



The Eternal Tide (Star Trek: Voyager)

By Kirsten Beyer

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An all-new novel that continues the epic saga of the Starship *Voyager*!

As the *Voyager* fleet continues its exploration of the Delta Quadrant, investigating the current status of sectors formerly controlled by the Borg becomes a key priority. Two of the fleet's special mission vessels, the *U.S.S. Galen* and *U.S.S. Demeter*, are left at New Talax to aid Neelix's people, while the *Voyager*, *Quirinal*, *Esquiline*, *Hawking*, and *Curie* do a systematic search for any remnants of the Borg or Caeliar, even as the *Achilles* moves to a location central enough to offer aid to the exploring vessels as needed. As this critical mission begins, Fleet Commander Afsarah Eden, who has shared what little she knows of her mysterious past with Captain Chakotay, begins to experience several more "awakenings" as she encounters artifacts and places that make her feel connected to her long-lost home. She is reluctant to allow these visions to overshadow the mission, and this becomes increasingly difficult as time passes. But in the midst of this growing crisis, no one in the fleet could anticipate the unexpected return of one of Starfleet's most revered leaders—a return that could hold the very fate of the galaxy in the balance.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Kirsten Beyer is the *New York Times* bestselling author of many *Star Trek: Voyager* novels, including *A Pocket Full of Lies*, *Acts of Contrition*, *Protectors*, *The Eternal Tide*, *Children of the Storm*, *Unworthy*, *Full Circle*, and *String Theory: Fusion*. She is also an actor for theater, movies, television, and commercials. She lives with her family in Los Angeles.

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Star Trek: Voyager: The Eternal Tide

Chapter One

VOYAGER

Captain Afsarah Eden couldn't tear her eyes away from the viewscreen. Voyager moved at maximum warp, the deck below Eden's boots thrumming with the engines' strain as stars stretched themselves out in the illusory image that defined this particular version of warp flight.

Eden and her crew were fleeing certain death. And with each second that passed, oblivion was gaining on them. The ship could not maintain its current velocity indefinitely, nor could it safely form a slipstream tunnel to increase its odds of outrunning destruction.

Part of Eden knew that by running, they were only prolonging the inevitable. In some cold, lonely corner of her heart, she had already accepted her own death. But the duty that had bound her to Starfleet and sustained her through the most difficult times of her life demanded that she make this attempt on behalf of those she led.

The temptation, no, the desperate longing she felt to order the ship to come about was becoming more difficult to ignore. Did she need to see the beast, to name it before it devoured them? Was it some absurd definition of honor that called on her to stand her ground, even in the face of annihilation?

Or was it simply the fact that she was tired of running? This monster had already taken too much from her. There was no longer any true victory to be claimed here. She was not fleeing a predator that might grow weary of its chase. She was attempting to outrun something that had all but stripped away every last shred of her own identity. She was incapable of resisting or defying it. It would have her. And given enough time, it might actually bring her to accept that its version of Afsarah Eden was truer than the one she had constructed in fifty-plus years of life.

She belonged to this darkness, and as that certainty struck her with the force of a roaring wave, she began to lose her bearings. Her head grew inexplicably light and her knees buckled. Eden reached her right arm back to steady herself against the command chair in which she knew she would never again sit.

Her eyes briefly registered another person standing beside her, and the motion meant to reorient her became a graceless stagger as she unconsciously rebelled against the sight her mind refused to accept.

I'm dead already.

She had to be.

Eden willed the vision to clear, but the longer she stared open-mouthed at the figure next to her, the more that figure seemed to coalesce and solidify.

"Impossible," Eden whispered.

Beside her, Admiral Kathryn Janeway's stone-cold eyes held Eden's with a painful mixture of determined despair.

"This is a dream," Eden said, willing her voice to hold steady even as her senses scrambled for an escape route.

"Feels more like a nightmare to me," Kathryn replied.

• • •

The mess hall was all but deserted this close to the middle of gamma shift. Most of the crew members who had signed off a few hours earlier had already eaten, and those looking to get a jump on their day prior to the start of alpha shift wouldn't start straggling in for another hour at least.

Still, Captain Chakotay didn't look up from his padd until the individual who had entered moments earlier made her way toward him and stood silently for a few seconds behind the chair across from his.

"I thought you were planning to turn in early for a really good night's sleep," the weary voice of the fleet commander greeted him.

"And I thought the wee hours were the only ones that ever found you sleeping," he replied convivially as Captain Eden pulled out the chair and sat restlessly.

"Do you mind?" she asked once the deed was already done.

