

Summary: Janeway and Seven's first date after "Sandrines Revisited"

Content Disclaimers: Sometime in 5th season. Continued from my short story, "Sandrines Revisited"

A NATURAL COURSE

by Lara Zielinsky

© 2002

In Astrometrics, the next morning...

Seven of Nine expended very little concentration on her duties. The calculations of trajectories, shield harmonics, recording gravitationally significant pulsars and other starship-diverting phenomena were having a hard time competing with the young woman's memories of the previous evening. Her eidetic memory spent the hours luxuriating in the sights, sounds and smells from her activities in Chez Sandrine's, one of the ship's open holodeck programs.

The Doctor's piano music in the background became a pleasing hum in her ears as the projected starfield shifted. The patterns were no longer just stars. The blue shift became Kathryn's eyes.

A breathtaking smile lit up Seven's face as she remembered the satin feel of Kathryn's cheeks under the pads of her fingers.

"Seven?"

Abruptly her face flushed sharply. Seven turned to see Lieutenant B'Elanna Torres, Voyager's Chief Engineer, entering the Astrometrics lab. "Lt. Torres," she greeted briefly.

"I knocked. No one answered." The compact woman, her almond skin and broad ridged forehead indicative of her half-Klingon heritage, gestured over her shoulder. "What are you working on that's got you so engrossed?"

Uncomfortable with the socially easy-going engineer at the best of times, Seven was reluctant to share her thoughts regarding the captain. "I am laying in the star charts for the next fifteen sectors," she explained simply.

"Anything anomalous?" Torres asked easily. She moved alongside Seven and scanned the readouts.

"Two class 15 pulsars, and a class 8 nebula which spans two sectors."

"Sounds like dry stuff." Seven watched the engineer straighten, as if drawing herself back to something unpleasant. "You wouldn't want to take a break from this, would you?"

"I do not require a break."

"Ah, well." B'Elanna frowned and then presented her situation quickly in a verbal rush. "I've got some equations for adjustments to the warp coils. The captain told me to get your opinion."

Seven stepped back from her board, settling her hands calmly behind her back. "If you require my assistance, I can delay the completion of this project."

"It's not..." B'Elanna looked at the chronometer readout. "Hey, we could make this easy. Discuss it over lunch?" She offered a wry smile and a shrug.

"I cannot eat lunch with you," Seven replied calmly.

The lieutenant seemed stymied for a moment. "You eat. I know you do."

"I... have other plans."

Torres blinked. "Really? After what Tom told me... I thought you and the doctor..."

"The Doctor is not--"

"Chapman? After that 'date' I'd have thought--"

Seven sighed. It was obvious that the engineer was having a hard time with something. "If you would stop speculating, Lieutenant Torres, I will tell you."

The woman's lips snapped shut for a long startled moment. Then she ventured, "All right, Seven. So what are you doing for lunch?"

"I have been invited to join the captain for her meal."

Seven found herself unable to interpret the expression that next shaped the other woman's features. Her forehead ridges flexed. Her skin, normally dark, paled. "The captain? I didn't think she did anything other than coffee during her shift." The smaller woman stepped back, scanning the Borg's face with an expression Seven interpreted as amazement. "In fact I don't recall her ever taking a lunch break." Dark brown eyes settled on Seven's. "So how'd you manage to pry her away from the big chair?"

Absorbing the idiom-laced sentence, Seven finally comprehended. "I did not ask the captain. She asked me."

"How did you do it, Seven?" Torres shook her head. "Well, here's the work. Maybe after lunch you could come down to Engineering?"

"Yes, Lieutenant." Seven glanced at the PADD then back up in time to see the lab doors close behind a departing Torres.

She had just turned back to her board when her comm badge chirped. "Janeway to Seven of Nine." The captain's low burr resounded in the quiet room.

"Seven here, Captain."

"Ready for our lunch?"

"Yes, Captain. I will meet you in the hydroponics bay."

Janeway's voice came back, altered slightly, the alteration sent a warm sensation down Seven's spine to rest comfortably in her stomach. "I'm looking forward to it. Janeway out."

Efficiently the Borg logged off her board and exited the lab.

On the bridge...

Janeway looked up at Chakotay as her hand dropped from her comm badge. Seeing the light smirk, she called him on it. "It's just lunch."

"Perfectly natural," he replied with a widening grin. "So... are you happy?"

"Taking it slowly," she responded. "This is new to me." She stood and straightened her uniform. "Not only is Seven the least experienced person I've ever had feelings for, but..." Her voice trailed away wistfully. "I must sound pretty silly, hmm?"

