

## Fair Heaven

by Lara Zielinsky

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"It's been good t'see you again, Katie." Michael looked up from drying a glass under the counter as the redheaded woman set her empty ale glass down on the bar top.

Katie O'Clare pursed her lips, curved the corners in a smile, eyes dancing a little as Sullivan blew her a kiss. "Don't let your wife catch you," she quipped though she reached into the air as if to catch the affection.

"Who's that?" A female voice preceded the entrance of a big-boned woman hefting a box through the kitchen doorway. "Oh, hightail it back t'yer ship, Katie, afore I challenge y'tsome rings of me own."

Katie laughed. "I might just take you up on that challenge, Meghan."

"So it's t'be rings at dawn?" Michael questioned. "Ye'd make a might sightlier pair than ol' Tom and Lingham wrastlin' in the mud Saturday last." He kissed his wife's cheek as she presented it. "O'course my quid be on ye, Maggie."

The sun was just beginning to make its faintest rosy appearance as Katie O'Clare stepped out of Michael Sullivan's pub onto the cobbled streets of Fair Haven. She looked around at the nineteenth century Irish port town, smiling as she saw the masts of ships in the harbor, flags from around the known world flying.

She inhaled the sweet scent of heather, watching the farmer's wives leading small ponies, donkeys and mules pulling carts of homegrown and homespun wares. *Ah, the industrious day begins.*

She pulled her shawl more tightly about her shoulders, holding for just a spare few seconds longer, to the simple feeling of contentment. Turning she headed for the town stable.

A large bulk slammed into her. A gruff deep voice cried, "Odin's tits!" and then large hands, losing their hold on a loaded gunny sack which clattered to the stone street, pulled Katie upright once more. She looked up, righting the spinning world. The very definition of a mountainous figure stood before her, eyes icy blue like the North Atlantic where he obviously made his living. His face was unusually pale for a seafarer, unlined, even boyish. She fought against the urge to hold her nose at the mixed smells of fish, seawater, sweat and whale blubber wafting from him. He was the first from the North countries that she had seen in Fair Haven and curiosity nibbled at her tongue. Sanity however prevailed. Either that or a realization that she wasn't supposed to still be here.

Sensing the Norwegian wouldn't tarry to talk with a woman, especially one who had overset him, Katie sketched a bow, muttered "Thanks," and stepped quickly out of the way. Running to the safety of the stables, she spared a look back at the broad sailor's body as he stooped to collect his belongings. He had smelled very naturally like a man who hadn't bathed in at least a week at sea. But he was also covered in well-mended clothes. His face, what Katie had seen of it, was unmarked, therefore pegging

him as young, although clearly master of his own fate.

Though her curiosity was piqued, Katie knew her job could wait no longer. She slipped between the stable doors and called out.

"Computer, Exit."

\* \* \*

Captain Kathryn Janeway stepped through the arched doorway leading from Holodeck One, straightening the lie of her cranberry red command uniform. Tapping the communication badge over her left breast, she stated, "Janeway to Chakotay."

"Chakotay here. Go ahead, Captain."

"Status, Commander?"

"On course for the Alpha Quadrant. Nothing unusual on sensors."

"Then I'm going to get some breakfast."

"Enjoy. Neelix's special this morning is Vreldt eggs on toast."

Kathryn rolled her eyes. "Thanks for the warning."

Before the com system closed, she heard Chakotay's robust laugh and smiled herself. Neelix's concoctions were fine, most of the time, now. In the beginning he had possessed no clue. He had learned, mostly through trial and error, over the last six years what probably would work with most of the crew. Vreldt Two was a planet they had left only a few days earlier, and the foodstuffs Neelix had bartered for were still mostly untried. Eggs were eggs, right?

Entering the mess hall, Janeway was instantly recognized and greeted by Neelix. He left his post behind the counter, scooping a cup off the counter. *Not another native shot at coffee?* she hoped.

"The Vreldt suggested this would make an excellent caffeinated brew for you, Captain."

"Thanks, Neelix." Gamely she tried the beverage, sipping cautiously at the steaming dark contents. The liquid was sweet, the aroma almost fruity with an undercurrent scent of something almost like almonds. Attuned to caffeine, her body immediately recognized the introduction of the potent energizing source and she felt her heart race a little. Then she felt the flush of higher energy already hitting her brain. *What a wake-up call!* She pulled the cup from her lips. "Nice kick," she reported.

He promised her a plate of the eggs if she would just take a seat. Crossing to the tables over by the large transparencies, she was just pulling out her chair when the doors to the mess hall opened, drawing her attention to them. People came in and out all the time, but the decision to glance up pleased her when she saw it was Seven of Nine entering.

The young woman was immaculate as ever, hair secured in a French twist, biometric support suit snugly fit to her lean, curvaceous figure.

Seven went directly to the replicator and Janeway overheard the order of "Supplement number 14." When it had materialized, Seven swept it from the console and started for the exit.

