but none of them, not even Seska, had the courage to confront her directly.

None, except for a young ensign named Harry Kim.

Harry had been carrying a tray with an appetisingly smelling meal. She invited him to join her with an almost imperceptible nod.

His smile still had the fresh-out-of-he-Academy-flavour she had come to love over the course of the last couple of months. Harry had become a younger brother to her, a younger brother and a friend. So, she took no offence when he asked,

"Hey B'Elanna, are you saving your replicator rations or do you have developed a sudden

masochistic streak and an appreciation for Neelix' cooking?"

Her eyes widened a bit when she heard her name correctly pronounced. "Something like that, Harry."

She smiled at the description of the Talaxian's cooking. It had improved greatly since she had started to give him some pointers. At the moment, however, he was at a stage where everything he created turned out to be rather bland - but she had no doubt that this too would change soon.

In her eyes a change of topic was in order, so she asked, "Tell me, Starfleet, where did you learn to say my name correctly?"

The young man blushed slightly. "I heard Captain Janeway say it the other day and it sounded so different, so noble." His blush deepened and he quickly added, "I looked it up in our database. Why did you never tell any of us that the way we pronounced it was wrong?"

"The glottal stop is hard to produce for most Humans. Over the time I learned that most people just don't bother and it got tiresome to correct them all the time. I got used to it; that makes efforts like yours even more precious. Thank you, Starfleet."

"I was my pleasure, B'Elanna. It's the least a friend can do. I... I want to... Did you hear the rumours about you and the Captain?"

"Yes Harry. Do you want to know if they're true?" The young engineer asked cautiously.

"I... I... It would be none of my business, B'Elanna. I'm just worried about your reputation, yours and the Captain's."

Coming from anyone else she simply would have brushed them off but the dark haired young man deserved better, "Thank you, Harry, you're a real friend. No, the rumours are not true. I'm not the Captain's lover. She is helping me.

"The night after we left Sikari I had a rather physical disagreement with Commander Chakotay in front of my quarters. The Captain ended it and now she is teaching me how to control my temper. - And Harry, I want this to stay between us. Don't tell anyone, not even Tom."

"Of course, B'Elanna, your secret is safe with me."

The rest of their lunch break was spent with other gossip and some engineering talk. It did not sit well with the young woman that she could not tell her friend the whole truth. She, of course, would not go into any detail, that was only between her and her Devwl' SeQ. Harry would have understood that the captain was trying to help her deal with her Klingon half, but he also would have asked why his commanding officer knew so much about Klingons and the answer to that question would betray her teacher's trust.

-X-X-X-X-X-

## Chapter Five

Two days after her lunch conversation with Harry, B'Elanna was in one of the storage rooms when she was roughly pushed against one of the bigger crates. She turned to find four of her former Maquis crewmates forming a half circle around her. Two of them held no visible weapons, one of them was brandishing a heavy spanner and the last one was armed with a knife.

"We have a message for your bitch of a lover, you whore!"

They attacked.

B'Elanna ducked the spanner aimed at her head and barely avoided being sliced open by the knife. The unarmed men tried to get a hold of her arms, and she quickly became aware that they wanted more than just to scare her.

She remembered them well. None of them was Starfleet material, and even on the Maquis ship, they had been nothing more than simple crewmen without specific talents. They certainly did not count among the best and brightest fighters, but four against one stacked the odds firmly against her.

They continuously closed in on her. She knew that she needed more room to defend herself properly. She waited for an opening while she continued to evade their attacks as best as she could, though she still was taking hard hits.

With the edge of her hand she hit the hand holding the knife. The crewman tried to pick it up; and that gave her the opening she needed. The young engineer barrelled through their defences towards the empty area in the centre of the room. She would stand a real chance if she got the opportunity to use the moves the captain had taught her.

Turning around to face her opponents she felt a searing pain in her left arm and almost lost her balance. She saw the knife sticking out of her arm. Her instinct told her to pull it out and use it against them, but before she could do it the first of them reached her and she took him out with a powerful kick to the chest. He stumbled backwards and took down one of the others. Meanwhile the man with the spanner had closed in and hit her. She was knocked backwards. The communicator had taken the brunt of the blow and burst into tiny pieces before it even hit the floor.

Pain was flaring through her body. The spanner had hit her chest and re-injured arm. She had a hard time to fight through the pain, but the scent of her own blood had finally awakened the Klingon warrior in her; that and the anger of not having thought of calling for help in the first place.

B'Elanna launched herself at one of the men and broke his neck with a roar. His friends renewed



their attack and for the first time since this all started they worked in concert with each other. She was thrown to the floor and one of them yanked the knife out of her arm. She had just enough freedom of movement left to catch the man's wrist.

B'Elanna turned the weapon against him and pushed as hard as she could while the other two rained blows on her. The knife slipped into his abdomen.

Two down, two more to go.

She felt her hold on consciousness slipping. Suddenly she heard the distinctive sound of transporter beams. The men hammering her with blows slumped to the side, hit by phasers set to stun. The face of Lieutenant Commander Tuvok appeared in her field of vision, and she gave up her fight against the overwhelming pain.

-x-x-x-

"Welcome back. You gave us quite a scare, young lady." Kathryn smiled at the young woman whose brown orbs were still slightly unfocused.

"That's what my Gramps always called me when I was in trouble. Am I in trouble?" B'Elanna's voice was slightly hoarse.

"No, B'Elanna, but you were badly hurt. I want you to sleep and relax."

"The others, the crewmen, what happened with them, Captain?"

"One is dead, the man with the knife wound has already been healed and the other two woke up in the brig some time ago. They all will face charges for attempted murder and the assault of a senior officer."

"Did they tell you who put them up on it, Captain?"

"What makes you think that they didn't act on their own, Lieutenant?"

"They are followers, not leaders, all of them. Someone must have provoked them into attacking me.

"I'm sorry I disappointed you, DevwI' SeQ," B'Elanna continued. "I should have put a stop to these rumours from the beginning."

"You have nothing to be sorry for, B'Elanna, and you didn't disappoint me. You acted honourably and did your ancestors proud."

The young woman's eyes began to drop shut but before she once again drifted to sleep, she

whispered, "Thank you."

Kathryn smiled and allowed herself the luxury of letting her right hand rest on the young woman's left cheek as soon as she had closed her eyes. Only then did she turn towards the doctor's office,

"Doctor, I want you to let me know as soon as Lieutenant Torres regains consciousness again."

"Yes Captain. Is it true that there will be a court martial against the Maquis who attacked the lieutenant?"

Kathryn's eyes took on a dangerous glint, "They tried to kill one of my senior officers. You can bet your database on it, Doctor. - I'll be in holodeck II should you need me during the next two hours."

-x-x-x-

Two hours later the captain was back in her Ready Room after having worked out her anger and other unsettled emotions by participating in a martial arts tournament. Commander Tuvok would give her his full report in about ten minutes.

Just enough time for a cup of coffee.

She smiled when she smelled the full aroma of the brew. B'Elanna had fine tuned the replicators in the Ready Room as well as in her quarters and suddenly everything, smells and taste, seemed to be greatly enhanced.

"Come in."

Unfortunately her old friend had not much to report. The security tape monitoring the storage room showed that the four crewmen had entered the room only seconds after B'Elanna. The door protocol apparently had been manipulated to keep the door from closing entirely after an authorised entry. It took some engineering experience to fool the locking mechanism this way, and though the Vulcan Security chief come unofficial First Officer was sure that the four attackers did not have the skills necessary, there also was no indication on who could have done it.

"Any indication that Chakotay had anything to do with it?"

"No, Captain. He has not left his quarters for five weeks now. In the beginning most of his Maquis friends and a couple of others tried to contact him but only got his automated message that he was on a spiritual retreat and could not give any time frame on how long it would take. Ensign Seska tried to break into his room five nights ago. He told her to leave him alone and to not contact him again."

"Thank you, my friend. I'm really sorry for burdening you like this."

"I'm only doing my duty, as a security officer and as a friend. Anything else would not be logical. About Commander Chakotay, a couple of minutes ago he asked to speak to you."

"Well, he can call me in about eight months. I have nothing to say to him."

"I expected this to be your response and already informed him accordingly. He insisted. He said that he had undergone a vision quest and needed to speak with you about what he had found."

Her instincts screamed at Kathryn Janeway to deny the request but the Starfleet officer in her insisted that he at least deserved a tiny chance.

"Alright, schedule something for later this day, but make it clear to him that this will be an exception. I have other things to do than to be at his beck and ..."

The bleeping of the captain's comm badge swallowed the rest of her words.

"Sickbay to Captain Janeway."

"Go ahead, Doctor."

"You wanted to be notified as soon as Lieutenant Torres woke up."

"Thank you, Doctor, I'm on my way," Kathryn cut the comm link. "We'll finish this conversation later. I want you present when I speak with Chakotay."

The tall Vulcan raised his eyebrow as if he wanted to say that he wouldn't allow it any other way and followed her out of the Ready Room where he took the Bridge.

-x-x-x-

The doors to Sickbay opened to a loud argument between B'Elanna and the visibly exasperated holographic CMO; neither of them heard their captain come in.

"I'll rearrange your photons if you don't let me go, you holographic moron."

"That's enough, Lieutenant. Doctor, report!"

"Your officer here diagnosed herself as healed and intends to return to Engineering where she probably will re-injure herself in an effort to prove how tough she is."

Janeway shut him up with one of her trademark glares and he continued more professionally,

"Lieutenant Torres' injuries have been healed. All her organs are working normally but she needs to rest the arm a couple of days at least. Even her Klingon physiology needs time to get over the trauma."

After Janeway's reprimand the young woman had quietly settled back on the biobed and berated herself. She once again had lost her temper and overstepped her bounds and the other woman would undoubtedly call her on it.

"If she wears the sling I was about to put on her," the doctor continued, "she can retire to her quarters and go back to light duty tomorrow."

"Do it Doctor."

This time the engineer did not protest but followed his orders to the letter.

"I want you back for a check-up after your shift tomorrow, Lieutenant Torres."

"Yes Doctor." She hopped from the biobed. "Doctor, I apologise for threatening you. It's nothing personal. I just always detested hospitals and your Sickbay is too close a reminder. Thank you for putting me back together."

The bald CMO swallowed his surprise and answered, "I was only doing my job but you are welcome, Lieutenant. Please see that you get something to eat before retiring to your quarters, and no detours to Engineering."

"Yes Doctor."

-x-x-x-

The two women walked to the turbo lift and the captain ordered, "Mess Hall!"

"DevwI' SeQ, I..."

"Now is not the time, B'Elanna. We'll talk as soon as I can get off-duty. In the meantime I want you to write a detailed report on the attack, as detailed as you can get it."

"Yes, DevwI' SeQ."

The turbo lift doors closed and B'Elanna mentally squared her shoulders before entering the captain's private dining room come mess hall. She hated being seen as vulnerable and that was exactly what the sling on her arm proclaimed loud and clear.

-x-x-x-

Hours later the engineer was pacing her quarters, once again. The report Captain Janeway had requested she wrote had told her that she could have ended this much sooner and possibly without anyone getting hurt or killed if she only had thought of calling security. She was angry with herself but this time she knew that the Ca..., her Devwl' SeQ would help her to cope with the far too familiar feeling.

The captain's shift had officially ended more than half an hour ago; so when the door chimed she was certain she knew who it was. The sight of the first officer standing at her door surprised her - to say the least.

"What do you want, Chakotay? To resume your sick game? And anyway shouldn't you be in your quarters?"

"I came to apologise and to make you an offer, Lieutenant Torres, in the hope that we could somehow save or restore our former friendship. Captain Janeway authorised that I speak to you about it."

"Come in."

"I don't know where to begin. I never should have done what I did to you."

"When Captain Janeway sentenced me to nine months of confinement I was angry, but after a few days of having nothing to do I started to think and went on a vision quest. I took a hard look at myself and I didn't like what I found. And I'm doing everything I can to become a better man and a better officer while serving the rest of my sentence."

"What I did is against everything I thought I believe in. I never should have used a Klingon ritual as an excuse. I dishonoured and betrayed you by doing so, and I dishonoured and betrayed myself. By Klingon law you have the right to balance the scales by treating me the same way I treated you. It's called pol 'ruv [saving justice], sort of an eye-for-an-eye justice. Captain Janeway told me that she would not interfere if you were to accept my offer. B'Elanna," he pronounced the name carefully, "you were my friend long before I jeopardised our friendship by my actions. I'll take everything I have to for the chance to be your friend again."

Her instinctive reaction had been to take him up on his offer but she knew she could not. It would not be honourable, and that's what she told him.

"The captain predicted that you would not accept," he answered with a hint of sadness in his voice, "but I never would have thought that you would base any of your decisions on Klingon honour."

His words were clearly intended to provoke her but she didn't take the bait. "Klingons are not the only race in the universe that has a sense of honour, Chakotay. I accept your apology but you are not the only one to blame. I allowed you to do these things. I dishonoured myself." She took a

deep breath. "Having you as my friend meant a lot to me but please understand that it will take some time before I'm ready to go back to what we were to each other before."

Chakotay was stunned at her reaction. He had expected anger and violence, not a hand cautiously offered in peace. "I think I understand, B'Elanna. Thank you for giving me another chance."

The young woman was not less confused by her own words. She never before had acted this way; anger was so much easier to handle - but somehow she was relieved. It felt good; so, she continued. "Thank Captain Janeway, Chakotay."

-x-x-x-

The arrival of the captain kept her from contemplating her feelings more deeply. She didn't wait for her to take a seat before she got down on her right knee.

"Please stand up, B'Elanna. You did nothing wrong."

"I disagree."

"That's obvious - and not the answer I wanted to hear. Try again."

"I should have called security as soon as I realised what they were up to. Daniels, the man I killed, I could have simply knocked him out. I could have tried to disable him and the others from the beginning but I just acted on impulse. I didn't think."

"Anything else you could have done differently in your eyes?"

"I should not have fought with the Doctor."

"And...?"

"I... I wanted to take Chakotay up on his offer earlier. I wanted him to pay for what he did to me, for what I allowed him to do. That's when I knew that I could not accept."

"Why?"

"It would not have been honourable, DevwI' SeQ. Chakotay reminded me of Klingon law but it still would not have felt right."

"Klingon law is about more than an eye-for-an-eye, B'Elanna. Sometimes it's more honourable to show what others might perceive as leniency."

"I understand, DevwI' SeQ."

"No, you don't but one day you will. It takes more than one lesson to learn. And now tell me: how was your lunch?"

"Neelix tried a new combination of spices today. He's getting better every day."

"B'Elanna!"

"I know that's not what you want to hear. Are you sure that you're not also part Betazoid, Captain?"

"You're still stalling, B'Elanna. If it helps you make up your mind we can go for a run on the holodeck."

The young woman shook her head in the negative and answered, "I thought that everyone would look at me with pity because of my injuries but I was wrong. Neelix and Harry were relieved to see me up and about, they even hugged me and I sort of bantered with Tom."

"Bantered?"

"Yes DevwI' SeQ. He told me that the Doctor had put a lot of effort in healing my arm and that it seemed as if it were true that Klingons are really hard to kill. I told him that half-Klingons are even harder to kill and we all laughed. It felt good.

"Then a few of the former Maquis crew came to our table and for a moment I thought that they were out to make trouble, but they only wanted me to know that not everyone shared the views of these - and I quote - 'pea brained goons'. One of them even said that she hoped you would throw them out of an airlock. I answered that it would be against Starfleet regulations and that I didn't want to see them dead - and surprisingly I really meant it.

"It was good that I didn't hide away in my quarters like I wanted to," the young woman ended her report.

"That's good to hear, B'Elanna. I read your report. You really were very thorough and Tuvok wants you to know that you did a more than adequate job. I now want you to have a look at the security recording of the storage room and tell me if you have anything to add."

"Security recording?"

"Yes, you used your authorisation code to open the door but someone manipulated the locking mechanism. That's how they got in. The door sensors still detected movement where there should not have been movement. That activated the security monitors and alerted the security department."

Kathryn took a seat on the couch and studied the other woman's face. She dreaded the fall-out of the unfortunate incident. According to Tuvok, except for the door, there was no evidence that the four men had not come up with their hair-brained idea on their own though they both had a prime

suspect. This person had been seen talking to all of them individually and in a group but that was not enough to incriminate her, at least as long as the three men in the brig refused to talk.

The court-martial was scheduled for the next day, one hour after the end of Alpha shift. She and Tuvok would have the chair and three members of the former Maquis and three Starfleet officers would form the jury.

B'Elanna returned to the console and returned to her kneeling position. "So, anything to add?"

"The attack, it lasted just over a minute. It seemed much longer to me."

"And?"

"Had I taken the time to call security they might have overwhelmed me. I still regret that I killed Daniels but according to the recording I didn't have much of a choice in order to protect myself."

"Do you still think that you should be punished, B'Elanna?"

"No, not for what happened during the fight, DevwI' SeQ, but for losing my temper with the Doctor."

The young woman intensely studied her hands that were resting on her left knee. Kathryn's right hand cupped her chin and made her look up.

"You felt vulnerable and lashed out. It might not have been right but it's understandable. You apologised without being prompted to do so; that's a big step. Don't be too hard on yourself."

"I'll try, DevwI' SeQ."

Kathryn nodded and the dark haired woman asked if she wanted something to drink. "A glass of water would be fine, B'Elanna. I also think that we both deserve a break tonight though the house arrest limits our choices somewhat."

"Would you play a game of chess with me, Captain?"

The other woman nodded enthusiastically. "Yes, I'd love to. The last time I played chess I was on Mars, waiting for Voyager to leave the Utopia Planetia shipyards."

B'Elanna pulled a chess set out of one of the wall compartments and quickly set it up. Their playing styles could not have been more different but it turned out that they were evenly matched.

After the second game had ended with a draw the engineer got herself a glass of water and asked her captain, "Are you sure that you don't want anything else? Blood wine, tea, coffee?"

"I'm fine with water, B'Elanna."



"You don't have to do this on my account, DevwI' SeQ. As my teacher you are not subject to the same rules."

During the lajQo' quvHa'ghachtay it was expected that the ghojwI', the initiate or student followed a strict diet consisting of non-replicated, vegetarian food and water.

"I know, B'Elanna, but I have my reasons. In a few weeks you will understand. And now, back to the game."

-X-X-X-X-X-

## **Chapter Six**

When Gamma shift changed to Alpha the security officer on duty in the brig was found dead by his replacement from Alpha shift, Ensign D'Vor. He immediately sounded a ship wide alert; with his phaser drawn he checked the cells and found the prisoners also dead. There were not any visible injuries to them. The surveillance logs and their back-ups had been erased; and even a molecular scan showed no sign of unauthorised entry.

The autopsy report said that the four men had been poisoned by a neuro toxin used in Romulan poison patches. Death had been immediate and cellular degradation put the time of death at 40 to 42 minutes after the start of Gamma shift.

The news spread faster than wildfire through the ship and the rumours and speculations followed quickly behind.

Captain Janeway was pacing her Ready Room, prickly like a bear with a sore paw and every status report from the Doctor and Tuvok made her more irritable. This whole incident had the potential to polarise the crew at a time when the two groups had just been starting to come together in common purpose and leave behind their differences - and then there was the tiny voice deep down telling her that she and her secretive behaviour were at least partway responsible for the current situation.

