



## Episode 8-18 - Mind Trap

By: Bec & Rebel (CoffeeNut47@aol.com)

Seven of Nine stared at the wall in front of her. Her gaze almost seemed to pierce through the thin, metallic wall separating the rooms, her eyes never deviating from a fixed point. Blinking seemed to be almost mechanical, equally spaced out.

Behind the wall observing the former Borg, Lieutenant Jordan shuddered, swivelling around on her chair to face her colleague, who was busily tapping away at her console, deeply engrossed in her work. Behind Jordan, through the one-way window that appeared as a mirror to the woman in the secure room, Seven of Nine continued to stare directly forward, exhibiting no change in her expression or posture.

Resting her cup gently on her pregnant stomach, and casting a look back over her shoulder at the Borg giving the penetrating gaze, Lucy commented quietly, "It's almost as if she can see us."

Yvette paused with her research to glance at her friend. "That's crazy, Lucy. There's no way she can see us through that. It's just..." she glanced up at the Borg perched on the biobed.

"A coincidence," she finished quietly, looking most unsettled.

"Yeah," Lucy sighed. She looked back at Seven, who was still staring directly ahead, her startlingly blue eyes still focused on a certain point. The thought that the Borg was watching them was more than she could stand. Though she and the rest of the team doing surveillance and security work with Seven of Nine had been assured during the briefing that she was now harmless, Lucy failed to control the shiver that ran down her spine every time she looked at the former Borg. They had been enemies with the half-cybernetic race for so long, that it certainly was strange to now be protecting and guarding a member of that race now.

"I understand..." Seven spoke in a hushed tone, though her voice was amplified in the observation room. "Yes... yes... I concur..." Suddenly, she was silent again, as though listening to something

"How long is it until her debriefing again?" Yvette asked distractedly.

"It's either tomorrow or the day after," Lucy said, chewing her lip thoughtfully. "I'm not entirely sure. You should check with her file. Any reason?"

"Oh no reason in particular," Yvette assured her. "Just wondering... between you and me, the sooner we get her out of here, the better. She just gives me the creeps..."

"No!" Seven's cry rang out through the room, causing both women to jump. "Unacceptable!"

Lucy sighed. "Me too. The sooner she's debriefed, the better."

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Kathryn Janeway was bored. Infinitesimally bored.

She tossed down the PADD she had been attempting to read for the fourth time that hour and rose from her chair, crossing over to the replicator.

"Coffee. Black."

The cup materialized with a hum and a blue shimmer and she picked it up, cradling it in her hands as she slowly walked to the window, where she could watch the myriads of Starfleet officers scurrying about on odd errands. Even that seemed to be more interesting than her work. She and desk jobs did not mix -- and never had.

Desk job. The very words sounded distasteful to her ears. She much preferred the active life -- the likes of commanding a starship -- to the dreary monotony of sitting at a table, reading and rereading reports. The thrill of exploring, of discovering and challenging the new and unknown had always intrigued her, and she'd hoped to continue doing it throughout her life. It was one of the reasons why she joined Starfleet in the first place.

And here she was, stuck doing reports -- her greatest nemesis. There was a reason she'd left most of them to Chakotay while still aboard Voyager.

Her thoughts traveled of their own will to her former ship and crew and the time they had all spent fighting their way through the Delta Quadrant. As usual, she began to wonder whether she was sorry that things had turned out the way they had -- that they'd ended up stuck in the Delta Quadrant for seven years, trying futilely to find a way home. She'd done a lot of thinking about that very issue during their involuntary exile, and, inevitably, the answer was no every time. Their time together had bonded them as a group, in an unprecedented way, and Voyager's crew had become more than that, more than her crew -- they'd become her family. She knew she would have taken the same options, even if she had known about Voyager's fate when she took command of the ship.

She could still remember that day. She'd been so happy, so excited that Starfleet's newest ship would be hers to command -- excited at the prospects of doing things never before attempted, of pushing the novel technology to its limits. And she'd done exactly that -- and had a whole lot of fun doing it. Yes, she had made some questionable decisions, but she had tried to put them behind her and had resolved not to make the same mistakes again. It had been tough, but she lived for challenges -- and her time on the opposite side of the galaxy had been fulfilling in a manner that nothing previously ever had. She'd changed, she'd matured, she'd had some of the best times she'd ever had, and she wouldn't have given that up for anything.

She wished she were back on Voyager.

Her mind returned to the present with a thump, and she felt her heart begin to sink. Those seven years had been some of the best years of her life -- and now Voyager's technology was no longer cutting-edge, and she was trapped in an office. Three days, and she was already feeling the strain of her less-than-fulfilling desk job.

