

Triangle Theory

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by [kes7](#)

Summary

It's Valentine's Day, and no one is happy. Three young Starfleet officers scattered across half the galaxy ruminate on love, loss and longing in the 24th century.

(Contains minor spoilers for Star Trek: Tesseract.)

John Quigley, USS Titan **Somewhere in the Beta Quadrant** **14 February 2385**

It's Valentine's Day. I know she knows it, even though she didn't say a word about it. I suspect it's why she chose this night for our twice-monthly subspace chat, and I *know* it's why the few smiles I managed to drag out of her during our ten-minute conversation never made it to her eyes. She's lonely, and she's sad, and she's missing him, and even if she won't admit it, I can see it. I've known her too long.

It sounds cheesy, but if I could be her Valentine, I would be. I'd run my hand along her perfect creamy cheek and bring her lips to mine and make sure she knows without a doubt that she doesn't ever have to be alone, because I would keep touching her like that forever, if only she would let me.

Two things prevent this. One is the several hundred light years between us -- she's sitting in her quarters at Jupiter Station, and I'm on the USS *Titan*, deep in exploration of the Beta Quadrant. The other is him. The one she loves, the one she's missing. He's my best friend in the universe -- the brother I never had. That's why even now, nearly a year later, I still won't tell her how I feel -- how I've always felt. He's lost too much, been betrayed too often. I won't add to it by making a move on the only girl he's ever loved.

I don't know why he left her. I can tell he didn't want to. He sent me a message on subspace right after he left and told me to look out for her. Look out for her? *Why?* I tried to ask for clarification, but he wouldn't give me any. He was insistent, though, and as disturbed as I think I've ever seen him. I wish I knew what was really going on.

I haven't spoken to him much since then, not because I'm angry -- even though I am -- but because he's not returning messages from *anyone*. I wish I had the foggiest idea what happened, but I don't. They were so happy together, and now, they're neither happy nor together, and neither one of them will say the first word about what actually broke them apart.

It had to be huge. Whatever it was, it had to be *huge*. Because they lasted through everything, and I do mean *everything*. You would not believe the things people said to both of them when we were at the Academy. They faced daily, constant, *ridiculous* abuse and harassment because of their relationship. Once, I put two cadets in the infirmary because of it and nearly lost my commission. To this day, I think it would have been worth it.

The way people acted, it was like they thought the devil himself had come to Starfleet Academy and seduced one of our own. Well, *some* people acted like that. Some other people acted like *she* was the biggest slut in the galaxy, whoring herself out to the Borg Collective for better grades, or a cheap thrill, or universe-knows-what-else they thought she was trying to accomplish.

It seriously wasn't like that. They were just two kids in love.

Really, if anyone had cause to be pissed off, it was me. I met her our very first day, and fell for her on the spot. You know, it's ironic, I'd never had trouble landing women before, but the first one I met who really captured my imagination and made me wonder about a future together? I completely lost my nerve. By the time I worked up the courage to let her know I was interested in more than the friendship we were developing, it was too late. She met Icheb, and she fell so hard and so fast it was a little shocking. It was okay, though -- I may have lost a potential girlfriend, but in the process, I gained something like a family ... two of the best friends I've ever had.

To this day, I can tell Maren anything -- anything at all, and she'll listen, and be honest with me in return, even if she knows it'll make me mad. She's like my compass. When I'm doing well, she's my biggest cheerleader. If she thinks I'm making a mistake, I have to listen. She's rarely wrong.

As for Icheb -- I don't think I would have made it through the Academy without him. Don't get me wrong, I'm a smart guy -- you have to be, to make it in. But the higher-level science stuff always went right over my head until he would sit down and explain it to me -- over and over again, as many different ways as it would take until I got it. There weren't many at the Academy who would have done that. The atmosphere was pretty cutthroat, and my hanging out with Icheb and Maren wasn't helping me in that regard, since half the other cadets hated them. But that's the thing about Icheb -- it never occurs to him that life is a competition. He has knowledge; he's willing to share. Maybe it's the Borg in him, I don't know. But between his smarts and his willingness to teach me, I graduated in the top third of my class.

