

*Summary: Janeway's whisper of "Sweet Dreams" wasn't the end of "Dark Frontier" (season 4). Here's what happened next.
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LIGHT AFTER THE DARKNESS

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Cargo Bay 2...

"Sweet dreams." The words were uttered almost without thought, as well as without breath, as the auburn-haired woman stepped back from the Borg alcove, having set the regeneration cycle on its singular occupant. Captain Kathryn Janeway couldn't seem to take her eyes from the pale face in repose. Nor could she discipline her thoughts away from their troubled path down the latest adventure just concluded.

Janeway had hoped she would reach the young woman before the Collective reasserted its total control. It appeared she had been successful, noting there were no scars in the delicate skin from Seven's recapture by the Borg. Seven's eyes shifted as the former Borg entered REM sleep. With the faintest touch of farewell on the still hand at the young woman's side, Janeway finally tore herself away and walked with heavy steps toward the cargo bay exit.

She paused at the threshold, the doors obediently waiting open for her to complete her passage. But she turned instead, and looked back, watching the green flicker of Borg equipment play over Seven, took a deep breath to school her thoughts away from the fears that resurfaced despite her rather handy rescue.

The Borg queen had been a surprise. Her very adamance that Seven remain with the Collective, one drone among billions, was unfathomable. Janeway knew Seven's struggle with individuality made her unique, but that the Collective would somehow want that in its "conform or die" mentality baffled her.

The captain's path took her past deck 8 where she stopped in front of the Astrometrics lab. Janeway stepped across the threshold and stood in awe of the huge astronomical shell and its sections of vidgrids. Someone had left a starmap displayed, its constant reorienting cast the room in a swirling light. With a deep breath, no stranger to starcharts, Janeway stepped up to the console and studied the readouts, then checked the displayed starfield again. *Could it be?*

Adjusting the perspective and originating point, she input a series of Cartesian coordinates as familiar to her as her own heart beating in her chest. She stepped back after pressing enter and watched as the starfield obeyed her command.

Her breath caught in her throat. Janeway covered her mouth with a shaking palm to hold in her gasp of reaction. The starfield now displayed a course, from *Voyager's* present location, to sector 0,0,1... the Earth's solar system. Home. The distance was 28,000 light years and a large section in the middle of the path was blank, flashing a small notice "no data on file" around an unnaturally straight flight path. Janeway realized that Seven must not have yet had time to offer any insight to

those sectors.

However, the sectors that comprised the next thirty light years were filled with hundreds of points of light, stars and planets. Undoubtedly the result of the data Seven had been inputting when Janeway found her still working in the cargo bay instead of regenerating.

The Astrometrics lab, in operation for almost a year already had proven invaluable in giving them all hints as to what lay ahead. The knowledge meant being forewarned to some degree, and the amount of worry had diminished considerably for Janeway since having access to Seven's weekly reports on their progress and the starmaps given to Helm. Restless and anxious to know if there were more Borg ahead endangering *Voyager's* path, the captain moved the focus over one planet, and was surprised with a brief astronomical summary of the body. A planet, fourth from its sun, a G-type star, had a J-type atmosphere and no known civilizations. Its neighbor, a marginally class-M planet, was fifth from the star and served as the home world of Species 1612, who called themselves the Drayd.

Janeway finally stepped back, returning the display to the way she had first discovered it. With a promise to herself to request that Seven include all of the planets along *Voyager's* immediate flight path in her next Astrometrics report, the captain quit the lab, leaving silence in her wake.

The gamma shift was well underway now, and the corridors were nearly empty. As she passed places where people gathered, the crew lounges on every other deck, she shied away from the open doorways, not wanting to eavesdrop on her crew, or be disturbed in her own thoughts.

And her thoughts kept returning to Seven of Nine.

"*I did not expect you to return for me.*" Seven had spoken with such plain conviction -- so appalled at her own actions that she believed herself unworthy of such actions on the part of a Starfleet captain and Federation crew.

