

Title: Mistletoe
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Rating: [PG]
Codes: K/7, J/C, P/T, and just about everyone else!

Summary: Neelix and Chakotay plan a holiday fete around the Christmas season, with lots of good food, cheer, and...oh yes..*Mistletoe!* Romance runs rampant and kissing ensues.

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"Captain, if I may have a word with you?"

Captain Kathryn Janeway sighed, smiling to hide her irritation at being interrupted from the report she was reading for the umpteenth time. She pushed it away, taking a quick sip of her coffee before placing the cup back on the messhall table.

"Yes, Mr. Neelix. What can I do for you?"

The Talaxian morale officer fidgeted nervously with the ends of his apron. "Well, you see Captain, I noticed that Christmas is coming in a week and I wanted your permission to hold a party to celebrate it. It would do wonders for morale," he said earnestly.

Morale had been rather low recently, Kathryn silently acknowledged. Ever since the incident with the Equinox, the crew seemed...she searched for the right word...subdued. Perhaps a party would be just what they needed to bring their spirits back up.

The red-haired captain smiled wryly. "Well, it is a holiday celebrated by a good portion of the crew, however, perhaps it would be better to incorporate some other holidays that also follow around the same time of year, so that others will feel welcome to participate."

Neelix nodded, a broad smile crossing his spotted features. "Good idea, Captain. I'm sure I can find other holidays by cross-referencing the Federation database. However, I'll have to come up with a different name," he mused thoughtfully.

"I'm sure what ever you come up with will be fine," Janeway stood up from the table, tucking the report she had been trying to read under her arm, and headed for the replicator, Neelix trailing at her heels.

"Coffee, black."

Her hand was reaching for the cup even before it finished materializing in the replicator. She turned back towards Neelix who was still looking thoughtful.

"You may want to check with Commander Chakotay before you get started," she said, wrapping her fingers around the cup and delighting in the aroma that wafted upwards. "He may have some ideas about holidays and who might be willing to help you pull this off."

Neelix smiled, nodding hard enough to make the tufts of hair on his head quiver. "I'll do that. Thank you, Captain."

Kathryn smiled and left the messhall, heading straight for the turbolift. She had exactly five minutes to enjoy her coffee and finish her report before she had to be on the bridge.

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Kathryn Janeway studied the invitation that had been deposited on her desk by her 'assistant', Naomi Wildman, just a few moments ago. Her mouth twitched in amusement as she examined the garishly decorated piece of paper. Neelix had obviously taken her suggestion to heart, and had incorporated as many holidays as possible into the celebration. She scanned the decorations along the edge and recognized many of the symbols from different earth faiths, and several that looked unfamiliar. Intrigued, she opened the invitation to read the carefully printed words inside.

You are cordially invited to a celebration of the following holidays:

*Christmas
Hanukkah
Kwanzaa
Boxing Day
M'Ktvor
Pleischiram*

And any other holidays falling within the Earth month of December

The celebration will take place in the messhall beginning at 1900 hours.

Hors d'oeuvres and drinks will be served.

*Music provided by DJ "Spots" Neelix
And the Federation Music Database*

Evening attire recommended.

Please RSVP

Kathryn's eyebrows lifted in surprise. Obviously Neelix had done quite a bit of research. Her lips twitched slightly as she re-read the invitation. "DJ Spots?" she muttered under her breath.

Her door chime interrupted her musings and she placed the invitation aside for the moment.

"Come."

Commander Chakotay walked through the door to her ready room, a familiar looking brightly colored piece of paper held in one hand. His dimples were in evidence, and Kathryn found herself smiling in return.

"I see you got your invitation, Commander."

Chakotay nodded, noting her invitation on the desk next to her coffee cup. "And you received one as well. The whole ship is invited, of course, but Neelix wanted to do this 'by the book', I believe is how he phrased it." The dimples reappeared briefly. "Are you going to go?"

Kathryn folded her arms across her chest, leaning back slightly in her chair to look up at her handsome First Officer. "I might. How about you?"

"Wouldn't miss it for anything. I hear Neelix used up most of his replicator rations replicating mistletoe." He grinned, wagging his eyebrows suggestively.

Kathryn's eyebrows shot up in surprise. "Mistletoe? How did he hear about that?"

Chakotay had the grace to look slightly embarrassed. "I happened to mention it when he talked with me about different Earth holiday traditions. When I told him that any man and woman 'caught' under the mistletoe together had to kiss, he became quite interested in seeing if the replicators had a pattern for the plant in them."

