

## If It Looks Like A Duck By Scribblesinink

Lunch was nearly over when Woolsey dropped a small package on the table. "Dr. Keller, this came in on the Daedalus for you," he said. He didn't comment further, but the tone of his voice made it clear he didn't approve of using government transport for personal correspondence.

"Oh?" Jennifer took the box and read the label, raising her eyebrows in surprise. "Hey, it's from my old college roommate!"

She began to pick at the tape holding it shut. Cargo space on the Daedalus was limited and expensive, and expedition necessities always took precedence, so getting a private package was rare enough that none of the others at the table left to go back to work. They stayed and watched her struggle with the wrapping.

"Here, let me." Ronon pulled his knife from its sheath and offered it to her. Jennifer gave him the box—it weighed next to nothing, which, along with its tiny size, must be why someone had decided it couldn't hurt to squeeze it in with the rest of the shipment—and he quickly sliced through the tape. He handed it back to her.

Rodney leaned forward eagerly. "Well, what is it?"

"It's a...um... a duck?" Jennifer pulled the small, yellow object from the box, looking doubtfully at its bright orange beak and pointed tail.

"Huh." Rodney was quick to scoop it up as soon as she put it down in favor of fishing out the note lurking underneath it in the box. "A rubber ducky. How... cute" He snickered as he juggled it from hand to hand.

Jennifer unfolded the note and started to read it. As she scanned the lines, a deep blush began to creep up from her neck. Ronon watched with fascination as she slowly turned the color of a Satedan summer rose. He'd seen her flustered before: out of her depth, scared to death and desperately trying to keep a brave face. And he'd seen her determined and fully in charge in the infirmary. But he didn't think he'd ever seen her blush like *this*.

"What the...?" Rodney nearly dropped the duck when it suddenly started buzzing in his hands. He smirked at the others. "Hope it's not a bomb."

Jennifer glared at Rodney so fiercely that he flinched. She snatched the buzzing bird out of his hand and stuffed it, along with the note, back in its box before pushing her chair

back so violently it screeched across the floor. She sprang to her feet. "I'm... eh... I got work to do."

Not meeting anybody's eyes, she scuttled from the cafeteria just a step shy of actually running, the box clutched close to her chest as though she wanted to hide it .

"McKay!" Sheppard glared at him.

Rodney threw his hands up. "What did I do?"

For once, Ronon thought, Rodney's confusion was justified, since he had no idea what just happened either. But it was obvious Rodney had done *something*. With a shrug, Ronon got up and picked up Jennifer's tray as well as his own, not even attempting to puzzle it out.

Even after all this time, these Earth people still didn't make any sense.

oOo

A few hours later, he found himself in the infirmary, holding an icepack to the back of his head. An unfortunate lapse in concentration while sparring with Sheppard had seen him flat out on his back on the floor, his skull connecting hard enough with the ground that even his dreads had failed to cushion the blow. The colonel shouldn't have been able to get through his defenses like that, but everyone gets lucky once in a while, and well, accidents happen.

It wasn't a serious injury, but Ronon hadn't objected too strongly when Sheppard suggested he get checked out by a doctor.

As he'd expected, Jennifer was still on duty. After examining the bump on his head, and shining her tiny pencil light into his eyes, she'd declared his skull sound, no concussion, and given him the icepack to keep the swelling down.

He was leaning against the edge of the examination table now, and watching her putter about, when his gaze fell on the box, discarded on a nearby desk.

"So," he said, "what was that all about?"

"What?" She glanced over at him, and he nodded in the direction of the box.

"Oh, that. Nothing." She turned her back on him, but not before he'd seen an embarrassed expression cross her face.

"Okay." He waited a beat. "Then why are you blushing? Again?"

She whirled around. "I'm not!"

"Okay." He merely looked at her, and after a moment she deflated.

"It's a toy," she mumbled, looking down at her feet.

Ronon frowned. "A toy?" Why would anyone bother to go through all that trouble just to send her a toy? More importantly, why would a simple plaything make her so uncomfortable?

"An *adult* toy," Jennifer added, with a bit of a weary sigh.

"Adults don't need toys." Or did they? Perhaps it was another strange Earth custom. They had invented television, after all.

She looked up at him for a long minute, her eyes searching his face as if determining whether he was serious.

"Girls do," she eventually admitted, quietly. "When they're lonely. Or at least my girlfriend thinks they do."

"But you're not—." He stopped abruptly, finally working out what she was trying to say. "Oh." He could feel the heat rising in his own face and regretted ever asking.

He glanced at the box again, at the yellow duck tail that was peeking over the cardboard edge, and couldn't help himself. "But... a *bird*?"

Jennifer giggled, sounding relieved. "Weird, don't you think?"

"Yeah." Ronon pushed off from the table to leave her to her work. She was right: these humans from Earth were definitely weird. He might have got his explanation, but it only made him think he'd never really understand them.

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