

Separation Anxiety

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by [kes7](#)

Summary

March 2381:

For two and a half years, Maren O'Connor has been the primary source of acceptance and encouragement in Icheb's life at Starfleet Academy. They're so close people call them "The Collective" – but what happens when they're forced to be apart?

It's only three months. They've repeated this statement over and over again, trying to convince themselves a little distance – okay, a *lot* of distance – will be just fine. It begins now. He is lined up with the other first-class cadets who will be accompanying him on what for them, will likely be the most exciting journey of their lives so far.

He's already done this, first as a drone and later, after he was rescued. Exploration of the Alpha Quadrant will be interesting for him simply because he's never seen most of it in person, but the real reason he has to go – to see what life on a starship is really like – is fairly irrelevant. He grew up in space, in three different command structures. He's ready for this.

What he is *not* ready for is leaving her. The second-class cadet standing in front of him has been his primary source of strength and happiness at Starfleet Academy since he met her two-and-a-half years ago. She stands up for him, encourages him, loves him ... even when so many others don't. Unfortunately, since she's a year behind him, she won't be going on this training cruise. For the first time since they've met, they'll be light years apart.

The prospect of this separation, however short, is more difficult for him to accept than he expected it would be. Yes, they will be able to communicate via subspace – mostly text-based, with the occasional visual conversation – but three months without kissing her lips, caressing her soft hair, or holding her warm body against his feels wrong. The reality of not having someone nearby who is not only unafraid of his past, but truly tries to understand him ... that feels even *more* wrong. He's perfectly willing to spend three months aboard the *USS Bhaskara II* and perform his duties to the best of his ability, but for the first time he can recall, he doesn't feel excited about it. She's not happy, either, but there's nothing to be done. This is part of their training.

As they stand on the tarmac of the spaceport at Starfleet Headquarters, they've already said everything they wanted to say. Last night was bittersweet, the I-love-yous and I'll-miss-yous all rolled up into a long evening of talking and touching that lingered into the early hours of this morning. They're both tired, but it was definitely worth it. During this separation, there will be no questioning how the other one feels, for either of them.

Only, he wasn't completely forthcoming last night. The one thing he didn't say is the thing that's been on his mind a lot these past few months. He *can't* say it yet – it's too soon; they're too young. But as he holds her close one last time – before he leaves her for the first time since he found her – he is more certain than ever that he must find a way to ask her to marry him, before she graduates and they are both assigned separately, and three months looks like nothing compared to years apart.

She smiles bravely through uninvited tears and kisses him – just once. "I want to hear about everything," she whispers, and gently taps him on the side of his head, right above his cortical array. "So take good notes."

He smiles back at her and kisses her on the forehead. "I'll call you on subspace as often as I can," he promises. One more time, he reminds her. "I love you."

The green eyes get a little brighter with tears, but she doesn't lose her composure, or her smile. Instead, she grabs him, holds him tight, and murmurs into his uniform collar, "I love you, too. Be safe out there, okay?"

When she pulls away, they share a long look. Then someone says "it's time," and he leaves her there, hefting his travel bag to his shoulder and

climbing aboard the waiting runabout for this next tiny step of his life's strange journey. He manages to get a window seat on the side where she's still standing and waves at her. She waves back. Thoughts and promises are wordlessly exchanged through the transparent aluminum viewport. All too soon, the small craft is aloft. Even with his enhanced vision, he can't stop her getting smaller and smaller until they pass through the stubborn layer of clouds above San Francisco and he can't see her at all.

Three months, he tells himself. It's only three months.

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