

The Ritual
by Carol Sandford

I missed you this morning, and I knew then it was going to be a bad day. And sure enough, by the time lunchtime came and went and still no word, I was in a lousy mood. Not that anyone would have noticed of course, my professionalism wouldn't allow me to show the rest of the crew just how much the absence of your words; Your smile; Your tender touch, and God help me, yes, I needed to see the love in your eyes.

It was what made my day. It was what I got up for every morning.

Just for that.

And I missed it.

When I returned to my cabin at the end of my shift, my eyes immediately fell to the single bloom left upon my table. I didn't have to read the note to know it was from you and that it said simply 'Hi.', but it did comfort me to know that you had missed the ritual too.

I breathed in its rich heady scent and I whispered into its blooms without an ounce of shame at being caught talking to a rose, 'Hi.' But at least I was smiling again, inside and out and I was grateful to Will for doing that for me.

I decided to spend the evening listening to some quiet music and catch up on some letters home. That would at least appease my mother if nothing else. But by ten o'clock the loneliness was coming back and I couldn't help picking up the rose once more and breathing in its scent again, conjuring up a vision of Will's smiling face.

~Imzadi~

The door opening broke the silence and a tall figure stepped into the shadows, but I wasn't afraid. He was here, he had come.

"Hi."