When the news about the murders had reached Engineering B'Elanna did not know what to think. They had tried to kill her; so, a tiny part of her was relieved that they now had paid the ultimate price for their crime. But the dark haired woman also couldn't help but feel responsible for the death of the young night shift security officer. If not for these crewmen's misconceptions about her relationship with the captain none of this would have happened and he would still be alive.

She was desperately trying to concentrate on the padd Harry had sent to her office. She knew that it contained a plan to increase the range of the sensors without the usual energy drain. They had talked about it during lunch the day before but she simply was not able to focus on the data. As

usual the door to her office was open and she was thankful for the distraction when she felt someone standing in the doorway - until she looked up and saw Seska.

Ever since the incident with the Sikarian trajectory matrix, her former friend had become more distant and they had not spoken for days now.

"Seska," she said, trying to keep this as professional as possible, "what can I do for you?"

"I just wanted to congratulate you, Belanna. I thought that Starfleet and your four-pip-lover had you completely cowed but to take out these three morons all at once - my respect. That was nice work!"

The dark haired engineer flew out of her seat and snarled at the other woman. She wanted to wipe the smug grin off her face and then introduce her to the interior of the warp core, but that only would make her think that she had been right in her assumptions. So, she took a deep breath and answered, "I didn't kill them, Seska. Poison is not my style - and you know me long enough also know that I don't kill in cold blood. They no longer were a threat to me, and now get out of my office if that's all you have to say."

There must have been something in her eyes and voice that made the ensign back off. "Have it your way, Torres."

Seska turned around and stormed off and the young engineer couldn't help remembering the conversation she had had with Seska directly after the Sikarian disaster.

-----

B'Elanna was sitting in front of the smoking remains of the device that should have shortened their journey by more than four decades. Her phaser had destroyed the matrix and saved the warp core but now they would have to face the consequences.

"I start erasing sensor logs. We can blame it on the phase discrepancy."

B'Elanna stopped her. "No, we're not going to cover this up."

The other woman looked at the chief engineer as if she just had sprouted two heads.

"Are you crazy? We don't have to take the blame for this."

"But we're going to. We disobeyed orders, gambling that it would pay off. It didn't. And we can't just pretend that nothing happened."

The expression on Seska's face mirrored her words. "I don't understand. There's no need for this."

B'Elanna's next words surprised herself, "I'm sorry if you don't get it, Seska, but it has something to do with being able to live with yourself."

"That doesn't sound like you. You've changed."

The woman sounded disappointed but for the first time since this whole mess had started B'Elanna felt comfortable in her skin when she answered, "If that's true I'll take it as a compliment."

- - - -

Yes, she had changed, more than she ever would have thought possible - and she was surprised to find that it had begun before she had engaged on her new journey with her captain.

Before she could deepen this strain of thought her comm badge brought her back to the here and now. "Tuvok to Torres."

"Torres here."

"Your presence in Security is required, Lieutenant."

"I'm on my way, Lieutenant Commander."

She knew that he probably wanted to interview her. She was a logical choice for a suspect.

"Lieutenant, please take a seat. Since your house arrest started the comings and goings to your quarters have been monitored. Last night you left your quarters at 2230 in the company of Captain Janeway and re-entered at 0154. The murders were committed at around 0040. Where were you at the time of the murders, Lieutenant Torres?"

Not too long ago she would have reacted violently to being accused, but this time she had expected it. On a Klingon ship it would have been her right to kill those men; she had a motive. So, she simply answered.

"I joined Neelix in the mess hall and we worked on a couple of his recipes. I don't know for sure when I returned to my quarters but Neelix accompanied me there. I'm sure he will confirm my whereabouts."

"Thank you, Lieutenant Torres. You may return to duty." The young woman nodded, turned around crisply, and left Tuvok's office.

Her mind was running a mile a minute. His simple question was a sure sign that her interview had only been a formality, to make sure that no one got the idea that the captain's alleged

girlfriend got preferential treatment.

The 'captain's girlfriend' - what in Grethor was she thinking? Wishful thinking if she was honest with herself. Even before she had known about the woman's dual nature, she had been fascinated by Kathryn Janeway, by her inner strength, her convictions, her principles - and on the Bridge during a red alert her command presence made her more than just a bit attractive. Her heroic beauty was outright compelling - but the redhead was not only her commanding officer she also was her teacher, her DevwI' SeQ. She owed her respect and obedience, not overtly active hormones. She simply had to put it out of her mind.

Besides, someone as strong, independent, and beautiful and wise as Kathryn Janeway could ever find herself romantically drawn to someone like her. She just had to put it out of her mind, which of course was easier said than done. To make things more difficult her mind insisted on bringing up the memory of Janeway's scent, the scent of her blood, the scent of her arousal after their holodeck adventure. It was indelibly burned in her mind.

Meanwhile the young engineer had once again reached the sanctuary of her office, but she still was far from calm. She really wished that she could chalk up her feelings with pure physical attraction but she knew that it was more.

It had been from the beginning, but since they had started on this ritual journey it had grown considerably. She knew that from the captain's side there never would be more than the care and friendship a teacher has for her student - and even if there could have been more, Starfleet frowned upon captains who got involved with members of their crew. There was no official regulation forbidding it, but the unwritten rules dictated that a captain had to be aloof, distant from the crew in order to make critical decisions clearly.

B'Elanna sighed and tried to push these thoughts down as deeply as possible, for once following one of her mother's Klingon sayings: 'qoH vuvbe' SuS' [You can't stand against a force of nature]'.  
  
-x-x-x-

B'Elanna had just managed to immerse herself once again in Harry's padd when a slight jolt ran through the ship and the warp core changed its hum. She sprinted out of her office and looked around Engineering. None of her people seemed to have felt something but she could hear and feel the difference. She automatically checked the flow rate, phase variance, and temperature but everything seemed to work within normal parameters.

The readings, however, didn't calm her. She stared at the warp core as if this dangerous but vital piece of equipment could give her an answer. There it was again, a slight jolt, the hum once again changed to a higher pitch, then there was a hiss. She rushed over and pushed Ensign Susan Nicoletti out of the way just as one of the main plasma conduits exploded. She was thrown to the side and while still falling she ordered the evacuation of the engine room.

She quickly climbed back to her feet. B'Elanna knew she needed to repair the damage, and she had to do it before the plasma had a chance to reach the warp core. Voyager dropped out of warp and she once again landed on the hard deck, her back in the dangerously steaming liquid.

Her uniform jacket soaked it up like a sponge, effectively keeping it from getting closer to the core. Her comm badge chirped and the captain asked for a status report. B'Elanna tried to keep her answer short and calm while she once again got back to her feet.

"One of the main plasma conduits blew. The engine room has been evacuated. Ensign Nicoletti is unconscious. I'm about to seal the breach."

The plasma had begun to burn its way through her clothing and she tore the fabric off her body before it could burn her skin. A tiny part of her mind registered that it was already too late to prevent this while the other part finally found the tool kit and sealed the break by bypassing the ripped section. It would put more pressure on the other conduits but with the ship out of warp she was not too concerned.

Less than ten minutes after the emergency evacuation, B'Elanna recalled her people and began to issue orders while helping Susan Nicoletti up. "Clean this mess up, replace the conduit, and find the hell out how this could have happened. We ran a complete check only last week."

The black and yellow clad men and women had a hard time not to stare at their fiery and half-naked chief but they obeyed immediately.

"Carey, call Tuvok down when you analyse the ruptured conduit. I have a bad feeling about this - a very..."

The doors to Engineering suddenly opened and Captain Janeway rushed in, her Vulcan security chief hard on her heels, and despite his longer legs obviously hard pressed to keep up with her determined stride.

"Report Lieute...", the word died on Janeway's lips when she saw her chief engineer.

The young woman was using one arm to hold up an obviously dazed Ensign Nicoletti who was profusely bleeding from a gash at her temple. The other hand, the one that should have been in a sling, still held the tool she had used to redirect the plasma flow.

Kathryn ran the last steps while unzipping her jacket. As soon as she had reached the younger woman she threw the garment over B'Elanna's shoulders and handed the ensign's care over to Tuvok.

"Computer, medical emergency, four to beam to Sickbay."

-X-X-X-

"Activate Emergency Medical Hologram," the captain barked in her best command voice before they even had fully re-materialised. "Janeway to Kes, report to Sickbay, on the double."

"Please state the nature...."

"Lieutenant Torres was subjected to liquid propulsion plasma, on her back and arms, Doctor," Tuvok calmly informed him while helping Susan Nicoletti on the next biobed.

"Get her to the surgical booth, Captain," the hologram took command. "Remove your jacket and help me to get her undressed. I can smell plasma on her trousers."

"I'm alright, Doc. See to Nicoletti, she was unconscious." B'Elanna's words would have been more convincing if her knees had not chosen this moment to collapse out from under her.

The Doctor scooped her up like a doll and put her face down on the biobed. With Kathryn's help he cut through the rest of her clothing and shoed Captain Janeway out before erecting a force field around the bed.

The dark haired woman's back, buttocks and upper thighs were a mass of raw, bleeding flesh. She had brought her good hand to her mouth and bit down to keep from crying out in pain; the adrenaline rush that had kept her going having finally run out.

"Doctor, sedate her."

"I can't, Captain. Plasma burns are tricky; any kind of medication before I have cleaned the residual liquid could considerably delay her recovery. And according to her medical file she refuses the use of painkillers or sedation except for life threatening injuries. At this point I see no reason to countermand her wishes."

Kathryn had no choice but to accept the medical reasons her holographic CMO had given. As always when dealing with him she had to forcibly remind herself that he was not just any hologram and that according to Starfleet regulation he was the ultimate authority in all things medical on the ship. So, she relented, especially since B'Elanna had apparently made her wishes very clear, but she still was not ready to simply let her suffer. There were other ways than pain killers or sedation.

"Doctor, please rotate the table. I want her to face me during the procedure. B'Elanna, look at me and only me; I'll help you through the pain."

For the next three and a half hours Kathryn's world consisted of nothing but the brown orbs of the young half-Klingon, and B'Elanna focused everything she was and felt on the captain's blue-grey eyes. Janeway was peripherally aware of people entering and others leaving the infirmary. At one point she recognised the voice of Tom Paris, and on a certain level she knew that her behaviour would only add fire to the rumours but this was too important to worry about

appearances.

Finally, the Doctor finished the treatment and deactivated the force field but neither patient nor captain seemed to notice. Twenty minutes later Kathryn rose and stepped closer to the bed, "Well done, B'Elanna chaj."

The younger woman's brown eyes widened in surprise and a smile spread over her exhausted face when Kathryn continued, "vuv baj no', Miral puqbe' [You make your ancestors proud, daughter of Miral]."

"Thank you, DevwI' SeQ."

"Sleep now and don't give the good Doctor too hard a time."

-x-x-x-

Janeway found the Doctor working in his office. He looked up and his eyes seemed to reflect awe, "Captain, how did you do it?"

"Do what?" Kathryn asked innocently.

"Lieutenant Torres, of course. Eighty percent of the skin on her back, buttocks and upper thighs had to be replaced. The plasma caused severe damage to the gluteus maximus and was about to burn its way into her shoulder blades. Even a pure Klingon would not have been able to stand this much pain without being restrained but as soon as you made eye contact her breathing and heartbeat became almost normal and her whole body relaxed. It was as if the pain were suddenly gone. How did you do it, Captain?"

The woman hesitated for a moment. "Check your medical files, Doctor, the subsection about Klingon medical history. Search for 'oy'sontay [Ceremony of Pain], but consider what you find as falling under doctor-patient-confidentiality."

She let her words sink in and then asked, "So, what's Lieutenant Torres' prognosis?"

"The gel packs regenerating her epidermis will have to stay on for twelve more hours, then another four hours for the new skin to settle and desensitise. She can be released to her quarters around midday tomorrow, and provided she really gets some rest she can resume light duty the day after. The sling will have to stay on for at least seven days; she overstressed the just repaired ligaments and muscles - and considering her volatile temper I'm not looking forward to tell her."

"I'll talk to her. Let me know when she begins to wake up."

"I will, Captain. Commander Tuvok wants to talk to you. You can find him in the security office."

As soon as the door had closed behind the energetic woman the holographic Doctor called up the word she had mentioned. At first the translation did not make much sense until he found out that the first word she had spoken did not translate as being thirsty ("oj") but was in reality a noun and meant "pain". It seemed that this "Rite to relieve pain" was almost as old as Klingon culture itself and the more he read about it, the less he believed his eyes.

As CMO he had familiarised himself with the medical history of the whole crew; so he knew about Captain Kathryn Janeway's rather unique, half-Klingon, half-Human physiology. The file said that the changes had been made to save her life after a fatal accident but he still was a bit surprised that she also had adopted the more obscure aspects of Klingon culture. It was eerily fascinating but her comment about confidentiality was a sure indicator that she was not prepared to talk about it.

-x-x-x-

Before Kathryn reached Tuvok's office Lieutenant Carey informed her that the repairs to the engine room were finished and that they were ready to go to warp. She told him to go ahead and ordered the Bridge to resume their course. A couple of minutes later she sat in front of the Vulcan's desk, a steaming mug between her hands.

"I'm all ears, Tuvok."

"The plasma conduit rupture was induced by an explosive attached to the pipe and the casing. It was designed to direct the plasma flow to do as much damage as possible. If not for Lieutenant Torres' timely reaction we could have lost the warp core. The explosives were supposed to be detonated by remote control. It is logical to assume that it was intended to serve as a diversion of sorts but I regret having to inform you that there is no evidence, not even on molecular level. Whoever set this up is good but he or she made a mistake. They forgot to isolate the trigger.

"Lieutenant Carey thinks that the bomb went off by accident. There was a small phase variance in the warp core that probably triggered the reaction prematurely. A combined team of security and engineering combed the whole engine room for further surprises. That's why the repairs took so long. I put security on condition yellow."

"Good thinking. Keep me posted on anything you might find."

"Of course, Captain."

-x-x-x-

Kathryn had hoped that the Mess Hall would be empty at this time of the Beta shift but the



experience of the last couple of days seemed to make the crew wanting to stay together. She carried Neelix' newest creation to one of the few empty tables near the view ports and began to eat, making a mental note to congratulate the Talaxian on his cooking. The lessons with B'Elanna really seemed to pay off.

Janeway sensed someone approaching the table. She looked up. Harry Kim seemed to be nervous and determined at the same time; so, she decided to invite him to sit. "Take a seat, Mister Kim. What can I do for you?"

"I... We... We'd like to know how B'Elanna is doing. I asked the Doctor but he said something about privacy and refused to answer."

"Lieutenant Torres will make a full recovery. The plasma burns were severe and she re-injured her arm but will be able to return to light duty the day after tomorrow."

"That's good to hear. Thank you, Captain." He started to rise and leave her to the rest of her meal.

"Harry, what's the crew's reaction?"

"Nicoletti and Carey are singing B'Elanna's praises and everyone is shocked about the threat to the ship. Tom feared that Maquis and Starfleet would start hurling accusation at each other but so far it seems to be bringing them closer together, united against the saboteur as the common enemy."

"That's not the way I would have wanted to achieve this but I guess one has to be grateful for small favours."

They spoke for a few more minutes about ship's business but the captain quickly excused herself. The late dinner had gone a long way to restore her depleted energy reserves but she still was bone-tired. The "Ceremony of Pain" had been very exhausting and her whole body cried for the comfort of her bed. Despite her weariness and what she had told Tuvok about getting some rest, something told her that she should not delay checking on her chief of engineering.

-X-X-X-X-X-

## **Chapter Seven**

To Janeway's surprise she found the young woman wide awake and staring angrily at a portable computer console just out of her reach. The EMH was in his office, with his back turned to his patient.

The morose expression on B'Elanna's face told Kathryn everything she needed to know, but it quickly changed to one of joy when she saw who had just entered the room.

"B'Elanna, did you give the Doctor a hard time?"

"A bit," the young woman answered with a sheepish grin. "He is so stubborn. He won't let me have a look at the engineering reports. I know that I can't get up yet but I have to make sure that my engines are back to normal."

"Your sense of duty is commendable, Lieutenant, but for now I want you to concentrate on healing. The Doctor plans to release you from Sickbay tomorrow around 1200 hours. I'll make sure that copies of all reports are sent to your quarters by then. You can go back to light duty the day after. You re-injured your arm and will have to wear the sling for some time; so, no crawling around in Jeffries tubes for the time being, understood?"

"Yes Captain. Captain, I can feel that we are back to warp but we're running not faster than warp four. Is there a problem with the repairs?"

Kathryn's eyes widened in surprise, "Captain to the Bridge."

"Tuvok here, Captain. What can I do for you?"

"Lieutenant Torres tells me that we're only running at about warp 4. Why?"

"Warp 3.85, Captain. Lieutenant Carey detected a phase variance that only seems to appear when we're faster than warp 4. He wants to wait until tomorrow to track it down but he's still in Engineering to keep an eye on things."

"Does he think that it's the same variance that triggered the explosives?"

"He's not sure, Captain."

"Proceed and keep an eye on the readings from Engineering. Janeway out."

"Explosives, Captain?" B'Elanna asked from her prone position on the biobed.

"That's one of the things I only wanted you to find out tomorrow but I'd better fill you in now."

B'Elanna listened thoughtfully to the captain's explanation. "That's strange. Why would someone go to such lengths as to not leave even a hint of evidence and at the same time be imprudent enough not to shield the explosives against outside interference? Please, Captain, let me have a look at what the security team found. I have a hunch."

"B'Elanna, you need to rest."

"I feel fine, Captain, and I'm not stupid enough to even consider leaving this biobed. I just want the chance to have a look at the data on the explosives engineering and security found. If you could just roll over the table? Please, Captain, what can it hurt to let me have a look?"

The other woman just moved the table with the portable computer unit over and activated it. About ten minutes later the young woman accessed the communications' subroutine of the unit and called the engine room.

"Carey here. It's good to hear from you, chief. Are you alright?"

"I'm fine, Carey. Don't get too comfortable in my chair. Listen. I need you to send me all energy readings, plasma flow records and flux rates from ten hours before the explosion until now. I'll explain later."

"Understood, Chief."

-x-x-x-

Shortly after lines and lines of code began to appear on the small screen, and another ten minutes later B'Elanna requested additional data.

Kathryn had taken a seat nearby and chided herself for doing exactly that. She should do something constructive instead; let Tuvok know what was going on, talk to the Doctor, retire to her Ready Room to get some paperwork done - but she was sitting in Sickbay, observing her chief engineer at work and doing a very bad job at disguising it.

B'Elanna's face, she ruefully admitted, was worth studying. Despite the look of concentration in her eyes, her emotions were easy to read. There was curiosity, frustration, guilt, a moment of triumph, anger, consternation, more anger. It would be easy to get lost in the expressive planes.

When B'Elanna finally sought her captain's attention for a short moment her eyes were full of regret and guilt before she schooled them into a more neutral expression.

"Captain, we have to drop out of warp and realign, probably replace the dilithium crystals."

"Elaborate, Lieutenant."

"I studied the information concerning the explosives and the conduit pipe and found minuscule traces of fused insulation. The explosives were shielded but something must have gradually eroded the shielding."

As on numerous other occasions the Janeway immediately understood where the younger woman was going with her line of thought. "The phase variance that triggered the explosives also destroyed the insulation, but how? It would mean that this has been there much longer than just a few hours. We should have picked up on it sooner."

