

Orbital Disruption

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Rating:	General Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	F/M
Fandom:	Star Trek: Tesseract
Relationship:	Icheb/Maren O'Connor
Character:	Icheb , Maren O'Connor
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2023-10-03 Words: 1,159 Chapters: 1/1

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by [kes7](#)

Summary

Companion piece to Separation Anxiety from Maren O'Connor's point-of-view.

“A binary star is a star system consisting of two stars orbiting around their common center of mass. ... The components of a binary star system may be designated by their relative temperatures as the hot companion and cool companion.

If components in binary star systems are close enough they can gravitationally distort their mutual outer stellar atmospheres. In some cases, these close binary systems can exchange mass, which may bring their evolution to stages that single stars cannot attain.

...

It is also possible for widely separated binaries to lose gravitational contact with each other during their lifetime, as a result of external perturbations.”

- Wikipedia

It's only three months. I keep telling myself this, over and over again. I survived the first eighteen years of my life just fine without even knowing he existed. Surely I can manage twelve weeks without him. After all, I'm a busy girl. I've got finals to study for. I've got the chroniton field stabilization project to work on. I have my family, and my friends. I have about a million things to keep my mind off of how much I'm going to miss him.

Still, it was awfully hard to say goodbye. Standing here on the tarmac watching his runabout disappear into the clouds, carrying him far away from me, I'm barely keeping it together, trying so hard not to cry. It isn't working.

Not even four hours ago, we were so physically close he was inside me. Now, the distance between us is about to be measured in *light years*, and it hurts. It hurts like losing a limb, or an organ. (Specifically, my heart.)

Sometimes I still can't believe I fell so hard in love with him. He was the unlikeliest of choices. A shy, awkward, freckle-faced boy with a head full of alien hardware and a tortured past. He was Borg, for God's sake. But he was so sweet, and so brilliant, I just had to get to know him. And once I did, it was inevitable. I fell for him on our very first date, kissed him, and never looked back. It's selfish, but I'm glad I got to him first, before anyone else realized how special he is. All the people who wrote him off as just a drone missed out on all kinds of wonderful.

I'm not afraid to lose him. I know a lot of people worry that their significant others will cheat on them during the training cruise, or get caught up in the adventure of space and re-evaluate their priorities. Distance doesn't always make the heart grow fonder. Sometimes distance is just ... distance. I'm not worried about that, though. I know he loves me. He'd never cheat. His conscience is way too rigidly structured for that. He'll come back to me, and then we'll do this all over again next year when ... *oh, shit. Next year. He graduates in June.* I was about to say "when I go on my training cruise," but it's just as possible he'll be assigned to a starship by this time next year. He keeps telling me he wants to stay close by, teach genetics at the Academy or work on the slipstream project at Utopia Planitia. But so much depends on Command. I wish there was a way to make them understand that together, we're so much more than the sum of our parts. He completes me, makes me better. I couldn't have won the Daystrom Prize last year without our late night brainstorming sessions. He fills in the gaps in my perspective. I do the same for him.

That's actually what I'm most worried about as we face this three month separation. I'm worried about *him*. How he'll do without me.

It's unfair of me, I know. He's first in his class for a reason. He's brilliant and competent and brave and about a thousand other things that

make me fall more in love with him every single day. But he's just so goddamned vulnerable, and doesn't even seem to realize it. He's got this innocence, a certain naiveté about him. He isn't really one hundred percent aware of what's going on around him at any given time. Socially, things go right over his head. Often, that's a blessing. It probably spares him a lot of pain. But it only works when I'm there to take the blows for him before he notices they're coming. And for the next three months, I won't be. All my hopes rest on the fact that he'll be on an honest-to-God starship, not at the Academy. Surely commissioned officers will treat him with more decency than his classmates have.

I'm also worried about his health. Things have been happening with his implants lately, little things, but I'm worried that they someday might turn into big things. He keeps downplaying it, trying to keep it quiet, but I know he's been to see The Doctor a few times without me. A few weeks ago, though, I went with him. His auditory implant was malfunctioning and he couldn't hear. After an unsuccessful attempt to fix it ourselves, I escorted him to The Doctor's office. I could tell by the expressions on the hologram's face that this is a much bigger deal than Icheb is making it out to be.

Three months apart. Ugh, I can't stand it. It takes me a few minutes to tear my eyes away from the gloomy San Francisco sky, where I've been pretending I can see the runabout through the clouds, like a little kid who let go of a helium balloon. I wipe the tears from my cheeks with the backs of my hands, feeling self-conscious.

Around me are a half-dozen other stragglers, mostly second-class cadets like me, along with a couple of underclassmen, who have just said similar goodbyes. We regard each other with cautious empathy. Most of them don't like me, and they certainly don't like Icheb. But I can see in their eyes –some teary, some not – that they get it. They get that 'goodbye' sucks hard, even if it's only for three months.

"Which ship?" one girl, a tall, willowy Andorian asks me. I think her name is Slane.

"*Bhaskara II*," I reply.

"Good ship," she says. "Nareth's on the *Rhode Island*."

"I know that ship. First officer's a friend of mine," I tell her. "He'll be fine there."

"I know," she says, but she sounds unconvinced. Her antennae droop slightly.

"It's only three months," I say, with a last look up at the sky. Even to my own ears, I sound more like I'm trying to convince myself than reassure Slane.

She shoots me a sharp look, but her expression softens quickly. "Yeah," she concedes, and looks upward herself. "It's only three months."

There's nothing else to say. The six of us make our way back to campus, a loose cluster of binary stars cut off from our companions, suddenly adrift in space.

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