I give back what I can. For one thing, they're both so damn cerebral they forget to have fun sometimes, and I've always tried to make sure they remember. I've also gone through two different disciplinary hearings for beating the shit out of people who went too far harassing them. (If I had just a molecule of latinum for every time I heard someone say something filthy to Maren about her dating an ex-drone, I swear I'd own Ferenginar right now.) But most of all, I just try to be there for both of them. I don't have much in the way of family myself, so they're it. I love them both.

When they were still together, we called them The Collective. They pretended to be annoyed, but I could tell they kind of liked it. I can see where it could have been offensive, but it really just seemed to fit. I swear, sometimes I thought they actually shared a mind. They spoke in unison, finished each other's sentences, came to all the same conclusions about things. It got to the point that I almost didn't care that I wasn't with her, because the two of them just seemed so right together. Maybe you won't believe me, but I was truly happy for them.

But now, it's over. They haven't spoken in at least eleven months. She's a shell of the person she used to be, just going through the motions. As far as I can tell from our conversations over subspace, she works hard; eats, sleeps and exercises just enough to keep herself functional; and thinks about him constantly while pretending not to.

He's no better off, from what I can tell. Work, work, work. That's his life. I don't know how much he thinks about her. He certainly hasn't shown interest in moving on, but he doesn't talk about her, either, other than to ask if she's okay. She instructed me early on to tell him, no matter what, that she's just fine. But it's a lie, because she's clearly not.

Why is she still hurting so much? Why can't either of them move past this? What happened to them?

I think of how sad she looked on the viewscreen tonight, and I feel hollow inside. More than anything, I wish I could be there for her.

I don't know what happened between them, but I know one thing for sure:

I would *not* have walked away.

Maren O'Connor, Jupiter Station

It's Valentine's Day. I used to mock this stupid holiday relentlessly. Then I fell in love.

For five blissful years, I shared my life with someone special -- someone unique and one-of-a-kind. We were supposed to have been married eight months ago. It didn't happen. After five years of actually enjoying this stupid holiday, I'm now back to hating it. I wish I could just ignore it, but I can't. There are too many memories now, and they're still too fresh.

I stopped mocking Valentine's Day on February 14th of my plebe year at the Academy, when Icheb showed up at my dorm room door with flowers because his research indicated he should.

How do you explain to someone who is trying so hard to please you that he's just fallen prey to a bizarre cultural artifact left over from the consumeristic past of a world he's only lived on for ten months?

I'll tell you -- you don't. You take the flowers, put them in water, give the boy a kiss and go to dinner. And you have a great time, because you're falling head over heels in love with him.

Five years, five Valentine's Days. The first one was all sweetness and innocence and awkwardness and him not knowing he was dragging me into participation in a holiday I couldn't have cared less about. By the second, we'd made it our own. Every year after that was better than the last -- privacy and picnics and walks and kissing and the moon and stars -- perfection.

Perfection. What a letdown *that* turned out to be. The Borg advertise perfection, but what they deliver is technology. And here's the one thing I've learned for certain about technology: Eventually, it breaks.

As an engineer, I'm used to things going wrong, and going wrong spectacularly. But --being an engineer -- I'm also used to fixing them. Rare is the problem that doesn't have a solution. Of course, leave it to Icheb and me to run into the unsolvable.

I blame the Collective. They're the ones who filled him with nanoprobes and made him dependent on Borg technology for his survival. I could also blame his parents, who sent him to be assimilated in the first place. But blaming Leucon, Yifay and the Collective is the easy way out, because it saves me from blaming Icheb himself ... along with Seven, The Doctor, and Admiral Janeway. They were the ones who removed the

cortical node. They were the ones who risked his life. They made a choice -- they chose to save Seven.

I love Seven like she's family ... but I love Icheb more. So, you'll understand why I just can't allow myself to think too much about what happened on *Voyager* that day -- when Icheb was maybe fourteen, and very scared of losing the closest thing he'd ever had to a mother who loved him. It's true that he took matters into his own hands ... but the adults in charge helped him do it. Now, all these years later, he's paying the price. I *have* to blame the Borg Collective. Otherwise I'll start to blame these people I love, these people who accepted me as part of their family, and I just can't hate them. I can hate the Borg.