Janeway hoped she had lain to rest the last of Seven's beliefs that she did not belong with *Voyager*, but was yet another welcome passenger on the wayward ship's long lonely trek home. More than anyone else aboard, Kathryn Janeway knew Seven of Nine needed a home; she needed a place to belong, to shelter her as she grew into her humanity. The process for the young woman was a struggle at the best of times. Janeway had seen the frustration, and the attempts at casual disregard the young woman used to cover up her more disquieting emotions. She longed to heal the wounds left by the Borg on the young woman's psyche.

Kathryn entered the turbolift, calling out softly, "Deck 3, captain's quarters." As the lift rose she pondered how to further aid the young woman she had come to care about so much.

Captain's Quarters...

Falling onto her sofa with an exhalation of relief, Janeway groaned and closed her eyes, pressing the heels of her palms against her temples, rubbing futilely. "God, what a day," she breathed. Sitting up, she unzipped her command tunic, rolling her shoulders in the freedom of the gray sweater beneath. She stood and gathered up the garment, detaching the communication badge pinned over the left breast.

The hard outline abraded her palm and she loosened her grip, studying it for a long moment. She reached up to her sweater collar and removed the four pips, laying them and the comm badge on her bedside table. *I almost gave these up today*, she thought, feeling the solidity of the symbols of her office as she remembered thinking about dropping them on her ready room desk as she

argued with Chakotay that they had to go back after Seven of Nine.

"Maybe you can't take the Borg out of the Collective, Kathryn," he said. "She went back of her own free will."

"I won't believe that," Kathryn had said sharply. "She was coerced. Somehow."

Chakotay had not gainsaid her again. Tuvok and Tom Paris were assigned as security and flight commander, and she boarded a shuttle not certain she would ever return.

But she had known then, as now, that Seven of Nine was worth that risk.

From the moment the first sparks from blue eyes had met hers from behind a massive tangle of Borg implants to later when the first signs of a scared young woman had burst forth in a brig cell, Kathryn Janeway had known rescuing Seven of Nine and returning her to the human identity Annika

Hansen, was a mission she was determined to see to completion.

Stripping off the rest of her clothing, she padded barefoot into the ensuite and stepped into the pulsating hot hydro setting of a shower. Resting her forearms against the tile, she stepped into the spray, luxuriating in the pounding rhythm of the water on her head. Eyes closed, she reached over for

a squeeze of biodegradable shampoo, massaging it into her scalp. As the suds were rinsed away, she grabbed a cloth and rubbed scented sandalwood soap briskly over her face, shoulders and upper and under arms. With a toe, she closed the drain, and settled to the floor of the high-side tub, fitting herself against the back and lifting one leg then the other to massage each with soapy fingers.

As the water level reached mid-chest, she turned off the flow with another tap of a toe, and leaned back, drifting half-asleep in the relaxing heat and clouds of steam.

Cargo Bay 2...

"Welcome... home, Seven of Nine. You will add much to us." The Queen of the Borg Collective stepped from the dreamy mists, her thin face offering a smile.

Seven shied away from that face. Her instinct screamed 'danger', and she had to steel herself from running. I must do this.

Seven's mind conjured a face and she felt a fullness come into her chest. *Captain Janeway. I must do this for Voyager.* The captain of *Voyager* had been a strong presence in her brief existence on the starship and Seven had grown to... how would Mr. Tuvok put it? *Appreciate, yes...* appreciate the older woman, and her devotion to her mission of returning her ship and crew to a place so distant even the Borg had only been there a handful of times.

In giving herself up, Seven had assured the ship's safety, and the captain would remain free from assimilation. She could live with that.

Suddenly the Queen was back, taunting her with the "deliciousness" of feeling an race's distinctiveness meld with their own. Seven swallowed against the revulsion twisting her stomach and she finally struck out at the Queen, determined to do something, to stop her somehow.

