

*Summary: Seven asks Janeway for help learning to dance, and both women get more than they expected out of the lesson.*

*Content disclaimers: Takes place sometime after "Human Error" and contains some spoilers for that 7th season episode*

# THE SOUND OF TWO HEARTS DANCING

*by Lara Zielinsky*

© 2005

## Chapter One

"Neelix is planning a dance party," Chakotay said to Seven. They sat in the Mess Hall going over the Astrometrics duty rosters and consuming their morning nutrients. Before Chakotay was a half-eaten platter of Talaxian omelette while Seven lowered her glass of nutritional supplement to raise her eyebrow at him. "What does that have to do with the duty reports?" she inquired in confusion.

"It doesn't. I've noticed you're really not involving yourself in the crew's off-duty activities at all any more. I was thinking you should go... with me, if you want, so you don't have to deal with the situation alone."

From her research Seven realized that the Commander was asking her on a date. She swallowed. Her failure in her simulations was still exceptionally fresh in her mind. Not to mention the dangers of overloading her cortical node. She could not have him arguing with her. "When is this party?" she stalled.

"In four days," he answered. His nod seemed to take her question as a positive response. "I'll pick you up in the cargo bay?"

Seven studied his face, swallowed again, and nodded.

"I've got to go. Is your duty shift on the bridge today?" he asked, rising to his feet.

"No."

He frowned; she flinched a little. He shrugged. "See you afterward then."

She could not respond. Her mind was too quickly running over her possible options. When all the data had been analyzed, she rose, recycled her glass, and headed for Sickbay.

"Welcome back, Seven," The Doctor offered her in cheery greeting. "Have you given my proposal some more thought?"

"I am in need of instruction," she requested without preamble.

"In what regard?"

"I require more lessons in dancing," she admitted.

"You're a wonderful dancer," he assured her. "A natural."

"I am not. I injured my last partner. I do not wish to do the same to The Commander."

"The Commander?"

"He has asked me to accompany him to Neelix's party."

"Taking steps into the real world so quickly?" The Doctor quipped, inside his virtual heart pounded anxiously.

"I must succeed," she replied with succinct urgency.

## The Sound of Two Hearts Dancing by Lara Zielinsky

"Can't help you, Seven. I really do think you're anxious over nothing. It's all in the rhythm. You just let the Commander lead. And feel the music."

"But I do not comprehend rhythm, and I cannot feel the music."

"Seven, relax. Music is... well, it just is."

"Will you assist me or not?"

The Doctor stubbornly shook his head. "No."

Anxiety riding her, Seven left Sickbay quickly. Her destination originally Cargo Bay 2 where her alcove was maintained, she found herself passing up that deck as the turbolift opened and asking the computer, "What is the location of Captain Janeway?"

"Captain Janeway is on the bridge."

*What time was it?* Surprised she could even be unaware of missing her shift's beginning, Seven realized then she would need to put her visit to the captain on hold until after she completed her shift as well. With several scenarios presenting themselves, unpleasantly, in her mind, Seven exhaled. She definitely would need time to consider her words.

"Computer," she addressed the turbolift, "Deck 8, Astrometrics."

"Come." Seven felt an unusual vibration in her stomach at the captain's usual greeting. I must be nervous about my request, she reasoned, squaring her shoulders against her doubts that the captain would accede to her request. She stepped inside the private quarters.

Stopping just inside, she acclimated herself to the lower lighting. Her ears caught the gentle and soft cadences of a haunting feminine singer. *The captain...?* Her traveling gaze finally located *Voyager's* captain, not the source of the song, but a soft sight nonetheless.

The normally formidable leader had vanished with the uniform, as Seven often found her this late at night. The soft gray of Janeway's shirt clung more relaxed to her body than the cranberry tunic.

She looks tired, Seven realized, noting the way the other woman cupped her cheek in her palm. The way her eyes only moved slowly across the pages of a book.

Seven's stomach muscle fluttered as she identified an odd notion to counsel the captain to sleep. I do not give her advice; I am seeking hers. But her feet would neither move forward to ask nor retreat to leave the captain in peace. Janeway looked up during her indecision. "Seven?"

The huskiness of the voice drove Seven back a step, involuntary systems racing. "Excuse me, Captain. I did not intend to disturb you."

It's all right, Seven. I'm awake. Is there something I can help you with?"

"No... Yes... No." Seven took a breath dismayed by her stammering. She took a firmer hold on her inner discord. "Do you dance?" she blurted.

Janeway sat up slowly tucking her book into her lap, a slender finger trapped between the pages. Irrelevantly, Seven wondered if it hurt. Blue eyes seemed to drag over her. Finally Janeway replied. "I... Yes. Yes, I do."

Seven looked up. "Will you dance with me?"

"Seven, I -- "

Seven swallowed, exhaled and tried to restate her request. "What I... Will you teach me... to dance?"

*Why am I shaking?* Seven anxiously tucked her hands behind her back, fingers interlocking. She held herself very still, eyes downcast, and waited.

The captain stood slowly from her chair. Out of her peripheral vision, Seven saw the woman carefully place a bookmark on her page, close the book and set it aside. It seemed very methodical

to Seven, controlled. Her heart hammered in her chest with fear.

Janeway's behaviors had become very familiar to Seven over the years. As often as they had disagreements Seven knew the prelude to a fierce dismissal when she saw it. She swallowed down the painful lump that thought caused in her throat. She did not want to be dismissed.

"Why?"

Janeway's one word response was so wholly unexpected, and so softly spoken, that Seven doubted her enhanced hearing. She queried, "What?"

"Why do you want to learn to dance?"

"It is a human skill I should acquire." Seven felt some relief as she was able to explain herself with logic, devoid of these emotional responses that reared up and choked her. At least she was not being sent away yet.

"Perhaps. But why now?" The captain stepped close, looking up into Seven's face. Out of the corner of her eye, Seven noticed Janeway's right hand move. Then it stopped and Janeway's voice drew Seven to actually meet her gaze. "Why me?"

They were only inches apart; Seven froze again as she tried to process a response. "After the Doctor refused I could think of no one else."

"The Doctor refused you?" The captain sounded disbelieving. "He said that I do not need to learn, that I am 'a natural.' That I will feel the music." Her words came out in a rush. Janeway's hand did come up then, fingertips grazing Seven's cheek, leaving behind a sensation of heat.

"Relax. You are perhaps a natural. You move very gracefully."

"But I injured my last partner. I must not injure the Commander."

Janeway drew back. "The Commander?"

Kathryn Janeway had not been truly surprised by Seven's late night entrance to her cabin. The young woman frequently invited herself over the years, usually troubled by some emotional quandary or another. Janeway found she appreciated the interruptions in her otherwise private time. But this time Seven had surprised her.