She sighed, taking a long swallow of her coffee, and gently massaged her temples. All those lines of repetitive, one-form writing had started to give her a headache. She longed to be on the bridge of a starship again, commanding it into places previously unknown.

Someday, she hoped she'd get the chance to do that once more. Until then, it was simply a matter of adjusting to her current post.

But deep down inside, she wondered if she ever would.

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Unlike the other crewmembers being detained and awaiting their debriefings, Seven hadn't personalized her living space in any way. No items of a personal nature lay around; no photographs, no data PADDs, nothing for entertainment. Only necessities were in the room, such as clothing, and even those were stored neatly in the drawers provided. The room appeared as pristine and as immaculate as it had been when she had been assigned to it in the first place.

With a whoosh, the doors to her cell opened, and a blonde security officer stepped through, smiling cheerfully.

"Seven of Nine?" she asked, although it was clearly a rhetorical question. There was no mistaking the former Borg for anyone else, and she was already the object of much curiosity and speculation. Voyager's entire senior staff was well known throughout the Federation for their soon-to-be legendary journey home, but Seven had gained more publicity than all but Kathryn Janeway, due to her being half Borg.

"I'm Lieutenant Hawkins," the security officer continued, introducing herself. "I'm here to accompany you to your debriefing, if you're ready."

Seven rose from her seat on the small bed. "I am... prepared," she stated, approaching the Lieutenant.

"All right then," the young woman said cheerfully, leading her out of the room. Outside of the door, two armed security officers stood, awaiting the woman's exit. In silence, they began their journey across Starfleet Headquarters to reach the briefing rooms. The corridors were reasonably quiet, not bustling with activity, as Seven had once supposed that Starfleet Headquarters would be.

Seven was conscious of the looks she was getting from any personnel they did pass. She supposed the rest of the crew must be getting the same kind of treatment, being instantly recognized, and she wondered how long it would continue. She disliked the attention she had been accustomed to getting from the fact that she was half-Borg, and if this attention increased, as it looked set to do, she was unsure of how she would adapt.

"And just in here," the woman's voice said pleasantly, gesturing to a doorway on the left as they slowed to a halt.

The doors opened to reveal a large room, rays of sun filtering in through the windows, casting a warm glow over the room. A large table stood in the middle of the room, surrounded by chairs, at which numerous Admirals were seated. Pieces of tasteful artwork were the only decoration to the room's walls, and plants stood alongside the walls. In one corner, there was a small tank of lionfish.

Quiet chatter that had filled the room was now hushed, and Seven found the silence rather distracting.

"Please be seated," Hayes said quickly. As Seven did so, he began. "Now, would you please begin by stating your name and former designation for official records?"

"Seven of Nine," Seven replied. "Formerly of Tertiary Adjunct of Unimatrix 01."

As she finished, Hayes picked up his data PADD, preparing to begin questioning. "On what date did you first join the Voyager crew?"

"Stardate 51003.7," came Seven's prompt answer.

"What was your first reaction to Voyager?"

"I disliked being forced to remain on board," Seven recalled. "I had no desire to become an individual. I wished to rejoin the Collective. I was unsure of how to survive without the Hive mind."

"Do you deny that you attempted to contact the Borg?" Hayes asked, regarding her with an icy stare.

"No," Seven said, seemingly unintimidated by the harsh look. "I have stated that I attempted to communicate with the Borg several times in my logs which I believe you have examined."

Hayes looked at her. "Why did you wish to contact the Borg?"

"I wished to rejoin the Collective," Seven stated.

"Why?"

"It was all I had ever known," Seven said, her mind quickly attempting to find a way to explain so that Hayes would be able to comprehend. "To me, the Borg were my equivalent of a family."

"And when you had adjusted to this individuality, did you wish to return to the Borg Collective?" Hayes asked.

Seven paused for a moment, as though wondering how this could be significant. "No, I did not."

"Why?"

"I fail to see how this is relevant," Seven protested, voicing her concerns, but got no further.

"Just answer the question," Hayes insisted sharply.

Seven gave him an almost exasperated look, then continued. "I had discovered that there was perhaps more to humanity and being an individual than I had first assumed. Although I found the silence within my own mind disturbing, I adapted."

"Did you attempt to contact the Borg after this?" Hayes queried, leaning slightly forwards, as though eager to hear her next words.

"No," Seven responded. "I did not."

"Not once?"

"No," Seven firmly stated.

Hayes leaned backwards, disappointment emanating from him. "All right, let's move on," he said, looking back at the data PADD in his hand. "What were your feelings towards Kathryn Janeway when you first met her?"

