

Summary: After Seven's disaster with dating, Janeway tries to coax her back into continuing her romantic investigations.

Content disclaimers: Right after Voyager 5th season episode "Someone to Watch Over Me".

SANDRINES REVISITED

by Lara Zielinsky

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"Doctor, could I speak with you?"

The vibrant voice of Captain Kathryn Janeway jolted the Chief Medical Officer out of his reverie. Which wouldn't be much to comment on, except he was a hologram and not programmed for distracting daydreaming.

Yet, he realized, as he looked and caught the silvery blue gaze of the compact redhead raising an elegant eyebrow at him from the doorway. "Captain. My apologies. I didn't hear you come in." He rubbed his hands on his uniform trousers and pursed his lips in an attempt at a smile. "What can I do for you?"

"I have a question about Seven."

He tried to keep the residual discontent of his last few days out of his face. He really did.

But Janeway's next words told him he had utterly failed. "She says that you instructed her in dating practices. But she did not seem pleased with the results."

"Did she say something?" he asked, recognizing trepidation in his voice.

She eyed him askance, but said only, "No, she didn't. But something upset her about it. She wouldn't be direct with me."

Uh oh. When Seven of Nine, former Borg drone and chillingly direct personage was dissembling... No wonder the captain was here. "I guess that would be my fault, Captain. Seven came to me with a desire to experiment with romance."

"That," the captain interjected sardonically, "would be *my* fault. I suggested instead of studying the crew that she ought to try it herself."

The Doctor felt an odd flip-flop in his stomach--which said a lot since he didn't technically have a stomach. "You suggested it?"

"I did." Now Janeway leaned back against the doorway, crossing her arms over her chest and looking down at her booted feet for a long moment. "I didn't have time to fully discuss it and planned to when I returned from the Kadi colony." She rolled her shoulders and straightened once more, crossing the office space as she spoke. "But now she won't talk to me at all about it."

"It was conceivably her first 'failure' in her eyes, captain. 'Once burned, twice shy' and all that," he suggested amiably.

Janeway's eyes lit up, suddenly going more gray than blue. "You know something." She brushed her hand over her hair brusquely, as if arranging her thoughts. "You're right."

"Captain?"

"Doctor, thank you for your help, but I think I know how to help Seven put this in perspective."

Would you mind enlightening me? He asked, "How can you do that?"

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"I can give her a better experience to wipe away the bad memories."

He nodded. "Certainly promising." He thought to point out however, "She found no one other than Lieutenant Chapman suitable for her."

"Chapman's nice, Doctor, but hardly really a match for Seven."

Again he nodded. "I suppose that's true. Who else did you have in mind?"

That gave Janeway pause. She stopped in the middle of the office space, putting her hands on her hips and studying the floor back and forth as if she was watching herself pace. He thought it unusual, but said nothing.

"I'll have to discover what she likes," she contemplated aloud.

"She already did that."

"*Other* things, Doctor."

He considered what Seven's reaction might be to find the captain matchmaking for her. "Um, may I suggest something?"

"Go ahead, Doctor." She sharply looked up at him from her thoughts.

"You probably shouldn't tell Seven what you're doing until you've identified a partner. She might--"

"Get upset," Janeway finished. "Yes, I realize that." She frowned. "Thank you, Doctor."

"Good day, Captain." He stood in the doorway watching Janeway leave. Between the two of them, the Doctor thought, they would be able to help Seven yet.

* * *

"Janeway to Seven of Nine."

Standing at the console in Astrometrics, the stately figure of nearly six feet of blonde ex-Borg jerked to attention following the call over her comm badge. Her hands still on the console's reflective panel then she tapped the badge over her left breast. "Yes, Captain. Seven here."

"Would you join me in Holodeck 2."

"Captain?"

"I'd like to... apologize for asking you to rehash a painful situation. With a game of Velocity, perhaps?"

The usually burred tone of the captain's voice was decidedly meeker, Seven thought.

"Seven?" The silence on the comm line had obviously gone on too long.

"All right, Captain. I will be right there."

"Thank you, Seven. Janeway out."

Seven of Nine logged off duty, shut down her calculations and exited Astrometrics, already looking forward to one of her customary Velocity matches with the captain. She admitted it was one of her more pleasurable non-duty activities.

* * *

Dodging the red disc and firing, Janeway tipped the now-blue speeding object into a spiral, headed right for Seven. The long-limbed blonde dropped onto her back on the floor and stiff-armed her phaser in both hands. Her enhanced vision tracked and calculated trajectories over her head.