"Good morning, Seven."

Janeway smirked as Neelix's greeting stalled Seven's hasty exit perfectly. The young woman turned politely and inquired, "Is there something you require?"

Neelix shrugged. "Just thought I'd say 'good morning'."

"Good morning," Seven replied. The words were simple enough, even issued gently, and if Janeway was not mistaken, the young woman offered a hesitant smile.

*Good on you, Neelix*, Janeway thought. She started toward Neelix and Seven before she had another thought. "Good morning, Seven."

"Captain?" Seven drew herself up cautiously at Janeway's approach, the ease with which she had been speaking to Neelix evaporating like water vapor.

"Oh, I forgot your breakfast! Please, Captain, excuse me."

"Neelix," Janeway looked away from Seven, who had not yet stopped staring at her, and grasped his arm. "It's all right. Hold it... for lunch. I've got to get to the bridge."

"Um, all right." She let go of his arm and he looked up at Seven. "Anything else for you, Seven?"

"No, thank you. I should also report to my post."

Janeway put herself in stride with Seven as the young woman exited the mess hall.

"Was there something you needed, Captain?"

The question unexpectedly caused a shiver down Janeway's spine. "No, just thought I'd join you in Astrometrics."

"My report is not yet ready."

"No hurry."

They walked in silence together to the Astrometrics lab, and after about fifteen minutes watching Seven bustle around, exchanging greetings with Icheb, Kathryn Janeway took herself off to the bridge.

\* \* \*

Leaning on the polished wooden surface of the counter, Hans surveyed the darkened corners of the Irishman's drinking hall, relieving his shoulder of his sack, waterproofed with whale fat. His nose twitched as he caught the smell of alcohol on the various bodies dancing past in the raucous noise these people called "dancing music."

"What have ye got in today, Norseman?"

At first Hans was startled, then he recalled he was supposed to have been here before. "I have lutafiske, sausages, a fine ale..." The man tending bar, Michael Sullivan by name, reached out a hand. "I've a case, but I'll give you a taste for a single piece."

Michael nodded and his hand disappeared below the edge of the bar, coming up with a single golden piece of metal rounded into the shape of a coin which he passed to Hans. In exchange, Hans rummaged through his sack, and retrieved a hand-hammered metal jug. Reaching across the bar, he grabbed one of the glasses – pausing before slamming down the less substantial glass, and poured a fingers-height of a golden liquid into it.

Michael tasted the glass, pursed his lips a moment, spit back into the glass and set it back down on the bar top.

"It is sufficient?" Hans asked.

"You say you have a case?"

"On my ship."

"Bring it by at closing time tonight, and I'll try it out on some of the regulars tomorrow."

Hans nodded. A deal set, he pushed away from the bar, repositioned his bag over his shoulder and started for the door.

A slight female, corseted and gowned, turned, catching up her skirts and Hans opened the door. "Thank you, sir." Hans felt his ears actually tingle as though touched by the honeyed sound. He harrumphed.

"Oh, it's you." Hans straightened, then slouched, then didn't know what to do with himself as the woman's bright blue eyes focused on him. "I wanted to apologize about this morning. I hope none of your things were damaged."

The woman looked to his bag. Oh yes, he had dropped it this morning to catch her from falling. "No. Nothing broken."

"Good." She beamed at him.

Hans was grateful when she finally moved aside and let him pass out into the Irish sunshine. Out on the street, he inhaled several times, adjusted his sack and headed for the pier where he had his small fjord ship at anchor.

Looking around as he approached the busy pier, he tossed his sack to the gunnel and climbed aboard. Below deck he walked to the cabin door.

"Computer, exit."

\* \* \*

Seven of Nine pushed the final pin into her French twist as she exited Holodeck One, her lunch break over, intent to return to her post in Astrometrics.

Entering Astrometrics she smiled at Icheb as the young man turned at her approach. "You may go eat," she informed him.

"Did you enjoy your break?" Icheb asked.

Assailed by a vision of bright blue smiling eyes, Seven nodded. "I did."

"What's Neelix's special today?"

"I do not know. Everyone is taking their meals in the 'Fair Haven' program today."

"Giving Neelix a day off," the young man nodded in an approving way. "I think I will take Naomi to lunch on the holodeck as well."

Seven nodded her concurrence with that suggestion and watched the young man leave before turning her attention to the calculations she had left running. The data flowing from the long range Astrometric sensors was routinely processed by algorithms she had devised long ago, sorting out data which met certain parameters to create her report to the captain, or anomalous data she would need to examine more closely for possibly hidden dangers to Voyager or its crew. Today the data looked to be remarkably benign and she felt a sense of calm as she prepared her formal report.

\* \* \*

"Seven's report?" Chakotay preambled as he leaned toward Janeway who had just turned to answer a quiet beep at her console.

Janeway nodded as she read the header. "Looks like a quiet bit of space ahead. Maybe we can take a few days shore leave on a planet somewhere."

