

## bifurcated

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### Summary

B'Elanna gets rid of her soul-mark the day she realizes that her father is never coming back. It's common among Klingon warriors—a soul-mark is a dangerous thing to bear openly. But she can't stand the way that her classmates at her Federation school look at her, the way they mock her when it wavers between two different marks. "I guess a half-breed can't have a real soulmate," they say. "Maybe that's why her father left, he couldn't stand the shame."

### Notes

See endnotes for dubcon explanation and other warnings.

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

B'Elanna gets rid of her soul-mark the day she realizes that her father is never coming back. It's common among Klingon warriors—a soul-mark is a dangerous thing to bear openly. But she can't stand the way that her classmates at her Federation school look at her, the way they mock her when it wavers between two different marks. "I guess a half-breed can't have a real soulmate," they say. "Maybe that's why her father left, he couldn't stand the shame." She knows it would be the same anywhere she went. The full-blooded Klingons look at her the same way, with a kind of unease at her low ridges and square teeth, call her *mongrel* under their breaths—and sometimes it's not even meant as an insult, but only a statement of fact.

It hurts much worse than she'd thought it would, the burn. When the human doctor sees it, she frowns and says, "I can repair the skin, but not the damage to the soul-mark. I'm so sorry."

B'Elanna can feel Miral watching her, knows the disappointment in her eyes. It's one thing for a Klingon warrior to remove his mark as a symbol of commitment to battle and nothing else, but it's shameful to destroy it in the name of cowardice. "This is not working," Miral announces, when they get home. "You lack discipline. You have no honor or you would not have done such a thing."

"*Honor?*" B'Elanna spits back. "You dishonored your house when you married a human! When you produced a *mongrel*! What honor is there in bearing a mark that won't settle?"

"You require teaching," Miral snarls, and B'Elanna knows that if she was a real Klingon child, Miral would strike her—but B'Elanna's half-human bones are too fragile for proper Klingon discipline. "You will go to Boreth and you will *learn* what it is to behave with honor."

"You can send me away, but it's not going to make me any more Klingon," B'Elanna shouts at her. The place where her mark should be stings almost constantly, a reminder that it would still be shifting if she could see it.

The monks at Boreth try. Over and over, they try, to teach her to find some peace within herself. They're not unkind, the way that her classmates are, but their endless attempts to mold her into a Klingon—any kind of Klingon—only enrage her. She wants to *fight* and her teachers won't fight with her, even when she screams at them, "What kind of Klingon won't honor a challenge?"

She applies to Starfleet Academy as soon as she can, passes the entrance exams on her first try, and leaves Boreth behind without saying goodbye. But she doesn't know why she thought Starfleet would be any different. B'Elanna keeps the sleeves on her uniform rolled down at all times, but people can still *see* the mongrel blood. She can't hide the ridges on her forehead. She can't restrain the Klingon strength that gives her the edge on the decathlon team. She sees the looks of surprise on her instructors' faces when she excels in her engineering class—

who would think a dumb Klingon could succeed intellectually?—and one even tries to bring her up on disciplinary charges after he hears one of her classmates saying that she must have cheated. That charge doesn't stick, but the one for punching the classmate until he begs for mercy does.

That's the first disciplinary hearing. By the fourth, which gets her suspended, B'Elanna is—done. Done with Starfleet, done with Klingons, done with humans—done with the Federation.

Chakotay saves her life, literally, and then again when he brings her to the Maquis. She's only two or three fights away from killing someone at that point, she knows, and the Maquis want that, *need* that. They're all outcasts, some more than others, and no one blinks when they see her. The Maquis become family to her, a better family than the one she had before.

Her missing mark stops stinging, and for half a moment she wonders if it's supposed to be Chakotay, if he's the one to quiet the storm—but no. She cares for him, even loves him, but something inside her knows that her mark would never have matched that unchanging shape above his eyebrow (and what a terrifying thing, to have a mark so openly shown, impossible to hide!).

He tries to teach her to find her animal guide. She follows his ritual, and there, before her, is a wild targ. It's a matter of instinct to find a large rock and fling it, grope for any weapon to protect herself, and her mind has given her a crude spear to stab the thing when she abruptly wakes up, breathing hard.

"I take it that it...didn't go well," Chakotay says.

"Why would you say that?" He glances down at her hands. When she follows his gaze, she sees that she's dug her fingernails into her palms deep enough to draw blood. "Oh."

