

Summary: When life gets too busy for birthdays... Will someone else remember?

Content Disclaimers: There be spoilers ahead... for... let's see... "Endgame" definitely; "Human Error" for another. Both are seventh season episodes. The references are vague, but... anyway, you have been duly warned.

THE BIRTHDAY WISH

by Lara Zielinsky

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Part One

Kathryn Janeway, eldest daughter of Admiral Edward and Gretchen Janeway, sat in the bedroom her parents had shared for over thirty-five years, until her father's death on a test piloting mission to Tau Ceti. Now Kathryn was trying once again to save a parent.

Rubbing her auburn hair from her face she tiredly considered her life.

She had been on Earth barely a week, testifying before every Starfleet review board known, and a few heretofore unknown to her. In the same afternoon she received her verdict she received a short note from her sister, Phoebe. Starfleet's verdict hit her hard.

"Captain Kathryn Elizabeth Janeway, you will be stripped of rank and returned to starship duty only after a year of restricted movement on Earth. You will enter no Starfleet facility without security escort. Unauthorized accesses of any kind will result in your placement in a penal facility."

She hadn't even tried to argue that her future self, now dead, had done those things, and so she shouldn't be punished for the woman's decisions. But she hadn't. Phoebe's note had taken any wind out of her sails:

Come home. Mother needs you.

So she packed up her few belongings from her apartment in San Francisco, and left her Starfleet pips and uniform on Admiral Paris's desk - God his disappointment in her sentence had nearly killed her. Kathryn Janeway, civilian, headed for the Traditionalist settlement in Indiana where her family had lived for over three hundred years.

All the doctor could tell her was Gretchen had caught something in her garden. Whether it was a spore on the plants, or an insect living among the stalks, he could not tell. Gretchen had forbidden him from tearing up the garden and testing the samples. The infection however was not responding to any bacteriological antibodies he had yet concocted.

When her mother had still been strong, Kathryn had argued for her to San Francisco for treatment. Her mother flatly refused. Kathryn argued until she was hoarse, frustrated and angry herself. Phoebe had finally left, unable to watch Mother die of stubbornness. But Kathryn would not give up. She had beaten the Borg for crying out loud. Her mother should listen to reason. Kathryn missed her sister's company though.

It was not simply because the younger Janeway brewed delightful coffee, and cooked more than passable meals. Kathryn missed hearing about life in San Francisco, where Phoebe now lived with her husband, Todd. But Kathryn figured out how to make the chicken soup, little more than a

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broth, and fed her mother whenever she would eat. In between she watched her sleep, talked to her - no more arguments, and learned about her lesser-known parent.

Gretchen had not liked being left so often to raise the girls alone, but she had loved Edward fiercely enough, understanding enough about what made him the man she loved, to let him go do what he needed to do.

So when young Kathryn exhibited signs of planning to follow her father to the stars, Gretchen had prepared herself for the separation and for the worry. Kathryn only realized now that never once had her mother actually stood in her way.

"If you love something, Kathryn," she said. "You have to love it enough to let it grow separate from you."

When Gretchen grew too weak to talk often, Kathryn still kept vigil. She read her logs, elaborating when she thought she should, and reminisced the good and the bad of seven years on *Voyager*.

Seven. Talking of the young woman, Seven of Nine, a Borg she had liberated unexpectedly caught Kathryn off-guard.

"That's where it all began to fall apart, I think," she murmured. Her mother's hand moved in hers. "I loved her more than I should have. Hearing of her death, imagining it.. I knew I couldn't let it happen. But she loved him. So I made sure they had a chance. As far as I know she's with him now in the Arizona territory of his people."

She sighed, rising from the bedside chair, and peeked out the west-facing window. The sunset was almost gone, twilight darkening the broad expanse of sky. She peered at it, trying to see, trying to believe she had done the right thing.

She saw the faint twinkle of a star. *The first star of evening*, she thought. "I hope you're happy, Seven," she whispered at the dark horizon, wishing her well.

She had no idea how long she stood there, but the front door knocker sounded downstairs. Kathryn wondered if it was the doctor from town, with another clue to her mother's condition.

Kissing her mother's cheek, she wiped her hands on her slacks nervously. She hurried down the steps to the front door.

Part Two

Kathryn's evening visitor looked like *Voyager's* former Astrometrics officer, yet not. She was blonde, strikingly tall. However, the severity which characterized Seven of Nine, former Tertiary Adjunct to Unimatrix Zero-One was completely gone.

Seven wore, not one of the skin-hugging suits she had preferred aboard ship but, a loose top of homespun fabric, its tan understated coloring emphasizing the thinness of the body cloaked within. Kathryn looked down. *Her legs are bare!* A skirt of similar fabric, dyed dark blue fell from Seven's hips to just above her knees. On her feet were flat leather shoes.

"Seven?" Kathryn dragged her gaze back up to see the face again. The usual bun was gone. The golden hair had been gathered at her nape and loose across the top of her shoulders. Then Kathryn saw her eyes, a bright pure blue, and the gray sweep of her ocular implant above her left eye. "My God, Seven. It really is you." She stepped aside. "Please come in. Are you all right? How is...Chakotay?"

Kathryn noticed then the young woman carried a bag in her hands. She offered to take it. "It's heavy. What have you got in here?"

"A portable regeneration unit the Doctor gave me before he left."

Kathryn blinked. "I'd forgotten. So they granted him a commission now?" Seven shook her head. Kathryn watched the flow of her hair around her shoulders and felt a smile touch her lips as she became aware of the vitality infusing Seven now.