"I thought you were enjoying the Fair Haven program again," he replied.

"I am," she said with an easy smile. "The change up of new faces around the bar has been nice."

"New faces?"

"Mr. Paris has obviously been paying better attention to the fact that Fair Haven is a port town. There's all sorts of traders in and out these days."

Chakotay's brow lifted, stretching his tattoo. "Someone catch your fancy?"

"Just Katie's curiosity about other cultures."

"Well, I wish you, and her, a delightful evening."

Janeway smiled. She wondered if the gorgeous young Nordic seaman would still be in town. Perhaps she could interest him in a pretty Irish gal showing him around.

\* \* \*

The songs, wine, and a new ale, courtesy of their Norse visitor according to Michael, circulated freely among the patrons at Michael's pub that night. Katie O'Clare danced jig after jig, and played rings with Michael's wife Megan. Her eye strayed to the door repeatedly. Finally she felt her breath catch as the tall seafarer, with a clean woven cap pulled tightly over his golden hair, only the occasional strand curling past the dark brown wool. He looked more slender today, having clearly changed from his bulky seawear to clothing more suitable for the slightly fairer clime of Ireland from his homeland's arctic chill. Where the Irish around him wore vests and linen, he still sported a pullover sweater.

Katie wondered what sort of woman had knitted it for him, a sister... a wife? She spun away from her current dance partner, using the energetic tempo to give her courage, and fell against him just as he was straightening in the lantern lights. "It's customary to remove a cap indoors," she said, breathlessly as she looked up into the gaze meeting hers as her hands fell against the strength of his forearms.

"Thank you, but I wish to keep it on."

Katie shivered, a very good, deep shiver that went directly to her groin, at the warm, deep tone. She couldn't speak immediately. The Norseman stood still as well.

The din suddenly crashed into Katie's ears as Firth, dancing to the jig playing from Roald's pipe, stumbled right through her, pushing her into the Norseman's body. His hands grasped her waist, squeezing just a bit. She caught her lower lip in her teeth as her body warmed to its neighbor.

Breathless against his chest, Katie asked, "What's your name?"

"Hans," he replied.

"Hans," Katie whispered. "I think I need a little fresh air."

He blinked. She thought perhaps he was about to ask her what she meant by that, but then he straightened them both, and opened the door, gesturing her to step out of the pub ahead of him. She grabbed her shawl from the hooks by the door and preceded him out into the moonlit night.

She inhaled several times, giving truth to her request for fresh air. "I love the smell of spring coming to these hills," she murmured wistfully. "It's what I miss most about home." She started walking, without a predetermined destination in mind. The curiosity she had seen in his eyes did not disappoint her as he

followed, quietly striding alongside.

"I have not been home in many... months," he said.

"So you have been at sea a long time?" Hans nodded. "Do you like it?"

"It can be interesting. Though it is the places to see along the way which are more interesting."

Katie smiled. "Are you widely traveled then?"

He cocked his head, clearly considering his words before speaking. "Yes, I am."

"I would love to hear some of your adventures," she said.

"I am not used to telling stories."

"Oh, you should. It's the only way we'll learn about each other after all."

He seemed to consider this. "Do you have stories to share in return?"

Katie put her right hand on the inside of his elbow as they walked along and tucked her left hand on top with a gentle caress of the wool fabric. "If you tell me yours, I'll tell you mine."

\* \* \*

Hans inhaled as the woman touched him. Wool didn't seem very thick right now, though he was warmer than he thought he should be for the weather. Clearing his throat, he realized he had given his name but the pleasantries dictated by the social order were incomplete. "What is your name?"

"Katie. Katie O'Clare."

"I shall have to give your stories some thought... Katie."

She blushed at his words. He had tried to keep his voice low, to hide the nervous quaver. He had never before done such a thing, but the inclination came over him to draw her close, and reassure her.

As he did so, Tom Paris came romping onto the street, rings in hand. "Katie O'Clare, time to defend your unbeaten streak."

Katie turned in Hans' arms. "Do you want to go back inside?" she asked him after surveying Tom Paris's face.

"I should return to... my ship... for the night."

"I hope to see you again," Katie replied. "I had a good time on our walk."

"Then we should do so again."

Katie's smile widened. "I'd like that. Good night, Hans."

"Good night... Katie." Hans dipped his head toward Tom. "Mr. Paris."

Tom assessed Hans then turned and followed Katie O'Clare back inside the bar.

Hans returned quickly to his ship in the harbor and disappeared below deck.

\* \* \*

Reentering Michael's bar, Tom leaned close to the captain, "You seem to have found a new friend."

Kathryn Janeway looked briefly back over her shoulder at the unseen Norwegian character. "I'm intrigued by your adding the new algorithms to bring in the seafaring traders common to the era."

Tom's brow furrowed. "Just don't go messing with the framework of the program."