"Of course not," he replied sincerely. "I'm not going to finish this letter tonight anyway," he added, stifling a yawn as he pushed the padd aside and sipped from a cup of tea that had grown cold an hour ago.

"It's unusual to find you at a loss for words," Eden said lightly as she rubbed her eyes.

A faint smile traipsed across Chakotay's lips as he replied, "Is that a good thing?"

"So far I'd say, absolutely," Eden said more seriously.

A few months earlier, before the fleet had crossed paths with the Children of the Storm, Chakotay would have been hard-pressed to imagine himself engaged in such easy banter with Eden. Though she was a distinguished officer and an able leader, he'd found it difficult to warm to her, probably in no small part due to the fact that Starfleet Command had seen fit to assign her to Voyager's center seat when the fleet had first launched and he was still deemed unfit for duty. Once Eden had assumed command of the fleet and officially requested that Chakotay resume his former place as Voyager's captain, she had continued to maintain an

aloof distance from those she led.

Recent, near disastrous events, however, had begun to bridge the distance between them, as they were forced to stretch the boundaries of the formal command structure and work together to find solutions to a vast array of challenges, including the loss of one of the nine ships that had originally begun the journey, the almost total loss of a second, and the capture of a third by the Children. Eden had also recently seen fit to share some of her personal history with him, including her mysterious origins, and he'd finally begun to see her not just as his commanding officer, but as an individual: complex, devoted to duty, but painfully alone. Now, he found that he had no compunction in returning her confidence and was actually grateful for the opportunity to share a little of his own current burden.

"It's my sister, Sekaya," he sighed.

Eden's eyes left his as she searched her memory. "She's not Starfleet, is she?"

"No. She has accepted civilian assignments from time to time, but where I've seen the possibility of working for positive change from within Starfleet, she's always been skeptical."

Eden nodded. "Your people's experiences with the Cardassians probably had something to do with that."

"For starters," Chakotay agreed.

Suddenly Eden's eyes widened. "She thought your resignation was going to be permanent, didn't she?"

"She wasn't the only one," Chakotay chuckled. "Of course I wrote to her the moment I reassumed command of Voyager, but I didn't get her response until we regrouped with the rest of the fleet last week."

"She's not happy," Eden rightly surmised.

"No."

What began as a slight pause was threatening to stretch into a lull when Chakotay added, "I don't blame her. She never saw what Kathryn's death did to me, but we have enough mutual friends that word got back to her anyway. Her relief at my resignation was comforting at the time, but I'm finding it harder now to explain my certainty that as much as leaving the service, even briefly, was absolutely necessary, returning now is the best choice I could possibly make."

"Do you doubt your choice?"

"Not at all," Chakotay replied firmly. "I know I haven't 'taken a step back or retreated from a better future.'"

Eden's eyes narrowed. "She doesn't mince words, does she?"

"It runs in the family." Chakotay grinned knowingly. "But beyond assuring her that she's wrong, and without actually being able to see her and explain myself in person, I don't know how to convince her. The more I think about it, the more I realize that my choice has more to do with instinct or . . . a feeling I trust but can't really name. I've made peace with my past."

Eden shook her head and smiled mirthlessly. “That makes one of us.”

Setting his own concerns aside, Chakotay took a moment to study Eden. Tension knotted her brow and lifted her shoulders. Her black, almond-shaped eyes were uncharacteristically uncertain.

“So, why aren’t you sleeping tonight, Afsarah?” he asked kindly.

She sat back in her chair and took a long sip of whatever warm beverage she’d replicated before joining him. “It’s nothing.”

“I doubt that.”

He was pleased to see her countenance soften just enough to let a little light back into her eyes.

“For the last few weeks, I’ve been having this recurring dream.”

“Really?” he asked, genuinely intrigued. Though he was no expert in dream analysis, it, like all manner of subconscious exploration, had been a subject of deep inquiry throughout his life. His curiosity was grounded in his people’s unquestioning acceptance of a spiritual realm that coexisted with reality and could be entered willingly with enough practice. But this belief was rare among Starfleet officers—so rigorously grounded in reason, logic, and science.

Eden took another sip before going on. “I’m alone on the bridge. At least at first.”

Chakotay kept his expression neutral as he nodded for her to continue.

“We’re moving at high warp away from something terrible. We need to go faster, but we can’t. I’m absolutely certain the ship is about to be destroyed. And then . . .” Her voice trailed off.

“Then?”

“I shouldn’t be bothering you with this.”

Chakotay was puzzled by her abrupt retreat. “Then?” he gently coaxed.

Eden studied his face and in a brief instant, Chakotay saw that her concern was not that she would be embarrassed but that somehow she would insult him.