"At the moment it's barely strong enough to register on our instruments. I'll need more data to

prove it conclusively but I think that it built up since the anti-neutrinos from the special trajectory bombarded our warp core. I believe that either the anti-neutrinos or the phaser beam I used to destroy the matrix have caused micro fractures in the dilithium matrix."

"And the fractures are getting bigger, the more stress we put on them. Damn it."

Kathryn took a deep breath. "Janeway to Bridge."

"Yes Captain," the calm voice of her temporary First Officer answered.

"Drop out of warp and go to full impulse, report to Engineering. I'll fill you in there." She once again tapped her comm badge. "Janeway to Carey, prepare a controlled shut-down of the warp core. I'm on my way."

"Aye Captain."

"Good work, B'Elanna. I'll keep the comm link open, so you can see what's going on."

"Please, Captain, let me go with you. I'm sure the Doctor can rig up something to make me a bit more mobile."

"That's out of the question, B'Elanna. Shutting down the warp core and running an integrity test on the dilithium is a routine procedure Lieutenant Carey and I are easily able to carry out on our own. There's no reason to risk your health," seeing the stubborn set of the younger woman's jaw she added, "please, B'Elanna."

B'Elanna reluctantly nodded.

"I'll let the Doctor know that I authorised the use of the terminal."

B'Elanna followed her mentor with her eyes. She had felt Janeway's blue-grey orbs on her while she had been working and something inside of her got all warm and tingly at the thought but she didn't dare dwell on it.

She knew it would take about two hours for the first test results of the crystals to come through, and she knew that she would not be able to rest; so, she returned her attention to the energy readings.

Half an hour later with a sick feeling in her stomach she called bridge operations and asked for the complete sensor logs to be sent to her station, starting with the moment they had picked up the bogus distress' signal of the Sikarian magistrate. It took her a while to find it but when she did the sick feeling turned to outright nausea - and of course the Doctor monitored her closely enough to pick up on it.

"Captain Janeway said that your work is important, Lieutenant, but I won't allow you to overtax yourself."

Instead of verbally attacking him B'Elanna drew him in, "Doctor, have a look at these numbers, please. Do you see a pattern?"

"Don't try to distract me, Lieutenant."

"Just humour me, Doc."

The shortening of his designation was enough to do just that.

"It looks like some sort of regular transmission," he said.

The young woman pushed two buttons. "Sensor shadows? No, that can't be right. Why would anyone disguise regular transmissions as sensor shadows?" He asked incredulously.

"That's the question, isn't it?" B'Elanna said. "The sensor logs show that the signals were only received while we were in orbit around Sikari. They could be nothing more but a side product of their technology or they could have been especially designed to destroy our dilithium crystals."

"You think that they wanted to force Voyager to stay? We have to tell the Captain."

"We will but not now. At the moment it's nothing but speculation. It also could be wishful thinking on my part."

"Wishful thinking?"

"Yes, when I first suspected that there was something wrong with our dilithium I thought that it had started with the trajectory matrix and its destruction but if the resonance frequency of these transmissions caused the problem then it was not my fault."

"So, how will you find out?" the Doctor asked in obvious curiosity.

"Actually," B'Elanna answered, "that should not be that difficult. - Torres to Carey."

"Chief, you're early. We didn't have a chance to test the crystals yet."

"That's alright. Before you do the ones in the warp core I want you to run a micro structure analysis on the dilithium in storage, the raw ore as well as the refined crystals, especially those we got from the Sikari."

"What's going on, B'Elanna?"

"I'll explain later, Captain. At the moment it's just another hunch. Please, indulge me."

-x-x-x-

Minutes stretched into hours while the engineer and the EMH were anxiously waiting for the results. Finally, Captain Janeway stormed in, her chief of Security at her side.

"How did you know? The whole stock of refined dilithium has micro fractures. It's essentially useless."

B'Elanna explained her reasoning and as expected the Starfleet captain didn't take it well.

"These damned bastards, Qopqagh HuH [dead gagh slime]. What in Grethor did they do this for? p'taQs!" Janeway shouted in anger.

To her own surprise B'Elanna tried to stay rational and calm though she felt anything but. "Captain, at the moment the only way to find out if it was deliberate or not would be to turn back and ask the Sikari. It could be an unexpected side effect of their technology."

Kathryn looked at her with fire burning in her eyes, "You don't really believe that, do you, B'Elanna?"

"No Captain. This is all just a bit too circumstantial for my taste. The Sikari generously provide us with high quality dilithium; they even offer to trade in our ore but if we had agreed to that we would be dead in the water in about three or four days. Without the explosion it easily could have taken us much longer to find out what caused the disruptive phase variance. They are technologically more advanced than we are. I just don't understand what they hope to gain."

Janeway was pacing the length of Sickbay, angry energy radiating from her in waves.

"I'd really like to turn the ship around and shove their damned hospitality back in their faces," she growled.

"That would be an unadvisable course of action, Captain."

Tuvok's calm voice seemed to reach the agitated woman. She stopped in mid-stride, took a deep breath and turned around.

"I know, Tuvok. There's nothing we can do but to repair the damage as soon as possible and look for a planet to stock up again. bIQ'a'Daq 'oHtaH 'etlh'e' [There's no going back; it can not be changed]. I don't have to like it though."

B'Elanna's respect for her commanding officer rose another notch. The woman had gone from burning fury to calm rationality in the blink of an eye. She seemed totally composed now while she herself still felt her own anger burning dangerously close to the surface. It made her once again understand how much she still had to learn.

"Ensign Kim and Lieutenant Carey are already in the process of refining the ore. We should be

back to warp in about five to six hours. Lieutenant Torres, that was good work with the sensor logs. Doctor, see that Miss Torres has everything she needs."

-x-x-x-

Just as the captain had predicted they were ready to initialise the warp core in the early hours of the morning and resumed their journey. At the same time the Doctor removed the gel packs from B'Elanna's back and thighs and created a sterile area around the biobed. The new skin was still very sensitive and would have to settle before he could let her go.

For B'Elanna these last four hours were harder to take than the twelve before because her new skin was itching fiercely. She couldn't wait to get in the shower to make it stop.

-x-x-x-

The sling came off after five days which seemed like an eternity, and B'Elanna happily returned to regular duty, just in time to head the part of the away team that would mine a large deposit of dilithium while the other, bigger group was collecting leola roots and other delicacies Neelix' found indispensable.

Speculations about the possible identity of the saboteur had mostly replaced the gossip centring on her and the captain. Her lessons were progressing nicely and she began to feel inner peace for the first time she could remember.

Then they were faced with a Kazon vessel almost destroyed by a sloppily installed Starfleet food replicator. All but one of the crew had been killed. In the process it turned out that her friend Seska not only was the saboteur and working with the Kazon Nistrim but also a Cardassian spy and the murderer of the security officer and the three prisoners. She couldn't believe how easily she had allowed herself to be manipulated by the woman and her old insecurities came back with a vengeance.

When Janeway joined her in her quarters in the late afternoon, she immediately saw the change in B'Elanna's eyes. "Go and change into your training's attire, B'Elanna."

The raven-head nodded and went to her bedroom. Lessons in MoQ'bara, the Klingon version of martial arts, were usually at the end of each session, not at the beginning. So, her teacher was up to something.

"Computer, status of the holodecks?"

"Holodeck I and II are in use and working within the specified parameters."

"Computer, check the gym rooms for life signs."

"Gym I: three human life signs; Gym II: one Bajoran, one Vulcan life sign; Gym III: no life signs."

"Computer, seal access to Gym III, authorisation: Janeway alpha one theta phi seven," she ordered and changed in her own training's outfit, seemingly loose fitting off-white trousers and shirt with strategically placed padding at the knees, elbows, shoulders and chest.

-x-x-x-

They started with their usual warm-up routine, a series of slow but powerful movements designed to free a warrior's mind from immediate worry and stress and focus on the fight ahead. If necessary a true warrior could reach this state with a single controlled breath but B'Elanna knew that she was years of regular training from such perfection, even though the captain had assured her that she was progressing more than adequately.

Instead of exercising the different forms as they usually did, the older woman squared off against her and barked, "Defend yourself!"

The flurry of moves caught B'Elanna completely off guard. She tried to get some distance between herself and her attacker. She barely held her teacher off and suddenly the attack stopped.

"Take a deep breath and close your eyes, B'Elanna. Can you feel the anger simmering just below the surface? Use it, set it free! Open your eyes and defend yourself."

If it had not been totally inappropriate Kathryn would have smiled at the sudden change in B'Elanna's eyes. They had darkened considerably and had acquired an almost dangerous glint. This time she was not caught by surprise and they began to fight each other in earnest.

B'Elanna gave it her all and Kathryn did just enough to keep her student completely involved. When Kathryn was sure that she was really focused on nothing but the fight, she began to taunt her,

"Is this all you got? You fight like a Cardassian."

The reaction was instantaneous, B'Elanna attacked with a loud roar, forgetting her training for the fraction of a heartbeat and landing hard on the floor. She quickly reasserted herself and was back on her feet. They continued to trade blows and kicks.

Kathryn noted the gradual change in the other woman's fighting style with satisfaction; that was what she had hoped for: B'Elanna began to actively use the anger she felt to fuel her actions, she channelled her anger into controlled action.



"Tell me about Seska."

B'Elanna intensified her attacks but did not answer.

"She deceived you. She betrayed your trust. You don't give your friendship easily but she played with you. She played with you and Chakotay; she played with us all."

"She didn't deceive you and Tuvok," the young woman snarled while trying to reach her captain with a roundhouse kick.

"Tuvok does not trust easily. It's something that has to be earned with him, and I had personal reasons not to trust her - but for all our prudence and our suspicions, there was never any conclusive evidence against her," Kathryn calmly answered while fighting on.

"How could I not have seen that she was a damn Cardassian spy?" B'Elanna's voice reflected anger and thoughtfulness at once and the sparring continued unabated.

"I hate having to admit it, B'Elanna, but she was good, very good, and we probably won't have heard the last of her. We will get a chance to get even with her, sooner or later."

"I'd really love to introduce her to the business end of a phaser rifle," B'Elanna growled.

"As your captain I might not be able to grant you that wish. That's not the way Starfleet operates."

The growl was much more pronounced now, and Kathryn only barely blocked the edge of a hand headed for her throat. She ducked a right hook, rolled out of the way and came up to the left and slightly behind her student. It was time to end this sparring session.

Her arms closed in a vice grip around B'Elanna's arms and midsection. She lifted her off the floor and waited for the situation to sink in. B'Elanna struggled in her arms. Her legs kicked helplessly and her already laboured breathing became ragged. She quickly stopped moving but it took another minute for the tension to leave her body.

Kathryn set her down and loosened her hold, expecting to be attacked as soon as B'Elanna had some mobility back but nothing like this happened. The young woman started to tremble. Kathryn turned her unresisting body gently around and found B'Elanna's brown eyes brimming with tears.

"The only reasons Klingons don't cry is because they have no tear ducts. There's no shame or dishonour in crying, B'El."

The soft words and the quiet support in Kathryn's eyes broke the dam and the young woman started to cry, big, silent tears. Kathryn closed her arms a bit more firmly around her student but maintained eye contact. She basically held her upright with her eyes.

She waited until the tears started to subside and then said, "Talk to me, B'El."

"I'm sorry I disappointed you, DevwI' SeQ."

"What makes you think that I'm disappointed?"

"Klingon warriors are supposed to be strong and I just proved my weakness."

"Strength is not the same as showing no emotions. We're not Vulcan. There's no shame in tears, B'Elanna, and letting your feelings out is no sign of weakness. It takes a lot of courage to allow oneself to feel and I'm gratified that you trust me enough to do it in front of me."

Kathryn chose her words carefully. She knew that she was crossing a line, once again. It had been a possibility since she had consented to lead the other woman through the lajQo' guvHa'ghachtay. Now, looking at the big brown eyes and the shy, tentative smile, she didn't care any longer.

"Thank you, DevwI' SeQ."

"K'Ryn, call me K'Ryn."

"K'Ryn?"

"Yes, K'Ryn. It's my Klingon name, the name my DevwI' SeQ gave me when I had reached a certain point in my development."

"Like B'El? No one ever called me B'El."

"Yes, just like B'El."

"So, I didn't screw up?"

"No, B'Elanna, on the contrary. Let's go back to your quarters and talk. We shouldn't monopolise the gym the whole night."

-x-x-x-x-x-

## **Chapter Eight**

This day marked a considerable change in the relationship of the two women, though to the casual or even interested observer it was not obvious.

Ever since they had started the ritual training, the captain had focused their sessions on making

B'Elanna understand that her volatile temper was not necessarily only coming from her Klingon side. The young woman had learned a lot about Human psychology and emotional response patterns but theory alone would never have helped her.

They also had spoken about her past, focusing on the occasions she had lost her temper. Kathryn had helped her to analyse her actions and reactions as if they had been someone else's. The older woman had been her voice of reason and though she always had been objective and logical in her approach, it was still far from the dispassionate, Vulcan kind of reason and logic. She never made any allusions or personal comments but to B'Elanna it was evident that she spoke from experience. In a strange way it allowed her to accept intellectually what she learned about herself - and the MoQ'bara lessons they always finished the evening with helped her to deal with the emotional fall-out.

Now, Kathryn Janeway gave their lessons a much more personal touch. She allowed B'Elanna some glimpses in her personal history to make her understand that she was not alone with her problems - and more than anything that made a difference for the young woman.

She was still easily angered but instead of resorting to physical force she used Starfleet regulations to reprimand her staff. Engineering had been working smoothly before but now it was like a well oiled machine and the atmosphere seemed at once more relaxed and more professional.

One evening they spoke about the differences between Klingon and Starfleet protocols, and Kathryn told her about the day she took revenge on the man who had ordered L'Larrela's death.

She had had to practically beg to be allowed to participate in the raid.

- - -

"Please, let me go with you, DevwI' SeQ", the young woman in the training's outfit said.

"You are not ready, K'Ryn."

"It is my right, Rel'Issa joHwI' [Lady Rel'Issa]. She died in battle but her body is not yet whole. I don't want her spirit to be restless in StoVoKor because of that."

"Whenever we discussed the Klingon afterlife you were more than reluctant to even accept the possibility. It does not seem honourable to refer to it now."

Kathryn knew that her teacher wanted her to lose her temper. She had done the same on countless occasions before, but this time the young woman was determined not to fall for it.

"What I believe is not important, Rel'Issa joHwI'. What L'Larrela believed is. I intend to honour her convictions."

"You are not ready to eat the hearts of your enemies, my student." Another softly spoken and only thinly veiled insult, her teacher could as well have called her a coward. But once again she didn't answer with anger.

"And I might never be ready to do this. Besides, the vermin who killed your daughter were cowards and the heart of a coward is not worth being eaten by a warrior. Even your targh would rather spit on it. It is my right to avenge Lar's death and I demand that you take me with you."

Kathryn by then had adopted a rather aggressive pose; her feet were shoulder wide apart, her hands rested on her hips; her eyes were burning and her jaw set.

The Priestess studied her intently and laughed loud. Then she rose from her seat and said, "Come, you'll need more appropriate attire to fight at my side."

L'Larrela's killers had a quick death in battle but no one would howl for them. Their master, the priest who had ordered the attack and who was proudly displaying her head in his private study was not so lucky. He belonged to the few people who still believed that Klingon women were only good to bear more warriors and had been angry about Rel'Issa's recent promotion to the Boreth High Council, the highest spiritual authority in the whole Klingon Empire.

Her daughter not only had the audacity to follow in her mother's footsteps but had also been consorting with a Starfleet officer, and to make it worse a female officer. Attacking and killing her in his eyes had been the just punishment for her mother's unnatural ambition. That was at least what he had loudly proclaimed as long as his warriors still had been holding their attackers off.

When Rel'Issa, Kathryn and their fighters breached their defences he fled to what he perceived as the security of his house. Kathryn was the first to reach his study. She opened the door and had to duck a dagger aimed at her throat. The Priest was standing in front of his desk, battle ready with a bat'leth in his hands. He recognised Kathryn and began to taunt her but only when he called L'Larrela a "Starfleet whore" did the young woman react.

One smooth, fast movement disarmed him, kicked his legs further apart and cut off his private parts. He fell to the ground, instinctively trying to stem the flow of blood with both hands and writhing in agony. A booted foot kicked him on his back and with his own dagger in her hand an enraged Kathryn was on him, ready to carve out his eyes.

"Stop! Don't kill him just yet. He deserves to die like the 'Iwaghargh quvHa' 'up [dishonoured, disgusting bloodworm] he is: staked out in the desert and eaten alive by fire lizards - the death of a traitor and a coward as ordained by Kahless himself."

The priest's pain seemed momentarily forgotten as Rel'Issa's words began to sink in. He started to beg and to plead to be shown mercy, to be killed, to be given a chance to kill himself.

Kathryn was still on her right knee next to him. She plunged the dagger deep in his throat,

through the spine and into the floor, ending his cowardly whimpering and his life. She slowly rose to her feet, took the mummified head of her beloved and looked deeply into the sunken but still open eyes. Then she howled, a cry conveying an agony so consuming that it washed everything else away.

A hard yank brought a wall tapestry down with the symbol of the brotherhood of Boreth embedded in bright colours. She draped it over the desk. On the other side of the room was a book case from where she took the large volume with the rules of the monastery. She placed it in the centre of the desk and reverently put L'Larrela's head on top of it. Her blood incusted bat'leth was laid in front of the book. One of the warriors gave her the priest's weapon and she sank to her knees and offered it to her teacher. Rel'Issa took it without a word; the young woman rose and left.

Only much later did Kathryn remember the short conversation between the Priestess and the warrior that had drifted to her ears while she slowly left the building.

"You were right, joHwI'. She was not ready. She should celebrate her first victory like a true warrior."

"She might not have been ready, my friend, but I also was wrong. Today she will be learning the last lesson she needs to be what she was supposed to be. She alone had the right to kill him the way she did."

- - -

"I didn't have a plan when I left; I only wanted to get away as fast as possible. I began to run, trying to silence the sound of his cries and his begging with the rhythm of my boots hitting the ground. Without being really aware of it I had begun to ascend the mountain, simply obeying my body's need of movement. The path got steadily steeper. At one point I slipped and looked down.

"The house of the priest was on fire; I sat down and observed the flames lapping up to the sky. I knew it was intended to open the gates of StoVoKor for L'Larrela and damn her murderers to Grethor. It should have given me some satisfaction but I only felt empty.

"When the flames had totally consumed the house I continued my trek up the mountain. It was already late afternoon but I didn't care. I reached the top around midnight and lost myself in the stars sparkling overhead. Slowly the images of L'Larrela's murderer and his anguished cries began to fade and I started to remember all the good times L'Larella and I had together, of looking up at the stars and sharing stories about the patterns up there, of our long runs together, of spending time in the library of the monastery. For the first time I didn't feel the need to cry my eyes out or to lash out against anyone and anything."

Kathryn fell silent and B'Elanna respected her silence though every single of her instincts cried out to her to take the older woman in her arms and protect her. The unusually detailed retelling

had told her more than clearly that the memories were still painful and that the most difficult of them might not have been touched yet.

"That night," Kathryn finally continued, "I made my peace with L'Larrela and for the first few moments of the new day while watching a spectacular sunrise I thought that I had the answers to all of my questions. But then I looked down and saw my hands and armour - dried blood glittering in the morning sun. I must have stared at my hands for hours."