Chakotay stepped back and put his head down for a long moment. "No," he said finally. "Grab it, Kathryn. With both hands. If it will make you less alone."

She let her eyes, more blue now than gray, drift up to meet his. Her smile barely quirked but her hand was warm on his upper arm. "Thank you." She paused then asked, "Would you do me a favor?"

He nodded. "Anything."

"Keep my comm badge quiet for an hour?"

He smiled broadly, the corners of his eyes crinkling as he stifled a chuckle. "Only an hour?"

She playfully slapped his stomach with the back of her hand as she passed him then.

Obligingly he grunted in mock pain before following her out of the Ready Room onto the bridge.

"You have the bridge, Commander," she stated formally, separating from him at the command chairs and going up to the turbolift.

"Yes, Captain." She didn't look over her shoulder but she could hear the laughter in his voice and pictured the grin on his face as he settled into the captain's chair to monitor the readouts.

Now, she thought, I can look forward to Seven of Nine with a clear conscience. Her "angry warrior" had told her he still only wanted to see her happy. Even if it wasn't with him.

That kind of friendship with a male Janeway had never quite managed before. She realized the value of it now.

Seven was just entering the hydroponics bay as Kathryn came out of the turbolift within sight of the entrance. The young woman wore her blue unitard, the fabric snug against generous curves. Janeway smiled with a bit of a leer; Kathryn on the other hand almost swooned when Seven glanced back over her shoulder and those cool ice blue eyes darkened on contact with her face.

Dear God, I am in love, Kathryn thought, feeling her pulse race and her cheeks heat under the smile transforming the normally austere face. Her own stomach squeezed in anticipation as she quickly moved to Seven's side.

"Seven," she breathed in greeting.

"Captain." The former Borg inclined her head and swept the captain's figure.

Janeway reached out and found Seven's hand, the long fingers slid easily between her own. The touch was electric. "I'm glad you could break away from your work."

"I would never deny you anything," Seven replied simply, quietly.

The sentiment, so casually uttered, still served to overwhelm Kathryn. She swallowed. "Are you very hungry?"

"Not particularly," Seven admitted.

"Well let's see what there is light to eat." Aware that her own appetite had also distinctly shifted *away* from food, Janeway determined to move slowly. She led the two of them into the large bay, overgrowing with a profusion of nature.

One part had carefully cultivated edible specimens--Neelix's leola roots and various spices. Another part, Kes's contribution, had walkways among potted beds of flowers, bushes and even small fruit-bearing trees. Anything could be harvested, but the natural areas served beautifully as a park and picnic spot.

There was even a large grass area, the long stalks given over to "wilderness." It was here that Janeway led Seven. "Have a seat, I'll be right back." The long legged woman settled primly to the ground, fingers sliding through the green as she watched Janeway at the replicator.

"Does anyone else come here?" Seven asked.

"This was... Kes's favorite place on the entire ship. She tended it. Some of the crew enjoy it, I suppose, though it's frequently empty whenever I can break away. Most people are more inclined to go to one of the star-viewing lounges or the mess hall for their meals." Janeway returned to Seven's side, bearing a tray with vegetable-filled bread pockets and a pair of glasses filled with a light yellow liquid. Setting it between them on the ground, she offered the first glass to Seven. "It's lemonade," she explained.

Seven nodded and sipped. The flavor was tart, but not overly much. "Pleasant," she

commented.

"My mother used to make it sour enough to pucker our cheeks. Phoebe and I would make faces."

"Phoebe?"

Janeway leaned back on her elbows. "My sister. Younger." Janeway offered Seven a bite of her bread pocket.

The younger woman's straight white teeth bit into the offering, her lips brushing Janeway's fingers. Their eyes met as Seven chewed and swallowed. "Thank you." She watched Janeway take a bite herself. "Please, tell me more of your sister. Do you miss her?"

"She was a horrid tease when we were growing up," Janeway lamented. "Some days I just wanted to dump her over the nearest cliff... Of course, being Indiana, there weren't any," she chuckled. "So I suffered in silence."

"You do miss her though. Somehow I... sense it."

Kathryn dusted her fingers together, freeing them of crumbs. "Yes, I do."

"Is she very much like you?"

Shaking her head, Kathryn explained, "Not at all. We are as different as night and day. She's artistic." Her tone suggested that was all the explanation necessary.

"As are you," Seven pointed out. When Janeway raised an eyebrow in question, she clarified, "Master Da Vinci?"