Kathryn lifted her right hand in a "on my honor" gesture. "I learned my lesson with Michael." She paused and nodded toward the bartender who turned to fill a stein for her from one of the barrels tapped behind the bar.

"It wasn't why it went unstable, but you're safe not to take the chance. Too many folks really like it here, just the way it is." He nudged her with an elbow. "But I never took you for taking up with a blond."

Kathryn blushed. Collecting herself she reminded, "I believe you invited me to get your arse kicked in rings, Tom?"

He handed her the bridle rings and they commenced, in the distant reaches of the unfamiliar Delta quadrant to play a game developed by Irish horsemen some 600 years ago.

\* \* \*

Seven entered the cargo bay where her alcove stood and stared up at the panels, hard angles, rigid surfaces, and felt the unchanging sameness as though it were a stifling force. No longer was she Borg, comfortable in the rigidly defined role of one of many.

She sighed. But neither was she entirely comfortable in the constantly changing world of humans with their independent thoughts.

Her mind settled, as it often did, on the conundrum presented by one individual in particular, Captain Kathryn Janeway.

Clearly the captain's imagination enjoyed the separation from her duties provided by the holodeck

programs. From her first introduction of Seven to the holodecks, using a simulation of Leonardo Da Vinci's workshop, Janeway had continually encouraged Seven's imagination.

In an effort to understand it, but at the same time not to put herself up to ridicule should she fail, Seven had adopted the guise of a Norwegian tradesman, coming and going from Fair Haven to his homeland. It was well past the age of Vikings, her ancestors who had sailed the Earth's oceans, pillaging and kidnapping. In the nineteenth century, her ancestors had become preeminent trades people, sharing their wares throughout the known world.

Becoming Hans Alesund, Seven hoped to role play a little more understanding of her ancestors, and herself. The captain's reminiscence about the stories of her ancestor Shannen O'Donnell providing her with inspiration to be who she was today had been particularly compelling, so much so that when the captain's own trust in that stumbled, Seven had understood the power of inspiration, mimicry, and role playing in the development of personality and persuaded the captain to not lose trust.

The captain's uncharacteristically shy smile had done funny things to Seven and she resolved to examine even more than her boxing ancestor Sven "Butterfly" Hansen.

When she had read about the nineteenth century trader, Hans, what she had enjoyed most about his logs of his travels was the adventure, the discovery of new things... the love he found in an Irish village.

A little creativity (the captain would be proud) and Seven had introduced Hans Alesund to the Fair Haven program, and fully hid her true self with the help of a cloaking shield generator within her costume. She had caught a glimpse of herself in the bar's shining brass and been only somewhat startled when the captain approached.

There had been a gleam of curiosity in the usually sanguine blue eyes, a sense of Naomi's mischief as well. Uncertainty what to do had only served to make "Hans" stumble in his greeting, and then the captain had leaned close – Seven could only recall one time, in the holodeck then as well, that the captain had spoken thusly to her, an immediate sense of privacy, "for her ears only" sense arising from the exchange. When the captain had confided she thought Seven's encounter with Omega sounded like her first spiritual experience.

If that had been true, then this encounter with the captain, from their conversation in the bar to the walk out in the street, the way the captain had leaned close, whispered conversation, sharing a little introduction of their personas within the holodeck, had felt the same.

A spiritual experience. She felt a sense of anticipation, the curious sensation of being hungry though not for food, swamped her bodily functions, making her heart race at the thought of returning to the holodeck.

Now.

"Computer, where is the captain?"

"Captain Janeway is on the bridge."

Clearly suffering disappointment, Seven took a deep breath. Her heart rate slowed. Time to work.

Leaving the cargo bay, she reported to Astrometrics.

\* \* \*

Janeway enjoyed her shift on the bridge that day. Not because of anything interesting which occurred, but because of the occasional drift across her mind of the smooth features of the blond hologram that had captured her attention that morning. *Hans*. His voice had been smooth, dark and sweet as mead. His hands filled with the strength and surety of contentment. His eyes... She closed hers and recalled the purest blue, the way they seemed aged with knowledge, yet also alight with the flames of adventurous passions.

The stories he could probably tell. *Would tell her*, she thought. He had promised to walk out with her again.

"Captain?"

Janeway turned a smile on Chakotay as she opened her eyes. "Yes?"

"Nice smile," her first officer said softly.

"Nice memories," she replied.

He nodded and they turned back each to their own work.

\* \* \*

Hans Alesund strode into Michael's bar at the end of a long day. The dancing and revelry the inhabitants of this land indulged after their long days reminded him of the nights in longhouses when his own people shouted and danced and sang of their exploits.

These however were songs of love, not ballads of battle. Michael stepped out twice to join a jig with his wife. The rings game lay untouched, the reigning champion not yet arrived that night.

Alesund found himself looking toward the door each time it opened, wondering when the Irishwoman with the fire-reddened hair would join her neighbors.