B'Elanna immediately picked up on what the older woman was talking about, "It was your right to avenge her death, DevwI' SeQ"

Kathryn looked into her student's eyes. She saw no judgement there, just a genuine need to understand.

"Try to see it from the point of view of a Federation citizen," she simply said.

Kathryn knew that this simple phrase would be enough to make the younger woman think. B'Elanna took her time answering.

Finally the young woman went to the replicator and ordered two fresh glasses of water. She returned to her seat and took a small sip though she rather would have gulped down a big mug of blood wine. After taking a deep breath she began to speak.

"My mother and I were the only Klingons where I grew up, more than that we were the only non-Humans. My father had made arrangements that I could have my lessons at home and for two years after he left, it worked out fine. Then the local authorities decided that it would be better for me to attend the local school. A lot of the other parents were afraid that I could inadvertently hurt their children and didn't allow them to play with me.

"At the time I only blamed my Klingon half. It's only now that I understand that it was their fear of the unknown, of the supposedly uncontrollable that ruled them. Now I know that my mother tried everything she could to make them change their minds. It's only now that I understand how frustrated she must have been."

The younger woman fell silent and Kathryn held her brown orbs with her pale blue, almost grey eyes. Kathryn resisted the urge to ask, 'So, now, what do you intend to do with your answer? Take the next logical step. You're so close.'

It wouldn't do any good to pressure her. B'Elanna's gaze had drifted down to her hands still closed around the glass of water and stayed focused there.

"When you looked at your hands, after the sunrise, and the blood stains on your armour you saw yourself with the eyes of a Federation citizen, one who has heard a lot of stories about Klingons but possibly has never seen one. Being a Starfleet officer must have made it even more difficult. In their eyes what you did had been revenge, not justice. - How did you find your balance, K'Ryn?"

"I spent the whole day and the next night on the mountain top and by then my head had come to a decision. I no longer wanted to be a Human with Klingon strength and Klingon instincts, and, yes, a Klingon temper."

Finally B'Elanna understood, "By killing your parmaqay's murderer the way you did, you found a balance between Starfleet and Klingon justice. His death was inevitable but by killing him swiftly you showed a degree of compassion not easily found in Klingon warriors. But I suppose that thinking it was one thing, really believing it quite ano...."

The comm system effectively cut the young woman off. "Red alert; all hand to battle stations, senior officers to the bridge."

-x-x-x-

Both women sprinted out of the door and towards the turbo lift before the message had even finished. They learned that the shuttle that had been sent on a reconnaissance mission to study a nebula with Tuvok and Chakotay on board apparently had been attacked by a vessel coming unexpectedly out of a nebula. When they had been brought to Sickbay Tuvok had been unconscious and the first officer for all intents and purposes brain dead. An unknown entity seemed to sabotage the ship and it turned out that Tuvok had been possessed by an alien energy creature that intended to use the neural energy of the whole crew as food for its people. In the end Chakotay's disembodied spirit had saved the day.

With his sentence half completed Chakotay had begged her to be allowed back on duty. He had not asked to be reinstated in his former job, but he wanted to do something to once again actively help them to get back to Earth. Tuvok had agreed to monitor him and his performance during what should have been nothing but a routine mission. Now, Janeway was grateful that she had listened to his pleas. He had saved the lives of the whole crew; that went a long way to mellow her towards him. She reinstated him as her first officer, but she still didn't trust him on a personal level and thus refused to also reactivate his command codes and insisted that the house arrest would continue until he had completed the sentence. Chakotay seemed genuinely thankful, but in the quiet of her Ready Room Captain Janeway admitted to herself that the only reason he was back on the Bridge and in the chair to her left was that B'Elanna had asked her to give him another chance.

Kathryn remembered the short conversation they had had about the subject in a turbolift on the way to Engineering and yet another double shift to repair the damage caused by the encounter with the energy creature.

"I know what Chakotay did to me was wrong, and consequently what he is capable of doing given half the chance doesn't exactly encourage anyone to trust him again. He should have had a much better control over his urges, but despite everything, and it took me a long time to admit this to myself, despite everything he is a good man. He saved my life more than once. In my eyes

he deserves a chance to redeem himself."

-x-x-x-

As soon as things started to return to what in the Delta quadrant passed as normal, sensors indicated an asteroid with seemingly large Dilithium deposits and the ship's chief engineer was of the firm belief that one could never have too much Dilithium ore. An away team consisting of Ensign Durst, Lieutenant Torres, and the ever adventure-happy Lieutenant Paris was sent down while Voyager itself set out to scan and map the whole area.

When the team failed to make contact at the appointed time and a more detailed scan showed that some of the corridors had shifted direction the captain started to get a very bad feeling, instantly validated by the discovery of Viidian force fields, force fields protected against their phasers. Chakotay finally came up with the idea to rescue their missing crew members from the mining colony they apparently had stumbled upon by posing as a Viidian and infiltrating the complex.

Tom Paris was safe and sound but Durst had paid with this life and B'Elanna's DNA had been split in half, creating two different persons: a fully Human and a fully Klingon B'Elanna Torres. Unsurprisingly at first they didn't get along at all but when push came to shove they worked together. The Human B'Elanna had managed to disable the shields around the mining complex and Voyager beamed them out. The Klingon B'Elanna, however, gave her life protecting her other half.

When they all re-materialised on the transporter platform the Klingon already was beyond the Doctor's help - and when she closed her eyes for the last time the Human B'Elanna howled for her and whispered, "batlh Daqawlu'taH [You will be remembered with honour]."

The young woman felt that it was the least she could do for her other half, announcing her proud entrance into StoVoKor. Never having done this before, however, the dark-haired engineer had not been prepared for the rush of emotions with which the simple gesture almost overwhelmed her. And then she suddenly felt very empty.

She was relieved when the Doctor later told her that he had to reintegrate her Klingon DNA because without it her cells were no longer able to synthesise proteins. B'Elanna was still very pensive when Chakotay asked her how she was doing.

"I'm not sure. It's been a pretty strange experience. I do know that right now, the way I am, I'm more at peace with myself than I've ever been before. And that's a good feeling."

Sensing her thoughtful mood the tall man asked, "But?"

She looked at him, trying to explain what she really felt. "I'm incomplete. It doesn't feel like me."



The gentle smile on his face told her that he probably would not understand the truth, so, she said what she thought he expected her to say, "I guess I had someone else living inside of me for too long to feel right without her."

"I'd have to say that you two made quite a team down there."

B'Elanna didn't know if he said this to help her make peace with her other half or to simply change the subject.

"I know. I came to admire a lot of things about her, her strength, her bravery. I guess I just have to accept that I'll spend the rest of my life fighting with her."

The moment the last sentence had passed her lips, she knew that it was not true, that she just had betrayed the sacrifice of her other half. Chakotay, however, seemed not to have expected anything else and patted her left forearm in sympathy before leaving the infirmary.

-x-x-x-

At first the Doctor's injections didn't seem to have much effect and she wanted him to release her to her quarters but he insisted on keeping her under close observation until the process was complete. That gave her a lot of time to think about the last several days.

She remembered having been thrown around the barracks like a rag doll after the guards surprised her at the terminal, and then this glorious Klingon had rushed in and swept the floor with them. After feeling weaker and more frightened with every passing hour, trading insults with herself had constituted a comforting return to normality. She recalled snippets of their discussion that still had resulted in developing an escape plan that had really worked.

Would the Doctor have been able to reunite both halves if the Klingon had not been killed? Would any of them have agreed to such a procedure? Could she have learned to live in a Starfleet ship, following Starfleet regulation or would she have ended up in the brig for continuous insubordination or for breaking the jaws of everyone who mispronounced her name?

Then her thoughts returned to her conversation with Chakotay and the half truths she had fed him. Her other half had been right to call her a p'taQ - but she also had told her that saving her life had made her death an honourable one. Now, it was up to her to live up to her other half's expectations.

B'Elanna didn't get the chance to come to any clear decision when her world suddenly was flooded with intense pain, a pain brought on when the Klingon DNA began to restore her brow ridges and secondary organs.

The Doctor practically begged her to allow him to administer some painkillers or a sedative but all she asked for was some privacy. So, he erected an opaque force field around her biobed. With

the next injection it got even worse and every single one of his subroutines told him to do something.

"Let me call the captain, Lieutenant. She can help you like she did the last time."

"I will not allow you to do that, Doctor. Keep Captain Janeway out of it. She is not to know about the pain."

"But she can help you," the young woman doubled over in pain. "This is not necessary."

"Yes, it is. The 'Ceremony of Pain' will not work this time. I have to do this alone. Respect my wishes, Doc, please," she pressed out when the next wave of pain raced through her body.

The EMH nodded and left the isolated area. He still thought that it was wrong to simply let her suffer but with one word the fiery young woman had considerably weakened his resolve; she had said 'please'.

After the next to last injection, with 70% of her original physiology restored, B'Elanna thankfully passed out. Had he not been holographic, the Doctor would have breathed a sigh of relief.

About an hour later Captain Janeway strode into Sickbay. Together with Ensign Kim she had worked on a way to deactivate the Vidiian's force fields in case of future encounters. With their combined scientific and engineering competence they really had found a way. She hoped to distract B'Elanna from once again having to stay in Sickbay by telling her all about it. But instead of finding a belligerent chief engineer she was faced with an isolation field and a visibly worried CMO.

"Doctor, report. How is Lieutenant Torres?"

He quickly filled her in on the unforeseen side effects of the gene therapy and B'Elanna's reaction to his suggestions, conveniently forgetting that she had specifically asked him not to inform the captain.

"And she really said that the 'oy'sontay would not work?"

"Yes Captain, but I don't see any reason why not."

"When did you plan to give her the last injection?"

He should have known that she would not answer his implied question, "I can give it to her now. It's been almost two hours since the last one and it might not be so hard on her if she's still out."

"Do it. I'll stay with her."

"Yes Captain."

The Doctor applied the hypospray and the young Hybrid's body reacted immediately and violently. It took both the captain and him to restrain her until the first spasms had passed. Thankfully she didn't regain consciousness.

As soon as she had settled down a bit the Doctor left them alone. Kathryn looked down on the still strained face of her student and wracked her brain on why she had refused her help, why she seemed convinced that the 'oy'sontay would not work. There was only one possible explanation: B'Elanna thought that she deserved to suffer this pain. But what in Grethor would make her think something like that? She had done nothing wrong; without her Voyager would have lost not only one member of the family but four.

-x-x-x-

In the middle of Gamma shift B'Elanna came to and opened her eyes.

"K'Ryn, you're here," she whispered.

"Yes, I'm here, B'El, and I won't go anywhere. Sleep now, you soon will be back to normal."

"Not normal, so sorry," B'Elanna mumbled before falling into a deep healing sleep.

The Doctor tried to get his Captain to spend the rest of the night in her bed but she insisted on staying at the Hybrid's side. Instead of arguing the holographic chief Medical Officer simply ordered the computer to log Captain Janeway off-duty the next day due to a medical emergency. She nodded her thanks and he once again left the isolation area.

He had been among the first to hear the rumours about the captain and her chief engineer but in his eyes they didn't act like lovers. He conceded that there definitively was something going on between them but he was less than sure about the nature of their relationship.

Whatever it was, Janeway's mere presence seemed to aid the younger woman's recovery. The side effects of the treatment had abated more quickly and all her readings for the first time in hours had started to even out as soon as Captain Janeway had touched her shoulder - just as if she had recognised the touch, like a lover would.

He compared his recent findings with the readings he had taken during the 'Ceremony of Pain' and found them consistent. But according to the information in the Klingon medical database this particular ceremony required eye contact to work.

When B'Elanna had regained consciousness, the calming effect of the other woman's presence had become even more apparent; her muscles relaxed, her breathing was more regular and her adrenaline output slowly returned to a more normal level.

It was fascinating, especially since he could not detect any change in his commanding officer -

and not for the first time he regretted not being able to look as easily into his patients' minds than he did into their bodies.

-x-x-x-

Kathryn was still observing the sleeping woman. Her words in this short moment of consciousness in a way had affirmed the captain's suspicions. The brown orbs had told her more than clearly that her charge felt guilty. 'But why?' she asked herself, 'and what had she meant with not being normal?'

She had thought that B'Elanna had finally come to accept her Klingon half. Was it possible that the direct confrontation had undone all their progress? Tom Paris' report had mentioned in passing how B'Elanna's Human part had been at the beginning. He also had stressed how she had overcome her fear to get them all out of there. Was it possible that the experience had made her see her Human half as weak and that she now would start to reject that part of herself?

Kathryn's rational mind knew that it was pointless to speculate one way or the other. She had to wait until they could talk in private.

During her short venture into consciousness B'Elanna had instinctively taken hold of her Devwl' SeQ's hand, and though the grasp had eased up almost immediately Kathryn had yet to remove her hand. Every now and then B'Elanna turned her head in sleep, and the older woman used the opportunity to brush a strand of hair out of her face gently.

Kathryn knew that she should not give into the temptation; she had no right to express her feelings. It was wrong on so many levels. With stolen moments like these she was taking advantage of B'Elanna, of her current vulnerability and of her trust.

Kathryn's hand rested gently on the young woman's cheek. She knew it was not right, but these clandestine moments were all she ever would have; they were all she could allow herself.

As a captain she had to be seen as larger than life to get her motley group of Starfleet personnel, Maquis rebels, and Delta Quadrant natives back to sector 001; especially with a Second-in-Command she no longer trusted. She had to set an example, not only to gain their trust but also to get them all to follow Starfleet protocols - and that meant she had to adhere to all of the rules, even, and maybe especially, the unwritten ones.

Kathryn sighed and B'Elanna turned her head again, just a couple of inches but enough to give the impression of snuggling into the other woman's touch. The small movement brought a smile to Kathryn's face, a smile so bright and enticing it made the dark-haired woman smile in answer when she opened her eyes.

For about a minute they just looked at each other, drowning in brown respectively blue-grey orbs.

Then Kathryn restored her captain's mask and they called the Doctor who released B'Elanna to her quarters under the condition that she got some rest for the next two days. He ordered a site-to-site transport for the two women.

"DevwI' SeQ, after your shift, could we talk, please?"

"I'm glad you asked, B'Elanna. I'm off duty today; so, why don't we both grab a shower and meet for lunch at my quarters. Let's say in two hours?"

"I'll be on time, thank you."

-x-x-x-x-x-

## **Chapter Nine**

B'Elanna pressed the door chime and when nothing happened she announced herself and the door to the captain's quarters immediately slid open. Kathryn was sitting on the couch, wearing some slacks and a simple shirt. She was sleeping. The door closed before the engineer could retreat; so, her DevwI' SeQ obviously had keyed the door to recognise her voice. B'Elanna speculated that she perhaps had not wanted her to have to wait outside, in case her teacher would not have been ready in time.

She found a padd to leave the other woman a message but when she sat down to compose it, her eyes fell on the relaxed, peaceful features of her DevwI' SeQ, no, of K'ryn. She looked younger than ever and the imposing command presence had been replaced by gentle beauty.

B'Elanna was mesmerised; she couldn't take her eyes off and instead of leaving she took a blanket from the other end of the couch and draped it over the sleeping body.

She knew it was wrong to stay and look at her commanding officer this way; it was an invasion of privacy, indiscrete in the extreme. Yes, she thought that she had seen love and desire in the other woman's eyes after she had woken up in Sickbay the second time. But it also could have been a figment of her imagination because a moment later there only had been the captain left.

A captain was not supposed to get involved with a crew member. B'Elanna had seen both, the captain and the woman.

K'Ryn, daughter of Rel'Issa, never would allow her feelings to interfere with her duty; and Kathryn Anna Janeway, daughter of a Starfleet Admiral, wouldn't either. It would be dishonourable.

The object of her thoughts began to stretch; she looked like a kitten waking from deep slumber. A wave of tenderness swept through B'Elanna and she vowed to do everything in her power to

protect the captain, her teacher, and the woman.

Kathryn woke up. It took her a few moments to get her bearing. Her internal clock told her that it was much later than lunch time and her senses let her know that B'Elanna was only a few paces away. She opened her eyes and saw her, fidgeting and trying to look everywhere but at her.

"Sorry for having kept you waiting, B'El. The night must have caught up with me. Now, how about something to eat?"

"I'm not really hungry, K'Ryn." The young woman tried to hide her surprise that Kathryn did not call her upon her obvious invasion of privacy.

"Don't let the Doctor hear that, B'Elanna. Why don't we grab a late lunch at the mess hall? It might be better to eat there anyway; the one time I invited my mother and sister to dinner at my home in San Francisco I managed to burn replicated pot roast."

B'Elanna nodded in answer and followed her Captain. The mess hall was surprisingly empty and Neelix so busy with dinner preparations that he didn't have the time to chat - much. They ate in companionable silence; so, none of them was prepared for the awkward silence that descended upon them as soon as they had returned to Captain Janeway's quarters.

Kathryn finally solved the problem by replicating both of them two tall glasses of water. She retook her place on the couch and folded her legs under her, just like she always did at the start of their lessons. B'Elanna imitated her posture and closed her eyes. They usually spent the first few minutes in quiet contemplation - to her probably the most difficult part of the ritual, at least at the beginning.

So, she was rather surprised when Kathryn asked, "Why didn't you allow the Doctor to use painkillers or to call me?"

"I meant no disrespect, DevwI' SeQ."

"I didn't ask to reprimand you, B'El. I asked to understand."

The dark-haired woman studied Kathryn's face. She was in full teacher mode but there also was a kind of deep understanding that had not been there before.

"According to the rules of the 'oy'sontay both parties have to be pure of heart, at least in respect to the injuries obtained. I was not. I deserved to feel this pain and regret deeply that I was not strong enough to stand it without losing consciousness."

So, her speculations had been right on target, Kathryn thought before asking, "Why?"

"That's not easy to explain." The younger woman took a deep breath.

"I betrayed my Klingon half. She gave her life for me and she thought me worthy to do so, but

when Chakotay asked me how I felt I still made him believe that I saw her as disturbing my peace of mind and that I never would accept her as an integral part of me. I told him that I would have to accept the fact to spend the rest of my life fighting with her."

"So, you lied to him?"

"Yes and no. I also told him that I admired her strength and her bravery."

Kathryn just looked pointedly at B'Elanna to let her know that she would not let her get away with such a simple diversion. The younger woman took a deep breath; the only avenue left for her now was the truth.

"I betrayed myself when I told Chakotay that I still see her as a powerful but isolated part of myself. Even before the Doctor started to put us back together, so to speak, I knew that she was and always will be a part of me. I betrayed her by not telling him the truth."

"Would he have understood?"

"That's not the point." B'Elanna had jumped up from her seat and now was pacing the length of the captain's living room. "The point is that I didn't care what he thought of me, not really, not deep down. My answer was born out of a deep instinct, honed ever since I was a kid. That's my betrayal. It's just one in a long line. I'm good at betrayals. I betrayed my father by being too Klingon and my mother by not being Klingon enough. I betrayed my teachers at the Academy by not fulfilling their expectations. I betrayed Chakotay by not being honest with him. I betrayed you by..."