"You can tell me about it if you'd like," Chakotay tells her.

B'Elanna shrugs, trying to look more casual than she feels. "It attacked me. I defended myself."

"You...tried to kill your spirit guide?" Chakotay's mouth twitches a little, because he's too kind to laugh.

She laughs for him. "I guess people don't usually try to do that, huh?"

"Only you, B'Elanna," and somehow it doesn't sting when Chakotay says it.

And then—then it's all stripped away. They're dragged into the Delta quadrant, and before they can even mourn their own crewmates who died in the abrupt jump, Chakotay is telling them that here, now, "Starting today, we're all going to be the crew of Voyager, serving under Captain Janeway."

The anger is back, buzzing beneath her skin. "Why not you?" She hears the agreement of the others. "Why shouldn't you be the captain?" The rational part of her brain knows that there are far more Starfleet personnel on this ship than there are Maquis, that Chakotay has made the safest decision by agreeing to be Janeway's Number One, but it doesn't matter. She wants *Chakotay* in charge, they all do.

"This isn't up for discussion," Chakotay says, and he may not be captain anymore but the authority in his voice binds them, at least for now.

Gradually, grudgingly, B'Elanna comes to respect Janeway—as Janeway comes to respect her. Most captains would never have made her chief engineer after punching Carey, no matter how good she is. Janeway walks a delicate line, keeping the peace between Starfleet and Maquis, between Voyager and every other ship or species out there that wants to destroy them. B'Elanna sees her soul-mark once, when they're both in a decontamination shower, and it hurts her heart a little to know that Janeway has refused Chakotay. But aside from that, Janeway is a captain that B'Elanna can respect, even if she can't always contain her frustration when Janeway asks the impossible of her.

The persistent problem with Voyager, though, is the presence of Tom Paris. Tom, who was a Maquis for about thirty seconds before stranding B'Elanna and her team. Tom, who delights in poking at B'Elanna to see if she'll react. Tom, who asks her on a date and looks mildly annoyed when she refuses. Tom, who *watches* her when he thinks she's not looking—when she's working, when she's on a date with someone else. When she's reporting something and flushed with the satisfaction of discovery, she'll catch him out of the corner of her eye, looking at her with a kind of longing. The buzz beneath her skin is—a little different then, but she refuses to think of it.

She doesn't miss having her own mark, not even as the crew all start checking to see if they match. When Janeway and Chakotay come back from their little vacation on New Earth, looking a little more dopey-eyed at each other than before, she's honestly, truly happy for them. "Congratulations," she tells Chakotay, and he rubs the back of his head a little sheepishly and smiles. "You both deserve it."

"Plasma burn," she tells Harry Kim when asks about her mark, and he accepts the lie easily. Engineers get burned, and she's an engineer.

Tom overhears her and raises an eyebrow. "What, back at the Academy? They were pretty careful about things like that, I thought."

"No," she lies, which is silly. The burn is in her record. "Engine repair. Just before I joined the Maquis." He looks suspicious, but he doesn't push it. He just—watches her.

It's dangerous to be around him—never more dangerous than when her guard is down. After Vorik attacks her, she starts to feel like she really is going to climb out of her skin. Everyone's voice is grating, almost *itchy*. She's hot, too hot, has to strip off her uniform even down in what should be the chill of the mining tunnels, and her absent soul-mark throbs painfully in time to her heartbeat. Tom is there and she can't help biting at his face, feels the Klingon in her react to the softness of his skin beneath her teeth. He yelps and shoves her away and they tell her she's been infected by Vorik.

She and Tom stumble through tunnels as her vision narrows, until all she can think about is Tom, Tom, the smell of him next to her, and when he refuses to let her walk alone, she manages, "You don't know how hard it is to fight this."

“So you’re saying I’m irresistible?” It’s a terrible joke, typical Tom, but even her brain can register the gentleness behind it.

Things get very blurry after that. She remembers pushing Tom against the wall and holding him there with her body, trying to persuade him—feeling his body react even as he tells her that he wants her but not this way. She remembers him yielding when she kisses him—the way he leaned into each kiss, more and more, until he’s shoving her against a wall and holding her there, exactly the way she wants. She thinks she grabbed his hand and slid it into her pants, because she remembers the way he had gasped almost frantically against her mouth and said “B’Elanna—you don’t want this with me—”

“Shh,” she knows she told him, “You’re not doing anything, you’re just standing there,” and held his hand in place while she rubbed against it, and “Just to take the edge off—you’d rather let me go insane?” and Tom kissed her almost apologetically as she came. Even as she released his hand, she knew it wasn’t going to be enough.