When she fired, changing the disc color to red once more, the wild spin corrected to a smooth arc into the wall where Janeway could watch its path easily.

Seven however spun on the floor as she rolled to her feet and her extended left leg swept Janeway off balance.

"Hey!" Janeway's breath whooshed painfully from her lungs on impact with the floor. Blinking away tears of pain, she rolled to a sitting position to find Seven over her, a hand out. She caught a brief glimpse of the disc, still red, speeding toward Seven's back.

"Captain?"

She was reaching for Seven's hand, their fingers barely touching, when the disc impacted the younger woman. With the holodeck safety protocols engaged, the contact startled more than hurt.

Seven's blue eyes went wide and she dropped to her hands next to the captain. The computer's voice forestalled Janeway's apology.

"Full impact, Seven of Nine. Round to Janeway. Janeway leads three rounds to two."

The captain put a hand on Seven's shoulder. "Are you all right?"

"I am undamaged, Captain." Brushing her loose hair from her cheeks, Seven rolled over and sat up, crossing her arms over her bent knees. "Are you injured?"

"No, but I have to ask," she chuckled. "Was that your strategy?"

"It was an accident, I assure you, Captain."

They remained on the floor, shoulders close, breathing easily. Kathryn studied Seven's profile at close quarters, remembering how attractive she had found the smooth features when the ex-Borg had helped her in her ready room with the pip.

Despite their exertions, Seven barely looked winded. Her skin had taken on a very delicate flush and the pulse in her throat was strongly evident, but not rapid. The starburst implant on Seven's right cheek, where her jaw met her ear drew her attention next.

"Is there something you want to say, Captain?" Suddenly Janeway was caught in a sea of intense blue.

"Um... No... Yes. Do you enjoy Velocity, Seven?"

The blonde leaned back and Janeway was treated to an up-close view of the optical implant flexing over Seven's left eye, which only made her blue eyes seem brighter. "Yes." There was a short pause. "Why do you ask?"

Janeway shrugged. "I don't know what sorts of things you enjoy. We're friends, I hope. I'd like to get to know you better."

Seven looked askance at her. "You wish to get to know me better?"

There was something in the inflection that made Janeway almost question Seven, but she couldn't put her finger on it, so said nothing. "Yes," she answered though. "I've shared things that I enjoy. Velocity. My Da Vinci program." She shrugged. "I guess I was wondering if those things really interest you, or if you just go along."

Seven considered that. "Out of some reaction to you being my commanding officer?" Janeway nodded. "No. I honestly enjoy both this game and the forays we have made together into the Maestro's studio." She looked away for a moment. "You have shown me much about my humanity. I don't always... understand the lesson," she said, then looked back at Janeway. "However... I... appreciate... the activities."

"Is there anything we don't... do... that you would like to experience?" Janeway wondered why her question had come out so oddly, but did not attempt to correct herself.

"I... much enjoyed dancing when the Doctor explained it."

"Do you?" she asked, wondering why her voice was low.

"Do you know how to dance, Captain?"

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Janeway shrugged. "I suppose. There isn't much call for it in command school, though," she joked. "What else do you like to do?"

"I do enjoy kadis-kot with Naomi." The blonde's voice filled with self-awareness and it put a smile on her face that made Kathryn catch her breath in appreciation.

"I never played," she admitted.

"I... could teach you." The offer seemed to come out of Seven without a conscious decision, but she kept her gaze steady on the captain's face even as her eyes briefly widened.

Kathryn reached out and grasped Seven's knee with a light squeeze. "I'm sure you could," she answered with a light voice. *Now*, she thought, while things are relaxed. "Seven, will you join me for a drink?"

"I would... like that." The tall woman started to her feet as Janeway, next to her, did the same. But when she headed for the holodeck doors, the captain laid a hand across her bicep.

"Computer, change program. Run "Paris 16."

The Velocity court vanished. Immediately it was replaced by the vibrant eddies of lamp light and shadows, quiet tables and soft music of the French establishment of Sandrine's.

Seven backed up in surprise--directly into the patient maitre'd.

"Mademoiselle," he asked, completely unflappable, though Janeway could see Seven's eyes widen once more. "May I seat you?" he asked.

"I--" Seven looked at Janeway, the smile falling away from her face. "Why did you do this?" She did not sound angry, just disturbed.

Not so long ago it would have been absolutely understood that Seven would object to anything Janeway suggested simply to assert her right to make an individual choice. In recent months however, Janeway had proven herself to Seven with measurable results. And a trust had grown.

Seven trusted her to have her best interests in mind as far as it was possible on a starship where some decisions still came down on the hard side.