I miss him. I've tried to move on, tried to date, be social. The truth is, other people bore me a little now. For five years, I was spoiled by spending all my free time in the presence of one of the most impressive intellects and unique perspectives that I've ever known. It's kind of hard to compete with that. Sure ... this one makes me laugh, that one has kind eyes, the other one tells a good story ... but none of them are him. Lately, I've just stopped trying. There's no point. I don't think I'll be able to move on until I finally see his name on a casualty list -- and believe me, I check them frequently, knowing I'll see his name there, one of these days.

I worry about him every day, and I really think that might be what I'm the angriest about. If he was going to leave me anyway, why couldn't he have done it *before* telling me what The Doctor said? Why couldn't he have just lied and told me he didn't love me anymore? That would have been less painful. It's unbearable to know he's out there somewhere counting down the hours to his own end, and he's all alone and there's nothing I can do, because he won't let me or anyone else be there for him through this. He won't even *tell* anyone else, and he'd never forgive me if I did, so it's my burden to bear in silence, too. Until he dies or comes home, I'll keep his secret. He asked me to, and I promised. Besides, I know it's the only way he can have something like a normal life for whatever time he might have left.

When he came home from The Doctor's the night before he left me, I knew. I knew what had happened before he even said a word, just by looking at him. *There's nothing more we can do. We've exhausted every option.* He'd been handed a death sentence. We held each other tightly; we cried; we made love.

I wasn't willing to give up without a fight. I proposed plan after crazy plan, but he was barely listening, and he had a look on his face that scared the hell out of me. For the first time since I'd known him, he looked totally and utterly defeated. I tried to turn him around, tried to get him talking, planning, working with me. It didn't work. Eventually, I fell asleep in his arms that night, exhausted and emotionally spent. When I woke up, he was gone, along with the few belongings he kept at our San Francisco apartment. The wedding was obviously off.

It's been almost a year now, and I just ... miss him. I wish I knew how to stop caring.

I forgot earlier this week when I set up my subspace call with J.Q. for tonight that it was going to be Valentine's Day. I've been working so hard in the hololab that I've honestly kind of lost track of what day it is. It was this afternoon that I noticed all the heart decorations in the replimat, and all the happy couples taking over the restaurants. I ate dinner in my room.

It was good to talk to John. It always is. He tries so hard to make me feel better when I get like this, but I can tell he's worried about both of us. I wish I could tell him the truth about what happened. Sometimes he asks outright, and I lie to him. I wish I was a better liar, because I know he thinks I'm hiding something, and of course, he's right. I wonder what he thinks really happened between Icheb and me.

It's getting late now. The comm. display is blank, and I'm alone with my thoughts. Against my better judgment, I walk over to my closet and take out the small box sitting on the top shelf. I open it up and remove a small velvet box and a single isolinear chip. I place the chip into the reader on my desk display, open the velvet box and remove the beautiful ring inside. The screen flickers to life, and as I open up my favorite holoimage of Icheb and me, I hold the ring in my hand, turning it over and over again to watch the light catch on the slightly iridescent surface. Finally, I put it on. Because I've lost at least a couple of kilos since he left, I can spin it freely around my finger with my thumb, spinning, spinning while I look at the picture of the two of us and get lost in the memories.

Wearing the ring he gave me when we promised to spend our lives together, I want to cry. I wish I could hate him, but I don't. I shift my gaze from the image on the screen to the star chart on my wall, a gift he gave me three years ago tonight. *Happy Valentine's Day, wherever you are.*

Icheb, USS *Hale* Somewhere in the Alpha Quadrant

According to the ship's computer and my chronometric node, it's Valentine's Day. The high number of requests I've received for duty shift adjustments tonight would have been evidence enough without independent confirmation. I did not realize there were this many dating couples on the *Hale*. I'm pleased they've been discreet about it.

If I was at Utopia Planitia right now, or in San Francisco, I would undoubtedly be walking hand-in-hand with Maren on our way to some tiny restaurant, or a secluded garden park, or maybe to the transportation hub to spend a weekend somewhere we've never been. It's also quite possible we would simply be at home in bed, very actively *not* sleeping. At this moment, I think there is nowhere else I would prefer to be.