\* \* \*

Taking her hands down from her pinned up hair, Kathryn Janeway checked her gown in the mirror and

hurried to the holodeck for dinner. Neelix had agreed to serve in the holodeck for the foreseeable future as most of the crew had taken favorably to the atmosphere of Michael's bar.

Yes, she acknowledged, she could have just as easily allowed billiard tables, dart and ring boards, and a bar atmosphere to be set up in the mess hall.

Like her, the crew enjoyed the complete release from their starship world from time to time.

She enjoyed being Katie O'Clare, shedding her command self and putting on the more demure clothing Captain Kathryn Janeway wouldn't dare.

She liked the way the crew related to her, themselves playing roles, some even taking up a trade in the town, like the Doctor becoming the town priest, or the crewman who had taken an apprenticeship in the town smithy, reveling in the heat of molding steel with the most raw of brutish strength, when in his daily tasks he was calling upon the replicator for every little pre-made thing.

It wasn't Da Vinci's studio, but it was raw, unedited creativity in a way Kathryn craved. She was whoever she wanted to be from one moment to the next. Michael had told her she would have been called 'faerie' had she lived in his day, with her flighty, gamin ways. She had liked that thought.

Captain Kathryn Janeway flighty? Never.

But Katie O'Clare? In a heartbeat.

She laughed as she entered Michael's bar. All eyes turned to her and she greeted a few faces with nods. When her gaze intersected Hans Alesund's, the smile broadened. The big Norwegian rose from his bar stool and offered it. "Would you care for a drink?" he asked.

*Oh.* Katie held his gaze and moved next to him as he held the stool for her to step up and sit. "Thank you, Hans," she acknowledged. His hands brushed her back as they moved to the back of the stool to set it forward to the bar. A shiver of pleasure chased itself down her spine and thickened into arousal in her groin.

Hans pulled out the next stool and sat down. She pushed his mug toward him. "What are you drinking?"

"It is from my homeland."

"I think I'll try that." She waved Michael over. "One of those," she informed him. Michael smiled, nodded, and pulled her a draught of the amber liquid from a small cask set among the others. She lifted, toasted Hans, "To your homeland," and drank. The taste was as sweet and thick as she had characterized Hans himself earlier. The aroma was heady, potent with alcohol, but went down smoothly. Throwing caution to the wind, she drank the rest down steadily, draining the glass.

When she put down the glass, Hans was staring in amazement at her. "Tell me about Norway?"

"I have never seen ... a woman do that," he said instead.

"Well, hopefully I'm not like any women you've met before."

"Ah, 'tis truth. You are not."

"Not bad, I hope." Katie put her right hand over his left wrist. They both watched her thumb rub in circles over the skin.

At last Hans looked up, meeting Katie's eyes.

Katie's vision swam a little and Hans went out of focus briefly. "A little fresh air?" she suggested.

"What would you like to do?"

"Would you show me your ship?"

"All right."

Katie smiled and watched his body move as he lifted himself somewhat puzzled off of his stool. She stood up behind him. After a quick look around, Hans led the way from the bar into the crisp, cool autumn air.

\* \* \*

The walk to the harbor was quiet. The sounds of town growing more distant, the sounds of the waves growing closer. "I like the sounds of the sea," Katie said.

"It is very rhythmic." Hans considered the description and nodded as he decided it fit.

"Yes, it is. Very relaxing."

They were just leaving the dirt path and stepping onto the wooden planks that made up the pier system, Hans wondered what on his ship to show the Irishwoman first, when Katie stumbled and fell against his body.

Reflexes quick, he caught her before she could fall all the way to the ground, his hands steady and sure around her waist.

She lifted her head, causing their gazes to meet. Luminous, as though lit from within, her eyes searched his face. Her hands, sliding over his forearms, he thought to steady herself, instead pushed her body up higher against his front, and her face came close to his.

There was a catch in both their breathing, as though time itself hesitated. Then Katie's lips were whisper light against his.

His arms crushed her against his chest, holding her firmly. She sighed and the kiss firmed, and deepened.

The touch of their lips lingered, only slowly, finally, parting. His hands had worked up into her hair, the strands now tangled around his fingers. Gently he withdrew them, stroking the locks. Her head fell back, her eyes closed, the expanse of her throat bathed in the moonlight.

"You..."

"Was I too forward?" Katie's chin dropped with alacrity.

"The Valkyries would mistake you for one of their own," Hans marveled. "But I cannot believe you wished to do that."

"Oh, I did, I do, and I want to do it again," Katie laughed. "You are a marvelous kisser."

Katie's hands went up behind his head, pulling his lips down upon hers. The taste, the texture. Explosions went off within him, and a throaty laugh from Katie broke his concentration.

"I think you'd better take us to your cabin."

\* \* \*

Heart pounding hard against her ribs, Seven lifted Janeway, cradling the smaller woman in her arms, their lips not parting. She half ran, half stumbled, the planks shaking under her boots, and boarded the *Torvald Maiden*, Hans' ship.