Nodding, Janeway finished her meal, musing on the point. "I guess I am. But you should see Phoebe's work. I ribbed her, but... she is... really quite good."

"You... envy... your sister? Why?" Seven's gaze caught Kathryn's in earnest. "You are very successful, Kathryn. Envy suggests you believe that she is somehow better."

Leaning back, Kathryn examined her feelings toward her sister, even as she studied the branches of a tree overhead. "It's... just a sister thing I suppose."

"I do not have any siblings," Seven responded, following the other woman's gaze up to the tree. "What are you looking at?"

"Nothing. Just thinking about home," Janeway admitted. "I grew up on land a lot like this." She patted a patch of ground on her other side and watched as Seven accepted the invitation and moved next to her. "Do you have any memories of a planetside life?"

"Personally? No. My parents preferred space." Seven turned her mind inward, searching her sparse memories pre-assimilation, for anything else. "I think we did go planetside occasionally. I seem to have a vague memory of my mother treating me for a bee sting." She shivered and blinked, refocusing and finding Janeway's eyes on her face.

Sympathetically Janeway brushed her shoulder. "I wasn't crazy about it at the time, but at the Academy I found myself always seeking out the wilderness spots. I used to study, reclining like this, on a grassy knoll or... up in the branches of a tree."

"You climbed trees?"

"Oh yes," Janeway chuckled. "I like my comforts now, but I was quite the tomboy as a child."

"I have never... I cannot picture it."

"Next time I grant R & R, I'll take you down and you can try it."

"Certainly I am too big?"

"We'll just have to find a big tree." Janeway had now lain all the way back, hands crossed over her stomach and legs crossed at the ankles. She regarded the roof of the bay with a sigh.

"Mmm, that was good."

"You should relax more often, Captain."

"Haven't really felt like it... Hard to find time to spend alone just quiet when there are so many responsibilities. Besides... Alone I get... pensive."

"You mean you start second-guessing yourself."

Janeway's eye quirked at Seven. "Something like that."

"I... like seeing your smile." Seven touched the expression in question, lightly tracing her fingertips over Janeway's lips.

The air crackled between them and Janeway found her hands sliding from Seven's lips to her chest as the former Borg leaned over her. The motion drew the younger woman even closer as if she was caught in a strengthening magnetic field. Seven's hands slipped from Janeway's face to rest on the ground to either side of Kathryn's throat.

The touch of their lips deepened until she felt the smaller woman's hands slide up her sides, and behind her neck. Gentle fingers slid into her hair.

When they parted for breath, Kathryn's voice filled with awe. "Seven."

"Kathryn." Seven studied the warm blue eyes, then, drawn to the rapidly beating pulse in the captain's throat, she touched her fingers to it. Trailing a hand exploratively down Janeway's chest, she felt a small point of hardness form beneath her palm as she rested against the captain's heartbeat. Her gaze returned to Kathryn's eyes, unaware how her pupils had dilated with desire.

But Kathryn saw. Tenderly she traced the younger woman's rapid pulse before tugging the blonde head down for another kiss. Easy explorations of mouths, lips and tongues gave way to nips along the elegant column of the blonde's throat. Seven's involuntary moan of pleasure warmed Kathryn to the core, as she introduced the young Borg to her own arousal. She traced fingers over hardening nipples straining against already skin-tight fabric.

Seven's unitard parted under her fingers. She captured Seven's mouth again with her own, feeling Seven's touch on her own uniform jacket zipper. The tug as the zipper stubbornly caught once before giving way, made her smile against Seven's full lips. Her blood pounded so loudly in her ears she almost missed the chirp of her comm badge.

Almost. With a groan of physical pain Kathryn tore her mouth away from Seven's, brushing the blonde's hair soothingly while the Borg fought for breath and calm, even as she moved away and seized the badge.

"Janeway here."

"Bridge, captain. We have two vessels on intercept courses."

"Whose?" Seven's arms wrapped around Janeway's waist as the blonde buried her face in the woman's right shoulder, away from the badge on the left.

"Hirogen."

"On my way. Initiate Red Alert." Kathryn closed her eyes and opened them again, with a worried smile to Seven as she once again set aside the woman, bringing the captain to the fore.

The red alert klaxon began to sound as she bolted for the bay doors, Seven on her heels. In the turbolift, she rezipped her uniform jacket and ran quick fingers through her hair. Seven did the same.

They parted at deck 6, where Seven exited to report to Astrometrics. "Be careful, Kathryn," Seven offered when she paused at the turbolift doors.

"I will."

Sequel: Duty Calls