“It’s a dream, Afsarah,” he said. “I’m the last one who would take anything you say personally.”

Eden sighed and dropped her chin in deference to his perceptiveness. Shrugging slightly, she went on, “And then I look to my right and Kathryn Janeway is standing beside me. I know in some ways that should make me feel better. I mean, whom would you rather have beside you in a fight? But the sight of her absolutely terrifies me.”

Chakotay lowered his head for a moment to hide the wide smile that erupted on his face at this revelation. Suddenly Eden’s discomfort was crystal clear. When he raised his eyes to hers again, he hoped they offered the compassion she deserved.

“It’s a captain’s nightmare,” he said, trying hard to compose himself.

“A what?”

“A captain’s nightmare. Most professions have their own version of it. Performers often dream that they’re onstage in the middle of a production but don’t know any of their lines. Musicians are trying to play a concert but their instruments won’t stay in tune. Teachers arrive at their class, begin a lecture, and realize they are stark naked.”

The corners of Eden’s full lips finally turned upward as he continued.

“And Starfleet captains find themselves facing certain death and the loss of their ships to unconquerable foes,” he finished.

“I see.” Eden nodded, though not without reservation.

“Every captain I’ve ever known has a version of it,” Chakotay insisted.

After a moment, Eden said hesitantly, “And Admiral Janeway’s presence?”

Chakotay felt his face fall into more serious lines. “Kathryn is more strongly identified with Voyager than any other individual who has ever served her. When you first took command, you were stepping into legendary shoes. I’d have been amazed if you didn’t find that daunting, consciously and subconsciously.”

“Did you feel that way when you first took command of Voyager?” Eden asked.

Chakotay shook his head. “It was different. I was already part of Voyager, and at least at first, I felt like I was merely picking up where Kathryn had left off.” He considered his next words carefully, then decided this was no time to hold back. “But you’ve already told me you feel a certain amount of guilt about Kathryn’s death; you used to believe that she wouldn’t have died if you and Admiral Batiste hadn’t pushed so hard to get this mission back to the Delta Quadrant approved. I don’t agree. But it sounds to me like you’ve got some unfinished business you need to find some way to put behind you.”

Eden sat somberly for a moment as his words sank in. Finally she said, “I’m sure you’re right.”

Chakotay sensed that she wasn’t convinced, but he knew the words needed to be said, and might again, several times, before Afsarah actually accepted them.

“Have you given any thought to my other suggestion?” he asked, wondering if her recent choice to share with him what little she knew of her past, as well as her belief that the answers to that mystery might lie in the Delta Quadrant, was partially responsible for increasing her general level of anxiety.

Confusion flashed briefly across Eden’s face before the light dawned. “About seeing the Doctor?”

“Yes.”

“I don’t know.”

“Okay,” Chakotay replied, unwilling to push too hard.

“It’s a perfectly reasonable suggestion,” she acknowledged hesitantly. “I’ve never shared my full history with any medical doctor who has evaluated me because, honestly, I didn’t see the need. And you’re right that he might be able to discover some physiological clue to my ancestry. I’m just reluctant to waste resources on my personal agenda,” she finally admitted. “As I told Hugh, I’m more than content to allow this mystery to unfold in its own time. I don’t need to hurry it along.”

Chakotay considered her qualms, then said, “I don’t see it as wasting resources, and I’m certain neither did the counselor. To seek answers to a question that is clearly troubling you is not to attempt to commandeer the fleet’s many tools for your own personal gain. You’re not Admiral Batiste, Afsarah. You’ve lived with this uncertainty your entire life, and in some ways it’s as comfortable as an old friend to you. But your reactions to the Staff of Ren and the Mikhal artifact have changed things. I don’t see the harm in acknowledging that and using every tool at our disposal to see if we can unearth any other missing pieces of this puzzle, as long as it doesn’t interfere with our other duties.”

“We do have a busy few weeks ahead of us,” Eden said.

“We’ll be at New Talax at least two days before Voyager sets out again.”

Eden’s eyebrows pinched together, creasing her brow. “Two days?”

“You haven’t forgotten about the reception, have you?”

Eden raised her hands to massage her temples. “Actually, I had.”

Chakotay smiled broadly. “I should have warned you earlier, but there’s something you need to know about Neelix: he’ll use any excuse for a party. And after the last couple of months, I’m not the least bit inclined to disappoint him.”

“Nor am I,” Eden agreed.

“Which means you have plenty of time to slip over to Galen for a physical,” he said pointedly.

Eden sat back and crossed her arms, grudgingly admitting defeat. “Apparently I do.”

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