"I suspect Mr. Neelix has matchmaking plans," Kathryn said frowning. "I don't know if this is such a good idea."

Chakotay crossed his arms in a fairly decent imitation of his commanding officer. "Really, Captain. I would think it would be fairly harmless and fun, and what is wrong with a little matchmaking now and then?" His tattoo crinkled as he raised his eyebrow at her.

"Have any specific couples in mind, Mr. Chakotay?" she asked dryly.

His trademark dimples reappeared. "I might."

She waited for him to elaborate, but was annoyed that he simply continued to grin at her, obviously enjoying her curiosity but not willing to give her any further information.

"All right, fine," Kathryn sighed, her blue eyes glinting with amusement. "I suppose it won't hurt anything."

"Then, should I tell Neelix you'll be coming?"

Kathryn nodded. "I don't suppose there's any way I could get out of coming, barring a Red Alert."

"No, ma'am."

"Dismissed." Her 'look' lacked its usual strength, and didn't even begin to diminish his smile. With a nod, he turned on his heel, invitation still held firmly in his hand. He paused before the door, triggering the automatic response and looked back at her before stepping through the doorway.

"Forget something, Commander?"

"Just wanted to remind you that the attire for the party is evening dress. I was wondering what you'd be wearing."

"I'm sure I'll think of something," Kathryn said, lifting her cup to drain the last of the coffee.

Chakotay looked at her a moment longer, then turned and left, the door to her ready room hissing shut behind him.

Kathryn sat for a moment, contemplating the bottom of her coffee cup.

"What am I going to wear?"

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"No. No. No. No."

The EMH threw up his hands in exasperation. "Seven, you've rejected every dress design I've come up with, for reasons you've not even bothered to explain. How am I supposed to design you a dress for the Holiday Celebration if you reject every idea I propose?"

Seven of Nine, formerly of the Borg Collective, looked at the frustrated EMH with impatience. She pointed to the picture of the last grouping of dresses she had rejected.

"Too short, too long, too loose, too tight."

The EMH's lips tightened perceptively as he struggled to gather his subroutines together. "Fine. What exactly then would you like?"

"If I knew what kind of dress I wanted, I would not be here asking for your assistance," Seven explained, crossing her arms across her ample chest.

The doctor looked up at the ceiling a moment, as if to ask for supreme guidance, then sighed, his irritation pushed aside for the moment.

"I want to help you, Seven. But I'm afraid my tastes are evidently not suited to yours. I am completely out of ideas."

"Why not take her shopping?" B'Elanna asked as she stepped out of the doctor's office. She had finished running his weekly diagnostic and had caught the very end of their conversation. "There are holograms of cities that have clothing stores. Perhaps one of them would have something in a design Seven would like."

Seven regarded the half-Klingon engineer with surprise, not only because she had suggested it, but that her suggestion had merit.

The EMH was nodding, a slow smile spreading across his features. "That is a perfect idea, B'Elanna. The shopping bazaar on Risa should do perfectly. There are over 1000 shops for ladies' wear alone."

B'Elanna raised an eyebrow, wondering how the EMH would know about the shopping facilities on Risa, but decided it was better not to ask. "Your diagnostic ran fine. The extra subroutines that you implemented last week seem to be working with the rest of your program without any problems."

"Thank you, B'Elanna." The doctor nodded with satisfaction. "Will you and Mr. Paris be attending the Holiday Celebration tomorrow?"

B'Elanna scowled at the mention of Tom's name, and the doctor realized belatedly that the two were obviously at odds with each other. Again.

"No," she said shortly. "I have work to do in Engineering." She gathered up the few tools she had brought with her and left sickbay without a backward glance.

The EMH looked at the doors that had just closed on the obviously upset engineer. "Well, I supposed it's only to be expected." He sighed, before turning his attention back to Seven, who had taken in the whole exchange with interest.

"I fail to understand the nature of their relationship," she said, frowning.

"You're not alone, Seven."

She blinked at him, momentarily taken aback at his words, but didn't pursue the thought any further.

"Will you take me shopping, doctor?"

The EMH nodded. "I'd be happy to."

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Seven sat at her workstation in cargo bay two looking at the packages that were stacked neatly on her console. Each carefully wrapped box contained an item that had been purchased at a holographic department store from Risa, and she was slightly overwhelmed at the number of them, although the doctor had assured her that each and every item was necessary for the look she wished to achieve. She only hoped that a certain, dark haired ensign noticed her efforts.