*Chakotay? Dance? With Seven?* Kathryn observed Seven's manner, realizing that the young woman was shaking. She wondered if Seven recognized her own fear. But fear of what in particular? "Seven, I think you need to have a seat." Certainly we need to stop staring at each other like we've grown two extra heads.

"Are you considering my request?" Seven asked, not moving.

"I'm giving it quite a lot of thought," Kathryn admitted. "Please sit."

Seven's hands unclenched from behind her back when she moved past Janeway to a small couch. Kathryn swallowed as the younger woman's body contacted hers for the briefest moment before she sat. Collecting herself she watched the way Seven settled, feet together, knees tucked, long fingered hands laced together over them.

Seven's chin rose and blue eyes pinned her. "What have you decided?" Seven pre-empted.

"I still want to understand why you want to dance."

"Is it not supposed to be a pleasurable experience?"

"Yes. It is. I just... Pleasure is not irrelevant?" Kathryn quipped just a little, trying to get Seven to understand how odd she found all this.

"Commander Chakotay asked me to accompany him to Neelix's party."

"And you want to go?"

"You have always encouraged me to mingle."

"Yes, but..." Kathryn tried to wrap her mind around the idea. "Chakotay asked you? He..." *He*

## The Sound of Two Hearts Dancing by Lara Zielinsky

*has thought you would sell us to the first Borg vessel to come down the pike since you came aboard.* She kept her mouth shut. If Seven and Chakotay had reached some sort of understanding, Kathryn thought, *who am I to interfere?*

But she wanted to, she realized. Seven may have tried dating, but was she really suited for Chakotay? He was sweet, could be devoted and was seldom argumentative. Kathryn could not shake that he was wrong somehow. It had to be that underlying distrust since his own assimilation, she reasoned, shaking herself out of her reverie as she realized Seven awaited an explanation still. Kathryn had to make some sort of decision.

"Okay, so you want to learn to dance. Why not have Chakotay teach you?" He certainly was a decent dancer; Kathryn had managed a few turns on his arm at past crew parties.

"Because I am required to dance with him perfectly."

"I doubt he expects that."

"I do," Seven clarified. "I cannot be... inadequate, imperfect. You..." Seven seemed to uncharacteristically pause and search for the words to express herself. "You and I disagree, but you have never seen my failures as weakness," Seven's voice grew softer and melancholy. Her head dropped, eyes studying her fingers entwined in her lap.

The vulnerability demonstrated by Seven's action made Kathryn's decision instantly. She reached out in reassurance, tucking her fingers around Seven's to draw her attention back up. "No, I never have, Seven. I don't think Chakotay will either, but..." She shrugged off the shiver down her spine. "If this is the way you want it, I'll teach you to dance."

Seven's eyes gleamed with sudden emotion, almost tears perhaps. Somehow Kathryn's simple acquiescence had managed to please her deeply. "Thank you, Captain."

Heartbeat pounding in her throat, Kathryn nodded and suggested, "2100 hours in Holodeck One tomorrow?"

"That will be acceptable."

## Chapter 2

The next morning, Janeway was still processing Seven's request and her own willingness to show the young woman a few steps. Stepping onto the bridge, she surveyed her crew and tried to forget the image of Seven's face as she had admitted to a fear of failure.

Harry at Ops gave the captain a smile; she returned it with a nod. Tuvok at Tactical slightly inclined his head. She raised her eyebrow at him; he returned the arch look. She burst a quick grin and then stepped down in the Command well.

Stars streaked past on the forward viewscreen and the back of Tom's head as he dutifully navigated made her smile. Since B'Elanna's pregnancy he had really become the officer she had hoped he would: responsible, dutiful and attentive.

Though he still liked the holodecks far too much, she added with a smile. She turned from her survey to the seat at the center. Her smile froze in place as Chakotay looked up from his console. "Restful night?" he asked conversationally.

"The usual," she replied, turning around a gripping both arms as she settled to the cushions of her chair.

Silence passed for a moment as she opened a session on her own console and scanned the inbound report subjects. Chakotay however had not stopped watching her. He prompted, "Today's the day we're expecting the monthly alignment with the MIDAS array."

She looked up interestedly. "Who are the lucky three today?"

He glanced down, tapped a key, undoubtedly bringing up the list Neelix had drafted from the lottery drawing results. General orders, command business, and a bundle of outgoing and incoming letters always went the first two minutes of the eleven allotted. The remaining nine minutes were split, three apiece, among the lottery winners, for face-to-face conversation with any chosen individual in the Alpha quadrant.

Chakotay finally found the entries. His eyebrows raised then settled before he looked up. "Billings, Crell and you."

Janeway ignored the looks from the others around the bridge, keeping her gaze steady even as it felt as though someone were compressing her chest painfully tight. Her breathing stopped for a telling second and she hunted around for something to say. While she enjoyed the monthly letters, newsy missives from both her mother and sister, and transmitted short ones in reply, face-to-face was...

*Going to be different*, she realized. She lifted her chin. "Seven will let us know when the alignment is established?" She held her voice down so Chakotay could not catch the quaver in it.

"Normally I have Seven just transmit the administrative packets to the appropriate workstations." He lifted an eyebrow in question. "Perhaps you'd like to collect them today?"

Janeway briefly nodded. He tapped a few keys and nodded back.

Settling back in her chair, Kathryn Janeway let her mind spin over what to say. They only had three minutes. But three minutes of silence as she tried to figure out what to say would not do.

Chakotay kept tabs on the reports from various departments on the space through which they traveled. Janeway remembered occasionally to prod Tuvok and Harry for readings.

When Seven's announcement sent Janeway shooting to her feet, Chakotay only nodded.

"I'm on my way, Seven. Janeway out." The captain tried to contain herself, walking with measured steps to the turbolift behind Tuvok's station. "Deck 8, Astrometrics," she ordered as the doors closed.

"Captain looks nervous about talking to her mother," Tom said aloud, turning around now that the object of his observations in the reflective surface was safely gone.

"I wonder why," Harry mused.

Tom rolled his eyes. Harry frowned, trying to figure it out as he returned to his workstation's readouts.

Janeway emerged on Deck 8 and checked the corridor was empty before rushing to the entrance of Astrometrics. None too soon as she spotted Crell and Billings, both from Engineering, emerging from another turbolift.

"Captain, the first packets are already downloading." Seven's voice was business-like as Janeway approached the central console where the former Borg worked carefully.

"Thank you. Just send them to the proper stations." She looked at the time indices, both real-time Delta and Alpha quadrant readings, and the link's countdown clock, currently passing through minute number two of their connection. "Is there any real time missives from Starfleet Command?"

"Admiral Hayes does not have a note indicating anything," Seven reported. "You have thirty-one seconds before the link will open to Indiana," she added concisely.