They escaped the tunnels somehow, she knows, because she remembers when Tom finally agreed, when he stopped trying to hold back, when he held her down by her wrists to kiss her and his bare hand swept across the place where her soul-mark should be—

And oh, she remembers hitting Vorik. The satisfaction of it, and then the emptiness as the sweet certainty ebbed from her body—as she’s left staring at Tom, who stands, brushing dirt out of his hair, and won’t quite meet her eyes.

They transport back to the ship, where the Doctor examines her. “Your scans are getting closer to normal. Do you remember what happened, B’Elanna?”

She catches Tom looking at her from the next bio-bed, where he’s waiting for someone to heal the bite mark. She looks him full in the face and lies, “No.”

B’Elanna isn’t cruel, or she tries not to be, so when she and Tom leave the infirmary, she stops him. “Tom,” she says, and she sees sick guilt on his face. “Tuvok told me that you were willing to—help me.”

“B’Elanna—”

“I appreciate it,” she says. The words stick in her throat, but she doesn’t want him to feel like he did something—wrong. “Whatever you did, or were willing to do—I appreciate it.” He still looks miserable, so she adds, “I’m sorry I—hurt you.”

Tom touches the healed place on his cheek where she’d bitten him. “No harm done,” he promises, and the note of false cheer is painful.

“Tom.” She grabs his shoulder, safe beneath the fabric of his uniform. “I’m sorry I hurt you.” Then she turns and flees and avoids him for a week.

\* \* \* \* \*

She can’t escape a senior staff meeting, but she resolutely looks at him only as much as is necessary to keep other people from thinking something is wrong. He catches her as she leaves, and he’s just quick enough to make it onto the turbolift with her. “B’Elanna, we have to talk about this.”

“I don’t think there’s anything to talk about,” B’Elanna says.

“Then why are you avoiding me?”

“You’re on the bridge. I’m in engineering. Our paths don’t cross that much.”

“Bullshit. Computer, stop turbolift.” Tom takes a deep breath. “I know you remember—something.”

“Something?”

“From the planet with the galacite.”

“I told you—”

“Why did you apologize for hurting me, then? What do you think *you* have to apologize for?” Tom looks a little desperate, a little frantic.

“Because I haven’t forgotten, B’Elanna. I remember every minute of it—”

“You didn’t do anything wrong,” she says, and she might as well just admit that she remembers it, or at least the parts that he’s upset about.

“I think—” He gulps in a breath. “I know you don’t have a soul-mark, but I think—”

Oh no. Absolutely not. “Don’t be ridiculous.”

“When I touched you—”

“What? You felt something *special*? Something you’ve never felt before? What, letting me rub off on you in some kind of—psychotic frenzy?” She sneers. “Not exactly the stuff of fairytales.”

Tom flinches. “Ever since then, my soul-mark—”

“I don’t *have* a soul-mark anymore, Tom, so whatever you’re going to say—”

“I know you were burned, but that doesn’t mean—”

"I wasn't *burned*, I *got rid of it*." She growls and yanks her sleeve up to show him. Her burn scar has turned dark, the color of a fresh bruise, and started to bulge a little. Its shape won't settle, even as they look at it.

He looks horrified, as he should. "What *happened* to it?"

"It's done that my entire life. *Changed* like that." B'Elanna prods at it with disgust. "And now, ever since—last week, it's like it's—infected."

Tom starts to reach out like he's going to touch it and then snatches his hand back as B'Elanna yanks her arm away. "Have you gone to the doctor?"

She laughs bitterly. "Oh, stop trying to help, Tom. Computer, why haven't we reached engineering yet?"

"Engineering," the computer announces, and B'Elanna makes her escape.

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B'Elanna doesn't go to the doctor. She goes to the only person she trusts.

"I haven't seen you for a while," Chakotay says.

"I saw you this morning in the senior staff meeting."

"B'Elanna."

She's never been able to lie to Chakotay, not when he looks at her like that. She rolls up her sleeve up and shows it to him. "It started to look like this—a week ago."

He knows what she means. "You want to know what it means."

"I don't suppose you'd like to enlighten me?"

His eyes are gentle, like he knows how painful this is for her. "It looks like your soul-mark is a little more persistent than you gave it credit for."