Her gaze settled on the largest of the boxes and she reached for the lid, a faint smile played about her lips. Wrapped neatly in tissue paper was her dress. The doctor had taken her to nine different stores before she had finally found the dress she wanted. As she lifted it from the box, she couldn't help but admire the color, the deep wine-red velvet that had caught her eye the moment she had stepped inside the store. The fabric itself had a quality that pleased her; a softness that she had not known existed in a garment before. Having previously dismissed something as trivial as comfort in clothing as completely irrelevant, Seven was beginning to reconsider her previous opinion.

::Kim to Seven of Nine::

Carefully she re-wrapped the dress in tissue and closed the box, before tapping her combadge in response.

"Seven here."

::I got your message on my console. What was it you needed to ask me?::

She tried to ignore the sudden way her heart seemed to pound as she answered his question.

"I wanted to know if you were planning on attending Mr. Neelix's celebration tomorrow evening."

::Yes. Are you going to go?::

She nodded before she realized he couldn't see her. "Yes. I plan on attending," she answered, frowning at how stilted her answer sounded.

There was a decided pause on the other end.

::Was that all you wanted to know, Seven?::

"I..." she began, trying to ignore the fluttering sensation in the general vicinity of her stomach. She took a deep breath, stiffening her spine. "I wanted to know if you would like to attend the party with me."

The pause on the other end of the comlink was so long that Seven began to wonder if the connection had been lost.

::Are you asking me to be your date, Seven?::

She was familiar enough with his voice to know he was smiling, and knew it was a positive sign. An unfamiliar surge of relief swept through her, causing her to take a deep breath before she replied.

"Yes, Ensign Kim. I am. Do you accept?"

There was a chuckle from his end of the com signal.

::I accept::

Seven felt her heart resume a somewhat normal pace. "Thank you, Ensign."

::Do you want me to meet you there or pick you up at your quarters?::

She frowned, obviously not having considered any further than getting his agreement to go on a 'date' with her. "I am unsure which would be better," she admitted honestly.

::I'll pick you up there. What color is your dress?::

Seven's eyebrow rose. "It is approximately the color of red wine. Why?" She was extremely curious.

Harry chuckled again and even across the comlink the sound gave her a pleasant feeling in her midsection.

::I don't want to clash with your dress. I'll see you at 1845 tomorrow evening. Kim out.::

Seven placed the boxes next to a supply container, stacking them neatly together. As she stepped back into her alcove to begin her regeneration cycle, she realized that she was looking forward to the next day with a great deal of anticipation.

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B'Elanna sat on her bed with a sigh, slipping off her boots and stretching her toes with relief. The warp core relays had been giving her grief again and she had ended up working nearly an 18-hour shift. It felt wonderful to sit down.

Her pleasure at relaxing was short-lived, however. She had just started to remove her socks when her door chimed. She shook her head, grumbling under her breath. She had a pretty good idea who was on the other side of the door. Briefly, B'Elanna considered ignoring the chime, but knew that Tom wouldn't give up that easily. She wouldn't put it past him to try to override her door codes if she didn't let him in.

The door chimed for the third time and B'Elanna said a word in Klingon that would have gotten her mouth washed out with soap if her mother had heard her use it.

"Come in!"

The door opened and Tom Paris, her lover and constant source of aggravation, stepped into her quarters, looking rakishly handsome as always. He was dressed for Neelix's party, his dark green shirt coordinating nicely with his black dress pants and red tie. He was holding something behind his back.

"Why aren't you at Neelix's party?" she asked bluntly, in no mood to play any word games with him.

"I didn't want to go without you," he said quietly, his tone causing B'Elanna to examine him closely. He wasn't his usual cocky, confident self, she noted with surprise. "I needed to talk to you."

B'Elanna crossed her arms across her chest, looking up at him skeptically. "Talk away, helmboy." She wasn't going to give an inch.

He didn't say anything, but simply looked at her a moment, then brought out what he had been hiding behind his back. It was tiny, fitting easily in the palm of Tom's hand, and pink colored. She looked at it for several seconds before it dawned on her that he was holding a stuffed toy pig.

B'Elanna looked at the tiny pig nestled in his hand and then back at Tom. "What is that?"

"It's a pig."

She gave him a look that would have combusted lesser men. "I know it's a pig. What are you doing with it?"

