

The Captain's Valentine

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The Captain's Valentine

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Summary

Tom's Valentine may go a little too far.

Neelix held the last gift out to his captain. He'd delivered over seventy-five but this one was special to him. Neelix thought Kathryn Janeway spent way too much time being the captain and he hoped the valentine would bring her some cheer.

"What's this?" The captain looked bemusedly at her morale officer. She'd watched Neelix hand out a dozen roses to B'Elanna and a matching set to Chakotay—it caused quite the giggling fit at the staff meeting but Kathryn could hardly begrudge their merriment. She was thrilled the two had finally stopped avoiding their natural attraction. Tom had also sent B'Elanna a gift, but the very-un-B'Elanna-like teddy bear only accented what was always wrong between them. At first Kathryn worried her chief helmsman would not get over the rather public break-up, but he seemed fine with B'Elanna and Chakotay now. Just a little wistful.

Neelix had delivered a trio of valentines to Tuvok, much to his chagrin: a cake from Neelix himself—Neelix still hadn't quite grasped that Tuvok could never properly appreciate his chocolate cake, her own card—promising she'd try to pay more heed to his warnings—and, oddly enough, a single rose from Seven. Seven received at least a dozen valentines herself, but she only paid attention to the holo-kitten from Mr. Paris. Tom had encrypted the cat's off switch and she had absolutely no idea what to do with it.

The Doctor, having received no valentines last year—and having let absolutely everyone know—received even more than Seven this year. But *he* only seemed to notice the collection of music from the former Borg. And Harry was glowing over the note he'd received from Tom, Seven, and B'Elanna collectively and a half-dozen from various undisclosed admirers. Chakotay having finally moved on, and knowing enough not to expect anything from Tuvok, the captain hadn't expected any valentines for herself. But here was Neelix, standing before her with a festively wrapped basket of goodies. Kathryn peered into it to find chocolates, gourmet coffee, rose petals, a small stuffed cat, and a darkened PADD. "Who's it from, Neelix?"

"I'm not sure, Captain," he answered rather excitedly. "It arrived without a note, though perhaps they signed the PADD...?"

The talaxian obviously wanted her to read it right then and there but Kathryn preferred her privacy. "Hmmm, well, we'll see. I guess that's all for today, everyone, see you all tonight at the party."

It seemed Neelix wasn't the only one who wanted to know who the captain's valentine was, only Seven rose immediately and made for the exit, and she was somewhat distracted by her new cyber friend. But Kathryn didn't budge and eventually everyone but Neelix filed out. Tom left last, but Kathryn reflected that he'd always had a somewhat morbid interest in her social life. Neelix waited rather impatiently for her to acknowledge him. "Yes, Mr. Neelix?"

"Well, Captain, if you should need any help discovering who your admirer is...?"

"I'll know right where to come, Mr. Neelix." He looked like he wanted to say more. "Thank you."

"Of course, Captain. See you tonight." Neelix scurried off, no doubt to be accosted by the rest of her crew on the other side of the door. Kathryn chuckled. She knew she should retire to her ready room before reading the note, but she was rather anxious to find out who her valentine was, too. She turned on the PADD.

Five minutes later, Neelix was called back into the conference room. "Captain?" She looked a little pale.

"Neelix, I need for you to find out who this is from." She handed over the PADD, picked up the basket and exited the room without another word. She avoided

everyone as she made her way from the conference room to her ready room. Neelix looked down at the PADD she'd received. It read only two words:

"Marry me."

Neelix spent the rest of the day bothering the crew to find out who'd left the enigmatic valentine for the captain.

"Neelix, I'm happy with B'Elanna. I'll admit I once harbored feelings for Kathryn, but why would I jeopardize what I have with B'Elanna?"

"Mr. Neelix, I admire the captain, she is a significant part of my life, however, I am married already. It is illogical to think the note might be from me."

"Are you kidding? No. No. Neelix, I'm an ensign, she's the - the - the Captain!!"

"I'm a Doctor, not a bridegroom."

"Neelix, I already know what you're going to ask and it wasn't me. It wasn't Chakotay, it wasn't Seven or the Doctor or Tom..." B'Elanna stopped short, her mind drifting a moment.

