

Launch and Separation

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by [kes7](#)

Summary

There's the family you're born with. And the family you choose.

Transitions can be awkward.

My parents are idiots.

At nineteen years of age, this is literally the first time I've ever had this thought about them, and I hate myself for it just a little bit. I've always been a good girl. A little too independent for my own good -- at least that's what they're always telling me -- but basically good. I'm not a rebel, and I don't resent their authority or anything like that. But I'm sure as hell angry and ashamed at the way they just acted. They're forty-six and fifty-one, and they should know better. They really, really should. But apparently, they don't. My face is so flushed it feels like it's on fire, and I think I might cry. I really don't want to cry.

It's chilly out here on the endless lawn behind their old farmhouse. The cool air on my hot cheeks shocks me out of my anger a little bit. I throw myself backward onto the damp grass and lie down, looking up at the stars in the brilliant rural sky. Those tiny dots of light have been my comfort and my dream for as long as I can remember. They're the reason I attend Starfleet Academy. I intend to live among them.

It takes me only a moment of gazing up at the stars to find my voice again, but when I do, it's shaky. It doesn't matter. Icheb deserves an apology. He deserves so much more than an apology, really, but an apology is all I have to give right now. "I'm so sorry about that," I tell him. "They've never acted like this before."

"They're trying to protect you," he replies calmly, and I want to scream at him for being so reasonable. Carefully, intentionally, he sits down on the damp lawn, then leans back to lie down next to me. I watch him, ever-intrigued. Every movement he makes has a purpose. We have many similarities, but in this way, he is so unlike me.

"Yes, from you," I acknowledge. "It's ridiculous."

He argues with me, in the same tone of deep conviction that often makes our acquaintances at the Academy call him a know-it-all. "It's not ridiculous. Most species fear that which they don't understand. And the Borg have destroyed trillions of lives."

"But you're not Borg," I protest, and it's true -- he hasn't been for nearly three years, much longer than he ever lived within the Collective. Of course, the memories, like the scars, will last a lifetime. He'll never be whatever he was before the Borg again, either physically or emotionally, and I'll never get the chance to know that person. Sometimes I wonder what he was like, and whether I would have loved him as much as I love the person he is now.

"Not completely. But I was, and I'll never be fully free from that." He's staring up at the stars, and I wonder what he's thinking. There's always so much more he's thinking. It scares me sometimes how much he thinks ... how much he's able to think. Sometimes I wish I could climb inside his head and just soak it up, and then I feel guilty, because that's exactly what the Collective did to him; they invaded his mind and made his thoughts their own. But they didn't love him. I do.

"Why are you being so understanding about this?" I ask him. "They're not acting any better than the cadets who harass you all the time."

He sighs. "This is different. The people at the Academy are motivated by hatred and fear. Your parents are acting out of love for you. I can appreciate that."

On this, we disagree. I think they are acting out of fear. I squeeze my eyes shut in frustration. "It's not different. And if they love me, they should understand that you make me happy. This is a good thing we have, Icheb, and I won't allow them to ruin it."

“Good,” he replies, “because neither will I.” Then he takes my hand in his and gently adds, “But being confrontational with them isn’t going to help.”

I sigh and look back up at the stars, squeezing his hand in my own. “If you could pick anywhere out there to live, where would it be?”

“You’re changing the subject,” he notes with amusement. It’s too dark for me to see the faint trace of a smile playing across his lips -- mostly revealed in his blue-gray eyes -- but I know it’s there.

“And you’re not answering my question,” I retort, turning to face him.

He seems to think it over for a moment. “Are you coming with me?” he asks. He always wants to clarify.

“If you want me to,” I reply, with a small nod and a smile.

“Ferenginar,” he tells me, with a teasing gleam in his eye.

I laugh out loud and smack him gently with my free hand. “Pervert! You just want to see me naked.” He doesn’t deny it, and grabs me around the waist, pulling me in for a kiss. Our lips meet and we lose ourselves for a few moments, taking in the sight and sound and smell and feel and taste of each other. It makes me dizzy. I wonder if he feels the same way.

“Where would you choose?” he asks me when we come apart for air. His arms are still securely around my waist.

“I’ve never been outside this system,” I note sadly.

“You’ve studied the entire galaxy, though,” he points out. “Based on your studies, what would you pick?”

“You’re coming with me?” I ask him. He hesitates, then nods, and holds me a little bit tighter. “Then I don’t care,” I tell him seriously, looking him in the eye. “Anywhere you are is fine with me.” I mean every word of it.

Predictably, he makes a face and sighs. “There are many dangerous places in the galaxy. My presence wouldn’t --”

He’s missing the point.

I cut him off by caressing his cheek and sliding my hand down to gently cover his mouth. “Shut up, Icheb,” I say softly, pressing my fingers against his lips. I take a deep breath. The words are right there. They’re always right there. I just need to say them. “I’m trying to tell you I love you.”

There, I’ve said it. I hold my breath and wait, wondering how badly I’ve freaked him out.

He looks ... surprised. Even in the dark, I can see his eyes widen. Finally, he gives me a full-on grin -- a relatively rare sight, and all the more precious for its scarcity -- and I let out the breath I’ve been holding in a small sigh of relief.

“I love you, too,” he says, slowly and carefully. Then he pulls me closer and kisses me again, and soon, we’re wrapped around each other tightly, exploring each other with lips and hands and tongues as best we can while fully clothed on the cool, damp grass.

When we finally pull ourselves apart, I lay my head on his chest, listening to the unusually strong heartbeat his Borg enhancements give him. “We should go back inside. They’re going to come looking for us eventually,” I say reluctantly.

“I’d rather stay here a few minutes longer,” he replies.

I crane my neck to look up at him, then sit up. He pushes himself up to match my position. “What’s wrong?” he asks.

“Nothing,” I tell him, shaking my head. “I just wanted to get a better look at you.”

He smiles again. “For what purpose?” he asks me.

“It’s a nice view,” I say, laughing; then I tackle him back onto the grass, lie on top of him, kiss him playfully. We wrestle gently for another few moments; then I hear my mother’s voice calling out from the back door.

“Maren!”

I honestly wish we’d stayed in San Francisco. “Do you think she can see us?” I ask Icheb. He calculates the probability based on the angle, the ambient light, average human visual acuity, and probably a hundred other factors I’m not even aware of in less than a second.

“No,” he answers, “but we should go back.” I resist the urge to groan aloud.

We stand up, brushing the grass off our clothing and out of our hair. I’m pretty sure it will be obvious what we’ve been doing when we return to the house, but I don’t much care at the moment what anyone else thinks. I’ve heard enough of their ill-formed opinions for one night. I slip my arm around his waist and he wraps his around my shoulders, pulling me tight against him as we walk.

“Coming, Mom!” I call out in the direction of the house.

Someday, I think, this boy is going to be my family. I don’t know when, I don’t know how, but somehow, in this moment, I am sure of it.

My parents are just going to have to get used to it.

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