"I found her... persistent." Seven stated. "At first, I-" she cut herself off, a suddenly blank look on her face. Staring directly ahead for a moment, she abruptly looked back to Hayes, meeting his eye-line, but saying nothing.

"Yes...?" Hayes prompted her impatiently.

Seven gave him a slightly bewildered look. "I'm sorry...?"

Hayes shook his head, giving Seven a particularly nasty look. "Reluctance to answer questions... uncooperative," he spoke aloud as he tapped away at his PADD.

"What are you-" Seven got no further.

"Let's move on, shall we?" Hayes said rhetorically, looking at Seven. "Do you feel responsible for any of Voyager's further dealings and involvement with the Borg?"

Seven looked blankly at him, then looked back into space, muttering, "I concur... you are correct, as always..."

Several of the Admirals seated around the table exchanged concerned looks, then looked to Hayes for their lead. Hayes seemed rather taken aback by this sudden change in behavior.

"I repeat, do you feel responsible for any of Voyager's further dealings and involvement with the Borg?"

"It is not important," Seven muttered, looking at him, then around the table at the other Admirals.

"Further evidence of lack of cooperation," Hayes noted, glaring at her and jotting down more details onto the PADD.

"I believe so," Seven said quietly, looking at the ceiling, her eyes wandering about the room, as if taking it in for the first time.

The assorted admirals shared further concerned looks, and Hayes asked aside to a gray-haired woman seated next to him, "Was that directed to me?"

"I think she's talking to herself," the woman responded, never taking her eyes off of the former Borg for an instant.

"Completely unacceptable!" The sudden change in Seven's facial expression was startling. She looked decidedly angry; furious in fact, and was glaring angrily ahead, directing an icy stare at the wall. "Failure is unacceptable. I've told you this before!"

"Should we contact Starfleet Medical?" one of the Admirals asked worriedly in a low tone.

Hayes nodded as confirmation. "Contact Starfleet Medical, let them know what's happening, and get a security detail to escort her."

"Maybe we should contact their Doctor," another Admiral suggested. "To see if anything like this has ever happened before..."

"Excellent idea," Hayes praised, his eyes not leaving the former Borg for a single second.

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All conversation ceased as the metallic doors swished back, and three pairs of eyes fixed directly on the two Starfleet security guards dressed in gold and black uniforms who stood in the narrow doorway. One held a large phaser compression rifle, which struck B'Elanna as unnecessary, since they were releasing Tom, not doing anything for which a weapon would be carried as standard procedure.

"Thomas Eugene Paris?" One of the guards asked formally, looking directly at Tom as he addressed him. They seemed to be almost intimidated by the former Maquis members in the room, making no attempt to enter the room.

"I guess that's my cue," Tom said, rising slowly. He had spent the entire morning dreading this one moment. As he stood, he immediately turned to face B'Elanna. "Are you gonna be okay?" he asked her gently.

"I'll be fine," B'Elanna said honestly as she stood up too. She kissed him gently on the lips, wrapping her arms around his neck. "Give my love to Miral." she smiled, feeling a small pang as she thought of her precious daughter. The separation was hard on her. She knew perfectly well that the child was in safe hands, but it was still difficult to be apart from her own daughter for such a long time.

"I will," Tom agreed, returning the smile as they broke apart. It was hard to keep up the façade of being pleased at his departure when B'Elanna wasn't accompanying him, but he maintained it well. He had offered to stay, but B'Elanna had quickly dismissed the suggestion, assuring him that she would be fine, and reminding him that Miral needed at least one of them.

"Take care of yourself, Tom," Chakotay said, clapping the younger man on the back.

"You too," Tom said genuinely, returning the gesture before turning back to B'Elanna, and kissing her once more. "See you in a few days, if all goes well."

B'Elanna wrapped her arms around him, pulling him close. "I love you," she murmured softly.

"Love you too," Tom returned with yet another smile, as they slowly broke apart. Finally, he bent down to pick up the small bag of belongings he'd packed earlier that had spent the morning resting against the bed. With little effort, he threw it over his shoulder. "I'll see you soon," he promised yet again, as if to reaffirm that it would only be a matter of days before they were reunited.

Moving towards the door, Tom turned one final time to face B'Elanna. "Bye," he managed, before stepping out of the doorway, the metallic doors sliding shut behind him.

B'Elanna sank back down onto the comfortable chair, staring at the closed door after her husband's departure, the barrier between her and her own freedom.

"Are you all right?" Chakotay asked, slightly concerned. B'Elanna's face betrayed no emotion, but he knew her too well to assume that this meant she was fine. B'Elanna vented her rage, but that was the only emotion she failed to control. When she was hurting, it was only ever down to his intuition or her confiding in him that he knew her true feelings.