"Giving it to you," he replied without flinching. "I'm apologizing." He held the small thing towards her. "I was a pig, and I freely admit it."

B'Elanna grudgingly took the pig from his hand, trying to ignore the way it fit perfectly in her palm and cutely stared up at her with its beady glass eyes.

"You were definitely a pig, Paris. What makes you think I should forgive you?"

Tom stepped closer to her, reaching out with both hands to touch her shoulders. When she refused to meet his eyes, he reached out with one hand and lifted her chin, bringing her face up to meet his gaze.

"Because I was afraid of this kind of commitment, and because I need you, and if you forgive me, I'll never, ever do it again." His blue eyes were searching hers with an intensity that she found nearly overwhelming.

Her hands tightened convulsively on the pig, understanding finally why he had chosen this token as a symbol of his apology. Her shoulders relaxed slightly as her lips twitched briefly in a smile.

"If I ever catch you flirting with any female member of this crew other than Naomi Wildman while we're together, not only will I dump you faster than a breaching warp core, I will put you in sickbay for at least a month."

Tom nodded slowly, his eyes never leaving hers, a smile of his own forming across his full lips. "Then you'll come with me to Neelix's party?"

B'Elanna frowned, placing the pig carefully on the table next to her computer. "I don't know," she said with a twist of her lips. "I just got off shift, and my feet hurt."

"Would you like to stay here? I have enough replicator rations, I could treat you to dinner," Tom suggested, his look suggesting he would not be at all disappointed to miss Neelix's party if it meant spending private time with her.

"Just dinner?" she asked with an arched eyebrow, folding her arms across her chest.

"And a foot rub."

B'Elanna leaned forward until her shoulders were nearly touching his, her face inches from his own.

"*Just* a foot rub?"

Tom's answering smile spoke volumes.

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Kathryn gave herself a final inspection in front of the mirror, checking her hair, make-up, and lay of her dress before stepping out of the ensuite. She was satisfied that she looked attractive, but not too provocative. She had an image to maintain, after all. After slipping her stocking feet into her shoes, she

left her quarters, and walked with a casualness she did not feel to the door across the hall from hers. She rang the chime for entry and waited, silently calling herself all kinds of fool for getting herself all worked up over Chakotay's invitation to escort her to Neelix's party.

When Chakotay's door opened, all thoughts of 'boundaries' and 'establishing parameters' flew straight out of her head.

"Good evening, Captain," Chakotay smiled down at her, brown eyes sparkling with warmth.

Kathryn realized her mouth was open with surprise and closed it with a snap. "G-good evening," she said, recovering her composure. She gave him an admiring glance. "You look very nice, Commander."

He most certainly did, Kathryn thought with an inward smile. His sweater was black with dark green trees, certainly the most festive thing she had ever seen him wear. It fit him rather nicely, she thought with pure feminine appreciation, accenting the broadness of shoulders and width of his chest, and ending just above his very perfectly shaped bottom, which was nicely attired in a pair of black slacks.

Chakotay raised his eyebrow slightly, catching her appraisal with a mental grin as he stepped out of his quarters. "Don't you think we could drop the titles tonight? After all, it is an after hours function." He deliberately looked at her attire as if to make his point, although it was actually the first time he had been able to appreciate her appearance. He particularly liked the midnight-blue shade of her dress; it brought out the blueness of her eyes like nothing he had ever seen before. His gaze swept over the creamy paleness of her bared shoulders and throat, hesitating slightly at the peek of cleavage the neckline hinted at, before returning his eyes to hers. He read a cool amusement in them and smiled, faintly embarrassed.

Kathryn's lips twitched briefly although she was very pleased with his reaction. It wasn't every day that a man looked at her like that, and it filled her with a heady sense of her own femininity.

"I suppose we should, just for the evening, Chakotay," she replied finally with a smile.

Chakotay offered his arm to her, and was happy when she placed her pale hand on his bicep. Covering that small hand with his own, larger one, they walked together towards the turbolift.

As the lift doors closed, Kathryn realized Chakotay was standing rather close to her, even in the small confines of the lift. Rather than making her uncomfortable, she found herself actually wanting to step closer to him, to lean against his warmth and strength in the privacy of the lift. She imagined he would put his arms around her, place a kiss in her hair, and just hold her, letting her drop all her masks and guards that she wore and carried with her each and every day, allowing her just this moment to be only herself.