Kathryn appreciated that trust, hugged it to herself with pride. Now she led Seven of Nine to two seats at the bar.

Determined to make the experience as different from Seven's date as possible, Janeway requested two cups of tea and immediately engaged Seven in a topic she knew the young woman could comfortably speak on for hours: Astrometrics.

"I had Chakotay set a new heading through the Kadi system since we finished negotiations. Care to tell me what we'll find on the other side?"

Seven immediately perked up. She had, Janeway noticed, been surveying the room with timid glances. "Sector 394. Two star systems are controlled by Species 6641. Moderate technology and space travel. The Borg catalogued them but did not bother with assimilation."

"Waiting for them to evolve a few centuries?" Janeway's question accompanied a chuckle.

The blonde's reaction was immediate and charmingly shy. The superior expression fled, replaced with a drop of her chin and cheeks that pinkened with embarrassment.

"Ah, Seven. I meant nothing." She laid her hand over Seven's on the bar. "You'll be all right." She lifted her teacup and sipped quietly. In the lull she heard the music of the piano and glanced over to see the Doctor at the keys. She wasn't surprised. The holographic doctor would have known that the open program had been activated. She could also expect soon other crewmembers to take advantage of the relaxing atmosphere.

She put her hand once more on Seven's shoulder and brought the woman's attention around

to the music as well. "The Doctor plays very well, don't you think so?"

"His technique is exceptional."

"What do you think of his choice of songs?"

Seven's gaze unfocused briefly as she identified the melody and cross-referenced to the title. "It is 'Someone to Watch Over Me'," she said.

When Seven refocused she found Janeway's gaze centered on her face. The older woman's hand slid down her arm and over her mesh-covered left. "Come on," she said. "I'll show you how to play pool."

"I do not swim, Captain."

"Not *swimming* pool." Kathryn grasped the young woman's hand and tugged her toward the back where the light was even fainter, the air smokier and the rumble of conversation louder. She could feel the tension leaving Seven the further they ventured from the dining room. "The *game* pool. Also sometimes called billiards."

She stopped before a rectangular table covered with green felt containing six pockets. With pleasure, she watched Seven's face, mobile with emotion, as she examined the table.

"It's all a matter of physics," Janeway explained. "This is a cue stick." She then held up the white ball. "Cue ball. You use the stick to hit it into the others."

"The goal," she concluded, moving back to Seven's side, "Is to be the first to clear your balls from the table." She pressed the stick into Seven's hands. "You first."

She positioned herself beside Seven, settling the woman's hands on the stick. She wrapped her arms around Seven's waist capturing the stick and Seven's hands with her own.

"Captain?" The words brought Seven's warm breath across the crown of Janeway's hair.

She looked up into suddenly gray eyes and realized that Seven's was uncertain about something. "I'm just showing you how to shoot."

"I am... not... objecting."

"Good." Impishly Kathryn smiled. "Now, let's have some fun."

She guided Seven through a break and two more shots. "Now you do it." She continued to arrange the balls on the table as much to draw Seven's attention away from her discomfort as to prepare the table for the actual game.

That earned Janeway an abashed smile that she answered with a warm one of her own. "I will try." Seven settled the stick in both hands, then poked it after a fashion at the cue ball which caromed into the triangular arrangement of balls.

Kathryn cupped her hand over her eyes. *Dear God, I had to mention physics.* Obviously more rapidly than even Janeway, who was formidable, Seven had calculated all the forces involved. Eight of the fifteen balls rolled quietly into the various six pockets.

"An intriguing exercise," Seven concluded. She started to return the cue stick to Janeway, who waved it off.

"No, it's still your turn. If you sink a ball, you are allowed to continue. You sank four of each, stripes and solids." She pointed out which type was which. "Which would you like to claim?"

"Is there an advantage to either?" Janeway shook her head. "I shall choose solids then."

"All right. From here on, you can only sink the solid colored balls. Except the 8. It's special and reserved last. You forfeit the game if you sink it prematurely. Also you lose your turn if you sink the cue ball."

"I understand." Seven bent forward again, aligning another shot, unwittingly providing the captain with an enticing view of her shapely rear. After their close proximity teaching the ex-Borg

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to shoot, Kathryn felt her face flush and moved around to instead see Seven's face. The analytical look was there, but also a smile that curved her full lips and put a wonderful sparkle in her blue eyes. Janeway heard the soft thunk of another ball dropping into the pocket. "Nice shooting," she extolled.

Seven stood and examined the table again. Then she looked up to find the captain smiling at her once again. The pride in the older woman's voice and the sparkle of pleasure in her eyes gave Seven a flutter in her stomach. She returned her attention to the table calculating angles in her head.