"I'm fine," B'Elanna said, finally averting her gaze to look back at Chakotay. She sighed. "I don't like being separated from them. They need me, Chakotay."

"You'll see them soon," Chakotay assured her gently.

"I know," B'Elanna said, allowing her lips to curl slightly upwards, a trace of a smile at the thought. "But that doesn't make it any easier, Chakotay. I'm kept apart from my own daughter... and now my husband." She sighed softly. "Things were so much easier back on Voyager."

"I wouldn't say that," Chakotay disagreed. "Alien races determined to destroy Voyager at every turn, having to ration anything of importance, constant battles, journeying through uncharted space, not knowing who or what we'd be facing the next day... It was hardly a walk in the park."

"True," B'Elanna admitted. "But still, there wasn't this," she gestured hopelessly around the room. "Confinement, debriefings, being treated as criminals."

"We always knew this would come someday, though," Chakotay told her truthfully. "When we joined the Maquis, we knew this could, and probably would, be the eventual outcome. It just took a while in coming about."

"Things were different back then," B'Elanna said, sighing and staring back at the metallic doors. "I didn't have a family. It was just me for myself. If I was tortured or killed by the Cardassians, it didn't matter. No one would have been affected by my death. But now I'm being kept from my family... I have people who need me now. Responsibilities. And instead of being where I should be, I have to stay here." She looked around the room, and then back to Chakotay letting out a deep breath of air. "It's just frustrating."

A moment passed in silence, before Chakotay asked, "Do you ever miss the Maquis?"

B'Elanna gazed carefully at the ground, her eyes following the cement lines in the cracks between the tiles. "I don't know," she said thoughtfully. "Sometimes -- of course. It was a hard life, but I liked it. I fought alongside good people, and I did believe in the cause."

"But..?" Chakotay probed.

"But most of the time I don't miss that life," B'Elanna admitted. "I have Tom and Miral now. I'm not a homeless mercenary, just working for something to do. I've a family that depends on me. I'm a wife and a mother. It's a more satisfying life than serving in the Maquis."

"I can understand that," Chakotay said honestly. He could identify with her sentiments, even shared them. But unlike B'Elanna he had no family now. Nothing had changed specifically, but that lifestyle merely didn't seem appealing for other reasons.

"What about you?" B'Elanna asked, suddenly interested in the conversation. She turned towards him, drawing one knee up onto the seat of the chair and resting the palms of her hands on her knee. "Do you ever miss the Maquis?"

Chakotay thought for a moment. "Sometimes," he finally decided, wondering whether to elaborate further. In all honesty, he wasn't really sure he could explain everything clearly. He wasn't even sure he knew himself. He had done a lot of thinking during their time in the Delta Quadrant... And though he no longer wanted to be part of a resistance movement, at times Chakotay did miss it.

B'Elanna gazed back to the wall, sensing the conversation had drawn to an abrupt end. But Chakotay continued.

"I miss some aspects of it," Chakotay said, his tone slightly distant. "The lifestyle suited me back then... but I couldn't do that now."

It was on the tip of B'Elanna's tongue to ask why, but she managed to restrain herself. She disliked being pressured into volunteering any information about her past -- and as a result she rarely pressed anyone about their past.

Chakotay inwardly sighed. He wanted to tell B'Elanna, but he wasn't sure he could fully explain it to her... or anyone. He hadn't lost faith in the cause, nor had he gained any fondness for Cardassians. But he had put it past him, he had moved on. Although Chakotay still had sympathy for anyone opposed to the Cardassians because of personal reasons, similar to his own, he no longer felt the same strong urge to fight them, to make them pay for their own crimes.

Finally, he simply explained, "I'm a different person now... Being stranded in the Delta Quadrant gave me a lot of time to think about everything. I came to the conclusion that I couldn't involve myself in another resistance movement ever again. Not unless the cause was something very close to my heart, and perhaps not even then."

B'Elanna nodded in understanding, carefully listening to every word he had to say. It wasn't the first time they had discussed their past in the Maquis recently, but each time they discussed it she discovered new information about Chakotay. She found their conversations fascinating -- there was so much still to learn about him, though she classed him as one of the people she knew best.

"I'll tell you what I do miss," Chakotay said, his distant tone suddenly changing to a very alert one. He smiled at B'Elanna, suddenly animated as he spoke quickly. "The poker games we used to have in the evenings when things were quiet."

B'Elanna shook her head, a smile on her face. "You were never very good at card games, Chakotay."

"I can remember beating you once or twice," Chakotay said, remembering a few victorious occasions.