Janeway nodded. Seven moved over to the next console, certainly not out of earshot for those Borg-enhanced senses. While she was still trying to figure out what to say to Gretchen Janeway, that she would not be able to do so in privacy momentarily stymied her. "Seven?"

"Yes, Captain?"

## The Sound of Two Hearts Dancing by Lara Zielinsky

"Don't you step outside?"

"I must monitor the connection, make constant adjustments or you may be cut off."

Janeway blinked. "Oh." Certainly sounded reasonable.

"Ten seconds."

Exhaling, and unconsciously straightening her uniform, Captain Kathryn Janeway turned to the central viewscreen and watched the signal fizzle and fuss, and finally resolve into her mother's features.

Twenty-four years older than Kathryn, Gretchen Janeway still smiled with the warmth of a young woman. Now that smile reached across 15,000 light years and seared her daughter's heart. "Mother," she breathed carefully. "Hi," came the inner child's voice bursting up from her chest.

"Hello, Kathryn. I've been looking forward to this," Gretchen said easily.

"Did you receive my last letter?"

"Yes, of course," Gretchen said with a nod. "The three sentences were most informative. You have rescued all of your crew from that planet that blocked all your memories." There was something mildly reproving in the dry tone from the elder Janeway.

Kathryn forced a shrug. "No ill effects." She held her arms wide. "See?"

"And you tangled again with the Borg?"

"One of these days they're going to realize there's no going against a Janeway and winning." She grinned.

"And Seven of Nine is well, after her ordeal?"

Kathryn cast a glance toward Seven, whose back was turned to her. "Yes," she answered her mother. "Seven's fine."

Her name spoken, Seven turned slowly with a surprised expression. Janeway closed her eyes and lifted her chin toward her mother's image.

"My mother asked about you."

"Is this Seven?" Gretchen asked as, from her point of view, Seven apparently came into view.

Now with Seven standing beside her, Kathryn felt compelled to make introductions. "Seven of Nine, *Voyager's* Astrometrics officer. This is my mother, Gretchen Janeway." Kathryn's hand lifted from the back of Seven's to gesture to the screen.

"Pleased to meet you, Seven."

"A privilege to meet you as well, Mrs. Janeway."

"How have you been finding ship life under my daughter's command?"

"Captain Janeway is a resourceful and talented leader," Seven assured her.

"Sounds like you've been well-trained in Starfleet ways."

"The captain has been very thorough," Seven responded. Kathryn Janeway dropped her head into her hands. "Thanks, Seven. Mother, she's doing very well in her adjustments."

Seven cut in, "Yes, the captain will be teaching me to dance this evening on the holodeck after our shift."

The elder Janeway looked from the blonde Borg to her daughter, who was once again covering her eyes with a distressed hand. "Mother," she interrupted the terribly pleased look threatening to burst into full bloom on her mother's features. "How did Phoebe's latest showing go in San Francisco?"

"Very well received. She's doing a new series she's titled 'Delta Quadrant dreams' from the images you've included in each of your letters."

"Tell her she's welcome for the inspiration," Kathryn replied.

"I will."

The timer ticked down the last few seconds. "Seven, you'd better call Crell and Billings in," Captain Janeway said. "Mom, I ... We have to say goodbye."

"There's a letter in the packet for you, too," Gretchen assured her.

"I'll be sure to read it."

"Kathryn...?" Gretchen looked from Kathryn to Seven gently, then back to her daughter.

Forestalling more comments Kathryn nodded. "I know... I love you too."

"Goodbye, Seven of Nine."

"Goodbye, Mrs. Janeway."

The screen fizzled at the zero-count, and Seven stepped up to activate the connection for the next person. Staring at the blanked screen for a long moment, wondering at her mother's look toward Seven, and Seven's generously kind responses, Janeway did not immediately step out to fetch the other crewmembers. Seven triggered the door.

"Crewman Crell, your brother will appear momentarily. Captain, was there something further?"

Turning to meet Seven's gaze, Janeway shook herself. "No, Seven. Thank you, again."

"Yes, Captain."

In a daze the captain walked out passed the excited Brellian, Crell, his neck ridges an excited neon blue. "Captain!" he gurgled at seeing her.

"I'm just leaving. Enjoy your time."

Needing no other prodding, Crell disappeared.

"Captain?"

Would no one leave her alone? Janeway thought irritably, still overset by the emotions raised by her conversation with her mother. "Yes?"

"Crewman Billings, ma'am. Just to say nice to see you."

"Thanks. Enjoy your time on the array."

Leaving yet another widely grinning crewmember behind, Janeway strode for the turbolift. Alone in its silence, she closed her eyes, feeling a tear finally break from her eyelashes. She intercepted it against her cheek and hit her combadge. "Captain to Chakotay."

"Chakotay here."

"I'm taking lunch, Commander."

"Yes, ma'am. See you in an hour. Bridge out."

Maybe there would be a quiet corner, in the shadows by the star-windows where she could nurse a coffee and ease some of the aching in her heart.

### Chapter 3

Neelix tried not to look too obviously in the captain's direction. She had entered the Mess Hall nearly an hour earlier, said nothing to him. She had even skirted the replicator, not ordering her usual coffee.

In a position that could only be described as curled up, her arms wrapped around her knees, the captain had taken up a section of couch positioned such that occupants' vision was completely filled with the field of stars streaking past.

He dried the last pot and still she sat. Other crew, in for the lunch break, had already

## The Sound of Two Hearts Dancing by Lara Zielinsky

vacated. Neelix caught a glimpse of her face as the captain adjusted herself to rest a cheek against an arm braced on the backrest. He had seen other faces similarly melancholy in the months since the Alpha quadrant sent the ship instructions on aligning with a telecommunications array monthly.

A glance at the lottery record confirmed his suspicions. Today had been the captain's day.

After the first few crewmember's had drowned themselves in synthehol, Neelix had devised an ingenious intervention. "Neelix to Seven of Nine."

"Seven of Nine here. Go ahead, Neelix."

"I think we have another person to cheer up after today's connection."

"I will prepare the file. For whom?"

"Captain Janeway."

There was a long pause before Seven replied. "Understood."

His duties as *Voyager's* Morale Officer dutifully discharged, Neelix returned to the interior of his kitchen to take stock of his supplies and plan the evening meal as Ship's Cook.

\* \* \*

Seven approached the Mess Hall, her mind on the PADD in her hand and the captain's pleased reaction. Neelix had assured her in the past that this memento was treasured by each person, uplifting their 'spirits.' She had come to appreciate her small role in the improved morale of the ship's complement.

Starting toward Neelix, she was surprised when he nodded toward the far wall.

Same as the evening before, Seven was struck anew by how weary *Voyager's* captain appeared. Finding a tightening blockage irritating her throat, Seven walked to the serving counter and held out the PADD. "As you requested," she said politely, though unnecessarily. They both knew why she was there.