Chakotay watched Kathryn avoid his gaze, deliberately standing close to her, wishing he had the courage to speak to her and tell her everything in his heart, wishing he knew whether or not she felt the same way. He was frustrated, although he did his best not to show it. Kathryn ran hot and cold when it came to their relationship; one moment she was friendly, sharing dinners with him, smiling at him, even flirting with him, and just as he thought he was reaching her, her barriers would go up, and she would become cold, detached, and purely professional with him, politely declining his dinner invitations or any invitations to socialize outside of work. He hadn't given up his hope that one day she would open up to him and allow him to see who she really was beneath her command exterior. He sensed that beneath the mask she wore

daily was a deeply passionate woman who needed love and to be loved more than she would ever admit to herself. He was determined to prove it.

The lift stopped and Chakotay offered her his arm again. He was pleased when she placed her hand on his arm, and delighted when she leaned slightly into him before they exited the lift together and continued towards the mess hall.

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Harry hadn't known what to expect when he stepped into cargo bay two to pick up Seven of Nine, but the cool, blonde beauty in the velvet dress literally took his breath away. He stood as if struck dumb, eyes taking in the vision that had been hinted at but had never been seen before.

The dress clung to every curve and fell in a wine-colored pool at her feet, leaving her arms and throat bare to his admiration. But it was her hair that truly captivated his attention. Like spun gold it cascaded down her back and curled teasingly around her face, a shimmering curtain that moved with each breath she took and invited him to plunge his hands in it, promising a silky texture to tantalize his senses.

He swallowed with effort and blinked, finally bringing his gaze to hers, noticing the look of uncertainty and hesitation in her eyes. He realized that she was waiting for him to say something. Harry struggled to come up with a word, a comment, anything to let her know how beautiful she was.

"You are amazing." He cringed, inwardly thinking he sounded completely idiotic. He waited for the superior look, the raised eyebrow and pursed lips. Seven surprised him once more by her reaction to his words.

She smiled. It was small, but it was most definitely a smile.

"Thank you, Harry. You look very attractive this evening also."

Harry blinked, surprised. Perhaps this date would turn out better than he ever dared to hope. Harry had to admit that he was still a little apprehensive about 'changing the nature of relationship', especially after the messhall episode when Seven had offered to copulate with him. An evening where he had simply wanted an opportunity to get to know her in a non-working environment (and perhaps sneak a kiss, he had to admit if was going to be completely honest) had turned into a complete disaster simply because she had misinterpreted his intentions and he had lost his nerve when confronted so bluntly. They had continued their working relationship, and thankfully, nothing had been ever brought up regarding that evening. Harry had continued to find her attractive, however, and the more he got to know her, the more attractive she became to him. When she asked him to take her to Neelix's party, he had deliberately made his expectations low, not wanting to get his hopes up that this date would be anything more than a social lesson for Seven with someone she trusted, although Harry did consider the fact that she had chose him over the Doctor as a sign that there might be more to the evening besides a social lesson.

Harry realized he had been standing there, staring at her without speaking for several moments and felt a slow blush warm his cheeks. "Thank you, Seven. Are you ready to go?" He ignored the warmth in his cheeks and held out his hand towards her.

Seven nodded, feeling a pleased tingle through her spine as she accepted the hand he offered, enjoying the warmth of his fingers entwined with her own.

Harry couldn't help but glance down at his companion from time to time as they walked to the turbolift, enjoying the soft feel of her hand in his, and the fragrance that rose from her hair. He wondered who had helped her prepare for the evening, and silently thanked them for it.

After the lift deposited them on their requested level, they moved at a leisurely pace towards the messhall, the sounds and smells of the festivities reaching them long before they actually arrived at their destination. The doors to the messhall opened for them automatically and they stepped through the entryway together.

"Harry, Seven!" Neelix greeted them with enthusiasm from his usual spot in the cooking area. "Stop right where you are!"

Startled, they both halted, wearing nearly identical expressions of confusion.

Neelix clapped gleefully and pointed above their heads. "Mistletoe!"

Harry and Seven looked above them at what Neelix was pointing to. A green sprig foliage with red berries hung above them from a string attached to the ceiling of the messhall.

"You're supposed to kiss if you get 'caught' beneath the mistletoe," a voice to Harry's left explained in a somewhat apologetic tone. "Its an ancient earth tradition that Neelix dug up somewhere in the database."

Both Harry and Seven looked to see who had spoken.

