

A Time for Giving

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A Time for Giving

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Summary

In an attempt to learn more about human customs, Michael signs up for the Shenzhou's annual gift exchange. She doesn't expect to match to Captain Georgiou.

Notes

Written for crazykookie in the 2017 Yuletide exchange. Originally posted on AO3.

One of the strangest things Michael has had to get used to upon joining the crew of the *Shenzhou* was the many celebrations the crew engaged in. Valentine's Day, Easter, Passover, Week of the Rains, First Contact Day, Federation Day, Diwali, Halloween, Risian Feast Day... Any crewmember who wants to celebrate something from their culture is not only allowed, but encouraged to do so.

Michael recalls asking Captain Georgiou about it once, and receiving the explanation that these celebrations allow the crew to connect with both their heritage and their fellow crewmembers, even while being so far from home.

Coming from Vulcan, where the closest thing to a celebration is the Kal Rekk day of silence, the whole situation took some getting used to. Still, she knew joining Starfleet would put her in contact with many different ways of thinking, and decided to take it as an opportunity to learn more about the many cultures surrounding her.

Her research indicates that the end of the Standard year has many festivals associated with it, and this proves to be the case. On Stardate 1017.3 she walks into the rec hall to find it covered in decorations, the most obvious of these being a large conifer decked in lights.

The sight inspires a memory of decorating a similar tree with her parents when she was very young. A Christmas tree, they called it.

"You can add something yourself, if you want."

Michael turns to see the ship's psychologist, Doctor Kumar, standing beside her. Kumar waves a hand at the various decorations and adds, "Aside from the Christmas tree we've got a Yule log, Hanukkah menorah, Andorian fire-starter, Kwanzaa Kinara, Deltan fertility statues... It'd be interesting to have something from Vulcan."

"Vulcans don't put up decorations like this," Michael tells her. "It isn't logical."

Kumar shrugs. "Probably not," she agrees. "But I have a whole bunch of studies saying it's good for morale, so I'm not going to argue." She moves away, leaving Michael staring at the tree in thought.

* * *

A few days later, Michael is working in her quarters when a message appears in her inbox. "Holiday Gift Exchange! Sign up now!"

The exclamation marks do not seem entirely necessary, but Michael has long since become used to humans' odd ways of communication. She opens the message and reads through it quickly, then again, more slowly. Apparently Commander Henderson, the first officer, is organising a gift exchange among the crew, and anyone who wishes to sign up is welcome. The idea appears to be that everyone will be assigned a crewmember at random who they will then have to buy or make a gift for.

Michael's initial response is to ignore the message, but her discussion with Kumar comes back to her. If such rituals are, as she said, good for

morale, then perhaps Michael should join in. Besides, she thinks, it will give her a valuable insight into human celebrations.

She sends back a quick message agreeing to sign up, then returns to her work.

The reply containing the name of her assigned crewmember arrives three days later, laden with more unnecessary exclamation marks.

Inasmuch as Michael assumes anything, she assumes her assigned giftee will be someone she only knows in passing. There are, after all, 288 crewmembers on the *Shenzhou*, and it would be impossible for her to know them all intimately. But as it happens, she's wrong.

Your match is Captain Philippa Georgiou! the message proclaims. Please obtain a suitable gift and bring it to the Holiday Party on Stardate 1029.8!

She didn't realise the captain was even signed up, although when she stops to think about it it does make sense. Captain Georgiou has always been very close with the crew, and likely signed up for reasons of morale, just as Michael did.

That realisation, however, does not explain how to deal with the situation of having to acquire a gift for her captain. Michael respects Georgiou greatly, and the captain is always kind and friendly to her, but she would not describe their relationship as close. Then again, Michael would not describe her relationship with any crewmember as close. It would not be Vulcan.

The rules are very clear that she is not allowed to inform anyone else of her match, so she will have to figure out a solution on her own. Michael frowns, sitting back in her chair. This will require some serious thought.

* * *

Two days later, after much contemplation and some stealthy observation of the captain's habits, Michael arrives at an idea. A traditional Vulcan puzzle box.

It combines the captain's passion for both other cultures and puzzles, and Georgiou has several times expressed interest in Michael's Vulcan upbringing. In Michael's eyes, it is a thoroughly suitable gift. The question then becomes where to get one.

Having a box shipped from Vulcan would exceed the time allowance she has been given, and obtaining one from elsewhere in the galaxy would be difficult if not impossible, which leaves only one option. She will have to make one.