"mevjap!" Kathryn had not moved from the couch, yet her voice had been as sharp as a whiplash and her eyes were sparkling with anger. "Stop! That's enough! Stop belittling yourself, B'Elanna, and use your head. Hoch nuH qel! [Consider every option!] Think! How much do you trust Chakotay? Not as your commanding officer but as your friend?"

"Yesterday in Sickbay was the first time we have spoken privately since he apologised," the young woman answered after a few moments. "I still trust him with my life but not with my thoughts or feelings."

B'Elanna found other woman's eyes. "So, it might be possible that I said what he expected to hear, not because it's still true but because I didn't want him to know too much about me."

She retook her seat on the couch. "Or it might have been a combination of both. That makes it a bit more understandable but not less dishonourable."

Kathryn would have smiled at her student's predictable stubbornness were this not a very crucial point in the ritual.

"There's no dishonour in employing strategy to protect oneself. So, the real question should be. Did you believe what you said?"

"I didn't think about it before saying it, but I knew it was not true as soon as I had said it."

Her eyes were now much brighter than only moments before. "I did not betray myself," she finally said with wonder in her voice.

"Now, for your father..."

"Rationally I know that there's no betrayal in being what and who one is, especially when you're five years old but sometimes it's hard to make my heart think the same way."

"Then I will tell you as often as you'll need to hear it, B'El. If there is someone to blame it's your father. It's he who betrayed you, not the other way round," Kathryn let her words sink in and then asked, "How did your parents meet?"

"My father was a mining engineer fresh out of university and working for a small mining operation on Kessik IV. He attended a conference on new mining equipment, on Deep Space Five. My mother had accompanied one of her older sisters to the conference. She was groomed to supervise this part of the family business. My aunt later told me that she fell for him like Kahless did for Lukara but certainly didn't show Lukara's impeccable taste in men."

"How old was your mother?"

"I don... Kahless on a crutch! She was only seventeen, just the age I was when I ran away to the Academy. She was younger than I am now when my father left."

Kathryn loved to see the younger woman's mind at work and let her come to her own conclusions.

"Relying on her Klingon heritage might well have been the only way not to lose herself in this situation. I wish I had understood then."

"You were only a child, B'El, don't take responsibility for things that were out of your hands. Why did your mother not return to the home world?"

"When she married my father in a Federation Ceremony my great grandmother exiled her for ten years and when the ten years were over she had to deal with a very angry child who despised all things Klingon. She also might have been too proud to return on their terms instead of on her own."

"What do you mean?"

"When my father left, he not only packed up his clothes but everything even remotely of value. My mother convinced Uncle Steven, the owner of the mine, to give her a chance. The Federation would not have let us starve anyway, but this way we had a few bargaining chips to get extras, so to speak. On Kessik IV this made the difference between surviving and living. At the time I



didn't see it but I later learned that she's a really good engineer. She had been hired as an aide to my father's successor but soon replaced him."

"You are proud of your mother." It was not a question.

"Yes, I am but I never had the chance to tell her. As a child I didn't want to know; and what I know about her now I learned from one of my aunts. I met her while on a trip to buy weapons for the Maquis on Deep Space Nine a couple of weeks before Commander Tuvok came on board. She told me about my mother and how proud of me she and the whole family were for choosing the path of a true warrior by joining the Maquis.

"She told me that directly after my father had left, my great grand-mother offered my mother to return home earlier if she officially apologised to the elders of the House and underwent a purification ritual. She answered that she had nothing to apologise for and nothing to be purified of.

"I was twelve when we visited Qo'nos for the first time and by then my mother had made enough of a name for herself as an engineer that we could afford our own ship. It was not much bigger than a Starfleet shuttle but able to sustain warp 7.26 and equipped with an impressive array of shields and weapons. My aunts and cousins were very impressed when we landed at the estate of my great grandmother. But I'm digressing.

"While I was in school everyone, including myself, thought that my aptitude at engineering and science came from my father because he was an engineer by trade but since my aunt told me about my mother's reputation as a mining engineer and her out-of-the-box solutions for unusual problems, I think that my abilities come more from her than him. I hope one day I'll be able to tell her that and many other things personally."

B'Elanna saw the proud smile on her teacher's face. It encouraged her to continue, "When I now think back to my childhood I see that my mother never forced me to live my Klingon heritage. She made sure that I knew what it was all about. She taught me the language and the customs and the legends.

"And she made me understand that because of my superior physical strength I had to be careful in my interactions with others. I never was a courtyard bully but I think that's a lesson I'm still learning." The young woman offered with a shy smile but quickly resumed her train of thoughts.

"My mother also saw to it that I got to know my Spanish heritage. She contacted my father's parents and it turned out that they did not know about his marriage or his daughter. We came as quite a surprise but they welcomed us with open arms."

B'Elanna sought the blue eyes of the other woman and asked, "DevwI' SeQ, why didn't I see things as I see them now earlier? I missed so many opportunities. I rejected half of what I am just for the sake of someone I didn't even know. Why?"

"A few weeks ago you told me about this camping trip with your father's cousin and his children. You were a vulnerable child then; look at it from the perspective of an adult."

Unsurprisingly the young woman once again rose from her seat and began to pace. "It's not logical to mourn spilt water."

"Humans and Klingons are not very logical races, B'El, and they are allowed to get angry about things, even when they are in the past and can't be changed. The question is what to do with this anger."

"I turned it inwards, against myself - and because I was not at peace with myself I reacted with anger and aggression towards everyone else. I'm such a stupid moron."

"Don't be too hard on yourself, B'El. When I was a kid, going to a traditionalist school when your father is a high ranking Starfleet officer was not always easy and there was a time when I lashed out against anyone and anything. You did the same but for you it was more difficult because a lot of Federation citizens, even non-Humans are afraid of Klingons. You know better now, not only in your head but also in your heart. So, do you still think that you betrayed your mother?"

"No, K'Ryn. I regret that I gave her such a hard time and I hope that one day I'll get the chance to make it up to her. But I didn't betray her and I don't think that she felt betrayed. I'd like the chance to tell her that I love her."

The young woman looked up and then added with a mischievous twinkle in the eyes, "Of course only a few weeks ago I would rather have eaten a helping of all fifty-one kinds of gagh before admitting to something like this."

Kathryn laughed, a full belly laugh she only allowed herself when in the company of good friends. B'Elanna joined in and when they once again had calmed down she asked, "Devwl' SeQ, you still have not told me how you managed to join both halves in your heart."

"The same way you just did, B'El. Rel'Issa joH got me to talk and in turn told me a bit about herself, about the time when she was an apprentice at the monastery and no one wanted to have anything to do with her because she was a woman.

"It's late, B'Elanna, you need to rest. The Doctor will not be pleased with either of us if he learns that I kept you up half of the night."

Now that Kathryn had said it, the young engineer really felt her exhaustion and quickly retired to her own quarters. She fell asleep as soon as her head had hit the pillow and woke to a red alert shortly after lunch the next day. She jumped into a fresh uniform and by the time she had reached engineering it turned out to be a false alarm.

-X-X-X-

Apart from the bio-neural gel packs succumbing to an infection one after the other and endangering Tuvok and one of his Maquis' trainees, the next couple of weeks were rather quiet. So, everyone jumped at the chance of an adventure when they found this old, rusty Earth vehicle drifting in front of them. They found and revived the '37s and after the initial misunderstandings had been cleared up, got to know an entire civilisation of Humans.

B'Elanna had a great time with their engineers and some of their more daring theories about cold fusion. They were wrong but had given her an idea that could give them a considerable amount of energy to power the better part of the secondary systems. It probably would take her a couple of weeks to build a functional model but she was sure that it would work.

She was so focused on her project that she even missed the ship-wide announcement of the colonists' offer. So, she was rather surprised when a subdued Harry Kim found her in one of the engineering labs.

"Hey, Starfleet, what's up?"

"Didn't you hear? If only one third of the crew decide to stay the rest of us will be stranded here and we'll never get home."

"Calm down, Harry. I don't have the faintest idea what you are talking about."

With some prompting she found out about the colonists' offer to Voyager's crew to become part of their society, and she conceded that he might have a point.

"... but I don't think that your fears are really warranted, Harry. I doubt that more than five or ten will want to stay. There are not this many people on board who don't have a reason to want to go home - and some of them will stay on for the adventure," she tried to calm him.

"How can you say that? Even Tom is speaking of staying and he's as adventurous as they come."

Over the months Harry had become not only a friend but also a younger brother. She felt very protective of him, and now she saw something close to desperation in his eyes.

"Tom? No, Harry. He probably would be earth-bound for the rest of his life. He's a pilot to the core and Voyager gives him all the challenges he needs."

Harry's brown eyes lit up in hope, "Are you sure?"

"Positive, Starfleet. Tell me, there didn't happen to be a pretty colonist woman close by when he said that?"

"Yes, there was. You think he only wanted to impress her?"

"It might improve his chances to get lucky with someone else than the Delaney sisters. And now, you can help..."

-x-x-x-

A few hours later when both of their stomachs began to complain they decided to get something to eat. The big room was surprisingly empty. Neelix insisted on serving them himself and even the cheery Talaxian expressed his concern that too many of the crew would be tempted by the colonists' offer of a peaceful and stable life.

"I doubt that even one of the Starfleet officers will stay, Neelix. After all, what we do here, in the Delta Quadrant, is what the 'fleet was meant to do from the beginning, explore the unknown. No officers worth their commission would give up such a chance this easily; and the former Maquis are not this different.

"Most of us fought the Cardassians because it was the right thing to do, and staying here would not serve the greater good, getting all of us home will.

"There's another point," she continued when she saw their hopeful expressions. "Since Seska's betrayal we all have started to become one crew regardless of the type of insignia we wear, and a crew stands together."

"Since when have you become so eloquent, B'Elanna?" Harry asked.

"Since my friends needed some verbal comforting, Harry. I know I can't keep you from worrying, but try to believe me, everything will be alright."

In her effort to reassure the two men she had missed the entrance of their chief of Security. He headed straight for their table. "Lieutenant Torres, may I have a word?"

The young woman nodded. "There's a problem with holodeck I. The safeties are stuck at the lowest level with program Sub-zero-one running. Captain Janeway could use your assistance in fixing it."

B'Elanna at first stared at Tuvok, but before he had to get even more explicit, she finally understood, "I'll get my tools, Lieutenant Commander. Thank you for telling me about the problem."

She nodded towards the other two men and hurried to her quarters to change. Sub-zero-one was a MoQ'bara competition that had given her a few nasty bruises even with full safeties.

-x-x-x-

Surprisingly the entrance to the holodeck was not sealed and she stepped in just in time to have a big Klingon land head first at her feet.

"Would you care for a real sparring partner, DevwI' SeQ?"

Kathryn's outfit was already sweat soaked and her eyes were glittering with the beginnings of battle haze. B'Elanna didn't wait for an answer; she jumped into the ring and took her position. She knew she was in for a wild ride. She was far from being the captain's equal in hand-to-hand combat but she had a slight margin in strength that just might give her what she needed to hold her own until the woman had exhausted herself.

They circled each other, traded blows and kicks in a potentially deadly dance. B'Elanna felt something stir inside of her, an energy she never before had felt, an energy awakened by the scent of Kathryn's sweat. Had someone observed them, they would only have seen two women fighting each other but B'Elanna sensed the change.

The sparring match was slowly becoming something else, and even though B'Elanna had never lied to herself about her romantic feelings for the other woman, she was still surprised at the intensity with which she wanted this. Before, whenever their sparring had begun to get out of hand that way, it had been Kathryn who had held her back before her instincts got the better of her. Now, it would be up to her.

A blow to the head made her stumble backwards but she was able to turn it into a roll and tried to sweep Janeway off her feet by attacking her knees. Kathryn went with the flow and suddenly B'Elanna found herself pinned under the other woman's weight. With her hormones in overdrive she was more than reluctant to do anything about it. Her senses were filled with Kathryn's presence and with her last bit of will power she said, "I surrender, Captain Janeway."

Four simple words that brought the older woman up short. Her eyes cleared, she took in their position on the floor, the mixed scents of their sweat and arousal and jumped to her feet. She fled the holodeck.

B'Elanna stayed where she was; her blood was thundering in her ears. Only about ten minutes later did she regain some semblance of control. She knew that she had to tell Tuvok that his plan had backfired, that Captain Kathryn Janeway of the Federation Starship Voyager and her chief engineer, a Starfleet Academy dropout, had only been moments away from exchanging the ritual bite.

"Commander Tuvok, the holodeck has been repaired, sort of..."

"You can speak freely, Lieutenant. I'm in my quarters."

"I sparred with Captain Janeway and took her mind off the colonists' offer but instead..." she suddenly was at a loss for words.

*How can I tell a Vulcan what I almost did with his friend and commanding officer? On the other hand who else but a Vulcan could really understand the force of such emotions, and what it meant to try to control them?*

"Instead our sparring match almost turned into a mating ritual. Please, keep an eye on the captain."

"I will, Lieutenant. Thank you for letting me know. Are you alright?"

"More or less, I will be after I have burned off some energy and taken a very long, very cold shower."

-X-X-X-X-X-

## **Chapter Ten**

Kathryn heard someone approaching from behind. She picked up the scent of old leather and instantly knew who it was. She debated the wisdom of allowing the woman to come closer but her headless run from the ship had burned off most of her unchecked sexual energy. She still wore her MoQ'bara outfit, and so was not surprised when Amelia Earheart commented on it.

"So, Eastern fighting techniques have not been forgotten. In my time they only were practised by a select few in the West."

"Martial arts are an integral part of Starfleet training. We have found that every new culture, every planet has at least one version of this kind of hand-to-hand combat. My clothing indicates that I was engaged in the Klingon version when I decided to go for a walk."

The other woman didn't comment of the fact that she had seen Kathryn's flight from her ship and followed her to find out what was wrong. Out of uniform the auburn haired woman seemed to be so much younger, younger and more feminine, more beautiful. Over the last couple of days the two women had formed a fast friendship, easily bridging the more than four hundred years that separated them. They had spent hours talking about everything and nothing, and had surprisingly quickly learned to pick up on the other woman's mood.

Amelia had always followed her instincts; so, instead of speaking she bent forward and kissed Kathryn - and for a short heartbeat the kiss was returned but then the other woman scrambled backwards.

"Please, don't!" Kathryn whispered. "I can't."

The pilot recognised denial when she saw it but she was a bit disappointed that the highly advanced Federation had not done away with the archaic prejudices against same-gender relationships that were the norm in her own time - and she said as much.

That at least brought genuine laughter from Janeway, "No, Amelia, that's not the problem. There are a few planets in the Federation that have no discernible gender differences and others where heterosexual pairings are frowned upon."

"So, it's not just a woman you want, it's a specific woman. Is it the young one with the ears of an elf or the dark-haired one with the deformed forehead?"

"It's not deformed. She is just half-Klingon." Kathryn winced at the sudden defensiveness in her voice.

"Ah, yes, the dark-haired one. She must be really stupid to reject someone as bright and beautiful as you are."

This time she did not rise to the bait, but only with visible effort. She explained, "B'Elanna Torres is my chief of Engineering. She is a lieutenant under my command."

"So, a Starfleet Captain is not entitled to feel happiness and love?" Amelia's voice was full of startled incredulity.

"I have to stand above those weaknesses to give my crew the strength to grow together and make it home."

"There's nothing stronger than love, Kathryn. And in my time, when ships were still bound to the water, there was a saying: 'As goes the captain, so goes the ship'. Think about it - and return to your ship before you catch a cold in your sweaty clothes."

"It's a warm night; I'm not in any danger, Amelia; and my clothes are made of a material that keeps me dry and comfortable on the inside, regardless of how it may look on the outside. If you don't mind I'd rather talk to you. I'd like to hear more about your life, your adventures."

"You are an extremely stubborn woman, Kathryn, but before you once again start with your childhood hero speech, I'll indulge you for a while."

A couple of hours later, the pilot suddenly changed topic. "Now it's your turn, my friend. Tell me about this chief of Engineering of yours."

"I don't think that's such a good idea, Amelia."

"I think it's a great idea. You and your crew will leave tomorrow. That makes me just about the only person on this planet with whom you can actually let your guard down without compromising the chain of command. Your secret will be safe with me and it might help you to gain some perspective."

Kathryn's instincts told her that the other woman had a point. She might never be able to live her feelings for B'Elanna but for this one night she could share them with someone else, someone

she was sure could understand her and would not judge.

-x-x-x-

Kathryn returned to the ship shortly after sunrise. She felt almost relaxed though she still feared what she would find in the cargo bay where everyone who intended to stay with the colonists had been told to gather. She dreaded even more having to face B'Elanna after what she had almost done the day before, especially after running off.

So, her first reaction when she found her student's request to meet with her was to simply ignore it; but she was too much of a warrior to take the coward's way out. She agreed to a meeting at noon in her quarters.

After the door had closed behind B'Elanna she immediately fell on her right knee. "DevwI' SeQ, please forgive me!"

"Stand up, B'Elanna. You did nothing wrong. It is I who should ask for your forgiveness. I lost control, not you."

B'Elanna stayed in position but raised her head far enough to make eye contact with her teacher. "Please, hear me out, DevwI' SeQ."

"Speak."

"Yesterday, when I interrupted your program, I acted dishonourably. I saw the beginning of battle lust in your eyes even before I climbed in the ring. I deliberately risked our match getting out of hand. I enjoyed your reaction to my touch and my scent because they mirrored my own feelings. I was without honour when I allowed things to escalate to the point I did.

"For a few moments I forgot that you are my teacher and spiritual guide. I forgot that you are the captain and that we live by Starfleet rules. For a few moments I only saw the woman I love with all my hearts. Please, punish me for forgetting my place."

Kathryn was speechless and despite her former resolve to keep her own feelings out of this she acted on instinct. She knelt in front of B'Elanna, knowing that her gift of honesty could only be answered in kind. They had danced around each other for the last few months and Kathryn knew how much courage it had needed to say what B'Elanna had just said.

"There is no need for punishment, B'Elanna. For a few moments I also forgot that I am your teacher and your captain. For a few moments I also only saw the woman I love. I am in your debt for remembering before I did and for keeping us from making a mistake. You did your ancestors proud last night, B'El."

The brown orbs right in front of Kathryn widened in shocked surprise. "Do you really mean what



you just said, K'Ryn?"

"Yes, I do," the answer was barely above a whisper. "Since we started with the lajQo' quvHa'ghachtay I have fallen in love with you, but I knew that I never would be able to live this love. I never intended to tell you but now that you know I'm feeling better."

"Now that I know that it's not one-sided I can live with fact that we will never be able to live this love, K'Ryn. Only a few months ago I would have been content with one night of passion but you have changed me. I feel so much more now. What you just told me gives me strength. Please tell me that I don't have to stop being your student and hopefully your friend. I don't want to lose having you in my life." B'Elanna knew that she was begging but she didn't care.

"No, B'El, you will not lose me. I want you in my life. I can't have you as my lover but I want you as my friend, and for as long as you'll need me as your mentor and guide." Kathryn's lips for a fleeting moment touched the other woman's brow ridges before she rose to her feet. "Stand up, B'Elanna, you're needed in Engineering to prepare for our departure. We will meet for our normal lesson tomorrow after Alpha Shift."

"Yes, DevwI' SeQ. I'm looking forward to it."

-x-x-x-

Minutes later, Kathryn had a definite spring in her steps when she walked with Chakotay at her side to the cargo bay. When the doors opened to an empty room she seemed to literally radiate happiness.

