

Winter Break

Posted originally on the [Ad Astra :: Star Trek Fanfiction Archive](http://www.adastrafanfic.com/works/998) at <http://www.adastrafanfic.com/works/998>.

Rating:	Not Rated
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	F/M , Gen
Fandom:	Star Trek: Tesseract
Character:	Icheb , Maren O'Connor , John Quigley
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2023-10-03 Words: 799 Chapters: 1/1

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by [kes7](#)

Summary

Maren O'Connor has other commitments.

“What are you doing for break, Maren?” Rachel Quinteros’s bubbly voice interrupted Maren O’Connor’s intense focus on transwarp equations, breaking her concentration. She looked up from her PADD in surprise, squinting as her eyes adjusted to looking at something other than the device’s screen for the first time in nearly four hours.

To her surprise, Rachel was standing side-by-side with John Quigley, hands on her ample hips, staring down at Maren with a combination of amusement and frustration. It was obvious this was not the first time she had asked the question, but Maren hadn’t even heard them come in.

She squeezed her eyes shut and rubbed at them with one hand, still clutching her PADD in the other. “Going home,” she answered. “What else would I be doing?”

“Coming with us,” Rachel replied matter-of-factly. “We have *two weeks* off. That’s enough time to get really, really far away from here. *Risa*,” she said, with a wicked grin. “We’re going. You in?”

Beside Rachel, John gave her a hopeful smile. Maren hated to disappoint him, but she shook her head anyway. “I can’t; my parents would kill me,” she said. “We’re Catholic. Christmas is kind of a big deal.” She didn’t mention that she was hoping to convince her new boyfriend to come along. She and Icheb had only been dating a couple of months, but she had fallen hard and fast. Neither Rachel nor John were overly enthusiastic about it – partly because they found Icheb boring, and partly because he was a former Borg drone.

Both Rachel’s and John’s eyebrows went up in unison. “Wait, you guys actually celebrate Christmas? Tree and everything?” Rachel asked in disbelief.

Maren rolled her eyes and set her PADD aside. “Tree and everything,” she said. “Roasted dead bird, presents, carols, the works. We even go to church,” she added in a conspiratorial whisper, as if it was the most shocking thing someone could admit to. In this day and age, sometimes it felt like it was.

“You’ve got to be kidding me,” John said. “*Church?* Really?”

“J.Q., I went to Mass last Sunday,” Maren retorted. “Believe it or not, there are still a few open, even in San Francisco.”

“Was anyone else there?” he asked, sounding genuinely curious.

“Just me, the priest, three old ladies, and the communion of saints,” Maren quipped. John smirked, but still looked slightly intrigued. “Anyway, I can’t miss Christmas at home, especially not to go to *Risa*,” Maren told them. “My mother would never recover from the shock.”

“That’s too bad,” Rachel said, “because my uncle booked a whole floor at the Galartha Grande Hotel. It’s going to be amazing.”

Maren grinned and rolled her eyes. “It’s going to be an orgy. You’re all going to come home with liver damage and regrets.”

“I never regret anything,” Rachel countered, with a self-satisfied smirk. “And Starfleet Medical can handle the liver damage.”

“You’re insane,” Maren said, shaking her head and smiling bemusedly. She glanced up at John. “Don’t say I didn’t warn you,” she said. “If any of you return with your dignity intact, I’ll be amazed.”

“Dignity is highly overrated,” Rachel interjected. “Fun, however, is not. But you go on home and milk cows or whatever the hell it is you do back on the farm.”

“Normally, I study,” Maren replied, picking her PADD back up and waving it pointedly. “You might consider it yourself sometime.”

“Not everyone can be number one,” Rachel retorted. “I figure you’ve got that covered. I’ll focus on being the best number 213 I can be.”

Maren smirked, sighed and rolled her eyes. She settled back against her pillow and returned her attention to her PADD. “You guys have fun,” she said. “Seriously, thanks for the invitation, but I’m going to have to pass.”

“If Icheb was going, I bet you’d come,” Rachel challenged her.

Maren set the PADD down again. “Did you invite him?”

Rachel shook her head. “No, but if it gets you to loosen up a little and come along, maybe I will.” John gave Rachel a skeptical look – Maren could tell he was not at all interested in including Icheb in their plans for group debauchery. Something told her he would be far from alone in that opinion, but the point was probably moot – she couldn’t imagine that her shy, reserved boyfriend would be remotely interested in participating.

She shook her head. “I can’t come,” she told Rachel seriously. “Really. Try me this summer, but I’m not missing Christmas.”

“Even if we convince Icheb to come?”

Maren hesitated, but shook her head. “Even then. I can’t do it. I’m sorry, Rach.”

“Suit yourself,” Rachel said, flipping her thick black curls and shooting Maren a disappointed pout. “But I think you’re the one who’s going to regret it.”

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