Kathryn Janeway's breath warmed her ear, her lips caressed the pulse point in her throat and Seven stumbled so hard she fell back against a wall to regain her balance without losing her precious cargo.

She forced herself to steady her breathing as she felt Kathryn's hands push past the thick jerkin.

"Cap-- Kath-- Katie!" She had meant to add "stop" but the woman's touch was making her insensible.

The darkness of the cabin was total. Normally she would have called for the arch, or lit a candle to provide light spill into the surroundings.

Perhaps it was irrelevant for Kathryn to see. With her enhanced vision, Seven could. So she lifted Janeway onto the bed.

As long as she kept on her clothing, the holodeck cloaking program would keep all her secrets.

\* \* \*

Kathryn Janeway awoke with a start, aware she was chilled, and looked around in surprise. She had fallen asleep wrapped up in Hans' arms after the most incredibly varied lovemaking.

But the gentle rocking motion of the anchored boat was gone, as was Hans. The holodeck had been replaced by her quarters. The feather-stuffed mattress by her Starfleet-issue 24th century bedding.

There was a slight dull pain behind her left ear. Maybe the alcohol, Hans' special native ale, was the explanation why she did not remember getting up, leaving Hans and returning to her quarters.

The tingling between her thighs though was a delicious reminder the event had indeed happened. She lingered getting ready that morning and reported to the bridge for Alpha shift a leisurely twenty minutes late.

The smile stayed put, even through two marauder attacks that day.

\* \* \*

"Would you like to go with me to Fair Haven?" Icheb asked as he entered Astrometrics for his duty shift.

Seven flipped down onto the console a PADD she had been reading and turned quickly to the young Brunali. "I was unaware you had joined the crew in the program."

"Harry invited me."

"Then you should go."

"Will you come in as well?"

"I will not."

"Oh. Is there something I can do to help you finish your work more quickly?"

"No." Seven hoped to avoid having to fabricate a reason.

"Oh."

Icheb remained still for a long moment before Seven stepped aside at her console. "We must begin our work," she prompted.

He glanced at the status boards as he settled into his post. "The encounters with Species 948 yesterday do not seem to have caused extensive damage to Voyager."

Seven nodded. "I have been recalibrating the array sensors knocked out of adjustment."

Icheb held out his hand. Seven put a PADD into it. The young man's expression grew puzzled as he started to read it. "...The journey twas two se'nnights, but when finally we put to anchor in..."

Seven lifted the PADD from his hands, replacing it with another. "Excuse me."

Icheb's puzzled expression followed Seven over to the far console where she divided her visual attention between the readouts from the array controls and the PADD in her hand.

Seven continued to consume the logs of Hans Alesund as the day progressed, determined to find an insight into her ancestor's life, something to use in her own.

Particularly if it would create another opportunity to follow the events of the previous night.

At times in the past, Seven had cursed her eidetic memory, as it forced her to relive events of awkwardness down to the smallest detail.

However, now it served as the sensory record of possibly the most pleasurable experience in Seven's short time as an independent human. Dazedly she recalled the softness of cotton under her fingertips then parting buttons and corset stays to reveal the gentle slopes and curves of tawny skin. The heady scent of heather followed by the slick feel of warm and wet on her fingers, the taste of ale, piquant on the lips, and then Kathryn's essence on her tongue.

Every catch of the husky voice, the dance of small hands on her face, the melding of their lips in kiss after kiss.

Seven replayed the physicality of the night over and over again, caressing the svelte muscular body of Kathryn Janeway writhing and undulating, wanting Seven's every touch.

Exhaling Seven felt her own body temperature rise with the memories. It had been so hard to deny the woman's requests to touch her, but the pleasure for herself had nevertheless been very real, and very fulfilling.

When Kathryn Janeway lay exhausted, a contented smile gently curving her features, and falling asleep wrapped in Hans' arms, their bodies – Janeway nude and Seven still mostly clothed, Seven looked down at their bodies, drawn to the parted braes and the projection now flaccid against Janeway's hip. She caught her breath, suddenly hit by the reality of what she had done.

The holodeck had not failed her. With ingenuity, Seven had succeeded in connecting with Janeway in a way they never could in reality. A conundrum. She eased herself back from the sleeping woman, uncertain if she should wake her and confess all, or leave immediately.

Janeway adjusted her position in her sleep, a slightly upset expression beginning to form. The automatic gesture of pulling the woolen cover over the woman's figure returned the look of peaceful contentment and Seven nodded to herself, a decision made.

With a reluctant, quiet order to the computer, Seven transported them both to the captain's quarters, leaving the nude woman on her own bed before returning to the cargo bay and her own necessary regeneration cycle to be properly prepared for duty.

Her chest was heavy, and she greeted the end of regeneration with some trepidation. However, watching Janeway today, Seven was pleased to see that the captain seemed content and at peace. She had been as unbending as duranium facing the marauders, but the tensions and anxieties that Seven knew plagued the captain about the daily trials of their situation were greatly lessened, almost absent. Seven had always been captivated by the woman's many expressions, but decided she was most enamored of the positive, happiness... passion.