Sensing his Captain's good mood Chakotay tried to invite her to private dinner in his quarters; probably part of his on-going campaign to get back on her good side. The command mask quickly returned and she refused.

The next day there were a few awkward moment during Kathryn's and B'Elanna's lesson but the women quickly got over it and each, unknown to the other, drew an inner calm and quiet security from the knowledge of their mutual feelings.

-x-x-x-

About six weeks after leaving the planet of the '37s Tuvok, Neelix, Tom, Ensign Nicoletti, Harry, Kes, Chakotay, Lieutenant Carey, and three former Maquis received a summons to come to the conference room at precisely 1800 hours that day. The message also said that it had nothing to do with ship's business.

When they all had taken their seats Kathryn and B'Elanna entered. Harry and most of the others

jumped at attention when they saw Captain Janeway though she was not in uniform. The auburn haired woman wore hip-hugging black slacks and an off-white turtleneck; her long hair in a braid completed the casual look.

"At ease, people, sit down. This is B'Elanna's show," she said while leaning against one of the walls.

The engineer in question was visibly nervous. "Thank you all for coming. I asked you, well, Captain Janeway asked you in my name to come here because everyone of you over the years or in the course of the last few months has become a friend to me."

B'Elanna swallowed and looked at the expectant faces of her audience. Carey and one of the Maquis looked surprised at being called a friend while Harry Kim beamed with quiet pride.

"You all have at one point or the other been at the wrong end of my temper and over the last couple of months, since we left Sikari to be exact, Captain Janeway has helped me to accept my Klingon heritage and taught me how to control myself better. She became my teacher and spiritual guide and has recently informed me that the ritual we followed has taught me all it can.

"On the Klingon home world it once ended with the re-initiation of the acolyte in the world of the warriors. I want all of you to be a part of this initiation ceremony. Before you decide you have to know more about it because it contains elements that do not conform to Federation sensibilities or Starfleet protocol. Captain, would you please elaborate?"

Janeway and B'Elanna changed places. "Tomorrow, after her duty shift, B'Elanna will begin with her preparations which consist of fasting and sweating and last three days. During this purification period one of us, should you consent to participate, will be with her all the time to keep her from falling asleep, basically.

"When the three days are over B'Elanna will reclaim her place as a Klingon warrior. She will prove that she is worthy by fighting an opponent, walking through the corridor of pain, and receiving the mark of Kahless."

"Corridor of pain doesn't sound like fun," Tom piped in.

"It isn't, Tom, because it involves these." B'Elanna moved from her place at the wall and put a pipe like object on the conference table. She returned to the wall and added, "If you think that you can't use one of these on me, please don't participate."

"In case you don't know," Kathryn retook the stage, "this is called an 'oy'naQ, a Klingon painstick. The corridor of pain is formed by trusted friends or family members. Each is armed with an 'oy'naQ and will touch the skin of the initiate at least twice, once on the upper, once on the lower part of the body. The pain varies depending on the body parts hit and the goal is to get through the corridor without passing out. The painsticks don't leave any marks but in every other aspect it's similar to what on Earth in the past was called a gauntlet."

"It is similar to the Rite of Ascension," Tuvok said softly.

"I knew you would remember this, Tuvok, and in a way you are right. The nentay cha'DIch, the Rite of Ascension you witnessed with me on Qo'nos, when adolescents are accepted in the society as adults," Kathryn added for the benefit of the others, "is based on what we're about to do."

"Aside from this pain thing and sitting with the Chief what would be expected of us?" Lieutenant Carey asked.

"On the Klingon home world it would be expected that the participants of the ceremony share B'Elanna's fast or at least limit themselves to vegetarian non-replicated food and water. You are not Klingon, so we don't expect you to follow this particular custom. You also would be expected to participate in the party scheduled for after the ceremony."

"The baby shower!" Neelix burst out.

"Yes, the baby shower. I asked Ensign Wildman if she would mind if it became multi-purpose and she said she would be happy to share. She said this way at least the spotlight would not always be on her. - If there aren't any more questions at the moment, we'll leave you to make your decision. We'll be in my Ready Room."

The captain turned to leave, but B'Elanna addressed the others again, "I don't want any of you to feel pressured into doing something you are not ready for. I won't feel any different for you if you decide not to participate. We just have to know in time to arrange things accordingly."

-x-x-x-

As soon as the door had closed behind the two women, Harry said, "We should have asked about the mark of Kahless."

"It's a branding in the form of a bat'leth," Tuvok answered.

"A branding? But that's self-mutilation," Harry burst out.

"It is the Klingon way, Ensign Kim," the Vulcan calmly answered. "It is meant to remind the warriors of Klingon values and virtues until they die."

"Honesty, courage, and honour," Chakotay said almost tonelessly. He could have kicked himself for his own stupidity. With using the lajQo' quvHa'ghachtay for his own ends he had done much more than just dishonour his friend - and still B'Elanna had forgiven him and even honoured him by wanting him to take part in this ceremony.

"If it is supposed to last 'til their deaths, it can't be a simple branding. Over the years or decades

the scar would fade and finally disappear," one of the Maquis women, a security officer with the name of Ron Rael said.

"I apologise, I should have been more specific. As soon as the branding iron is removed the wound will be filled with an especially designed ink. It's a branding and a tattoo in one. Lieutenant Torres might need a couple of hours rest after the ceremony but Captain Janeway would never consent to anything that could really harm her."

"Will Captain Janeway conduct the ceremony?" B'Elanna's second-in-command, Lieutenant Carey wanted to know.

"No, I don't think so. As Lieutenant Torres' teacher it might not be appropriate but I'm sure we will be told more as soon as we have all made our decision."

For a few moments everyone seemed to be lost in their own thoughts, so, Harry's voice seemed rather loud to the others. "I want to try it, this painstick thing. Before I consent to hurt my friend I want to know how it feels first hand."

"Are you insane, Harry?" Tom asked.

"No, I'm dead serious."

Tuvok had left his seat and activated the painstick, "Please keep in mind, Mister Kim, that Klingons and even half-Klingons have a much higher pain threshold than Humans."

The Vulcan pressed the business end of the stick against Harry's arm and the young man collapsed back in his chair with a strangled cry. Kes immediately was at his side with a medical tricorder.

"You'll be alright. There is no physical damage. It was just a reaction of your nerve endings," she reassuringly told him and herself. "It's similar to the shock a detainment anklet can deliver, no permanent harm. The worst it can do is cause a person to faint."

Harry blinked a few times and then said, "I'm in. Do any of you need more time to think or can we call them back?"

When the two women came back everyone consented to participate, even the gentle Kes, everyone but for an unassuming young woman.

"I'm sorry, Lana, but you know that I never could deliberately hurt anyone, not even if they ask me to. I'm sorry, I didn't live up to you expectations."

"You didn't disappoint my, Yllas. I'm proud that you stand by your convictions and I expected nothing less from you. I would be honoured if you would instead accept to act as my *jup 'waDIch*. It literally means 'first friend' and is used for the attendant to the initiate. You would be at my side the whole time and hold the *bat'leth* while I pass through the corridor of pain. You

also would help with the preparations and the after care."

The pale green eyes of the young Bajoran glinted in surprise. "Yes, Lana, I'd like to serve as your 'first friend.'"

"Captain, will you conduct the ceremony?" Carey repeated his earlier question.

"No Mister Carey. To be valid it has to be conducted by a priest. I decided to use the hologram of Rel'Issa of the House of Kahless, the only Priestess ordained in the last five centuries. I will have my own role to play." The tone of her voice made it clear that she would not elaborate any further.

"Captain," Kes asked nonetheless out of genuine curiosity, "why do you know so much about Klingons and their culture?"

Kathryn was surprised that the question had not come up earlier. "I could tell you that all the pertinent information can be found in the cultural database but that would not be entirely true. When I was still a green lieutenant I lived on the Klingon home world for a few months. I lived close to the monastery of Boreth; so, I not only learned a lot about Klingon culture but also about Klingon spirituality." Then she changed the topic.

"Thank you all for your willingness to stand with B'Elanna. Enjoy the rest of the evening. B'Elanna, why don't you go with your friends and eat something? Crewman Zito Yllas would you please stay and help me to work out a schedule for supervising the purification?"

On the way out of the conference room Tom's highly amused, "Baby-sitting Belanna, that's kind of cool," earned him an elbow in the ribs from his best friend.

-x-x-x-

Tuvok and Chakotay excused themselves as the others went to the Mess Hall. Surprisingly there were only a few more questions about the upcoming event and the rest of the evening was spent getting to know each other better. Members from Alpha, Beta, and Gamma shift usually did not have much opportunity to socialise.

After one glass too many of spiced-up synthehol the helm's man asked, "Hey, Belanna, how come that little bit of a Maquis is using this nifty nickname? The Doctor told me about her; seems she has the training but not the stomach to become his assistant."

Before the young Hybrid had the chance to react Ensign Ron was right in his face; she didn't touch him but the expression on her face sobered him up considerably.

"She has earned the right to do everything she damn well pleases, Lieutenant Paris. She saved all of our lives and you will not find one single former member of the Maquis who would not do

anything to protect her - and that includes that cowardly snakehead Seska. So, you better watch your tongue, Mister Pilot."

"I'm sorry, I meant nothing by it."

"Apology accepted," a soft voice said from behind. "The captain asked me to stop by and remind you that Gamma shift is about to start and that you all have a full duty shift in the morning."

"I'm really sorry, Crewman Zito. That was the synthehol speaking, not me."

"I know, Lieutenant Paris. Just try to keep in mind that in the long run you can't hide from your feelings and your desires."

Before he could reply, she left the Mess Hall.

"What the hell was that all about?" Tom finally asked.

"Forget about it until your head has cleared, Tom. Zito Yllas has the gift to see behind the surface of things. What she says can sometimes be disconcerting but also very enlightening," B'Elanna answered. "And now I think we should heed the captain's advice."

-x-x-x-x-x-

## **Chapter Eleven**

Captain Janeway took the first shift keeping B'Elanna company during the purification ritual.

"Tell me about your jup 'waDIch, B'El. I somehow got the impression that she is more than just a fellow Maquis."

"You are right; she is more than just a colleague. She's wIj jup [my very dear friend]. I asked for her permission earlier, so now I'm free to tell her story to you, K'Ryn."

B'Elanna's choice of address made it clear that the younger woman wanted to keep Captain Janeway from doing anything rash when she had heard the story.

"Zito Yllas was our medic but before she joined the Maquis she was a Vedek apprentice on Bajor, the protégé of Kai Opaka herself. Vedek Winn, now Kai Winn had her dismissed, to put it mildly, for a minor infraction after Kai Opaka disappeared in the Gamma Quadrant. She could have stayed on Bajor, but she decided to work for one of the orphanages in the DMZ.

"On the way her transport was attacked by a Cardassian cruiser hunting for Maquis. When they started to hurt civilians Ron and I gave ourselves up. They began torturing us in front of the others, in front of children - Yllas stopped them. She looked into their hearts and made them

believe that the rebels had been killed. They left but the deception took a lot out of her; she was almost catatonic for more than four days.

"After the incident the captain of the transporter was too afraid to keep her on board, and so we took her with us. She started to work as our medic, and her ability to look into a person's mind helped her to treat us more effectively. Her abilities developed steadily but there also was a side effect. She had no way to shield herself against our emotions.

"Our feelings hurt her, our fears, insecurities, pains, our hate and need for revenge. It hurts her as we would be hurt from a physical blow. Every time she treated one of us, she felt our pain and more. Starfleet would probably call her an empathy, but she is much more than that. We sometimes needed her special ability to influence others; one time she convinced the whole crew of a Cardassian battle cruiser that the ship they had on their sensors was nothing more but sensor shadows. But afterwards she was blind for almost three weeks.

"Yllas once told me that prayer had always helped her to keep the outside world at bay but with close to one hundred and fifty minds on a ship this small it's hard for her. That's why she chose the Gamma shift and why she does not want to work in Sickbay."

"In the Federation she would have been trained as a Councillor and specialists from Beta-Zed would have taught her how to protect herself against the onslaught of emotions and thoughts.

"You don't have to worry, B'El. I won't do anything to make it more difficult for her."

For the rest of the captain's shift they didn't talk but concentrated on some light MoQ'bara exercises.

-x-x-x-

B'Elanna's next visitor was Harry Kim. He was still beaming with pride that he had been asked to participate and in the knowledge that he had been the only one to know at least half of the truth about her and the captain.

Lieutenant Paris spent the time telling her about the great refinements he intended to make at the Sandrine program and she tried to talk him into creating something new instead, perhaps a joint project with Harry.

Chakotay was almost subdued when he entered the holodeck. He once again tried to apologise for what he had done to her and get her to take her retribution but she just brushed him off and told him that her current journey had nothing to do with him or with what she had allowed him to do to her. She told him that in a way his actions had made it all possible and that for that she even was thankful.

-x-x-x-

Ensign Ron was next and greeted her with a slight nod, "B'Elanna."

"Ron Rael. How did you learn to pronounce my name correctly?"

"Young Harry Kim insisted. He said that after you honoured us with the invitation we should at least be courteous enough to use your proper name. He's still a tad on the naïve side but I think he can be a good friend, not like Paris, this jerk."

The young Hybrid laughed. "Tom has a lot of rough edges but his heart is in the right place. He just has to grow up a bit and stop running to finally meet his real self."

"That's what Yllas said yesterday. But could it really be that easy?"

"Easy? No! He has not the faintest idea of what she was talking about. He does not know her as well as we do."

"You really think that he doesn't know? It's written all over his face when he thinks no one pays attention."

"It might more be a question of him not wanting to know, my friend. Just like I did not want to know that you were right about Seska from the beginning."

"So, that's why you included me."

Having expected the question the other woman answered calmly, "Yes and no. Yes, I feel bad for not at least having given you the benefit of the doubt with Seska. And no, it had nothing to do with her. We fought together and we bled together; that's all I need to know. To me it does not matter how you called yourself in your former life or what rank you once had in Starfleet. The only thing that matters is that you were always there for us when we needed you."

"How? I never told anyone." The shock in the other woman's voice was evident.

"I only spent a bit more than one and a half years at the Academy and I still can't deny my training."

"I see."

"It might be a good idea to no longer try and hide what and who you are."

"I'll think about it, B'Elanna, but I didn't exactly resign my commission. I just left; that's not something Captain Janeway could overlook."



-x-x-x-

Tuvok didn't even try to talk; he gave her a choice between playing 3D-chess and Kal-toh. She never had tried her luck at the Vulcan game and after having been explained the rules it only took her twenty minutes to lose the first four games. The fifth game lasted just over ten minutes, and at the end of Tuvok's double shift she held the game for almost thirty-five minutes - considerable progress but still rather unremarkable if one took into account that a match between Vulcan masters could last for days.

B'Elanna was pleasantly surprised when Tuvok declared her an acceptable student before ceding his place to Zito Yllas.

The engineer loved spending time with the former Vedek apprentice, usually. This time, however, she was slightly apprehensive because she didn't want to talk about what the Bajoran had picked up about the captain's and her feelings.

Yllas surprised her by not asking any questions. She simply pulled her in her arms and held her. B'Elanna was reluctant at first but quickly accepted that at the moment she now needed this kind of contact.

Only when her time was almost up did she speak, "Kathryn Janeway loves you as much as you love her, B'Elanna Torres. Enjoy the feeling, it will nurture you both. Love is the strongest thing in the universe; so, it's unimportant if you decide to live it or not. True love is selfless, Lana."

B'Elanna hoped that her friend was right but the better part of her knew that it would not be that easy - on the other hand Yllas had never said anything about it being easy.

-x-x-x-

Lieutenant Carey passed the time by talking about their shared passion, Voyager's engines and warp drive. They even came up with some ideas on how to increase the stability of the deflector array and how to improve the efficiency of their dilithium refinery.

By the end of his shift almost half of her time was up and though she was a bit tired all in all she felt surprisingly good, especially after the shower she had been allowed to take.

Neelix was her next visitor and after about an hour he suddenly fell silent and profusely apologised for talking about food while she was not allowed to eat.

"It's alright, Neelix. I can afford to go a few days without food though I admit that what you described sounds really good. Your progress is astonishing."

"It's all your doing, my friend," he answered with a slight blush.

"You were a good student, Neelix - and besides, I never would have thought that cooking and taste testing could be so much fun. And now tell me about the baby shower. Will all the presents for Samantha and the little one be ready in time?"

"Oh yes, all the small things have already been wrapped, and Ensign Johnson promised that the crib will be finished just in time. He said it only needs another layer of varnish."

Ensign Conrad Johnson was a mineralogist by trade and had a real gift when working with wood. When he had come up with the idea of building a real crib for Voyager's only child the crew had readily pooled their resources for the material and had taken over his duty shifts to give him enough time to do the work. The biggest problem had been to keep it a secret because he worked in the same department as the mother-to-be.

"And Samantha still does not know?"

"We had a close call yesterday..." The Talaxian was still talking when Susan Nicoletti came for her shift on the holodeck.

-x-x-x-

The young ensign at first had been sceptical of including the Maquis in the normal ship's operations but they did their jobs with the same dedicated efficiency a Starfleet officer would. Working with B'Elanna in Engineering she had quickly learned to admire the other woman's skills and had been among the first to fully accept her as the new chief.

They had recently discovered a shared passion for Parises Square and played regularly. So, that's what they were talking about at first but the young ensign seemed preoccupied.

"What's wrong, Susan?"

"Nothing, B-Lana. Sorry. I just can't get this right."

"Just call me Lana. The glottal stop is difficult for Human tongues."

"Thank you. - Lana, why are you doing this? The longer I think about it the less I understand it."

"I have a lot to make up for, Susan, and this is the best way." Knowing that this sentence didn't really explain anything she added, "Ever since I was a child I didn't want to be a Klingon. I didn't want to be different and I did a lot of stupid things to make myself and others believe that I'm fully Human. The kids in school and most of the teachers didn't let me forget. Some made fun of me, some were afraid, some were envious.

"Over the years I came to associate everything that went wrong in my life with my Klingon half.

I didn't want to see that the Human part more often than not was just as responsible. Captain Janeway has helped me to understand that. She helped me to see that I can have both, the best of my Klingon and my Human heritage but I can't just claim my Klingon heritage without doing it right, the Klingon way."

"So, basically you're paying a debt."

"One could call it that, Susan."

"Thanks for explaining it to me and being so open and honest. I know you're normally a very private person."

"It's easier to be open when you no longer have to hide part of yourself. Don't get me wrong, I'll probably always be a mean tempered bitch when things go wrong but I no longer have to show it at every turn."

That got a heartfelt laugh from the other woman and they turned the conversation to less serious topics.

-x-x-x-

B'Elanna began to feel the lack of sleep but Kes entertained her with the newest gossip that unsurprisingly was centred around the mysterious happenings in Holodeck II where all the command staff and various others seemed to be drawn like moths to the flame.

The young Ocampa's friendly and open demeanour made it easy for her to hear all kind of things but unlike most gossip mongers with whom B'Elanna ever had to deal, what Kes chose to tell never belittled or ridiculed the persons mentioned.