"You disappoint us, Seven," the Queen said, halting her blow with a firm grip. "We believed you would help us," she sneered.

"Don't listen to her, Seven." Seven's head spun and her gaze met that of Captain Kathryn Janeway, the dingy green lighting and humidity not dimming the brilliance of the redhead's presence, nor the bright blue eyes set in a grimly determined face. The human woman trained a phaser rifle confidently on the Borg Queen. "She's irrelevant."

Seven's heart skipped several beats. She inhaled sharply looking from the Captain to the Queen and back again, and she waited. The captain had come back for her. It filled Seven with as much confusion as it did equal parts pleasure and alarm. Her heart raced again, as it had then in the Queen's chamber.

*"Cycle interrupted. Regeneration incomplete." Seven was suddenly conscious as the Borg alcove disengaged her. Disoriented for a moment, she swayed forward until she caught her balance and stepped down. She tapped the regeneration panel and called up the log. Her endorphin system had spiraled up out of acceptable ranges. *Anxiety?* Seven leaned against the structure. She felt a need to move, not just think, but *move*. She thought of the captain and wondered if the woman would consider a Velocity match. "Seven of Nine to the captain."*

"The captain's communicator is set on unavailable." The ship informed her.

"Computer, is Captain Janeway asleep?"

"Unknown. No bioreadings are currently attached to the captain's communication badge."

Seven's heels clicked sharply with every hurried step as she moved quickly from the cargo bay. At the corridor's end she summoned a turbolift. Stepping inside the car when it arrived she ordered sharply, "Deck 3, Captain's Quarters."

Captain's Quarters...

*Kathryn's eyes drifted closed and her hands settled over her stomach as she laid back nude, still slightly damp from her bath, against the cool bedcovers. The bath had greatly helped, but she still felt sharply keyed, her body tingling with an awareness that would not leave since seeing Seven safely into her cycle. She took several breaths, expelling the last of her tensions from the day. *Seven is safe.**

*Her fingertips slipped closer to the heat of her center, tendrils of her own mound moistly clinging to her touch. *Well, there is certainly one way to relieve my tension,* she thought, her lips curling up in the corner.*

Her own skin was soft and warm under her touch. Her right palm sketched up her abdomen. Her groin briefly constricted and warmth spread low in her body as she traced the shape of her breast, the nipple hardened sharply as she suddenly saw Seven again, safe in her alcove.

*Patience, Katie, she inhaled sharply and exhaled slowly through her nose. She forced her thoughts to the matter at hand. *You have all night.**

Kathryn arched into a stroke across her abdomen and breathed out heavily again, caressing the outer swell of her breast. Her nerve endings fired welcomingly at her own touch. It had been too long since she had indulged she realized. Parting her folds with her other hand, Kathryn's fingers spread wetness, growing more aroused by the moment. The first touch to her clit caused a jagged gasp.

A reverberation settled in her loins and she undulated under her own rhythmic touch. She moaned acutely, her desire to escalate matters coursing a shiver over her back and hips.

Closing her eyes Kathryn curled onto her side, angling her fingers inside, and her passage squeezed in welcome response. She pushed higher, curling into further herself and rocking on the bedsprings. Her head fell back and she gasped her pleasure aloud, continuing her pursuit of fulfillment.

Corridor outside...

Seven of Nine yanked her hand away from the chime. About to press it, she had paused when she heard an acute sound -- an agonized keening -- through the door. She doubted any other would have heard it, her hearing being considerably enhanced by her Borg implants. A glance to the right and left found her alone in the corridor.

Indecision lay upon the young woman. Another deep groaning -- certainly the captain in mortal peril -- settled the matter. Fingers moving faster than another could have seen, Seven accessed the secured quarters and crossed the threshold into the darkened main room. Confused, she wondered where the captain was, accustomed to finding the woman reading. But the recliner was upright and empty.