If, in her guise, she had played some small role in that, Seven decided it was a good thing. The passion,

so new, bubbled in her stomach. *A very good thing* .

*"Captain Janeway to Seven of Nine."*

Seven blinked as the voice of whom she had just been thinking interrupted the silence of the Astrometrics lab. Clearing her throat, she tapped her combadge. "Seven here, Captain."

*"B'Elanna needs your assistance in Engineering."*

"Yes, Captain." Seven's breath caught and she recognized disappointment. Examining her thoughts, she realized she had wanted the captain to say that she, Janeway, needed her help.

*"Thank you, Seven. Janeway out."*

\* \* \*

Captain Janeway strode into her quarters on light steps. The end of the Alpha shift had brought the previous night's pleasures back full force with Chakotay's innocent question, "So what have you got planned for tonight?" She declined dinner with him but said she would probably see him in Fair Haven. He told her he was planning a little meditation instead. She nodded and entered her quarters quickly searching out the things she needed.

She stepped into her bedroom to retrieve her gown for Fair Haven and found herself picturing the bed as the feature-bed on the *Torvald Maiden* . Even the deck seemed to shift under her feet as she was catapulted back to the magic of the previous night.

*Oh, Katie you've got to get some more.* Arousal rose and she put her hand to her throat, reveling in the rushing beat she felt under her fingers.

When she went to her closet and did not find the gown, she recalled again her unusual awakening that morning. Her gown had not come back to her quarters with her.

*Had Hans...? How could he?* Holograms could not leave the holodeck. She rubbed her head in brief confusion then considered the ale once again. She smiled accepting the reasoning easily.

Replicating a new gown, she resolved to stay away from Hans' ale. But there was not a moment's thought given to staying away from Hans.

\* \* \*

Katie O'Clare picked up her skirts and swept inside Michael's bar as Harry and Icheb, apparently headed for the bluffs overlooking the ocean, waved good bye.

She searched the many faces until she located Hans Alesund. The Norwegian was seated in the back of

the room, old rheumy Killian instructively shooting rings standing alongside him. Each successful toss raised a hue and cheer, each miss a chuckle. As Killian reached the point goal, the cheers were gradually changed over to encouragement to Alesund to try his own luck.

As he stood, Katie admired the heavily jacketed figure from behind, the golden fall of unruly blond hair, the pale lips as he responded to the jesting. Relenting to the prodding, he removed his heavy outercoat, revealing the fitness of his body in a sea green bbliaunt and rough-hide leather jerkin, the fishing knife in his belt glinting in the candlelight from the table.

He turned slightly then to collect the rings from Killian, stopped and turned more fully, gaze having found her.

It was the appreciation she saw in his eyes, the blue flickering from the bar's sconce lighting that propelled Katie forward to his side.

"Now here be the champ herself. Katie O'Clare, be pleased to meet Hans Alesund."

Hans held her gaze. Katie didn't disabuse the notion they were just meeting. A blush crept up her cheeks though as he reached for her left hand and lifted it to press his lips to her knuckles.

Knowing the feel of those lips in far more intimate places, her blush deepened.

"Will you demonstrate the game?" Hans asked, voice a low rumble.

She grasped the rings as he pushed them into her hands. Her aim was off. The first several falling well below their intended marks, even one falling to the floor. Hans' hand was suddenly on her back, the connection warm and steadying. She made her last three throws perfectly, much to the chagrin of Killian and Donegal who apparently lost side bets with Laird and Brinl.

Hans toasted her. She declined his ale and sat down next to him. Beneath the table, her hand sought out his. "So do you have any stories for me?" she asked.

"What would you like to hear?"

Katie looked between his eyes, licked her lips, swallowed and shook her head. "Just keep talking."

"You like my voice?"

She nodded.

"I like yours as well." Their heads had dipped closer, to be more easily heard through the noises around them. His kiss to her cheek as his lips moved near her ear made her melt.

It was a mutual glance, filled with all the longing built up since the night before, which brought them both to their feet with halting excuses and fobbing stories of needing to get out of the smoky air. Hans grabbed his coat and followed her outside.

Fresh night air filled their lungs. He put his coat around her shoulders, surrounding her in the warmth of his scent. They began to slowly walk down the central street of Fair Haven.

"Hans," she said.

"Yes, Katie," he answered.

"Will you hold me?"

He did.

As they walked along, he told her about his childhood, wrestling among the rushes of his grandfather's home with his kinsmen, learning to handle weapons, the gash he received when Gundragon, his Uncle Sven's oldest son, caught him in the ribs with the edge of a family sword. He recalled for her his first dunking in the fjords, learning to swim, pulling boats onto the land with thick ropes tied around his waist.

He spoke of the first time he had been given his father's ship and told to take the furs and fish to the Eire market, and his first taste of food not his own in that same market, a town further north on the Irish coast.