-x-x-x-

B'Elanna's face lit up when the last of her Maquis' friends entered the sweat caves. He was a young man of Indian descent and counted among the crewmembers who could be easily overlooked. He was working Gamma shift but after being named chief engineer B'Elanna had made sure that he also would head the shift by convincing Chakotay to list him as an ensign. His name was Ravi Khadifar and despite his exotic looks and dark skin he had no real fondness for heat, preferring the moderate climate of the Nordic regions in which he had grown up.

"Bella, darling, I hope you appreciate the sacrifice I'm making here. I don't even take warm showers, and now here I am."

"Ravi-baby, you really are one of a kind. And you can be sure that I'm full of awe at the almost

superhuman effort you're making on my behalf."

They continued to banter for some time with B'Elanna telling him about the things she just had heard from Kes. He was easy going and good to laugh with but only with the few people with whom he felt comfortable, the few people he trusted.

In the Maquis one quickly learned not to ask about a person's past; it tended to only open old wounds. So, B'Elanna was more than surprised when her friend began to tell her about his past beyond his childhood on Earth. He told her of his father's death when he was fourteen, his mother remarrying soon after and their move to one of the rural colonies near the Cardassian border.

He told her how his stepfather had turned out to be extremely homophobic and had made him suffer for not being 'manly' enough. Then his mother died from a fever because the only doctor of the colony had been too far away at the time, and verbal abuse quickly turned into physical.

"My mother would not have fallen in love with him if he had not been a good man at heart. To me he was anything but. I was seventeen when she died and nineteen when I fought back for the first time. I expected that he would throw me out but he seemed impressed that I finally had started to stand up for myself. Our fights became a fixture in my life.

"I knew it would be better if I just left and started over somewhere else but in a way he was all I had left and the only reminder of my mother. One day he came home drunk and what started like one of our usual arguments quickly went south. He pinned me face down over the kitchen table and tried to rape me. I got free just in time and knocked him unconscious. I finally left and joined the Maquis."

"Thank you, Ravi, thank you for honouring me with the knowledge about your past."

"I know it's nothing special but since you found the courage to confront your demons I though you deserved to hear the truth about mine," he answered with a shy smile.

"Ravi, please look at me." His dark brown orbs reluctantly found her lighter ones. "You are wrong; it's special, you are special. During everything your stepfather did you never tried to hide who you really are; you never tried to become someone else. That's incredibly brave, Ravi. I'm proud to count you among my friends."

They embraced and returned to less serious subjects such as the dating pool on Voyager.

-x-x-x-

Tuvok had volunteered for the graveyard shift and they spent the time with her once again losing at Kal'toh.

B'Elanna expected Ron Rael or Yllas next but the woman who came around the corner was a real surprise.

"Samantha, you shouldn't be here. It's not good for the baby."

"The Doctor said it would be alright if I don't stay longer than two hours. When Captain Janeway told me about the baby shower, she also told me about this ceremony of yours. She said that you would have invited me too if not for the pregnancy. Is it true?"

"Yes, it's true. It's ironic, in a way, because without your pregnancy you probably would not have ended up in the mess hall in the middle of the night with food cravings and found out about our little taste testing lessons - and then we would not have had the chance to get to know each other better. What will happen at the ceremony could be hard to stomach, Samantha. I didn't want to risk anything."

"I can understand that, though I really wish you all were a bit less protective. I'm pregnant, not ill. And I'm not the average Federation citizen, I'm a Starfleet brat. My parents were anthropologists and took me on a lot of surveys. I'm not easily shocked."

"In this case, Ensign Samantha Wildman, would you do me the honour of participating in the initiation ceremony?"

"Yes, Lieutenant B'Elanna Torres, I will."

They both bowed formally and then started to giggle like school girls.

After exactly two hours B'Elanna shooed her out and made her promise to get some rest before the evening's festivities.

Her next visitor was also a surprise. The Doctor came into view with the medical tricorder held in front of him like a shield. At first she thought that he only wanted to make sure that she would be alright; but every one of his scans seemed to take longer than the one before, It took a bit of prodding to find out that Tom Paris had sent him in on a dare, proclaiming that B'Elanna would throw him out after less than twenty minutes.

B'Elanna never would have considered herself someone to respect the feelings of a hologram, but she felt with the CMO - and it was more than just pity. So, she followed her instincts and asked him to participate in the ritual. In the end asking him had been easy; convincing him that she meant what she had said was much harder.

-x-x-x-

Harry chatted about Bridge operations and an ultimately boring nebula they had scanned but most of what he said was lost on her because she was beginning to get nervous.

Ensign Ron insisted on swapping Maquis' war stories and the young woman began to suspect that they had been instructed to keep her mind off the things to come.

For the last shift Kathryn and Yllas entered the holodeck together, both carrying heavy bags. Her DevwI' SeQ led her through her MoQ'bara routine while Yllas busied herself in another part of the caves.

When she stepped out of the shower the holodeck scenery had changed. They still were at the caves of the monastery but the temperature was considerably lower. She shivered slightly in her sports bra and form fitting shorts but quickly recovered when Yllas helped her into her battle dress. The young Bajoran gave her her bat'leth and told her to get warmed up and used to the armour. B'Elanna asked about the captain and was told that she was preparing in another room.

-x-x-x-

Finally the others entered the small ante-room where she had been waiting. Most commented on her attire and she was honest enough with herself to admit that without their presence she would have had a full blown panic attack by now.

The big double doors at the other side of the room finally were opened and Yllas led them inside. They were standing at one end of a well-lit, very big cavern, only half as big as the Great Hall of Honour at Qo'nos, but somehow more feral and intimidating.

The doors behind them closed and B'Elanna took her place in a red circle painted on the floor. Yllas stood half a pace behind her at her left side. The others were closer to the doors and found themselves quickly cut off from the two women by an invisible force field.

Captain Janeway came in from a side entrance. She was unarmed and instead of armour she wore an off-white tunic over black slacks, just as she would if they really were at the monastery and she in search of spiritual guidance, with the notable difference that she also wore a Ha'quj, a chain mail like sash with a family crest attached.

A woman in the robes of a priest but with an intricately carved ceremonial chest armour appeared at the other end of the room on a dais. To her right was a steaming brazier on a tripod and to her left stood a rather intimidating Klingon warrior.

Kathryn took a few steps forward and lowered herself on her right knee.

"Hear me, Rel'Issa of the House of Kahless!"

"Rise and state your identity and request."

Kathryn obeyed and her voice seemed to gain volume, "I am Kathryn Janeway, adoptive

daughter of Rel'Issa of the House of Kahless, Captain of the Federation Starship Voyager. I request that you perform the muvtay HochDIch [ultimate Rite of Ascension] for my student."

"Is your ghojwI' worthy?"

"Yes, she is."

"Is your word to be trusted, Kathryn Janeway?"

"I am a warrior and I wear the mark of Kahless but I intend to prove my words with my blood."

The woman on the dais nodded with a smile but B'Elanna exclaimed, "No, K'Ryn! You can't!"

She would have dashed forward if not for Yllas holding her back. The young Bajoran had been told to expect such a reaction.

"Take me, I'll do it in joHwI' place."

"Your student seems unduly worried about you. You may talk to her before we proceed."

Kathryn nodded and walked over to B'Elanna.

"Please don't, K'Ryn, I don't want to see you hurt."

"B'El, it has to be done. It's an integral part of the ceremony. I know I told you that I would try and find a way around it but there is none. I want this to be as close to a ritual on Qo'nos as possible, B'El, for my sake as well as yours. Please try to understand."

With the last sentence Kathryn's right hand touched B'Elanna's left cheek and for a moment the world outside the blue-grey eyes looking into brown disappeared. Finally, the younger woman nodded slowly.

"May I have the honour of serving as your anchor, DevwI' SeQ?"

Kathryn turned around and looked questioningly at the Priestess, "Yes, she may."

They walked in the middle of the room. B'Elanna turned her back to the dais. She placed her left foot about one and a half feet in front of the other to gain a solid stand and handed her bat'leth to Yllas.

Kathryn slipped out of the sash and the tunic and now presented her bare back to her crew members. The program then generated a Klingon warrior with a single tail whip dangling from his right hand.

Captain Janeway stood with her feet shoulder-wide apart and put her hands on B'Elanna's shoulders. The Priestess ordered "moq![Begin!]" and the first lash landed on Kathryn's back.

-X-X-X-

Until then their shipmates had looked on in astonished silence but now there was an almost collective outcry. Tom and Lieutenant Carey tested the strength of the force field. Harry ordered the computer to end the program but nothing happened. When he tried to access it manually Tuvok stopped him.

"Trust Captain Janeway. She knows what she's doing. Without this part the ceremony would not be regarded as valid on the Klingon home world. It is the Klingon way. We accepted that when we decided to participate."

"But Tuvok, she's the Captain... It's..."

"It's a great gift, Ensign Kim, an honour." Ron Rael said.

"I don't understand."

"I know; just take my word for it for now. I'll explain later."

Surprisingly the security officer's words seemed not only to calm Harry but also the rest of the crew.

They refocused their attention on the captain just in time to see the Klingon swap sides. Diagonal marks were crossing the woman's back, a few of them oozing blood but she had yet to utter a single sound. The first set of marks was systematically overlaid by a second set causing more bleeding but still there was no sound.

Kes had sought the comfort of Neelix' arms and was silently counting the strokes, 'twenty-two, twenty-three, twenty-four'.

It finally stopped and the Klingon with the whip disappeared. A couple of minutes went by without any of the women moving, then Janeway took a deep breath and B'Elanna helped her to stand on her own.

B'Elanna stepped to the side and the Priestess said, "You are worthy, Kathryn Janeway, Rel'Issa pugbe' [daughter of Rel'Issa], take your rightful place at my side."

Kathryn slipped back into the tunic as if nothing had happened and repositioned the sash. Yllas and B'Elanna returned to the red circle.

"State your identity and request, student of Kathryn."



-x-x-x-

B'Elanna went down on her right knee with the bat'leth securely held in her left hand and the sharp edges turned down.

"I am B'Elanna Torres, daughter of Miral of the House of Shig'Rai. I successfully completed the lajQo' quvHa'ghachtay, and request to be re-initiated in the world of warriors."

"Rise! You carry the name of a proud and prestigious House. Your teacher proved her worthiness many years ago and again just now, but you have spent most of your life rejecting our proud heritage. Your request could be nothing more than the whims of a child."

Kathryn had not warned her that the Priestess would try to provoke her, and so she growled at the accusation but quickly brought her temper back under control and answered, "When I was a child I feared the call of my Klingon blood. When I grew up I tried to silence it but my DevwI' SeQ taught me to embrace its call."

"Courageous words, young one, but nothing but words. I need more than that. To prove that you really are worthy you now will fight my champion. This is not a Hay' chu', a duel to the death. This is a quv tob', a duel of skills. It will end as soon as you draw his first blood."

The mountain of a warrior at the Priestess' left jumped from the dais in a surprisingly smooth movement and took position in front of her, "moq!"

He didn't waste any time attacking but she used her slighter build to slip out of his reach. He relied a lot on his strength and height advantage but with B'Elanna's focus on evasive manoeuvres he could not put it to good use.

In the past she would have tried to get the opening she needed as quickly as possible, probably by forcing the issue and risking unnecessary injury to herself. Her DevwI' SeQ had taught her patience. She had taught her, sometimes painfully, to get to know her opponent first.

Sometimes killing as fast as possible was a necessity but fighting with a bat'leth was as much of an art form as it was deadly. And as the Priestess had said, today was not about killing an opponent; it was about showing skill and cunning. So, they each tested the other's defences.

The initially bored expression of the holographic warrior's face had disappeared; and after a few more minutes of gauging their respective opponent they both were smiling.

Finally he said, "That's not bad for such a half-breed but we're not here to play. qabIj HI'ang! [I challenge you!]"

B'Elanna's answer was equally as formal as his challenge, "qabwIj vISo'be! [I accept your challenge!]"

The fight now began in earnest; B'Elanna started to block his blows and followed up with immediate counter attacks. For a while it looked as if they were evenly matched, despite the physical inequality. Then the young woman left a small but visible opening but instead of exploiting it, he changed angles and cut through the chain mail protecting her shoulders and arms. The resulting gash was bleeding freely but didn't seem to impede B'Elanna's freedom of movement or the force of her blows.

The Klingon was driven back a few paces by her quick jab-like attacks. He soon found a way to keep her at bay but her movements seemed too fast for him to launch an effective offensive of his own.

She changed tactics and took his feet out from under him. He landed on his back but instead of pressing her advantage she took a step back and let him get back on his feet. The fight resumed.

They traded blows until he left an opening as wide as a barn door. She feigned an attack on the other side; he shifted his balance. She fainted again and before he had a chance to compensate completely she used his initial opening to tear through his armour at the same point her own injury was situated. B'Elanna drew blood.

He roared in surprise and anger but the Priestess' comment brought him up short, "ylmev, yap![Stop! It's enough!]" He turned around and looked at her. "Your duty is done, my champion."

B'Elanna stood at attention. "You have done well Miral pugbe'. You may now prepare yourself to walk the corridor of pain."

-x-x-x-x-x-

## **Chapter Twelve**

B'Elanna bowed and returned to the red circle. She put her weapon in Yllas' hands and began to remove the battle dress, stacking the different parts in a neat pile in the middle of the circle until she was barefoot and wore only the sports bra and shorts.

The force field disappeared and the former Vedek apprentice let the others one after the other to their assigned places marked by more red circles on the floor. They formed two lines between B'Elanna and the dais.

The rules were very specific. They had to touch B'Elanna with the activated painstick either on her legs and hips or her upper body, with the exception of her head; then they had to step back and take their next place at the end of the line and wait to deliver the second shock. On her right were Kes, Ravi, Carey, Ron, Harry, and the Doctor. Samantha, Susan, Neelix, Tom, Chakotay, and Tuvok formed the other line.

B'Elanna held herself admirably during the first half of her ordeal but Kes second touch accidentally hit her at the hollow of her right knee and she stumbled slightly but brought herself back under control before Samantha tentatively touched her left, injured shoulder.

The Doctor touched her just where the sport bra ended, maximising the effect. She sank to her knees with a gasp but was quickly back on her feet. Now she only had to get past Tuvok. His painstick hit the same spot, just at the other side, and she once again went down. Her vision blurred but she held on and slowly climbed back to her feet.

After two more steps Yllas gave her bat'leth back. B'Elanna climbed the five steps to the dais and dropped to her right knee in front of the Priestess. She held the weapon with both hands horizontally in front of her, stretching her arms forward she flipped it around and presented it to the Klingon woman.

Rel'Issa accepted her offering. "You are deemed worthy, B'Elanna Torres, Miral pugbe' Shig'Rai tug. Are you ready to receive your ghItlH [mark]?"

"Yes, Rel'Issa joH, I am ready," B'Elanna turned around and asked, "Devwl' SeQ would you honour me with your assistance?"

"It will be my honour, B'Elanna Miral pugbe'."

B'Elanna took two steps to the side and then got down on both knees. She pulled the strap of her sport bra over her left shoulder practically baring the firm breast. She put her arms behind her back. Kathryn knelt down behind her and took both wrists in a firm grasp.

Priestess Rel'Issa pulled the branding iron out of the brazier. It was red hot and sizzling. The hiss when it hit B'Elanna's sensitive flesh seemed to echo through the whole cavern but to everyone's surprise she did not cry out. The smell of burning flesh filled the room and the eerie silence was finally broken when the ink was poured into the open wound and the young B'Elanna finally cried out.

The ink contained an antibiotic to ward off any danger of infection but it did nothing to ease the pain. The cry finally subsided and the young woman blinked her tears away. Kathryn helped her to get back on her feet and steadied her while she took a few calming breaths.

She then turned back to the Priestess and once again went down on her right knee with the mark of Kahless still oozing blood. She looked up to the older Klingon who said,

"Miral pugbe', wear the mark of Kahless with pride. It is an honour not many are worthy of. Rise and take this bat'leth as a further sign of your renewed status as a warrior."

B'Elanna obeyed instantly and instead of her old weapon received a beautifully carved blade. She raised it over her head and said in a firm voice, "DaHjaj Suvwl' vIghes! [Today I take my place as a warrior!]"

And the Priestess answered, "pInaDqu' tugIj wInaDqu' je [Glory to you and your house]."

B'Elanna bowed first to the Priestess and then to her teacher. Only then did she turn around and addressed the others.

"My friends, you honoured me with your presence and I hope that I will get the chance to thank you all personally later."

Tuvok answered for all of them, "It is we who were honoured to participate. We greet you, B'Elanna Torres, daughter of Miral of the House of Shig'Rai, as a Klingon warrior and look forward to empty many mugs of blood wine in your name."

-x-x-x-

As soon as they all had left, Yllas ordered, "Computer, switch to program Zed-Epsilon-Zero-Zero-One."

The hall-like cavern around them disappeared and was replaced by a sunlit room with a view of gently rolling hills and sunflower fields. The room was empty except for a sunken tub, two low couches and a small desk with a med-kit.

B'Elanna's first thought was to care for her teacher's back but the other woman didn't let her use the dermal regenerator.

"No, B'El. You can help me to take off the shirt and put some healing ointment on the welts. It will speed up the natural healing process but that's all I intend to do about it. With a bit of luck the marks will be gone in two or three days. The warrior was programmed to do no real harm."

The last sentence would have been more convincing had Kathryn not flinched when she pulled the tunic over her head. B'Elanna was busy applying the ointment when Yllas entered from an adjoining room, carrying two bowls of steaming chicken broth and a pitcher of tea on a tray.

"Eat, you need to rebuild your strength, both of you. Lana, take your bra off please. The branding needs fresh air to heal properly."

"The Captain's back is more important, Yllas, and I resent being bossed around."

"Just do as she said, B'El, as long as we're here Yllas is in command. Sit next to me, eat, and relax."

"Yes, DevwI' SeQ."

"You no longer need a spiritual guide, B'El."

"You'll always be my DevwI' SeQ, K'Ryn, just like you'll always be my Captain."

-x-x-x-

In silent accord Chakotay and the others went to holodeck II and the comforting familiarity of 'Chez Sandrine'. Harry slumped down in the nearest chair, still visibly shaken by the experience.

"How did they do it? How did they stand the pain? And how can I feel pride in having seen my Captain whipped and my friend mutilated? It's against everything I ever learned to believe in and yet I can't help think that I witnessed something not only special but very beautiful and perfect."

"You have every reason to feel this way, Harry Kim. We all can be proud that we were chosen to participate in this ceremony. Captain Janeway and Lieutenant Torres allowed us to see a part of themselves they usually keep private and more than that. This ceremony is as old as the Klingon Empire itself. It's regarded as sacred and usually non-Klingons are not even allowed to see it," Ensign Ron said softly.

"You seem to know a lot about all this," Kes said.

"It's recent knowledge. I looked it up in our database and after I had started I was so fascinated that I dug just a little deeper," Ron Rael answered with a smile.

Tom joined them at the table and gulped down his beer in one swallow. "She should not have done this. She's a Starfleet Officer for crying out loud. She should adhere to higher standards."

"Adhere to higher standards? Your Federation arrogance is unbelievable. By what right do you look down on a culture you barely know anything about," retorted the Bajoran security officer.

Tom looked at her with disbelieving eyes. "But she's our Captain. She should stand above such things," he repeated stubbornly.

"Oh, catch a clue, Lieutenant Paris." The emphasis on his rank made it clear what she thought of him. "Captain Janeway did exactly what is expected of a Starfleet Officer. She showed respect for another culture by following its rules. And as the adopted daughter of the Priestess Rel'Issa the captain did not really have a choice but to do what she did. Anything else would have dishonoured her own name and the name of her House," Ensign Ron explained.