Jenny Delaney raised a glass of what appeared to be champagne towards them both, her arm linked companionably through Steve Ayala's. "I think it is a charming tradition." She smiled amiably up at Ayala, who obviously agreed with her assessment, if his expression was any indication.

Harry flushed nervously, embarrassed at having been put into a situation he had no control over. While kissing Seven was certainly high on his list of things to accomplish some time in his life (perhaps even this evening), he certainly wasn't prepared to do it this very moment, and certainly not in front of an audience.

Quizzically Seven regarded Harry, noting his flushed cheeks, the increased respiratory rate, not quite understanding the reason for his obvious discomfiture. The tradition sounded simple enough to her. Finally, deciding that she should take the initiative in the matter, she leaned forward and pressed her lips against his.

Harry's eyes widened in surprise as he felt Seven's lips touch his in the most chaste of kisses. He resisted the urge to raise his hand and cup her cheek, deepening the kiss slightly instead, giving just the slightest hint of what a true kiss was like.

Seven felt Harry's lips move under her own and decided that every reference she had read about kissing was sadly lacking compared to the actual experience. Nothing in the database had described the softness of his lips, the perfect way they seemed to fit against hers, nor the sudden heat that spread itself throughout her body as a result of the contact.

"Well, its nice to see two young people take a tradition to heart," Neelix said cheerfully, moving behind the counter for another platter of hors d'oeuvres to place on the buffet table.

It was Harry who broke the kiss, Neelix's comment rudely bringing him back to his surroundings. His eyes met Seven's briefly and for a moment, he saw something reflected in them, but it was swiftly gone, and he couldn't be certain of what he had truly seen in their blue depths. Shyly, he reached for her hand, and felt relieved when her slender fingers twined through his.

"There are approximately 37 groupings of this 'mistletoe' hanging from the ceiling in the messhall," Seven said quietly to fill the silence between them, wondering at the trembling, fluttery sensation that she had experienced when her lips had touched his, and which continued as his hand held hers.

Harry pondered her statement, nodding slightly as his gaze swept upward, his lips still tingling from her touch.

Seven gazed at him frankly, a hint of challenge in her blue eyes. "Do you think we can stop beneath all of them?"

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"Oh, Tom," B'Elanna groaned with pleasure, practically purring. "I like that."

"Like this?" Tom demonstrated, his fingers moving deftly.

"Mmm, yes! Don't stop!" Her eyes closed blissfully as she relaxed under his touch.

Tom grinned wickedly, his thumbs moving from the ball of her foot to her delicate instep, increasing the pressure slightly with each sweeping movement. Several more moments of the massage had her sighing in delight, before he moved his hands to her heels and continued his careful and intent ministrations. He had promised her a foot massage after dinner, and he was determined to make it the best she'd ever had.

B'Elanna opened her eyes slightly, watching Tom from beneath her lashes. She was glad they had decided not to go to Neelix's party. Tom had been extremely attentive this evening, eager to prove to her how much he regretted his earlier, foolish actions. She sighed again, stretching her body languorously against the pillows scattered over her bed, never taking her eyes from the handsome face of her lover. It was time, she thought with a lazy smile, that he paid attention to more interesting parts of her than her feet.

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She could hear the festive music all the way down the corridor from the messhall and she thought she recognized the tune as one her mother had played many a Christmas at home in Indiana. She couldn't help but smile at the memory the music invoked: the smell of pumpkin pies and Christmas trees, the sound of her sister's laughter and snowflakes hitting the windows of her mother's house. Lost in her memories, Kathryn was unaware of her companion's affectionate regard as they walked towards the messhall.

The doors opened for them automatically and Kathryn's eyes widened in surprise and delight as she took in all the decorations brightening up the messhall.

"Captain! Commander! Welcome!" Neelix greeted them both cheerfully, setting the tray of Katurian Chocolate Puffs on the buffet table and making his way over to them. "I'm so glad you both could come. It wouldn't be a party without you."

Pleased and surprised by his warm welcome, Kathryn chuckled, gesturing at all the gay and sometimes garish decorations around the messhall. "You've done a wonderful job, Neelix. It looks great."

Chakotay nodded his agreement, brown eyes immediately spotting the bits of greenery hung from strategic locations. As casually as he could, he looked upwards and suppressed a grin. Hanging innocuously above Kathryn's head was a cheerful sprig of mistletoe.

