

Content Disclaimers: J/7 intimacy, but no actual sex in this story.

THE PRESENT

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(JDI Challenge 2) inspired by set 9



(also a sequel set sometime after my stories "The Birthday Wish" and "Seven Ways to Woo a Captain")

Kathryn Janeway had learned, in the months since Voyager's return, to sleep more fully. The fact that she now possessed far fewer reasons for anxiety and heavy decisions probably had a lot to do with it. However, she definitely had much more to be thankful for than the simple return of Voyager's crew to the Alpha quadrant after only 7 years loneliness.

After seven years of loneliness, and the pain of so many decisions made by herself, Kathryn was no longer alone. Seven had come to stay with her. To encourage her. *To love her.*

Smiling in her sleep, Kathryn rolled on her queen size bed to the right side, a lazy hand reaching out to the pillow. Her fingertips touched cotton sheets instead of luxuriously soft skin or silk-fine blonde hair and she came awake with a bit of dismay.

"Seven?"

She looked around her bedroom with concern. The chirps of birds outside the second story window told her that Seven had risen and opened the window to let in the morning's summer breeze. And whereas most mornings the long-legged blonde would then sit, just gazing at Kathryn sleeping until she awakened, this morning Seven was not settled on the large padded rocking chair which dominated the sunlit northeast corner of the bedroom.

"Seven?" Kathryn called a little louder.

Footsteps sounded then, on the staircase. Turning her eyes to the door, Kathryn's smile widened as she watched the shadow growing on the wall, reflecting the figure coming.

"Good morning, Kathryn," accompanied Seven's appearance at the edge of the doorway. She raised her left eyebrow, causing the optical implant remaining over that eye to arch, emphasizing her unspoken query.

"I missed waking up with you," Kathryn said a little bashfully. She was still getting used to how much she felt when she looked at Seven, how much she needed the young woman in her life. How much she needed to see the open love shining from blue eyes at last.

There was a sparkle to them this morning, Kathryn noted, as she also noticed the young

woman remained only partially in the doorway, her hands hidden from view. "So where have you been?" she asked.

"I was in the barn with your mother," Seven explained succinctly. She still did not move into the room.

"Doing what?" Kathryn asked, knowing it had something to do with whatever the young woman was not showing her.

Suddenly Seven's shoulders moved and she ducked out of the doorway as Janeway's ears caught the strangest noise... *was that whimpering?* Kathryn started to pull back the covers, the springs in the mattress alerting Seven to her intent.

"You are to remain in bed," Seven admonished firmly, her face briefly appearing in the doorway. "Your mother said I should 'surprise' you in bed."

Ah, mother. Kathryn smiled and resettled herself on the mattress, smoothing the covers over her legs. "All right. I'm in bed. So, what do you have?"

Seven moved into the doorway then and Kathryn finally identified what the young woman held... a puppy. The coat was smooth, speckled brown and black, and it had wriggled until Seven's grip only supported its middle. "Come here," she encouraged. Seven stepped into the room and crossed to the bed. Reaching out to take the young dog from Seven's hands, Kathryn asked, "Where did you find him?"

"He is from the litter which was born six weeks ago at your neighbor's home. Gretchen suggested you would like a dog."

The puppy seemed to rather like Kathryn, Seven thought, watching with interest as the animal pawed around Kathryn's chest, pushing away the delicate nightwear until a dusky nipple appeared. While the animal was more interested in licking at Kathryn's throat, Seven felt herself growing warm at the sight of Kathryn's intimate part.

They were not beginning overtures to have sex, she thought, a little disturbed at how easily she could be distracted by the older woman's figure from her purpose. While aboard Voyager, she had thought her constant focus on Janeway stemmed from the woman's position as captain of the vessel, and the complete charge she held over Seven's existence and the rules to which she had adapted, following a new 'queen' of sorts after her separation from the Borg Collective.

Now, since beginning an intimate relationship with Janeway, she understood it had always been the woman herself which held Seven enthralled. The compact delicate figure exuded such power and confidence along with a potent femininity.

Seven settled to the mattress covers, laying a hand over Kathryn's legs beneath the sheet. "I... I love you, Kathryn," she said, aware that the emotion building had caused a lump to form in her throat, and letting the tears appear in her eyes.

Kathryn looked away from the puppy, her gaze finding Seven's face. "Why are you crying?" she asked gently. She held the puppy with one hand and reached the other out to cover Seven's fingers on her thigh.

"I am happy," Seven said, a little confused. "But I am saddened that I waited so long to be with you. That I have only one life to live with you and I wasted so much of it fighting you."

Something in her words, every one of them the bare truth Seven had not voiced until that very moment of realization, brought tears to Kathryn's eyes. Laying the puppy down quickly between pillows so he would not wander or fall off the bed, Kathryn grasped Seven's hand and pulled the taller woman to her quickly.

"Oh, Seven, that is the most wonderful thing I have ever heard," she said before cupping

behind Seven's head and pressing her lips to Seven's deeply. Gradually their tongues explored one another's mouths and Seven wrapped her arms around Kathryn's shoulders, thankful for something to hold as she felt buffeted by the most powerful sensations in her limited experience. Her stomach quivered; her heart raced; the pounding of her pulse thrummed in her head and she felt dazed in a wholly pleasant way as Kathryn's lips left her own and the blue eyes met hers once more.

"Seven," Kathryn whispered. "I missed you all my life too."

Seven lowered Kathryn back down to the pillows, guiding her with her hands. She sought Kathryn's mouth with her own, beginning anew to learn her lover...

A cold wet muzzle brushed against her shoulder, sending Seven upright diverted from her pleasant task.

Kathryn looked at the dog; Seven sighed as she recognized the adoration. "Do you wish to keep the dog, Kathryn?" Seven asked.

"Of course. He's a present from you."

"Then may I suggest we remove him from the bed?"

Kathryn's rich laughter, as she scooped up the puppy, arranged a spot for him on the floor near the doorway with a spare blanket and pillow, carried through the house, down the stairs, to her mother just entering the Traditionalist home, dusting her hands on her jeans.

Gretchen glanced up the stairwell, heard, "Now where were we?" in her daughter's strong voice, and smiled as she entered the kitchen. No doubt her daughter and Seven would be *very* hungry when they finally came down for the evening meal.

THE END