"I want to continue the conversation we started before I left for the Kadi colony."

Seven drew up tightly. "I have not been studying the crew any more, Captain."

"I'm aware of that. I thought you might want some... advice where to begin."

Seven's summary of the evening was clipped. "The doctor assisted me. I identified a suitable match and acquired a 'date.' We consumed a meal and... danced. Then... he left."

Kathryn could feel her heart hammering as she heard what Seven said, as well as what she did not. "Perhaps you tried to do too much at once. Dinner and dancing. Have you considered simply having a drink? Or conversation?"

"Alcohol impairs my cortical function. 'Small' talk is... unsatisfying."

"It doesn't have to be alcohol," Janeway amended. Standing straight she walked back over to Seven.

She returned her attention to the table but her mind did not wish to focus, instead drawing her eyes time and again to the compact woman in the red-shouldered Starfleet uniform who seemed to be enjoying herself in a rare moment.

It came to Seven then as she missed her shot, that the captain was lonely. Why else would such an intriguing woman spend an evening teaching a game to her, an insignificant drone. They traded shots a few more times and each time the captain's light conversation, about what she had seen on the Kadi colony, simply filled the air with a quiet serenity.

Now, she handed the cue stick to Janeway and watched the captain, who despite her very imperfect Humanity, cleared three of her striped balls, one at a time, leaving herself only the eight ball to sink to win.

"You are an excellent player, Captain."

"I manage," she smiled. "Are you enjoying yourself?" Janeway asked as the black ball rolled across the green felt surface and concluded their game by mutely dropping into the near corner pocket.

Seven enjoyed the smile, slow and full, with which Janeway graced her. "Yes, I am," she answered.

The captain came around the table and reached up, brushing her thumb over Seven's cheek. "You had a bit of cue chalk," she murmured as she slowly pulled her hand back.

Skin tingling where the captain had touched, Seven thought this was part of the game. So she identified a light blue smudge on the captain's chin and brushed it clean with her thumb. The feel of the captain's skin against hers sent a jolt through her stomach.

The gesture was unconscious but however it happened, Seven's hand lifted Janeway's chin as it left her face and brushed down across the woman's throat. The warm wool of the uniform's undertunic finally ended the contact of fingertips to skin.

Their blue gazes were inches apart, each unconsciously breathed the other's air. In the same moment, Janeway acknowledged the heat and gaze of the young woman. She also acknowledged a need of her own: contact with Seven. She took the half-step necessary to bring their bodies

together. Then her left hand, which she held on Seven's cheek slipped into the blonde hair and unpinned it. Cupping her palm she guided the full lips to her own.

Her other hand slid up from Seven's left hand to lightly grasp the woman's muscular bicep as she tasted Seven for the first time.

She tasted of the tea they had drunk, of smooth cream and a unique spiciness. It was only a brief touch, of mingling lips, but it left the captain hungering for more. Even though she pulled away, she groaned softly.

Seven's senses caught the captain's scent, a musk and sweet licorice which sped her own heart rate up and kicked her adrenal glands into response. The sound of the captain's groan made her shiver.

Instinctively both women tightened their holds, wrapping their hands around each other's upper arms.

"Seven."

The first word either had spoken in nearly a minute caught both the younger woman and the old, who had uttered it, off guard, which served to bring them back to the reality of where they were.

Or rather the unreality. The sounds of piano music, another pool game starting and glasses being clinked by patrons crashed in on both Janeway and Seven. The latter was shockingly still.

"Seven." The blonde woman remained silent except for her breathing, which was shallow and fast. "Seven, talk to me. Please say something." Janeway's blue eyes searched the young woman's face.

"Are you... going to leave now?" There was a timid quality to Seven's voice.

The shock of that simple, almost forlorn statement struck Janeway silent. The world of Sandrine's crashed in once again. Dead silent. She looked around to find dozens of gazes, belonging to holocharacters and crewmembers alike, studying them intently.

Kathryn blushed. Seven's face took on a ruddy cast as well and Janeway's protective instincts, never buried far where this woman was concerned, flared. She cupped Seven's elbow and escorted the younger woman back to the bar, where she settled Seven before turning to the rest of the room and declaring, "Show's over."

Chakotay caught her eye across the room and smiled, then shrugged. Completely composed he threw his dart.

Absently she noted where it landed. Bullseye.

"Captain?" Seven's voice drew Janeway's attention back instantly. "I suppose this is 'good night'."

Janeway shook her head. "No. Why?"