"B'Elanna, the captain asked me to find out who it was but no one has any clues. I don't want to bring it beyond the senior staff— the Captain might be embarrassed! Can you find out who left this from the PADD?" He held out the device but she was still looking off into space. "B'Elanna?"

"What? Oh, sorry. Um, yes, yes of course. I'll let you know if I find anything."

"All right, I need to get ready for the party. See you there, and good luck."

"Thanks." As he ran off B'Elanna looked at the PADD, turning it over in her hand. She could probably break the code, but she had a feeling she already knew who'd left it for the Captain.

Tom spent the whole day being "too busy" to talk to Neelix and he was almost too tired to go to the party. But if he didn't show up, he'd look guilty. Tom sighed.

Hide in his quarters or not, he'd be found out eventually. What had he been thinking? Why did he always screw everything up? He looked at himself in the mirror.

"You look like hell."

Tom whirled around to find B'Elanna standing behind him. He should have been surprised, but he was really beyond surprise at this point.

"Why?" She didn't need to specify, he realized she knew him too well.

"It seemed like a good idea at the time." He said defeatedly, moving away from her and landing on the couch.

She sat down next to him. "You're too impulsive, Tom."

"I thought that's what you loved about me." She smiled, shaking her head. He let the silly grin he wore fall away and really looked at her, his eyes imploring her to help. "What do I do now?"

"Did you mean it?"

"What?" He seemed a little startled by the question.

"Was it just an ill-mannered joke, or did you mean it?"

"Yes! I mean, it wasn't a joke." He looked away again, unable to meet her eyes. "I'm lonely, B'Elanna. I miss you. And Kathryn..." He forced himself to look at her. "I loved you B'Elanna, in a way I still do. Please believe that. But I think I've always been a little bit in love with Kathryn Janeway. And I just thought— But, well, I'm not good enough for her. She's the captain, she's never done anything wrong in her life. I'm—" He shrugged. "Me. I don't think I've ever done anything right. And this about proves it."

B'Elanna looked at him. He was really hurting. She was happy with Chakotay, happier than she'd ever been with Tom, but she still cared for him deeply. And it broke her heart to see him this way. "Look, Tom, it was a stupid prank. But you need to tell her. Tell her everything. Hiding is just going to make you look guilty or ashamed. You shouldn't feel that way. It was a stupid prank but, in a way, it's sweet." She pulled him up and propelled him out into the corridor. "Now, come on, stop wallowing and lets go." She expected to have to drag him, but he came along quietly.

When they arrived at the holodeck, the party was already in full swing. B'Elanna made sure Tom wasn't going to bolt and then went to fill in Neelix and Chakotay.

Tom avoided the crowd and found a corner he could hide in, watching the party from the sidelines in a very un-Tom Paris-like way.

When the Captain arrived she looked every which way for Neelix, but when she found him, he refused to tell her anything he'd discovered.

Somewhat put out, she tried to escape the crowd and headed to a quiet corner to sit down. She heard a gasp and turned to find her helmsman beside her.

"Oh, Tom, I didn't see you." He looked out of sorts, as pale as she'd ever seen him. "Are you okay? I thought you'd be enjoying the party."

"I..." He looked down a moment, shook his head quickly and raised his eyes to meet hers once again. "I'm sorry."

"What?" She looked at him, bewildered. He was staring at her with an intensity she'd seen in him only a very few times. "For what?" she asked.

"For...for everything." He started to speak quickly, almost unintelligibly, but with more emotion than she'd heard from him in some time. "For letting you down. And making mistake after mistake. And never saying the right thing or taking anything seriously. For messing up your holiday and— and for— for—" He looked down again. "It was me, Captain. I'm sorry. I— I wanted—" His voice faltered. "I don't know what I wanted. Or what I was thinking. I only know— I love you, Kathryn. I think I've loved you since the moment I saw you." He paused and lowered his eyes. "I wish I'd come up with a better way to tell you."

"Tom." He looked up. She was smiling, a real smile. "You're forgiven." And she leaned over to kiss him, quietly, softly, gently. When she pulled away he looked astonished. But her expression made his face light up. Instantly the Tom she knew and, yes, loved, was back.

"So— you will?" He asked, mischievously.

"No." She answered with a smile. "But I'll dance with you."

From across the room B'Elanna watched as Tom led Janeway to the dance floor. She pointed it out to Neelix and the two smiled as the Captain and her Valentine danced the night away.

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