Neelix looked past her. Seven turned her head slightly to take in the captain looking up toward the sound of her voice.

"Why don't you give it to her?" Neelix suggested.

"That is not protocol," she pointed out, turning back to level her gaze at him. There were always rules to follow; she would always endeavor to do so. "You are morale officer." Oddly she felt the captain's eyes on her and lifted the PADD again, willing the Talaxian to take it.

Unfortunately Borg were incapable of inducing mind-control and her lingering with Neelix brought the captain to her side.

"Taking a lunch, Seven?"

"I am not," Seven replied tightly. "I have a missive for Neelix."

"Well, Neelix, better take your mail."

The furred face flushed apoplectic briefly. Then he smiled, far brighter than the situation warranted with the captain's dour expression still in place. "Actually, captain, I believe it is for you."

"All right," Janeway said, holding her hand out to Seven. The Borg bore the captain's tolerant look and placed the PADD in her palm.

Neelix prefaced the presentation when Seven remained quiet, unable to break her gaze with the captain's. "We... thought you... could you a pick-me-up."

Janeway frowned; Seven caught the woman's faint whisper as she muttered, "I knew I should've gone to my quarters." Aloud she said to Neelix, "Unnecessary."

Realizing that was as congenial a dismissal as he was going to receive, Neelix retreated to his kitchen.

"Seven." Janeway turned a stern eye on the Borg, her voice dropping a noticeable octave as she requested, "What is this?"

"A visual record of your conversation with your mother," Seven reported evenly, assured that dissembling as Neelix had would earn her the same reproach. Besides, efficiency did not permit anything less.

"A... but I thought...?" Janeway shook her head. "Why?"

Again Seven only offered truth. "Neelix noted early in this process how many people, despite the live contact, became... depressed after their turn came and went."

"So you have been recording the conversations... as mementos?"

Seven recalled how the captain reacted when she would not move out of the lab when the transmission started. Now she was uncertain the captain would be pleased by her endeavor. "Yes?"

Janeway did not immediately react, looking at the PADD without activating it. "Three minutes was not nearly enough," she murmured, finally pressing 'load' then 'play'. She paused the playback on the very first clear frame.

*Seven years... She's changed so much.* Sharp blue eyes that had laughed as Gretchen kissed her goodbye were dulled by pain. Kathryn had promised to return quickly from the Badlands mission, "So you can dance at my wedding," she had said.

Her mother looked too worn to dance anywhere now.

*Is it really going to be another thirty years before I'll see you again?* The pain welled up to choke the captain. She brushed her thumb over the power, turning it off.

"What I have done displeases you?" Seven asked.

Janeway studied the features she had watched grow from Borg clinical chilliness to warm woman in the space of four years. And wondered why she herself could not let her own emotions grow. *Why do I have to kill myself out here?* She pleaded with the unknown forces of the universe.

Concern now darkened Seven's eyes and Janeway could not bear it any longer. Unable to speak, Janeway shook her head and then dropped her eyes, brushing quickly past Seven and out the Mess Hall doors.

"Good idea, hmm?" Neelix asked blithely, having reappeared to see the captain's last steps before she disappeared.

"No," Seven sharply surmised, aware in a deep part of herself of pain, agonizing pain, on another's behalf.

She shot Neelix a dour look, turned on her own heel and left him puzzling in silence.

Too familiar with her own experiences with painful emotions, memories and regrets, Seven sorely regretted having caused the captain's. The other woman had only ever been the kind of friend Seven was just learning to become: generous with time and talent, a counterbalance when needed, and understanding when it seemed the rest of the universe conspired to make a lonely individual even more miserable.

Finding the captain in order to issue her apology was not difficult. The diminutive woman was striding away from her quarters for the bridge turbolift.

"Captain," Seven called out as the doors ahead opened. Janeway did not turn until she was inside the lift car. "Not now, Seven." Her commanding voice, to Seven's acute ears, cracked on her name.

Seven reached out to catch and hold the doors, pushing herself inside. "An emergency?"

## The Sound of Two Hearts Dancing by Lara Zielinsky

Janeway said nothing. She emerged ahead of Seven onto the bridge. The Borg moved to her adjunct station behind the command seats assessing the readouts and reporting her findings, even as Janeway called, "Report!" from the other stations.

"A Negulum vessel has demanded we hold until a security squadron can inspect our 'papers'," Chakotay explained.

"Papers? Did we cross into contested territory?"

"Not according to any of the maps we have of this region's political alignments," Seven replied.

Janeway pursed her lips. She turned to Tom. "Tom, what's your impression?"

"They felt like bullies looking for easy prey. We are alone. Sitting to await more ships is dangerous."

"Tuvok?"

"That would be my assessment as well."

"All right, Tuvok, fire a disabling shot to their warp manifold. Tom, take us out of range at Warp 8."

"Aye, aye, Captain."

Seven watched Janeway pace as Tuvok adjusted his targeting equipment and announced he was ready to fire.

Janeway grasped the side of her chair. "Tuvok, fire. Tom, go."

Following orders, Tuvok caused *Voyager* to spit a line of phaser fire against the rear assembly of the challenging ship. Upon Tuvok's "Manifold disabled," Tom Paris announced the engagement of the warp engines.

Seven saw Janeway shoot Chakotay a disturbed glare before she walked off the bridge, ensconcing herself in her ready room.

Chakotay stood from his seat, told Tuvok he had the conn, and went in after her.

Seven had an unreasonable urge to join them, to defend the captain, knowing her mood was partially Seven's fault.

Inside the ready room, Chakotay stepped up to the desk, fingering a figurine on the shelves as he glanced occasionally at the fuming woman, arms crossed over her chest, staring out at the stars streaking by the window.

"Why couldn't you handle that?" she asked sharply.

"I thought you could use the distraction," he said.

"Why does everyone seem to feel the need to 'handle' me suddenly?" She turned and snapped. "You, Neelix... Seven."

"Did something happen?"

"I had a very nice short chat with my mother, and everyone thinks I'm suddenly fragile."

He let go the figurine and faced her, a steady gaze boring into her face. She looked away from him. "You're not? Glad to hear that you're biting my head off in some normal fashion."

Janeway swallowed, chastised. "Okay, so talking to my mother rattled me."

"I take it Neelix tried to do something about that?"

"For all the 'sad crewmembers', he has Seven copy a visual and audio recording of their conversation." She held out the PADD that had somehow never left her hands though she dearly wanted to throw it across the room. "Seven presented me mine in the Mess Hall."

"Sounds like she cares." Chakotay smiled. "Remember you taught her that. Sounds like she learned the lessons well."

Janeway suddenly recalled what else she was supposed to teach Seven. "I hear you're escorting Seven to Neelix's next party."