"Oh... OH...AH..." came from the adjoined room. Concerned for the captain's safety, Seven drew to the doorway, feeling her heart beat much more quickly than she would have wished.

"Captain?" Despite the low light, she immediately identified the writhing figure on the bed. The response was incoherent, driving the young Borg to the bed; she immediately reached for the slight shoulder shaking. Some unseen force must be attacking the captain, she thought, just as her hand contacted skin.

It slipped in a layer of perspiration as the captain screamed, rolling onto her back, shoulder muscles stiffening under Seven's hand. "Seven!"

The agonized voice scared Seven in a way she hadn't felt so keenly since boarding the *USS Raven*, her family's ship, and reliving the Borg attack that resulted in her assimilation. "Captain!" She inhaled sharply to prepare herself to ward off whatever held her captain in its terrifying grip.

A pungent scent assailed her as wild blue eyes met her own. Her hand slipped over the other woman's torso, still slick from perspiration. The captain seized her left arm painfully just above the wrist and Seven's enhanced fingertips recorded the violent convulsions seizing Janeway's stomach muscles. Something inside the other woman was causing her pain, Seven deduced. She spread her fingers across Janeway's abdomen.

Apparent agony shot through the captain, and the woman arched sharply, her hips rising, bringing to Seven's keen awareness that the captain was nude.

"Seven!" The Borg's wrist strained under the captain's squeeze.

Need was evident in Janeway's voice. A relatively unfamiliar sensation curled through her stomach. A desire to offer compassion. "How can I assist you?"

Janeway bolted up, startling Seven into starting to back up herself. But the redhead's mouth was suddenly on hers and a restraining arm around her neck pressed her into the captain's heat. "No!" Kathryn Janeway's voice was both agonized and demanding as she tore her mouth from Seven's. "God, help me!"

Her voice faded sharply and the woman's head dropped against Seven's shoulder, suddenly turning and sniffing keenly at Seven's skin.

The Borg gasped, her nostrils flaring. The aroma surrounding the captain was beginning to fill her with an insatiable... itch. It was the only way to describe it, she thought, trying to qualify the sensations carefully.

Seven had no more time to think though as the captain's mouth seared across her own again, and she had the distinct impression of hard-nippled breasts pressing into her own chest.

Her right hand was grasped hard, then quickly the pressure eased, but the guidance was unmistakable. The captain leaned back, widening pupils edging out the blue. Seven's hand was taken on a tour of soft, hot skin, and finely curling hairs. "Seven!" Janeway groaned and arched into their

mutual touch on her body. "Sev...en," the woman's voice seemed greatly relieved.

An awareness of their bodies similarities came with Seven's touch against Janeway's opening folds. The coaxing touch of her captain's hand against her own knuckles encouraged Seven's explorations.

"Go... inside."

Seven immediately obeyed. She was helping the one who had helped her so often, so unselfishly. Slick velvet grasped her fingers and she put her left palm across the captain's abdomen to hold her in place carefully. Her gaze skimmed over the captain's stomach, enthralled by her actions and the unfamiliar play of muscles under skin. Janeway's voice, not much more than a husky choking cry, enveloped her and drew her gaze up to find the captain straining against some undefinable acute pain. Heartbeat hammering in her ears, Seven focused on the shining features, visually absorbing every muscle twitch, every groan, every time the other woman's eyes opened, settling on her own face, seemingly drawing her in closer.

And closer. Janeway's hand on the back of her neck pulled her down.

Mimicking Janeway's lingual touch a moment earlier, Seven's mouth explored textures both slick and coarse. A groan tore from an overwrought throat bathing Seven's tongue and teeth in delicious breathy heat. She pressed closer to experience more. The woman's body arched into hers and a rhythmic pulsing seized her fingers, as Janeway gasped and writhed.

"Captain!" Tearing her mouth away Seven gasped for breath, a hot flush catching her off-guard.

