

Crime and Punishment

By Seema (seemag1@yahoo.com)

Author's note: Rocky's fault. This is a follow-up to Rocky's story, "[Great Expectations](#)", and it will help to have read that first. My thanks to Rocky for looking this over and once again, graciously allowing me into her sandbox.

"Are there further questions?" Tuvok placed his hands flat on the table as he scrutinized the briefing room. Tom squirmed in his chair. B'Elanna stared straight ahead, her gaze focused on a non-existent spot on the wall. Harry's lips were clenched together, as if he was holding back laughter. Chakotay swirled his tongue over his lips as he eyed the captain who was sitting primly at the head of the table. As usual, Seven of Nine appeared unimpressed. Finally, the captain spoke.

"Thank you," Janeway said, not looking at anyone except her security officer. "I believe overall the mission was a success, but I suspect we may need to revise our protocols to be more... culturally sensitive."

Tom focused on weaving his fingers in and out of each other. Of course, a debriefing was required after he and Janeway had been taken captive on what should have been a routine away mission to collect minerology data. But given the *sensitive* nature of what had occurred down on the planet, Tom really wished Tuvok had exercised more discretion or at least a little bit of censorship. After all, did the *entire* senior staff need to know the alien had wanted to watch him and Janeway copulate? And more to the point, did the *entire* senior staff need to know he often took entertainment of a particular type to pass the hours when he was away from *Voyager*?

"Agreed. Not to mention, understanding the impact our personal belongings could have in a first contact situation." Chakotay looked around the room expectantly, his gaze falling on Tom. Tom felt his cheeks flush. "Tom, do you have anything to add?"

Harry Kim appeared as if he might indeed break out into laughter as his eyes met Tom's.

"No, I'm good," Tom mumbled.

"If there is nothing else then, you are all dismissed," Tuvok announced grandly.

Tom got up from his chair, but B'Elanna was faster. He could see the tension in her shoulders as she fast-stepped right out of the briefing room. He sighed heavily as Harry came to stand next to him.

"What *were* you thinking?" Harry asked. "Oh, wait. You weren't." He tapped his head with a knowing grin.

Tom grimaced. "Don't tell me you haven't, uh, taken some entertainment on an away mission."

"Not on a mission with the Captain!" Harry said.

"I thought *you* were coming with me and we'd watch it together. How was I supposed to know she'd take your place at the last minute?"

Harry arched his eyebrow. “You don’t have to explain to me but—” he tipped his head towards the door “—there’s someone else who might want – *need* – an explanation.”

“Yeah.”

Harry clapped Tom heartily on the shoulders and said, “I’m due back on the Bridge. Good luck.”

“Thanks.”

Tom meandered into the corridor and contemplated going to Engineering to talk to B’Elanna but then realized Harry – for once – was probably right. He didn’t think B’Elanna had known about his copy of “Earth Girls Are Easy” and the briefing was probably *not* the best place for her to hear about Tom’s late great prized possession (now reduced to a stinking pile of melted plastic, thanks to the captain’s phaser). He tried to think of a reasonable explanation that his cankerous girlfriend would accept. For example, he was an aficionado of twentieth century films, and this one starred Geena Davis, who was very easy on the eyes. And then he realized B’Elanna would not appreciate his admiration of Geena Davis. And of course, the whole incident probably reminded B’Elanna of the time he broke the warp ten threshold, abducted and then fathered children with the captain while in lizard form and that was always a sensitive subject. At least *this* time, there was no sex and definitely no amphibious offspring to occasionally muse about.

Tom stopped, envisioning how the conversation would go. “*Of course, I don’t think Geena Davis is prettier than you. No, I wasn’t seriously considering having sex with the captain. Yes, of course, I would have sacrificed my life rather than cheat on you.*” And then he considered that if indeed he’d died on the planet at the tentacles of the multi-eyed alien, he wouldn’t be in his current situation. Perhaps it was best to bring a peace offering to this conversation. B’Elanna usually responded well to roses. Maybe a dozen red roses and a nice bottle of wine, perhaps some dark chocolate as well? He had a spring in his step as he headed to the mess hall.

“Neelix—”

The Talaxian held up his hand. “Sorry, Tom, you’re running a deficit.”

“How did you know what I was going to ask for an advance on replicator credits?”

Neelix’s lips turned up into the faintest semblance of a smile. “I heard what happened on your mission with Janeway,” he said. He lowered his voice conspiratorially as he leaned across the counter. “Is it true you had a copy of ‘Earth Girls Are Easy’ with you? And that the aliens *thought* that humans, um, mate, as a greeting?”

Tom sighed as he glanced around the mess hall; there were a handful of crewmembers, most of them studiously studying PADDs or doing their best to *not* look in Tom’s direction. “Does everyone know?”

“Herron might not,” Neelix said cheerfully. “But if he ever emerges out of his hiding place—”

“Just this one time?” Tom pleaded. There was *no* way in Gre’thor that he could go to B’Elanna’s quarters empty-handed.

“Your account shows twelve ‘one time’ incidents. Sorry, Tom, no can do.”

"Maybe there's a poker game tonight. A few rounds and you know I'm good for the debt, Neelix." Tom knew Susan Nicoletti, Michael Ayala, and Pablo Baytart routinely played cards on the holodeck. He'd dropped in on more than one occasion to relieve them of their rations and maybe he'd get lucky tonight. Uh lucky at *cards*, he mentally corrected himself. "I'll pay you back tonight. Just help me out now."

"I can't condone gambling, Tom."

"Since *when*?" Tom couldn't help but ask.

Neelix looked sympathetic. "There's really only one way out of this situation, Tom." Neelix rested his weight on his forearms, the bright gold threads of his coat twinkling under the lights. "The old-fashioned way. Nothing works quite like a sincere face-to-face apology."

Tom let out a heavy sigh. Neelix was right. "Okay," he said. "I'll do it your way."

Neelix's eyes twinkled. "For what it's worth, Tom, if I had a copy of that movie, I'd never let it out of my sight either."

Tom wasn't sure whether the sentiment validated his actions or alleviated the current discomfort he was feeling with *everyone* in the mess hall turned in his direction. "Uh, thanks." He beat a hasty getaway and decided to head to his quarters to shower and change into an off-duty outfit before he found B'Elanna. After all, if he was going to die today, it was going to be in a clean pair of underwear. He punched into the code to his quarters and sighed with relief as he entered. It felt good to be away from the gossipy eyes of *Voyager's* crews. Truth be told, Tom was one of the biggest gossips on the ship, but it was a less comfortable position to be the *subject* of gossip. Not for the first time, he marveled at how quickly information traveled through *Voyager's* sixteen decks.

He stripped off his jacket, letting it land lazily on the floor, as he crossed his main living area to the bathroom. He tossed his t-shirt on to the bed and sat on his bed to take off his boots, when his gaze fell on a PADD lying between his pillows. He frowned as he reached for it. While it was a standard issue PADD, he didn't particularly remember leaving one on his bed. Curious, he turned it on and gaped at the six words that scrolled across the screen: *For your next away mission. B'Elanna*. He swallowed hard as he thumbed to the next screen and was rewarded with the bold lettered title: "Women Warriors at the River of Blood."

~ the end

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