"How'd you know?" Chakotay nodded. "She hasn't spoken to me since I asked her yesterday." Silence drifted between them. "I'll work on some reports," Janeway said finally.

"I'll run the bridge."

"Thanks."

"See you later." Chakotay waved himself out, surprising Seven standing in the ready room doorway. "You too," he told the Borg.

Seven did not reply. Janeway leaned against her desk regarding Seven, who remained in the open doorway awaiting permission to enter. Finally Janeway nodded and with a sigh, she said, "Come in."

"Captain, about... the PADD. If you give it to me, I will destroy its contents for you. That it did not cause the intended effect, I am sorry."

Janeway shook her head. "I'll keep it. I... Can we sit?" She indicated the couch under the windows. Seven nodded and followed her up.

They both settled. "I don't understand," Seven commented. "Are you upset?"

"I... was," Janeway admitted honestly. Seven's expression became self-flagelating. "But never, honestly, was I upset with you." She bit her lip lightly, admitting her failings came as difficultly to Janeway as it did to Seven. "You are acting on your emotions in ways I never expected." The captain grasped Seven's left hand. "And I have been unable to express mine for longer than I can remember. That hurt terribly."

Seven's gaze lifted from their connected hands. "I never meant to cause you pain."

"At least pain is a feeling, Seven." Janeway gripped her hand tightly. "We're alive when we feel pain. If we don't feel anything, as humans we're dead."

"Why are you saying this?"

"Because I'd forgotten, and it took a self-proclaimed unfeeling Borg with more access to her feelings to remind me that I wasn't accessing mine."

"Does this mean you have decided not to teach me to dance?" Seven worried. The captain was holding her hand rather tightly.

"Dancing," Janeway shook her head. "Is only the beginning." The captain leaned over and pressed her lips gently to Seven's cheek. "Thank you."

"You are welcome." Seven stood, finding it hard to pull herself away from the captain's touch. "I will see you at 1900 hours in the holodeck then."

"I'll be there," Janeway promised, her smile and heart light for the first time all day. In rapt silence she watched Seven's departure, positive the dancing experience would be just as unforgettable.

## Chapter 4

After Seven left the captain's ready room, she also departed the bridge. Janeway emerged quickly after, a faint smile unbidden as she settled to her chair.

Chakotay thought it quite the turnaround and wondered what Seven had said to Kathryn after he had left. But he had learned his lesson: no discussing the captain's emotions on the bridge. "Everything in order?" he queried obliquely.

She nodded, the smile stayed in place, even broadening a little.

## The Sound of Two Hearts Dancing by Lara Zielinsky

"Good," he said quickly. The rest of Alpha shift passed uneventfully.

Janeway was surprised to find Chakotay following her into the turbolift at the end of the shift. "Not supervising Beta tonight?" she asked.

He shook his head. Janeway's earlier mention of her knowledge of his intentions toward Seven had made him decide that he would more actively pursue the former Borg. "Decided to try dinner with company tonight."

"Oh." Her mind already ahead on her dance lesson with Seven Janeway did not register the words, only that a response had been made. "Sounds good."

They both emerged on Deck 2 where senior officers' quarters lay as well as Neelix's Mess Hall. Pausing in the doorway to her quarters, Janeway said, "Hope you enjoy yourself."

"Any plans?" he asked.

"This and that," she shrugged.

Chakotay disappeared into his quarters.

Kathryn sped through changing out of uniform as though it were a Red Alert. She showered and raided her civilian clothes, finally settling on a white cotton pullover with crisp lines and a v-neck paired with burgundy slacks styled to trimly hug her thighs and calves to the ankles. Tiny white canvas shoes with non-slip soles completed her ensemble.

The active wear would serve best since she was uncertain which dances Seven would wish to learn.

She pinned her combadge on last, almost considering leaving it behind.

"I'm not captain tonight," she reminded herself, the smile back again with a bit of a shy edge as she examined herself in her ensuite mirror. But to be without it would be the height of irresponsibility, a level she was not quite ready to attain.

Stepping into the corridor she found it empty and moved to the turbolift. "Holodeck 1," she ordered.

\* \* \*

To be prepared, Seven had read several histories of dance pertaining to Earth cultures, from ancient to modern. Many styles appeared to have attraction and mating purposes. Each was not simply a series of pre-connected movements but inherently a "message" given with the body to the prospective partner regarding invitations to sexual encounters. Many of the Native American and derived dances of Commander Chakotay's culture were also dances of hunting or prayer preparation, and performed in groups.

She had no idea where to begin. Not interested in inviting Chakotay to a sexual encounter in a public venue, the more 'communicative' dances would seem to be the wrong choice to learn. However as she imagined moving through some of the courtship dances with the captain, she felt their appeal viscerally.

Still trying to decide what instruction to request, Seven arrived early to the deck containing the holodeck rooms.

Hearing Chakotay talking with someone and approaching her location at a corridor junction, Seven moved out of sight hoping to avoid explaining her presence on the recreational deck until she was a skilled dancer.

"So what were you thinking of?" B'Elanna Torres, *Voyager's* chief engineer, was speaking to Chakotay as the pair walked past Seven's hiding spot.

"Do you think she'd like dinner, candles and a walk by the water?" he asked.

B'Elanna shrugged. "No one has asked Seven on a date before you, so who can tell?"

"Maybe I should just let her choose." Chakotay reached for his combadge. B'Elanna slapped his fingers away.

"No. We'll figure this out."

Seven exhaled as they walked away, finally disappearing around the corridor bend. If the Commander had hailed her, the sound would have given away her location. In the next instant, decisively, she pulled off her combadge, rearranging four circuits within the mechanism, rendering herself invisible to ship's sensors and unable to receive messages. For the time being.

Seven heard more footsteps but relaxed as she recognized them belonging to Captain Janeway. The smaller woman was lighter of step than Chakotay, and in a way more hurried too. The thought that the captain was eager for the lessons warmed Seven significantly.

The captain's appearance however was something unexpected. Absorbing the attire which accentuated the captain's femininity, Seven felt an unusual shift in her perceptions of their upcoming interaction.

Janeway smiled as she came to a stop. It was, Seven realized, a very rare but pleasant experience to receive such a look. "Captain," she greeted.

"Seven," Janeway replied. "While we're dancing, since it's not duty, please call me Kathryn."

"Yes, Captain." Janeway quirked a smile; Seven felt her cheeks warm.

The captain gestured over her shoulder. "I should tell you Chakotay's looking for you."

"Did you mention...?"

There was a long pause before Janeway replied. Seven wondered what was truly behind the captain's decision to keep her secret when she shook her head and answered, "All things considered, I didn't say anything."

"Thank you," Seven responded sincerely.