Finding instructions for such an undertaking proves less difficult than she expects. She alters the design slightly to add a personal touch, before synthesising each part individually out of wood. The parts are very intricate, and their creation takes longer than she would prefer, especially working in secret. But finally all the pieces are complete and all that remains is to put it together.

It is this part that proves most difficult. Each piece needs to be perfectly aligned if the box is to function correctly. It is delicate work, and she would be lying if she said she did not feel a spark of relief when she finally fastens the last piece into place. As a finishing touch she carves the Starfleet symbol into the top and the Vulcan symbol for IDIC into the bottom of the box before storing it in the back of her closet.

Finally the day arrives for her to hand over her gift. The rules state that the gifts are to be wrapped in paper and labelled with the giftee's name and rank, but *not* those of the gifter. Michael obtains some brown paper from stores and wraps the box carefully, then sets off for the holiday party.

As she enters the rec room she sees a sign to leave all holiday exchange gifts on the table. There are already a few dozen gifts stacked up, so she adds her own to the group then turns away, surveying the room. Her instinct is to leave, perhaps returning for the gift giving ceremony at 2100, but part of her feels as though she should stay and mingle with her colleagues.

In the end she pours herself a drink and hovers at the edge of the party, watching people come and go. The pile of presents on the table grows higher as more people stop by with their packages, and Michael begins to wonder exactly how many of the crew signed up for the exchange.

Eventually she is drawn into conversation with a few others from her department and stops counting the minutes. So she is mildly surprised when Commander Henderson climbs up on a chair and whistles loudly.

"Okay!" she calls. "It's 2100, let's do the gifts!" She hops down and picks up the nearest package. "Lieutenant Daniels!"

A dark-haired man Michael vaguely recognises steps forwards. Henderson hands him his gift and is instantly on to the next. "Yeoman Leeta!"

Michael is so focused on listening for Georgiou's name that the call of, "Lieutenant Burnham!" takes a few seconds to sink in. She quickly makes her way to the front and is presented with a heavy cuboid parcel wrapped in dark red paper.

She moves off to the side, tearing the paper off carefully to reveal a box containing a bottle of Vulcan port. Not one of her favourite drinks, but she supposes that is the danger of anonymous gift exchanges.

The giving out of packages continues until finally, "Captain Georgiou!"

There is a smattering of cheers as the captain makes her way through the crowd. She takes the gift with a smile and steps aside, towards Michael. Michael watches as Georgiou removes the paper covering the gift and stares at the box. She examines it for a moment, fingering the Starfleet symbol before turning it over and smiling as she sees the image carved into the bottom. She looks up suddenly, catching Michael's eyes, and Michael looks away quickly, her cheeks warming.

The rest of the gifts are handed out quickly, and Henderson claps her hands. "Looks like that's all for this year! Thank you all for a great exchange, and if you want to tell your giftee your identity you can, or you can leave them to guess."

"So, um, did you like it?"

The young woman beside her looks familiar, but it takes Michael a moment to remember her name. Ensign Lewis, from sciences. She twirls a piece of hair around her finger as she continues, "I didn't really know what to get you, but then I found this on shore leave and I know you grew up on Vulcan and-"

"Yes," Michael says, cutting off the flow of words. "I liked it." She searches her mind for the correct human response and adds, "It was very thoughtful. Thank you."

Lewis beams. "Oh, I'm so glad!" she says. "I hope the exchange next year is this much fun."

One of her friends gestures from a nearby group and she looks over. "Oops, gotta go," she says. "Catch you later." She hurries back to her friends and Michael lets out a long breath, only to cut it off as Captain Georgiou approaches her.

"Lieutenant," she greets Michael. "I didn't expect you to sign up for this exchange."

"Neither did I," Michael admits. "But Doctor Kumar said such rituals are good for morale."

Georgiou laughs. "I can't argue with that," she says, before her expression grows serious. "Thank you for my gift," she says warmly. "I love it."

Michael blinks at her. "How do you know it was from me?" she asks.

Georgiou turns the box upside down to show the IDIC symbol. "There aren't many crewmembers would give me a gift with a *Vulcan* symbol. I had a feeling you had something to do with it."

"Logical," Michael says, and Georgiou smiles, her fingers tracing the lines of the box.

"This must have been difficult to get hold of," she says.

"Yes," Michael agrees.

"Why did you go to such effort?" Georgiou sounds honestly curious.

"I wanted it to be special," Michael says, and sees something unidentifiable flashes in Georgiou's eyes.

"Oh, it's special," she replies quietly. "Happy holidays, Lieutenant." She hesitates, then corrects herself. "Michael."

"Happy holidays," Michael replies, thinking that maybe, sometimes, these illogical celebrations aren't so bad.

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