"The 'good night kiss' presumably concluded our 'date'," she responded quietly.

Kathryn took a deep breath. There it was, the perfect excuse for her behavior. Seven had decided that this was a lesson, pure and simple. The captain's kiss nothing more or less than a component of that instruction.

The problem was, it hadn't been.

Janeway studied Seven's face and saw strain in her eyes. In response to that look, and acknowledging her own feelings, she told the truth. "No, Seven. I was not simply kissing you to conclude our evening. I... felt something... very deeply and... needed... to share it with you." Even now she could feel the beginning of another surge of affection and arousal washing through her,

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setting her fingertips tingling. But she kept her eyes on Seven's face.

To find out if the captain's reactions could somehow help her quantify her own, Seven asked, "What did you feel?"

"Shh, come with me. I... don't think this is the best place to talk."

Chakotay, she caught over Seven's shoulder, smiled vaguely and dramatically pantomimed being shot in the heart. Determinedly looking away Kathryn smiled and brushed her fingertips over Seven's ocular implant and the starburst on her right cheek.

Seven would not be stalled. "What did you feel? Please?"

Janeway responded to that need, stark and soft in Seven's voice. She turned to face the young woman, looking up into swirls of blue that seemed to beg her for guidance. They were half out the door of the holodeck. It didn't matter. She felt the answer form in her mind, and she knew it was right. "Love."

Seven's hands squeezed lightly on her bicep. Her wonderful soft low voice was filled with amazement, disbelief, and, if Kathryn wasn't mistaken, a little relief as well. "You... love me?"

Kathryn nodded, feeling her eyes tear up and seeing Seven's do the same. The emotion really was amazingly overpowering. "Yes. Yes, I do. Seven, I love you."

"Captain... Kathryn. I... love you too."

In the corridor, the kiss they shared following that admission was the sweetest of all. Soft and dry it was an exchange of breath as their mouths touched. Then Kathryn's tongue tasted Seven's lips that parted unconsciously, permitting a sensuous exploration of the velvet interior. They both groaned in pleasure at the taste.

When it ended, Seven's head rested on Janeway's hair and Kathryn's cheek found its resting place against the fabric of Seven's suit covering her left shoulder. The ex-Borg's long fingers lingered in the captain's short auburn hair. The contentment and safety the older woman felt brought tears to her eyes.

"Kathryn?"

"Yes?"

"Is this what you meant when you asked if I had considered romance?"

Blue eyes bright with unshed emotion lifted. "I... don't think... I realized it consciously."

"If this is what you wanted, why did you never say anything?"

She felt Seven's fingers twine with hers as they walked, almost absently, toward Cargo Bay 2. With a careful, small breath, Janeway admitted, "This can never be... if it is only what I want."

"Ah. Thus the questions." Seven shook her head. "Sometimes the human tendency for subterfuge confuses me." She bent her head and touched her own forehead to Janeway's, meeting the blue eyes with her own. "Why did you not simply ask?"

The auburn-haired woman quirked a smile. *Why indeed?* "Seven of Nine, do you want to pursue a relationship with me?"

There was a long moment of silence as the words hung in the air they breathed together. Then Seven spoke. "I do."

Faced with such simple conviction and determination, Janeway felt her chest expand with overwhelming emotions: joy, fear, expectation, and fulfillment.

"What will we do now?" Seven asked, contentedly cradling Janeway in her arms and inhaling the scent of her hair.

Janeway considered that. Her palms drifted over the slope of Seven's chest, hidden by her sleeveless Velocity tunic. *There was acknowledged attraction, but was right now the time to act*

on it? Taking a deep breath she decided no. "We look forward to our next date," she said quietly. "Would you like to have lunch in the hydroponics bay tomorrow?"

Seven considered the request only a moment before accepting. "I'd like that very much, Captain," she answered formally.

Janeway's palms cupped her cheeks and Seven found herself subjected to another brief tender kiss. "Call me Kathryn."

"Yes... Kathryn. I... look forward to tomorrow."

Janeway gently settled the young woman into the gravimetric field of her alcove. There was a soft click as the regeneration conduits clicked into place. She pressed a kiss to Seven's palm before releasing the woman's hand. With a quick step, she stood before the console and tapped in the regeneration sequence. The 'routine' skill, something Seven had taught her as a matter of a captain being able to look out for her crewmember's well being, took on a more intimate meaning.

Seven's eyes twinkled with a similar change in perspective. "Good night, Kathryn."

"Good night, Seven." She activated the program and stood in observant silence as Seven's eyes closed and the woman receded into upright sleep.

Sequel: A Natural Course