Janeway smiled and pressed several keys on the entry pad. When the doors parted, she gestured. "Shall we get started then?"

The two women walked into a simple studio. Seven looked around uncertainly at the mirrored walls, seeing herself standing alongside the captain. Her heart skipped nervously. "Why mirrors?"

"When dancing you can observe your form and compare it to the standard postures," Janeway answered.

"A way to gauge my level of success," Seven realized. "You will be very successful," Janeway assured. She crossed the space ahead of Seven, who followed, to a table with a vintage turntable. "A relic from the dance classes in my Traditionalist home," Janeway explained.

Seven raised an eyebrow curiously. Covering her own nerves, Kathryn continued explaining, divulging peeks into her childhood to which no one else aboard *Voyager* had been privy.

"My father taught me the waltz. I was seven, perhaps eight. I stood on his boots to learn the movements."

"I could not stand on your feet," Seven observed with an air of consideration.

"No. Of course not." Janeway thumbed through the collection of vinyl discs, locating an appropriate score and setting it aside. "All right. Are you ready to learn a few steps?"

Seven immediately moved in front of Kathryn, reaching for her hands. Judiciously the captain took a step backward then moved alongside, facing the mirrors with Seven. But the scents of the young woman were hard to ignore. "Watch my feet," she said, a little too abruptly.

## The Sound of Two Hearts Dancing by Lara Zielinsky

When Seven's gaze dropped, Janeway counted aloud and executed the 1-2-3 pattern around the floor, watching Seven's absorbed expression with pleasure.

"Your turn," she said, stopping.

Watching her own feet, Seven stumbled through the repetition.

"Try watching your feet using the mirror," Kathryn suggested, demonstrating the pattern again.

Seven's fluidity improved with the advice.

"Good. Now..." Kathryn moved in front of Seven. "You have to learn to follow and lead. Basic movements are given individual accent in mixing them up. A partner can then lead or follow around the dance floor."

She looked up into Seven's face, finding the vantage on the blonde's features as she concentrated a pleasant one. By slight shifts in her cheek muscles, or the rise and lower of her eyebrows the woman had a captivatingly expressive face.

Holding up her hands, Janeway announced her intentions. "I'll lead to start." She put a hand on Seven's waist; Seven mimicked the action. Janeway grasped the woman's right hand off her hip, grasping it firmly. "No, we hold hands to this side."

Seven's left hand sliding over Janeway's hip briefly left the captain breathless. The touch was not tentative, but soft, and warm like a heating pad as Seven's longer fingers went well onto the small of her back.

"All right," Janeway finally managed, trying to remember proper distance though Seven kept her close. "When I step backward you equally step forward. If I move to the side, you follow to the same side."

"I believe I understand."

Janeway smiled at the certitude; Seven's self-assurance had always brought Janeway a complex smile: slightly proud of the determination, slightly chagrined as she knew each experience had the potential to crush that with failures, and inevitably, slightly pleased that Seven was still here.

Seven watched Janeway's feet, and stumbled about trying to predict the movements. With gentle pressure on her palm, Janeway stopped them. "Try watching the mirror instead. And don't guess. I won't lead you into trouble."

Considering those words an excellent summation of their entire relationship, Seven forgot to look at the captain's feet, instead moving as she felt the space between them widen, then shift, then narrow, then widen again. Over and over the patterns moved the pair of them around the floor.

It wasn't until Kathryn - Seven could no longer view the petite dancing woman in her arms as the austere captain - stopped dancing that she realized they had been moving for some time without music. Only the sound of Kathryn counting the beats.

"Well, that was definitely success," Kathryn said.

"Another?" Seven asked.

"To music this time, I think," Kathryn replied. Seven was bereft when their hands separated. She observed the woman's whole figure as she crossed to the turntable, placed a vinyl disc on the surface and lowered a pin attached to the end of a long mechanical arm to the grooved surface.

A melody poured forth and Janeway turned around. Seven recognized the type of music as Terran but could not name it as the woman before her became her whole world.

"Ready?" Janeway asked, her head tilting a little as she took in Seven's observational posture.

"Please," Seven responded. She was rewarded with the other woman stepping close again, taking her hands.

Two pairs of blue eyes, one ice-blue, the other the blue of late summer afternoons, met and fingers twined. Distance fled; bodies touched.

The music's rhythm swelled around them, buoyantly carrying them on its melodic path. Seven started to move, her body brushing Kathryn's, who followed. Feeling so many feelings in that moment, gratitude at the captain's instruction, pleasure at her own success, breathlessness at the contact their bodies made, Seven began to realize what "to feel" really meant. Everything was magnified, bright.

The dullness of the Borg world was left behind, washed away by radiant reds, brilliant blues, and the fine smoothness of skin as the captain's palm turned in her own. Seven drew the slight body closer protectively.

She recalled the melancholy she had recognized the day before and the echoing spasms of her heart she realized were empathy. *We are both lonely*, she thought.

Seven's cheek brushed the captain's hair; until that moment Kathryn was unaware how close their dance had become. She lifted her cheek from Seven's chest trying to find the will to pull away. Seven's lesson had taught her something as well.

She was in love with the young woman.

But the young woman was apparently in love with Chakotay. "Seven..."

Seven tilted her chin down and brought their gazes together. The intensity built and she focused only on those lips speaking her name. "Kathryn..."

She very nearly melted in the conflagration that the slight touch of full lips ignited in her stomach, and firebolts pierced her heart in her chest. She gasped; the kiss deepened.

Seven's foray into kissing competed with every memory Kathryn had of the intimate act, winning her heart hands down. She gave up trying to stand, body going limp, arms dropping.

Her weight was caught securely against Seven's soft frame. A moan passed her lips. Seven's arms tightened around her.

Seven exhaled then inhaled the air scented with Kathryn's arousal. Her heart raced in time with Janeway's. Her body ached, with taut nipples and a flexing in her abdomen which made her gasp.

Chapman had caused her to feel nothing similar. Her response to the Chakotay hologram dry compared to the warm, wet feelings she had now. The real Chakotay made her feel nothing next to the cacophony of emotional and physiological responses her body was dealing with presently.

"Kathryn..." she murmured, finding the lips against her own once again.

A loud screech erupted and the music ceased. Shaking her head to clear the daze that had beset her faculties, Seven looked up, past the captain's head, to the turntable.

In his right hand, Chakotay held a crushed music arm. "Sorry for the interruption," he growled.

In her arms, Seven felt Janeway turn and the soft form gained a backbone of steel. "Chakotay?" Still obviously winded, Janeway's voice came out as a question.

"Yeah. That would be me," he grumbled.

## Chapter 5

Seven observed the manner of Commander Chakotay's stance, the white of his knuckles as he gripped the crushed phonograph needle arm. The way his eyes raked over her, narrowed then pinned Kathryn compelled Seven to step forward protectively, drawing his gaze.