Instead, I'm alone in my quarters on the USS *Hale*, avoiding regeneration and wondering if I should use my command codes to access the subspace comm. system and call her.

I am unaccustomed to doubting myself. My classmates at the Academy used to call me a 'know-it-all,' and I naively accepted that as a compliment based in fact until John explained what they actually meant.

Now, I doubt myself daily. Should I have left her? Should I return? I miss her so much.

The logical answer is 'no.' I cannot allow her to let her life be destroyed with mine, and I am certain she will. I trust her to stay with me no matter how painful it becomes, and that is why I chose to leave. But I miss her, and it confuses me. I have been taught by Seven -- and programmed by the Borg -- not to let my emotions rule my decision making. But this feels so wrong.

I first met Maren six months after I arrived on Earth from the Delta Quadrant with the crew of the starship *Voyager*. Since the day of my arrival, I had been interrogated by my superiors, rejected by my peers, and tormented by a small minority of my fellow Academy students who saw me, a former drone, as a representative of the greatest threat the Federation had ever known.

Maren transferred into my engineering section twenty-three days into the 2378-2379 academic year -- her first, my second at Starfleet Academy. I noticed her immediately because of how rare it is for a freshman to be placed in the advanced engineering track -- and because I found her very aesthetically pleasing. I couldn't keep myself from looking at her. On her fifth day in the class, we were assigned to work in the same group on a collaborative project, and the conversations we shared while working became longer and longer in duration until we were conversing outside of class, too. I enjoyed her company immensely. I'm not human; I'm Brunali and Borg, but -- and this may sound strange -- she made me *feel* human, and I liked that.

Perhaps I should clarify: It isn't that I want to be something that I'm not. I've accepted my unusual origins. Although I've faced a great deal of unkindness in the Alpha Quadrant due to my visible cybernetic implant and the understandable widespread hatred for the Borg Collective, I must admit I've enjoyed the many advantages my background has afforded me. I am more intelligent, more knowledgeable, faster -- both mentally and physically -- and stronger than nearly all of my colleagues. I graduated first in my class at the Academy. It wasn't difficult to do so.

What I mean when I say that Maren made me feel human is that she made the differences between us seem irrelevant. Our home worlds are 50,000 light years apart, but when we met, it felt as if we had known each other our entire lives.

She was one of the first people outside of the crew of *Voyager* I encountered who didn't treat me like a curiosity, a resource, or a threat. She treated me like a person. She asked me to spend time with her. She cared how I felt about things. She saw *me*, and I loved her for it. Sometimes I still can't believe it, but she loved me, too. After five years had passed, I asked her to marry me, and she accepted. At the time, we didn't know the problems I was encountering with my cybernetic implants would prove to be terminal.

Occasionally, I still come out of my regeneration cycle expecting to see her when I open my eyes, but of course, she isn't there -- I did everything I could to ensure that. As soon as I finally accepted The Doctor's conclusion that we had exhausted all possibilities for treatment, I requested a deep-space assignment and took the next transport to Starbase 41 to await my orders. Maren located me immediately and contacted me on subspace, attempting to persuade me to come home. I terminated the subspace link and blocked any further transmissions from her comm. signature. That was the last time we spoke to one another. Occasionally, I ask John how she's doing, and he assures me she's fine. He is an unconvincing liar.

After departing Earth, I spent one year as chief of operations and second officer on another science vessel before transferring here to the *Hale* as first officer. I only plan to be here one year, as well. I've applied for the return mission to the Delta Quadrant, and I fully expect to receive the assignment, if I live long enough. My navigational expertise, my experience with the Borg, and my status as one of very few Delta Quadrant natives in Starfleet make me a logical choice for the mission. I'm unsure of what my plan is once I get there, but one thing is certain -- there is no future for me in the Alpha Quadrant.

To call her, or not to call her? That was the question on my mind when I entered my quarters tonight. I sigh and remove my fingers from the comm. control panel, where they've been hovering while I repeat the familiar debate inside my mind. For now, the debate is over, a moment of weakness behind me. Once again, I have convinced myself that I'm doing the right thing.

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