Settling back into the sheets her breathing deep but slowing, Janeway's expression was familiar, making Seven's flush subside a little even as her breathing sped up slightly. Blue eyes blinked at her in understanding as she drew back. Janeway's right hand slipped over Seven's brow. She shied away from the touch on her optical implant but Janeway's smile stilled her.

"It's... all right, Seven." The woman's lean fingers skimmed Seven's cheekbone. "Everything's going to be all right."

Seven blinked, feeling the sharp sting of something behind her eyes. She reached up with her right hand, capturing Janeway's right in it loosely holding it against her cheek. All the while she held Janeway's gaze with her own. "You are well?"

Kathryn's lips parted and the tiny tip of her tongue wet them with careful swipes. "I'm...fine." She eased up on her elbows and turned her palm, in Seven's light grip, until she cupped the pale cheek again. "What... brought... you here?"

Seven's left palm slipped over her exposed stomach as the younger woman began collected her scattered thoughts into her typical aplomb. "I... heard you cry out."

"You were scared for me?" Janeway studied Seven's face as the woman cocked her head and then, though still wearing a puzzled look, nodded. "You don't have to be."

"But you were in pain."

"Nothing... life-threatening," Janeway replied with a wry chuckle. The edge of her passion had been dulled, surprised but surprisingly fulfilled though she was. "I'm flattered to think you cared to protect us."

"I will always protect you," Seven avowed.

Janeway nodded carefully. "I... think I realized that." She grasped Seven's palm against her stomach. "The Queen threatened us to get you to return, didn't she?"

Seven worried at her lower lip with her teeth, finally drawing Janeway's attention and the older woman smoothed a fingertip over the abused lip. "I have known the Collective... You... I did

not want you to."

Silently they regarded one another. Janeway's fingertips drew a path along Seven's jaw, leaving tingling in their wake before pressing lightly behind her ear. "I want you," she said in a husky but firm voice before brushing her lips over the implants and skin that formed Seven's face. She drew back, watching Seven's face grow flush. "Do you know what I mean?"

Seven swallowed. "I... The knowledge is... not mine."

Kathryn nodded. "I know..." She swallowed down her own desires, determined make Seven understand first, before anything else. "Would you... want... me to teach you?" She held her breath, caught between wanting to assure a yes, and wanting to be sure that it was Seven's choice.

Seven curled her leg under her, and lifted her knee the cool feel of the fabric of her biosuit stabilizing her scattered thoughts. She crossed her palms over the knee and rested her chin there, watching Janeway, drawn again and again to clear blue eyes studying her just as intently. And suddenly the answer was clear... one she must give... for herself... and for this woman whose life had become inextricable entwined with her own.

"Yes," Seven finally responded, expelling a breath in relief as she took what she knew, and what she did not know... and gave her growth into the hands of this woman... so petite, yet strong enough to find her amid millions of Borg, tearing her from the Queen herself.

Janeway's smile was bright, white teeth against wine-shaded lips. Lean fingers slipped through her own. "Come here."

The Borg found herself drawn down, supine on the bedsheets. Kathryn Janeway wrapped herself around her length, making Seven aware of a warm thigh sprawled across her own, a heated mound pressed into her hip and warm soft breasts pressed into her ribcage. She lifted her right arm around Janeway's shoulders, a smile forming unconsciously on her lips as she stroked soft skin, disturbing fine hairs on Janeway's upper arm.

A foreign thought choked her for a breathless moment and she closed her eyes to focus on it. *I am home now*. For the first time she was thankful to find herself aboard *Voyager*, a tiny ship lost in the Delta quadrant, and thankful to the small but powerful captain who helmed the journey.

She turned her head, looking down at the smooth profile breathing softly against her shoulder. Dark lashes fluttered against creamy white cheeks; thin nostrils flared with breath.

She would have to tell her in the morning, Seven realized, and closed her own eyes. Sleep was unfamiliar, but with Janeway's heartbeat against her own, the rhythm soon lulled her into peaceful unconsciousness.

THE END