## The Sound of Two Hearts Dancing by Lara Zielinsky

She lifted her chin. "What do you want?" she requested firmly.

"We had a date tonight," he replied sharply.

"I neither made nor accepted plans to spend this time frame with you."

"It was going to be a surprise," he countered.

"I do not want a surprise." The last word dripped from her lips with disdain.

"You don't appear to want me at all!"

His left arm swept toward Janeway. Seven tensed, aware in that moment that she would intercept him if necessary, if he dared touch Kathryn, and break his hand.

Janeway intercepted. "Seven didn't want you to see her practicing – for you," the woman swallowed back the unease she felt when she realized what she was supposed to be doing was not actually what she had been doing.

"So you took it upon yourself to teach her - as her mentor - to kiss?"

"Seven asked me to teach her to dance," Janeway corrected.

"Nice steps," he complimented with vivid sarcasm. The captain winced but held firm to Seven's arm as she felt the taller woman's muscles flex as she took exception to the tone.

"You are being disrespectful. Kathryn is your captain," Seven reminded him.

"Yours too," he shot back. "And she seems to have forgotten that."

"I haven't."

"I requested her assistance, Commander." Seven was surprised to see the anger in his eyes directed continually at Janeway and did not understand its continuation after their explanations.

"She has taken advantage of you, Seven," he spoke with careful enunciation as though speaking to a child.

However Seven knew what she had felt and who had moved first into the kiss she had just experienced with the captain and shook her head. "Your assumption is incorrect. It was I who took advantage of the captain." Recognizing the implications she turned to Janeway immediately. "I apologize."

The soft, almost wounded expression lifting to meet her gaze became Seven's universe. Her pulse thrummed hotly in her ears. She wanted suddenly to return to kissing.

"Go away, Commander," she ordered. "I no longer wish to attend Neelix's party with you."

"Seven," Janeway began, surprised.

Since Chakotay had not moved however, Seven leveled a glare at him. "Leave."

Janeway laid her hand over Seven's own. "Seven, wait..." She turned to Chakotay and reached for his hand as well. "Chakotay," she said when he would not let her touch him. "Perhaps you should go." He glared at her; she swallowed. "Was there something else you came for?"

She had a brief thought that it might have been business which brought him into the holodeck at such an inopportune moment but the man shook his head. "No." Then he frowned at Seven again. "I asked the computer for Seven's location. It couldn't find her.

"I thought you'd like to know," he finished with a light of comprehension dawning in his dark eyes. "You always seem to worry about her."

Out of the corner of her eye Janeway caught Seven's expression of awed delight. It started her own stomach churning pleasantly.

"It's over," Chakotay said to Seven.

"It had never begun," the blonde woman countered not taking her eyes from Janeway's face. The captain had the grace to blush as the heat of Seven's words made Seven's choice painfully clear to *Voyager's* First Officer.

"But.. the simula--?" he blurted, clearly stunned and tipping his hand.

Seven cut him off: "-- was a mistake."

Janeway's brow slightly furrowed. "I saw it too."

Seven paled, a feat for the already porcelain-skinned woman. But she collected herself admirably. "Creating a simulation was wrong. I have found where my affections belong. I wish to take Kathryn Janeway as my lover."

Kathryn's stomach churned with the pleasant thoughts that image engendered. In Seven's conviction Kathryn found the strength to not deny herself any longer, and rather than reconcile Chakotay and Seven, claim the woman whom she had found beneath Borg armor for herself.

"Sounds like you have your answer," she managed.

He tried to square his shoulders twice, failing each time and only succeeding in shrugging. "Kathryn," he said finally, "just remember where we are. Seven, good luck."

Both women blinked as the man's ire evacuated like air from a decompressed shuttlebay. They remained silent for a long time after Chakotay had left them alone on the holodeck.

"What did the Commander mean?" Seven asked, unable with her limited experience to decipher his final words and motives.

Janeway nodded. Compelled by her heart to tell the truth. "Chakotay was reminding me of a conversation he and I had about four years ago."

"And his wish to me for luck?"

"He hopes that I make a different choice now than I did then."

"What choice?"

"It had nothing to do with us," Kathryn replied gently. "He's ... upset."

"Is there an 'us'?" Seven asked.

Kathryn blinked. *Had she really put it that way?* "I... I guess there is."

Seven beamed. Janeway found the expression irresistible; the shy light to the ice blue eyes, the merest pursing of the full lips captured her heart. She grasped Seven's hands, brushing over knuckles and implants with equal tenderness. "Yes, there is," she affirmed more strongly.

"I am pleased," Seven said. "I was truthful with the Commander when I said I know now where my emotions are involved."

Janeway nodded. "I should be as truthful as well." She inhaled catching Seven's light scent, very feminine with a metallic undertone, and exhaled, letting go reluctantly of the aroma which sent her heart racing. "Our relationship concerns me."

"You do not want one?"

"I need to know..." Kathryn cut herself off, trying to find a better way to put the question she must have answered in gentle terms that would not make Seven doubt her, but also feel free to turn away. "Are you in love with me or Captain Janeway?"

"Are you not the captain?"

"Yes. What I mean is... Seven, am I to remain your mentor? Or become your... lover?"

"Is that not what I said earlier?"

"I just... I wanted to check. It is... very important to me."

"You wonder if I can trust my emotions to be truthful?"

That wasn't exactly, but Janeway nodded. Perhaps an answer lay within Seven's elaboration.

"I have not had the Doctor remove the fail-safe in my systems blocking strong emotions because I..." She hesitated. "I was afraid of what I would experience."

"Fail-safe?" Janeway frowned at the new information. Something was endangering her Borg?

## The Sound of Two Hearts Dancing by Lara Zielinsky

"A revelation discovered during my... experimentation." Seven continued after a breath. "Strong emotions I experienced were... painful because the Borg installed a device designed to cause full system failure in such events."

"Strong emotions?"

"Anger. Contention. Fear... Passion."

"You... experienced these with the hologram?" Janeway's throat moved tightly. "And it caused you pain?" *God, if touching Seven would kill her...*

"Yes." Seven added, "But not with you."

"I'm... safer?"

"My emotions are even stronger with you... for you," Seven corrected herself. "But there is never pain."

"Oh."

"Are you not happy?"

"That you're not in pain? Of course. But Seven, I... don't... Is that really love?"

"When I am with you, I am not... lonely, not confused, filled with purpose, and aware of you... physically." Seven drew close, drawn in by that physical attraction now. Their bodies touched as she grasped Janeway's shoulders. "That is indicative of love, is it not?"