"It's still—changing, though." There's a quiver in her voice that she hates. "It should have—settled, if it was going to come back like this."

"Can I—?" Chakotay gestures. She offers him her arm. He touches the burn very gently. She flinches, but there's nothing more than the ordinary tenderness of a bruise. His mouth twists a little wryly. "B'Elanna. There are only two explanations. Either the—pon farr made this happen, or—"

"Tom." She doesn't want to examine the feelings that prompts in her, the idea that Tom is—enough of a soulmate to cause *this*.

"Would it be the worst thing?" he asks. "He's—improved, on further acquaintance. He's saved our lives once or twice."

She can't help smiling a little at Chakotay. "I think your judgment is impaired when it comes to bonds."

He grins back, the silly kind of dimpled grin that he gets when he thinks about Janeway. "Maybe a little."

\* \* \* \* \*

B'Elanna likes to think she isn't a coward, which is why it only takes her four more days to go to Tom's quarters, full of nervous energy, and say, "Look, do you want to talk about this or not?"

He blinks at her. "Hello to you too, B'Elanna." She realizes that he's in pajamas. She's not entirely sure what time it is.

"You wanted to talk," she says. "Let's talk."

He hesitates minutely. "Okay. Come in."

B'Elanna walks in, sits down on the bed, and then jumps back up. "Look," she says again.

"You said that."

B'Elanna yanks her sleeve up, until she's exposed the swollen burn. "Go on."

"What?" Tom recoils a little.

"You were going to touch it. In the turbolift."

His eyes fix on it. "Yes—"

"Do it. Let's see what happens." The challenge in her voice doesn't quite cover the nerves.

Tom walks closer. He takes her outstretched hand and holds it lightly. "You know, B'Elanna, we don't have to be—" He hesitates. "I like you, B'Elanna. If you don't want a—you know—that's fine." His fingers are soft on her palm.

She shakes her head. "Go on."

Slowly, Tom draws his fingers up her wrist to the ugly spot on her forearm. When she draws in a sharp breath, he hesitates, but she shakes her head. The feeling when he does is—somewhere between relief and exhilaration. She sees it on his face too. “Do you—remember what it looked like, before?” The bruise is dissipating, leaving blurred shifting lines beneath it.

“It was never steady,” B’Elanna breathes.

Tom lifts his hand away and unbuttons his pajama shirt with shaky fingers, spreading the shirt open. “Did it ever look like this?” The mark is at the base of his sternum, inky and solid.

“It looks—familiar,” she says. “Can I?”

Tom nods. He looks a little hypnotized by the lines under her skin. When B’Elanna’s fingers meet his bare skin, his breath catches in his throat and she sees goosebumps spreading. He reaches up slowly to grasp her forearm. They gasp in the same breath, and maybe B’Elanna should think about what she’s doing a little more, but the minute they touch each other’s marks, her mouth finds his.

Tom’s hands are hot on her skin, peeling off the rest of her uniform as they kiss. B’Elanna tears his shirt off, growls a little into his mouth, and he shivers against her. She feels the scrape of his teeth against her neck and the Klingon in her—no, all of her—rejoices in it. Strange, she’s so used to thinking of her Klingon and human selves as separate—warring—and for the first time, she feels like a single, whole person.

A whole person, whose skin is buzzing beneath Tom’s hands, and she arches against him. “Tom,” she breathes into his ear, and then tilts his head so that she can bite his cheek again—gentler this time, not enough to break the skin, and one of Tom’s hands clenches hard on her hip.

“Is this what it feels like?” Tom asks, and she barely recognizes his voice. “Does this mean—”

B’Elanna lifts her head just long enough to get a glimpse of her arm. Beneath the burn scar, there is a single blurry shape, steady now. “I—ah! think so—”

\* \* \* \* \*

They lie next to each other on the floor, panting. “Well,” Tom says. “I think you’re stuck with me now.” B’Elanna shoves him lightly, just where his mark is, and he makes a noise somewhere between a cough and a laugh. “I’m just saying, I’m pretty sure that counts as consummation—”

B’Elanna rolls onto her side and props her head on her elbow so that she can look at his face. “I think I’m stuck with you,” she agrees, and slings her arm across his chest. The shape beneath her burn scar is steady.

## End Notes

CW: dubcon - close narration of B'Elanna's POV during "Blood Fever"; past self-harm - one instance of a burn, referenced throughout.

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