"He is a civilian physician certified to practice," Seven said finally. "He left yesterday for Deep Space Three."

"I'm glad." Kathryn fondly recalled the spare-framed holographic doctor. "Did he ever choose a name?" she thought to ask, suddenly hungry for news.

"With his creator's blessing he is now Dr. Mark I. Zimmerman."

Chuckling, Kathryn nodded. "Perfect." She offered Seven a seat in the daintily appointed formal living room on the recreated Victorian settee. "Now you. That's...a very different look from the last time I saw you."

"This is attire typical to Commander Chakotay's people. My other garments were unsuited to the environment."

"Commander?" The formal address piqued Kathryn's interest. She settled into a nearby chair gesturing Seven to another; surprisingly the younger woman sat easily without the usual reticence she would have once exhibited aboard *Voyager*. "Care to tell me what happened?"

"When he was given the opportunity to return to Starfleet, Chakotay accepted a posting. We...disagreed, so I have left."

"Chakotay's back in Starfleet? Doing what?"

"He is the new captain of *Voyager*."

Kathryn exhaled as the shock hit her. "So, um..."

"I told him that this would be your reaction. That he should decline the position, demand instead that you be reinstated and take command yourself. He would not listen."

"Well, she's a good ship. I'm not surprised that Starfleet wanted to send her out again. She needed a captain. Chakotay knows her at least as well as I do," Kathryn's voice was reasonable but inside she felt the stab of pain at the hurt. She thought, *in a perfect world...*

"You are her captain." The younger woman was adamant, as implacable in this statement as she had been about a dozen disagreements aboard ship.

"Seven, I'm not in Starfleet anymore." She gestured at the house. "This is my life now." She smiled indulgently then stood and hugged herself. "Do you think I could send Chakotay a message?"

"I will not convey it."

"Seven, I'm very tired. I don't want to argue. Why did you come here if not to talk about Chakotay and *Voyager*?"

Seven knelt on the floor. Kathryn turned, struck silent by the sight. She had never seen the former Borg move more smoothly, more at home with her humanity. The blonde was searching through her bag and finally withdrew a small package. "I came here," Seven began, moving back to her feet, "to give you a present."

Kathryn looked up into cool blue eyes and a faint smile. She took the package in both hands and turned it over in her palms. "A present? Why?"

"By Terran standard reckoning, the date is May 20th, the anniversary of your birth."

Kathryn looked at the present. *Was it really?* She gingerly unwrapped the package and now held a small wooden box. Lifting the lid she removed a holography crystal.

"I created a program once," Seven explained. "That is the only part remaining."

Kathryn activated the hologram. It was about eight inches tall and much like the woman

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before her. In soft slacks and a blue blouse, her hair down. Implants gone. "Seven?"

"It is Annika, as I hoped eventually to be." Seven shifted uneasily. "I spent hours in the holodeck trying to figure out how to be Annika Hansen, Human." She dropped her chin. "I was unsuccessful in the experiment."

"Why are you giving this to me?"

"I told you that I would share the results when I had completed my experiments. Since my cortical node can neither be removed, nor deactivated, I am at an impasse. You may have it, to see the person I wanted to become...for you."

"You wanted to become this?" Kathryn put down the crystal. "Why? You're already beautiful, young, intelligent.."

"But I was not suitable."

"Suitable for what?"

"To be your mate."

Kathryn inhaled. "Seven, I...You can't possibly..I don't...I don't have anything to offer you," she finally managed, absolutely stunned by the admission. "I've lost my commission. My mother is upstairs dying.."

Seven, who had grown quiet, straightened sharply. "Your mother is dying? Why did you not say something?" She strode to the staircase. "Which room?"

Flabbergasted, Janeway could only answer, "Top of the stairs." She followed. "What are you doing?"

She entered her mother's bedroom in time to see Seven grab Gretchen's pale, thin wrists and intently bend over the woman's body. The light from a scanning device in her optical implant moved over the sick woman, from head to foot. Gretchen's body jerked suddenly. Kathryn leaped forward.

"Back!" Seven ordered.

Kathryn swallowed, subsided and, grasping the foot-board of the bed, waited.

Seven laid her left palm over Gretchen's chest. A red glow emanated from the nodes in her fingers. By degrees Gretchen's color improved. Soon her breathing also was less labored.

Stepping back, Seven caught Kathryn against her body instead of allowing her to touch her mother. "She needs rest, but she will now recover."

"How did you do this?"

"She had an infection. I cured it."

"But Dr. Philips.."

"Had not seen Species 1962 I suspect. I recognized the parasitic infection from the Borg's first visit to Earth, in Zephram Cochran's time." She fell silent for a moment. "Had I not still been Borg, I do not believe I could have helped her." She smiled then.

Kathryn smiled too. "Seven, I am so glad you're you. And you're here. Will you stay for a while?"

"I was going to visit my father's sister."

"Well, I certainly don't want to keep you from family. Thank you for coming by."

"I would not have forgotten your birthday. I am glad I chose to come by." Seven considered something else. "You have had a great impact on my life." She shifted her hands on Kathryn's back, making the smaller woman aware that they had not parted earlier. Seven's right hand then trailed away from her back. She felt it next against her left cheek. Soft fingertips traced her features.

Kathryn held her breath.

With the deep concentration borne of having heavily considered the subject, Seven said,

"Captain, I believe I love you."

The diminutive woman and former captain, lost to everything she had once known, found hope returned to her from one she had given it to long ago. Outside stars twinkled, but Kathryn only had eyes for the sparkling light in a pair of robin's egg blue eyes that closed only as full warm lips covered her own.