"Ah." Caught by the surprising warm eddies of blue in Seven's eyes, Janeway stuttered. "Um. I. Yes I suppose it is." Her chest swelled with amazement and her throat closed around awe as she knew she felt the same. A tremulous smile appeared as she opened herself to the fullest tide of the emotions between them.

She initiated their second kiss and revelled as the woman in her arms lost all the last vestiges of Borg armor and melted in surrender.

### Chapter 6

There didn't seem much to debate after that, Janeway realized, coming up for air after Seven's most recent foray into kissing which encompassed so much more than their lips.

Her body ached with passion, throbbing and hot in ways she hadn't felt in years. "Come with me," she whispered trying to hide the sharpest edge of her passion for fear of scaring the inexperienced young woman. She wanted the first experience to be the perfection Seven deserved.

"Where are we going?" Seven asked, easing up behind Janeway at the holodeck doors such that Kathryn's buttocks were cradled by Seven's pelvis.

The wantonness of the action sang through Kathryn's blood. *God, they couldn't walk through the ship like this.* "Seven..." she moaned. She gasped when the woman's hands stroked hotly along her torso, burning through the layer of fabric as though it were already gone. Moving her rear against Seven's pelvis in a mock of a dance, Janeway bit out an order, "Computer, bed."

"State parameters."

"Anything," she hissed. "Just do it now." Janeway turned in Seven's grasp and sealed their mouths together hungrily.

Given nothing to go on, the computer did its best to comply. Directly behind Seven's knees materialized a standard single, Starfleet-issued bed, medium hard mattress and made with Federation standard flag blue sheets and insignia-imprinted blanket.

Groping each other the two women fell across the bed. Seven's body cushioned the captain's fall. Their momentum nearly carried them off the other side to the dance studio's hardwood

flooring.

With dexterity Seven prevented the tumble and trapped Janeway against her voluptuous figure to resume their kisses.

Under the captain's writhing weight Seven's passion aroused fully. She instinctively bent her knees, lifting her hips so that her woman's mound rubbed against Kathryn's through their clothes. Sounds she recognized as exhibiting pleasure fell without effort from her mouth, and Janeway's.

Kathryn arched. Her chest rose into Seven's line of sight. With her left hand she parted the buttons of the blouse revealing bouncing taut nipples to her hungry gaze. She found herself licking her lips in nervous, anxious anticipation. Hands busy - one holding open the blouse, the other planted on Kathryn's lower back to keep their bodies in contact - Seven parted her lips and sucked the left breast into her mouth, plying the nub of nipple with her tongue to learn its texture and taste.

Kathryn gasped in surprise then her surprise segued into moans of pleasure. Hands that had been holding the smaller woman up above Seven went weak and then gripping into Seven's hair. "Oh, God!" she panted and her smaller body throbbed and shook in Seven's hands.

Her eyes went wide, the blue disappearing as her pupils widened with the fullness of orgasm.

The rapidity surprised Seven who had expected to have to penetrate the captain's sex to accomplish this pinnacle for her lover. "Kathryn?" she asked gently of the panting woman in her arms. "You are finished?"

Kathryn nuzzled her throat. "Not by a long shot, my Seven. Just... let me catch my breath. It has been a very, very long time."

Janeway was not inactive while she 'caught her breath'. Her breath in fact seemed terribly busy escaping as every time Janeway exhaled the most arousing breeze coursed over different areas of Seven's flesh. Cool blows tickled her nipples to hardness through the fabric of her top. Warmly exhaled air tingled the nape of her neck. Seven could feel her arousal making her vaginal cavity flow with moisture and she squirmed with the accompanying ache, trying to wrap her mind around the realization that she was not yet unclothed and yet it seemed her own pinnacle was imminent.

Wanting to feel Kathryn's flesh against her own she asked for it. "Please remove my clothes."

"All right." Kathryn's voice rumbled against Seven's right ear. The captain lavished it with the tantalizing tip of her tongue. Seven shivered, her nipples hardening so sharply she pressed her hands over them in an effort to ease the ache.

Janeway insinuated her fingers, parting buttons and pulling her nipples until Seven could remain quiet no longer. She arched, her center throbbing, and cried out when Kathryn's other hand massaged her center through the pants. The fly buttons parted and the material slid off her hips.

Kathryn's breath wafted over her engorged center. Seven closed her eyes, unable to concentrate with her eyes on such overwhelming sensations. "Kathryn!"

Then she sensed something she could never have imagined. Kathryn's fingertips parted her flesh and - Seven lifted her head to see - yes, Kathryn probed her center with her tongue. The connection felt more intimate than what Seven had done for Kathryn and the pinnacle fulfillment Seven had read about, helped Janeway experience and had wanted to experience for herself ever since she read about it, began to tingle through Seven's loins. She quivered and the sensations began to make her feel a little lost; she grabbed for Janeway, to keep herself anchored.

"Go with it, Seven," Janeway murmured against her flesh. Her hand slipped around Seven's thigh reassuringly. "I've got you."

## The Sound of Two Hearts Dancing by Lara Zielinsky

Her blood flowed so hot Seven thought she was burning up from inside out. Her heart pounded so fast and hard her chest hurt and her temple throbbed so much she feared her cortical node was going to fail.

She screamed at the latticework perfection of Omega seemed to flash before her eyes. "Omega! Kathryn!"

Body quaking she came to, Kathryn's body cuddled around hers, her voice cooing softly in Seven's left ear. "Oh, darling, you're beautiful." The rough pads of Janeway's fingers stroked calmly over the tense tendons of Seven's neck, the throbbing subsiding in her temples, and the wisps of her hair which had fallen into her face. "You are so beautiful," Kathryn murmured against her lips, offering a gentle contact of their lips.

Seven opened her mouth to speak, but found her throat dry. "Water," she gasped. When Kathryn would have pulled away to fetch it though she clung to the older woman.

"It's all right, darling. You'll be all right." Extricating herself from the bed and her new lover, Kathryn requested the water at the arch then returned to the bed. After a sip herself she crawled back onto the bed and cradled Seven to lift her head.

"I didn't think it would have this sort of effect on you," Janeway admitted sheepishly, stroking Seven's now sweat-soaked hair while the woman sucked the water from the cup.

"I will not die," Seven said.

"I've never seen Velocity take this much out of you," Kathryn worried. "How can you be sure?"

"Because I intend to do it again - to you," Seven promised. Her tone was absolute and sincere. "Just let me 'catch my breath' first." Seven's full lips tilted into a smile and her eyes lit with such mischief and promise that Janeway laughed openly and kissed her with such passion they were both breathless and clinging to one another for support when they parted.

"I love you, Seven."

"I love you, too, Kathryn."

"But promise me we'll have the Doctor check you out when we get out of here?"

"When we get out of here," Seven promised, rolling Janeway beneath her on the bed and beginning the process of giving pleasure to her lover all over again.

**THE END**