Kathryn's smile widened as she noted the couples that were obviously paired off together, seated companionably at tables, sharing plates of food and drink. The pairings reminded her of Chakotay's comment earlier this week regarding a certain tradition involving a plant. Her eyes swept upwards and she saw, to her amusement, that there were at least three-dozen sprigs of mistletoe hanging strategically around the messhall. Some of the pairings surprised her, individuals sitting cozily across from each other that she would never have imagined together. She was pleasantly surprised and pleased to notice Harry Kim and Seven of Nine, holding hands, talking earnestly to each other. If she wasn't mistaken, the red marks on Harry's cheeks matched the exact shade of Seven's lipstick.

She spotted an empty table and with a nod at Neelix, began to make her way towards it, intent on a path that would avoid any sprigs of mistletoe.

"Wait, Captain! Stop right where you are." Neelix's grin was most definitely suspect. With a wink he pointed above her and Chakotay's head.

Kathryn didn't need to look up to know that she was standing under yet another sprig of mistletoe. Lips compressed in a firm line, she shot Neelix a look that told him under no uncertain terms that he would be having a talk with the Captain, most likely as soon as he finished cleaning the messhall from this evening's festivities.

"Oh, certainly you don't expect the Captain to engage in improper behavior with her first officer," she tried, putting her hands on her hips, aware that she and Chakotay had suddenly become the focus of attention in the messhall.

"The Captain? Oh certainly not," Neelix affirmed, fully enjoying his role. "However, she's not here right now. You're off duty, remember?"

"You don't want to set a bad example in front of all these witnesses, do you, Kathryn?" Chakotay's lips brushed her ear as he spoke, his voice was warm, almost caressing and sent involuntary shivers down her spine.

Besides, a little voice insinuated inside her head, *isn't this what you wanted all along? An excuse to kiss Chakotay?* With a sigh and a small smile, she nodded her assent.

Chakotay smiled down at her, suddenly breathless. He knew he would have to pay for tricking her into kissing him, and that she would correctly blame him for putting the idea of mistletoe into Neelix's head,

good note. His fingers tingled where they curled around hers, and despite the goodly amount of kissing they had participated in this evening, Harry found himself somewhat nervous about how the evening was going to end.

The doors to cargo bay two opened for them as they came to a stop, and Seven turned towards Harry, still holding his hand with her own.

“Thank you, Ens...Harry,” she corrected herself, “for a pleasant evening. I enjoyed your company very much.”

Harry smiled, squeezing her hand gently. “You’re welcome, Seven. I had a good time too.”

There was a moment of awkward silence between them, before Seven finally spoke again.

“The nature of our relationship has changed, hasn’t it? We are now more than friends?”

“If that is what you want, Seven,” Harry answered carefully, barely daring to hope.

“Is that what you want, Harry?”

Slowly he nodded. “I would like that very much.”

A smile formed on Seven’s lips. “I would also like that very much.” She leaned forward and kissed him.

Harry met her kiss, his hand reaching up to caress her face tenderly. No matter how many times they kissed, he thought, he would never get tired of the feel of her lips against his. He ended the kiss by enfolding her in his arms and hugging her gently, relishing the feel of her arms wrapping around him, hesitantly returning his embrace.

“Have a good night, Seven. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

“Good night, Harry.”

Reluctantly they broke apart, and with a lingering kiss, Seven finally entered cargo bay two, leaving Harry to smile at the closed doors like a love-dazed fool. He would have been gratified to know, as he strolled happily back to his quarters, that Seven’s expression as she stepped into her alcove was extremely un-Borg-like and could be described, by some who knew her extremely well, as *happy*.

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Kathryn and Chakotay were the last to leave the party, banished from the messhall by Neelix, who declared he had the clean-up well in hand and didn’t require their help. Laughing together, the command pair left the messhall for the turbolift. When the lift doors closed, their laughter faded. Both realized, quite suddenly, that they were alone together.

Chakotay looked down at his smaller companion, who was looking up at him with an expression he had never seen before. He had certainly never seen the Captain look like that. As he searched his slightly

champagne-fuzzed brain for an intelligent comment to fill the silence that had grown between them, Kathryn stepped forward, hooking a finger in the collar of his shirt and bringing him closer.

“I know the mistletoe was your idea, Chakotay.”

Her breath smelled faintly of the whiskey she had been drinking, and he shivered at the way her husky voice caressed his name.

“I...that is...well it was...” he flailed vainly for an intelligent reply.

“Shut-up, Commander,” she growled, and ended his pitiful floundering with a kiss.