"This whole honour thing is overrated if you ask me," Tom grumbled while getting a refill.

"Why am I not surprised that this is coming from you, Paris?" Chakotay said. He knew that the helm's man was Janeway's special reclamation project, but as much as Captain Janeway still didn't trust him, he didn't trust the apparently easy-going pilot.

Tom whirled around and glared at the taller man, "You're my superior officer, Commander

Chakotay. You can count yourself lucky or I would make you eat these words."

"Please, we're here to prepare for a party. It's too early for a bar brawl." Neelix tried to calm everyone down and refocus their attention.

"Ensign Ron, perhaps you can clear up my confusion. I always thought that Kahless was some sort of Klingon god or something but how can a god have a House?"

"Kahless was a warrior and a gifted leader. He founded the Klingon Empire more than a thousand years ago. I didn't have the time to read all the stories about him but enough to know that a lot of Klingon traditions have their origin with him.

"It is said that in a time of dire need he would return to the home world to guide his people. During the civil war, when the House of Duras fought Chancellor Gawron the monks created a clone of Kahless to end the conflict. Captain Picard and the Enterprise helped to sort everything out and end the war a few years ago. The Chancellor is still the one in charge but they made him some kind of spiritual figurehead."

"And what has this to do with this Priestess adopting our Captain?" Tom asked with more genuine curiosity than aggression in his voice.

Before Ron Rael could answer, Tuvok said, "Before Captain Janeway took command of Voyager she attended the marriage ceremony of Kahless and her adopted mother and was inducted in the House of Kahless."

"Wow! That means that the captain is as high up in the food chain as one can get," Lieutenant Carey blurted out.

"Yeah, wow! But how did she wrangle herself in such a prestigious position?" Tom asked.

"Mind your words, Mister Paris," Tuvok's voice had gone as cold as ice. "It would be wise to refrain from such insinuations, or you might find yourself scrubbing plasma conduits with a toothbrush for the rest of the journey. It is a common disciplinary measure on Klingon ships."

Tom swallowed and tried to look unimpressed; this role playing to find the new traitor in their midst was harder than he had expected.

"Captain Janeway already told you all you need to know in this matter." The tone of Tuvok's statement left no doubt that there would be no further explanation - and though Ron Rael had unearthed more than that from the database she wisely kept her knowledge to herself.

-x-x-x-

Meanwhile B'Elanna tried valiantly not to fall asleep in the steaming sunken tub.

"I'm proud of you, B'El. You held yourself like a true Klingon warrior. Making the others participate was a good idea. It was very brave to show your friends this side of yourself."

"You got it the wrong way round. Thank you for going along with the idea. You were very brave, joHwI'. Aside from Tuvok all of them had known you as our Captain only, but today you showed them much more of yourself. I hope you'll never have a reason to regret this decision."

"I have no reason to hide what I am and I only did what I had to do, B'El. And even if this was an issue; for the Starfleet officers I acted within the guidelines for dealing with other cultures and belief systems. There's no reason to worry, my friend. - And B'Elanna, I'm not the Lady of a House, so please don't call me joHwI'. It's inappropriate."

B'Elanna smiled, to her it was a term of endearment. It was her private name for the woman she could only love from afar. So, she said demurely. "Yes DevwI' SeQ, but," she added with a twinkle in her eyes, "I beg to differ. With Samantha Wildman's baby this ship is on the fast trek to become a household, a family; and as our leader, as our Captain you are undoubtedly the head of this household, Lady Kathryn of the House of Voyager."

Kathryn's heartfelt laugh brought Yllas in from the room next door and they filled her in.

At Kathryn's request she told them about the program they'd used. "It's where I grew up, the private quarters of Kai Opaka. It's not as good and peaceful as the real thing but it gives me a sense of peace whenever I feel out of my depths. Harry Kim helped me to create the program."

"Thank you for opening your sanctuary to us, Yllas. It must be hard to know that the woman who forced you to leave your home now lives there," Kathryn said.

"Kai Winn has always been very ambitious. Kai Opaka would have said that the situation proves that the Prophets have a very strange sense of humour. At first I was angry with Winn but then Vedek Bareil let me be the guest of the Orb of Prophecy; that changed my mind, so, now I think that I'm where I'm supposed to be, Captain. It's true that I sometimes miss the peace and tranquillity of the monastery but being able to help people first with the Maquis and now here is worth the loss."

Both other women knew that a lot of things had been left unsaid but they respected the other woman's privacy.

"I heard about what you do for our crew members in your time off. If there's anything I can do for you, let me know," Kathryn said, alluding to the fact that the young Bajoran had become a spiritual and mental guide of her own for a considerable part of her crew.

"I have everything I need, Captain, thank you. It's time to get ready for the party."

The party was a big success. Samantha Wildman was beside herself with joy over the intricately carved crib and all the little things like knitted blankets and hand-crafted baby boots.

Neelix' culinary offerings were accepted with enthusiasm and Tuvok surprised everyone by opening a small keg of blood wine and breaking into a raunchy Klingon drinking song. When asked about his uncharacteristic behaviour he simply said that it was only out of respect for the customs of another race. Kathryn snorted in her blood wine at his words and B'Elanna decided that one day she would worm this particular story out of her.

All in all the young woman felt pretty good but she was sure that back in her quarters she would fall asleep even before her head had hit the pillow. The residual effects of the painsticks were slowly reduced to a tingling sensation and the pain of the branding filled her with pride and deep seated joy.

When she went to refill her mug the tall Vulcan stopped her, "Only one each, Lieutenant Torres. Captain's order!"

"Hey, Torres!" One of her fellow Maquis with whom she never had got along particularly well asked, "I thought you had rediscovered your Klingon roots. No Klingon warrior worth his salt could be kept away from his blood wine."

His effort to provoke her fell on deaf ears. She laughed and grabbed a glass of juice from a table nearby but before she had the chance to set the obnoxious man right the captain's smooth voice came from behind,

"I'll let you in on a secret, crewman. A Klingon warrior would have to be on the brink of unconsciousness before he would even think of disobeying the orders of his superior officer without an honourable reason."

The man only nodded and wished himself unsuccessfully to the other side of the room, at least.

One of the other crewmembers, Carter, an older ensign from the science department asked hesitatingly, "But I heard that on Klingon vessels the officers regularly kill each other, that it's a legal way to get a promotion."

"Yes and no," Kathryn answered. "No military organisation works without rules and though Klingon regulations are different from ours there are no less of them. Someone killing his or her superior officer is a rare occurrence but under certain conditions it's within the law. It even is expected.

"An officer can only be removed from duty if he or she proves to be a coward or a traitor or is a danger to the whole crew - and even then it's not a free for all. One can only try to dispose of one's direct superior and has to do it in the open, in a duel. There are some other conditions to be met but it would take too long to explain for now. So, yes, sometimes a Klingon feels honour-



bound to kill his superior officer, and no, Klingon ships are not without discipline and order," she concluded with a smile.

The topic of the conversation by then had attracted a lot of public and someone asked, "Why do you know so much about Klingons, Captain?"

"It's all in the database, crewman, but when I was younger I had the chance to study Klingon culture at the source, and I don't think that it will ever cease to fascinate me."

Once encouraged the crew had a lot of questions, and Kathryn and B'Elanna were happy to clear up a few misconceptions. Suddenly from among the crowd a voice asked openly about their supposed love affair, and B'Elanna was glad that she only had had one mug of blood wine, otherwise she would have blushed or flown off the handle.

Captain Janeway laughed. "Love affair, that's an interesting choice of words. It could almost been seen as an invasion of my privacy but since it seems of such general concern I'll tell you when I fell in love."

Kathryn leaned against the table with the blood wine and checked if all the eyes really were on her.

"The first time I saw her I knew that I had to have her. I decided on the spot that she would be mine, no matter what. It was in the office of Admiral Paris on Mars. He had been a friend of my father and had followed my career with interest; so, I paid him a visit to say good-bye before taking over the command of the Argonna, a small scout ship with a crew compliment of 58. A good little ship, new out of the shipyards, but then I saw her.

"I was so engrossed in studying each detail that I didn't hear the Admiral come in. He surprised me by saying, 'She's a beauty, isn't she?' I looked up into amused blue-green eyes and before I even knew how I said, 'I want her, Admiral.'

"He answered that she didn't even exist yet and that the oversight committee only the day before that authorised the building of the prototype of this new kind of ship. It was supposed to be a hybrid of science vessel and scout ship with bio-neural circuitry and a crew compliment of one hundred and forty-two."

"Voyager!" a few surprised voices blurted out.

"Yes. Voyager. The Admiral asked me if I was really sure that I wanted to command this intrepid class ship. I said yes and he arranged my transfer to his office as his aide while Voyager was built at the Utopia Planitia shipyards. I must have driven the engineers crazy with my frequent visits and the new ideas."

"You fell in love with the blueprints of a ship?" Chakotay asked incredulously.

"Stranger things have happened, Chakotay. So, B'Elanna, though I know that engineers tend to

get a bit possessive about the ship they care for, I have to tell you: Voyager is mine, always has been."

In the ensuing laughter the young woman's answer was missed by all but a few of the crew, "Oh, I don't mind sharing, with you."

Tuvok studied his Captain's relaxed features and also didn't miss the answering squeeze at the engineer's thigh.

After all the years they had known each other Kathryn Janeway rarely surprised him but with her story she had. He doubted that it had been entirely planned but in a single stroke she had instilled her public with a new sense of pride in their vessel. She had made it clear for everyone that her first priority would always be the ship and its crew. Her words had allowed them a look behind the captain's mask they would not soon forget. It would make them even more protective of their Captain and "her" ship.

The party continued far into Gamma shift, and Kathryn was relieved that she had had the foresight to assign herself to Beta shift the next day. She would need the time to allow her body to recover.

-X-X-X-X-X-

## **Epilogue**

About an hour after the start of her shift Captain Janeway received the request of Commander Tuvok to meet with him and a crew member in his office. She ordered them to come to the Ready Room instead. The crew member in question turned out to be Ensign Ron, closely followed by a stone-faced chief of Security. The Bajoran stood at rigid attention in front of her desk and Tuvok handed her wordlessly a data padd. She read it and then called Chakotay over the comm system.

"Give me ten minutes, Captain. I just came from the gym and need a shower."

"Acknowledged Commander. Janeway out."

Kathryn studied the other woman who refused to make eye contact. There was no outward sign that she was even the slightest bit nervous but she seemed very determined.

"Feel free to take a seat while we wait for the Commander, Ensign."

"If it's all the same for you I'd prefer to stand, ma'am."

Janeway only nodded and turned her attention to the padd containing the woman's confession and a copy of her service record.

"Ro Laren", she had heard the name before but it took her a while to remember where.

About two years ago she had per chance met up with Will Riker, a former class mate at the Academy and Captain Picard's First Officer. He had angrily told her about a Bajoran lieutenant who had been bullied by the brass in going on an undercover mission she had not been ready for - despite Captain Picard's protests. Will had been so angry at Admiral Nechajev for insisting on this plan of infiltrating the Maquis by sending a Bajoran as undercover agent. He had described Lieutenant Ro as a woman of great integrity and loyalty, and this mission had propelled her in a situation where she could nothing but lose.

The door chime brought her out of her musings.

Chakotay scanned the contents of the padd, "Ro Laren, I wanted to make your acquaintance for some time now. The raid on the Cardassian supply post you led some time ago assured the survival of the whole colony on Arbora V. Your quick thinking saved the lives of almost a thousand people. A few of them were my friends. Thank you, Ro Laren."

Ro blushed but didn't change her stance or commented on his words.

"Lieutenant Ro, knowing what you know now, would you make the same decision?" Captain Janeway asked.

For the first time since entering the room the other woman looked at the captain who was only showing her command mask. She decided to be as honest as possible.

"I don't know, ma'am. When Admiral Nechajev told me about the mission I was fresh out of tactical training and flattered to be chosen. I quickly learned that I was completely out of my depths because I really began to like the people I had been sent to betray. One of them reminded me of my father.

"After I left the Enterprise I told myself that I had done what I did because I was convinced that the Maquis was right and the Federation wrong but late at night I knew better. I also did it out of a sense of guilt. Instead of fighting for the freedom of my people from Cardassian oppression I ran the first chance I got. Instead of fighting for Bajor I joined Starfleet. Helping the Maquis was a way to make up for it."

Ro fell silent.

"Do you still feel that you betrayed your people?"

"No, Captain. I feel that I betrayed Starfleet and Captain Picard."

"Is this why you don't wear an earring even off-duty like the other Bajorans do?" Chakotay asked.

"In a way. I sent my earring to him, to Captain Picard because even then I no longer felt that I deserved to wear it."

Captain Janeway knew exactly what she intended to do about her newfound Starfleet Officer but first she needed one more question answered and then she would have to speak with the two men.

"Ro, why did you come clean? You could have gotten away with it."

"Yes, I suppose it would have worked, ma'am, but this muvtay HochDich has forced me to think about myself and I decided that I no longer want to run away from myself."

"I understand. Please return to your quarters and consider yourself as under house arrest. I'll call you as soon as my decision is made."

"Aye Captain!" She smartly turned around and left the Ready Room.

-x-x-x-

"Commander Tuvok, do you still want to groom her as your second-in-command?"

"Now more than ever, Captain, besides, she already did a good job covering for me when I had to fill in for Commander Chakotay. I began to doubt my initial evaluation of her character when she failed to come forward after our first missions together clearly revealed her tactical training. Now, I know that she is the right choice."

"Second in command? Didn't I hear you tell me not too long ago that you don't need an assistant?"

"I do not need an assistant now but that will not always be the case," Tuvok answered with the hint of a smug smile in his voice.

"Chakotay, what would you do with Lieutenant Ro?"

"Tell the doctor to update his medical database on her and give out a ship wide announcement about the change in rank and name," he answered with a lopsided grin.

"And aside from wishful thinking?"

He sobered considerably. "Technically she disobeyed the orders of her commanding officers. She is AWOL and a member of what the Federation sees as a criminal organisation, though on this ship that last point should be obsolete. In the Alpha Quadrant she would be court-martialled and depending on the current political fall-winds she would end up demoted, discharged, or in prison."

They talked for some time until Captain Janeway entered her decision in the main database. She sent the men back to their off-duty activities and returned to her seat on the Bridge. Only two hours later did she call the other woman to return to the Ready Room.

"Lieutenant Ro, I can't accept your confession the way it is. According to an addendum to your duty file you are not sought for desertion. You resigned your commission before you started on the last part of your mission and Starfleet command admitted that they might have been hasty in giving this undercover assignment to you.

"I restored Lieutenant Paris and Commander Chakotay to their former ranks; so, I can't do any less for you."

The captain rose from her seat. "At attention!" She stepped around the desk and in front of the visibly astonished woman. She removed the Maquis insignia from the turtleneck and replaced it with the two pips of a full lieutenant.

Ro looked at her as if she had just grown a second head and stammered, "But, ma'am, that can't be right. I betrayed Captain Picard. I have to be punished, not promoted."

"That's not the way he sees it, Lieutenant. Picard pulled a few strings and had all charges against you dropped. He feels that he has let you down in not taking you off this assignment in time."

"But how could he? How do you know? I'm supposed to pay for my betrayal."

"He had a letter added to your permanent file wherein he states among other things that he would welcome you back under his command any time. And as far as I'm concerned your feelings of guilt are more than enough punishment.

"Tuvok insists that you take a few refreshment courses under his tutelage. You can see this as a chance to improve your skills or as a punishment. Dismissed Lieutenant Ro."

The other woman saluted, turned half around, stopped and turned back, "Thank you, Captain Janeway. You'll not regret it."

THE END

-x-x-x-x-x-

**Addendum: Approximate translation of Klingon terms:**

The Klingon I use is based on: Mark **Okrand**: *The Klingon Dictionary. The Official Guide to Klingon Words and Phrases*. New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, Singapore: Pocket Books,

1992 and Mark **Okrand**: *Star Trek: Klingon For the Galactic Traveler*. New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, Singapore: Pocket Books, 1997.

<b>Klingon:</b>	<b>Federation Standard:</b>
lajQo' quvHa'ghachtay	Rite to reject dishonour
Sub	Hero
bljaghbe'chugh voj blHegh	Surrender or die!
ghe'torvo' narghDI' qu'pu	When spirits escape from Grethor - equivalent to: When hell freezes over
Heghlu'meH QaQ jajvam	It's a good day to die - traditional Klingon battle cry
parmaqay	Romantic partner
DevwI' SeQ	Spiritual guide - literally: ritualistic leader
pol ruv	Save/keep justice
qoH vuvbe' SuS'	You can't stand against a force of nature - literally: The wind does not respect a fool
ghojwI'	Student, here: candidate or initiate
chaj	Denomination for a close female friend of a female; considered insulting if used by the opposite gender
vuv baj no'	You make your ancestors proud - literally: You earn the respect of your ancestors
Miral puqbe'	Tochter von Miral
'oy'sontay	Ceremony of pain - literally: Ceremony to relieve pain
Qopqagh HuH	Dead Gagh slime - Gagh: Klingon delicacy, a worm eaten alive; dead Gagh is considered disgusting
blQ'a'Daq 'oHtaH 'etlh'e'	There's no going back; it can not be changed - literally: The sword is in the ocean; refers to Kahless' brother throwing their father's sword in the ocean after killing him. Kahless never spoke to him after that.
joHwI'	My Lady - used exclusively to address the female leader of a House
'Iwaghargh quvHa' 'up	Dishonoured, disgusting bloodworm
batlh Daqawlu'taH	You will be remembered with honour
mevjap!	Stop! It is enough!
Hoch nuH qel	Consider every option, every possibility - literally: Consider every weapon.
'oy'naQ	Painstick; also used on large animals it's basically a cattle

	prod.
nentay cha'DIch	Second Rite of Ascension; a coming of age ceremony
jup 'waDIch	Here: attendant during a ritual or ceremony - literally: first friend
wIj jup	My very good friend - literally: friend mine; usually only used among the higher classes
Ha'quj	Sash - for a optical reference think of Commander Worf
muvtay HochDIch	The ultimate Rite of Ascension - literally: the last or highest Rite of Ascension
Rel'Issa pugbe'	Daughter of Rel'Issa
moq!	Begin!
Hay' chu'	Duel to the death
quv tob'	Duel of skills - literally: to test one's honour conclusively
qablIj HI'ang!	I challenge you! - Traditional form to challenge someone to a duel - literally: Show me your face
qabwIj vISo'be!	I accept your challenge! - Traditional answer to accept a challenge - literally: I don't hide my face!
ylmev, yap!	Stop! It is enough! - more formal form of 'mevjap!'
Shig'Rai tug	Of the House of Shig'Rai
ghItIH	Mark - in everyday language only used as a verb, here used in ritualised speech as a noun
DaHjaj SuvwI' vIghes!	Today I take my place as a warrior - literally: Today I assume the responsibility of a warrior
pInaDqu' tugIj wInaDqu' je	Glory to you and your house - literally: We praise you highly, we also praise your House highly; formalised expression only used in induction or initiation ceremonies

Feedback always welcome under: [romansilence@yahoo.de](mailto:romansilence@yahoo.de)

---

[Index Page](#)