Against his chest, Katie snuggled as they walked. The pier was suddenly before them. He helped her to sit on the planks. Sitting down beside her, he saw she was pensive. "Have I said something to upset you?" he asked, kissing the soft flow of her hair at her nape.

She dipped her chin, wrapped her arms around her skirts and shook her head. "No. I was just remembering my childhood."

He leaned back, looking up at her framed by the moon's glow. "I would like to hear your stories," he said.

\* \* \*

Katie looked over her shoulder and down into his smile. The way he sprawled back, holding himself up on his elbows, the invitation in his eyes. She wanted to know what he was thinking. The life behind his eyes called out to her to ask.

She sighed. But he was just a hologram. A history, thoughts, all programmed to have the appropriate response for the situation.

He was probably programmed to be a sexual companion, not for small, or even deep, meaningful conversation. But still she wanted to ask.

She inhaled with sudden realization. *No! I'm falling in love with him... with a hologram...* Deflated her shoulders rounded in dismay. *Again.* She bit her lip, turned her gaze quickly aside, and brushed at her eyes.

"Katie?"

She shook her head. "I'm sorry. I have to go."

"Why?"

"I can't do this again."

"What can't you do?"

"I can't fall in love with you."

"Why not?"

"You're a hologram," she whispered, as if afraid to shatter his illusions while her own were already beyond repair.

"No, I'm not." He straightened. She leaned back.

"Yes, I know you're programmed not to be self-aware, but... and I'm sorry, you are." She started to her feet.

Hans was up beside her in the next instant, grasping her hand. "No, please stay. Come with me."

"Where?"

"To... my ship," he replied. Katie accepted his hand around hers and followed him to the Torvald Maiden. He passed her onto the deck and followed quickly. Once aboard, he led her again to the cabin below deck.

Katie pulled back as he went to enter the room. "I want to show you something," he said. His voice, always coaxing, always polite, always the soft husky sound of her dreams fulfilled.

She followed him into the room.

He tossed his coat on the bed, reached up to the collar of his bluiant and parted the fabric.

"Hans?"

"Hansen," he said, and it sounded like a correction. The cloth parted. He unbuttoned his braes, and Katie averted her eyes briefly, only to be drawn back by another voice.

"Katie... Kathryn Janeway."

In the middle of the cabin, blonde tresses tumbled across her shoulders, stood Seven of Nine, nude as the day she was born, a scattering of Borg implants catching the pale moonlight through the portholes. Strewn at her feet lay the clothing of a Norwegian seaman. Nipples of dusky pink stiffened in the cool air, and Kathryn's gaze drifted back up to Seven's face, taking in the pensive expression, anxious. Hopeful.

"Seven? What have--" She cut herself off. "Why?"

"I thought I would explore my ancestor's life through his logs," Seven stated factually. "I did not set out

to deceive you," she hurried to add.

"And... last night?" Kathryn asked.

"I did not want to leave you."

Kathryn started to draw inward. Her expression turned troubled. Seven immediately stepped forward, reaching for her.

"I still want to hear your stories," Seven said, the husky voice back, the exact male depth gone, but the emotion still present, pressing, and deep.

"Seven, I..." Kathryn trailed off, not sure what to say. She had not considered this.

"I am real, Kathryn Janeway. If you are in love, please... let it be with me?" Seven lifted Kathryn's chin, meeting her eyes. "I love you."

When Kathryn closed her eyes, Seven's lips slanted down across hers. At first the brief sensation was unfamiliar. After all, Kathryn Janeway had never kissed a woman. With the smallest shift and she was transported back to the night before. *But she had kissed Seven.* Her knees buckled.

Seven's arms, still strong, but much more slender, held her upright.

"Oh, Seven..."

"Kathryn..."

Seven lowered Janeway to the feather bed surface, buttons and corset stays parting beneath slender, nimble fingers.

When skin met skin, Kathryn cried from the intoxicating softness of the experience. She kissed Seven's closed eyes, aware that Seven was moved just as deeply by the contact.

Kathryn brushed her fingers over the face hovering over hers wonderingly. She stroked down the cheeks, over the lips, exchanging a kiss with them, and brought her hands down, as Seven held herself up, stroking down the woman's sides, over hips, watching muscles jump, and listening at each catch of breathing.

Catching a scent, Kathryn dipped her head, realizing as she brushed her lips over Seven's collarbone that the scent she had become familiar with, intoxicated by, had not been holographic, but Seven's own. *Why had she not recognized it?*

*The eyes see what they want to see,* she realized. Looking up again into Seven's features, the golden hair soft around her cheeks, and the lightning blue eyes, the cheeks flushed with emotion. Seven's hips rocked. The same motion as the night before, but now, the soft hairs of her mound tangled with Janeway's. Kathryn bent her knees, lifted her feet and locked her calves around the backs of Seven's legs.

"Make love to me," she whispered.