His lips were like velvet, like nothing she had ever felt before, and the fire that slowly built at their touch threatened to consume her. She had thought of nothing else since he had kissed her under the mistletoe, knowing that before the night was over, she would have to kiss him again, if only to satisfy her curiosity. His kiss had been almost chaste, so gentle, not full of the passion that she was feeling now. *I could get addicted to this*, she thought, as she felt him take control of this kiss, deepening it slightly. Her arms twined themselves around his neck as she opened her mouth under the pressure of his lips, feeling the first, velvety touch of his tongue against hers.

Chakotay was so startled for a moment that all he could do was stand there and let her kiss him. However, after several seconds, his brain finally kicked in with the thought that *she was kissing him!* Kissing him of her own volition, and without any tricks or coercion on his part. His hands crept upwards and held her face as he took control of the kiss, feeling her lips move in surrender under his. Her mouth opened under his persuasion and his tongue gently brushed against hers, the silky warmth driving him crazy and making him want more.

A quiet but persistent throat-clearing finally broke them apart, and Kathryn felt her cheeks flame with embarrassment as she realized the lift had stopped and the doors had opened for another crew member.

Tuvok’s eyebrow did its very best meet his hairline as the occupants of the lift hastily exited, both with faces as red as command uniforms. Neither officer would meet his gaze, something which he was actually very relieved for. As the lift doors shut, he was fairly certain he heard the distinctive sound of giggling, but firmly dismissed it as a possible passing anomaly.

The pair fled down the corridor, failing to stifle the giggles that erupted once the lift doors began to close. Chakotay leaned against the corridor, pulling Kathryn against him and holding her gently as their giggles subsided. He placed a gentle kiss on her hair and sighed.

“Do you think he’ll say anything?” Kathryn’s voice was slightly muffled against his chest.

“Probably something along the lines of hoping that he won’t be seeing that happen again,” Chakotay chuckled quietly. His humor faded when he felt her stiffen in his embrace, and he released her.

Kathryn stepped back, suddenly feeling very sober. She looked up at her first officer, but his expression was unreadable.

“We need to talk, Chakotay.”

Well, at least she didn't call me Commander, he thought as he stepped away from wall. "All right," he said quietly. "Now?"

She nodded. "Let's go to my quarters. Suddenly, I have a need for a cup of coffee."

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He sat on the couch in her quarters and watched her get her coffee from the replicator, bringing the steaming cup carefully back and placing it on the table across from him. He had declined her offer of tea, but now found he wished he had something to hang onto when she settled herself on her end of the couch. She reached for the cup, cradling it in her hands and taking a deep drink of its contents.

"Ah," she sighed, and smiled. "Better."

Chakotay briefly battled with an attempt at subtlety, and gave it up for lost. It was late, and if she was going to push him away again, he wanted to get it over with so he could go back to his quarters and cry in peace.

"You kissed me, Kathryn."

"Yes, I did. You kissed me first." She took another drink of her coffee. "As I recall, you didn't seem to mind the second time." Kathryn smiled, setting her cup down on the table. "Is that a problem?"

Chakotay shook his head, still uncertain. "No. As long as you meant it."

Kathryn met his eyes, and he was relieved to see she was still smiling.

"I meant it."

Chakotay let out the breath he didn't realize he was holding.

"Furthermore, I think that, if given the right opportunity and motivation, I could continue to pursue such activities with you." Kathryn's eyes glinted playfully.

Chakotay moved purposefully to her end of the couch and grabbed her, pulling her against him tightly. "You are the most infuriating woman I have ever known, Kathryn Janeway," he said softly. "Just when I think I have you figured out, when I've given up all hope of *this* for us..." He chuckled gently. "The mistletoe was my last effort to get to you, you know."

"I'm sorry, Chakotay," she said heavily. "I know I haven't made it easy on you." She pulled back slightly so she could look up at him. "But I thought, at the time, that I had good reason to keep you at a distance." She frowned slightly. "I'm not good at this part, Chakotay." She looked up at him in mute appeal.

He smiled, squeezing her gently. "You're doing fine, Kathryn."

She gave him a mock glare for interrupting. "I'm trying to say that I was wrong, Chakotay. I think that there are some definite relationship parameters we can safely cross."

Chakotay shook his head. “You say the sweetest things, Kathryn,” he murmured. “I think I preferred, ‘Shut-up, Commander’.” His lips closed on hers once more, and any further thoughts she may have had went quietly and without a struggle out the nearest airlock.