"You had a few lucky hands," B'Elanna defended herself. Her eyes were suddenly serious for a moment. "We had some good times in the Maquis, didn't we?"

"We did," Chakotay agreed, his statement every bit as serious as hers. "It wasn't all bad. There were a lot of things I did that I'm not proud of... a lot of mistakes I made. But there were some good times in with the bad."

He was almost dreading his debriefing. He was aware that they would ask probing questions, not only about Voyager, but also about his time in the Maquis, probably dredging back painful memories. He wasn't proud of everything he'd done when he'd served in the Maquis, and he had put most of it behind him. Chakotay wasn't looking forward to talking about such things. With B'Elanna, he could discuss their past. But with a roomful of strangers?

B'Elanna looked at him, debating inwardly whether to ask the question in her mind or not. After a short pause, she ventured, "Do you ever regret joining the Maquis?"

"No," Chakotay said instantly, surprising himself at how quickly the answer came. "I might regret some of the choices I made, some of the acts that I did in the name of duty, but I don't regret it. At the time it was the right thing to do, leave Starfleet to defend my home colonies. I couldn't stay with Starfleet after they had failed to protect my family and friends; so I joined the Maquis to do what I could to help the cause. Maybe part of it was about revenge... On some level I think I wanted to make the Cardassians pay for what they had done to my home. But more than that, it was about helping to ensure that the tragedy on Trebus didn't happen again to any other colony similar to my homeworld, fortunate enough to still be alive. There's no way I could regret that."

B'Elanna nodded as she listened intently to him talk. "My reasons weren't nearly as noble," she admitted. "I joined the Maquis because I needed a job. After the Cardassians attacked the freighter and killed the Captain I had nowhere to go. You needed a skilled engineer; I was a skilled engineer in need of a post. It served both our needs."

"Be glad that you didn't have a noble reason," Chakotay cut in, speaking from experience. "My 'noble reason' was that I'd lost my family in a brutal attack. I'm glad that you didn't join for similar reasons to my own. I wouldn't wish that on anyone."

"Wouldn't you rather have had people like that though?" B'Elanna asked. "It would have avoided spies like Tuvok getting into our midst... it would have ensured loyalty to a certain extent."

"It wouldn't have stopped spies," Chakotay argued. "We ran background checks anyway, yet Seska joined, remember? Anyone could lie, B'Elanna. I understand what you're saying, but we couldn't look into each claim that they were family or friends of a victim."

"That's true," B'Elanna said, momentarily pausing as she thought about Seska. Changing the subject slightly, she spoke aloud, "I miss her. It's ridiculous... she was a traitor who deceived us all, and a member of a race I learnt to detest, but she was a friend for so long."

Chakotay didn't speak, and for a brief moment, B'Elanna was worried she had overstepped her bounds in their conversation. She knew only just how much Seska's betrayal had hurt Chakotay. They had, after all, been lovers for a time. Seska had deceived Chakotay more than any of them, the pretense of being in love with him, using him in such an intimate way to gain his confidence and to gather information.

Beyond that, Seska had toyed with his affections. During the course of her relationship with him she had gained a valuable insight into his character, which she had later used to her advantage. Lying, she had told him that her baby was fathered by him as a ploy to take control of Voyager. B'Elanna didn't blame Chakotay for not missing her, perhaps even loathing or hating Seska. The Cardassian woman had hurt him badly, in ways he was unlikely to forget.

"I don't miss her," Chakotay finally said, looking B'Elanna directly in the eye as he spoke, his tone hard. "How could I? It's not the fact that she was a Cardassian spy, though that in itself was bad enough. But..." he trailed off, seemingly unable to continue his sentence.

B'Elanna nodded understandingly, regretting bringing up the painful topic. She had known it was difficult for Chakotay to speak of his past with Seska. Quickly, she changed the subject. "Are you going to visit Sveta when you're released?" she asked, curiously.

"I'd like to," Chakotay said, contemplating the possibility. "It depends on whether I can arrange with Starfleet to visit her sometime. They might not like it... they might see it as former Maquis conspiring."

"I'm sure they would," B'Elanna said in a low tone. She looked around the room again, as she was yet again reminded of their current situation. "They see conspiracies everywhere... I'm sure we're being monitored, under constant surveillance. I trust Starfleet command about as far as I can throw them." She gazed around the room, her eyes hunting suspiciously for any surveillance devices.

"Technically we're criminals, B'Elanna," Chakotay reminded her. "Starfleet are well within their rights to confine us here and keep a close eye on us."

"That doesn't make me feel any better," B'Elanna said, sighing. "Do you think the rest of the former Maquis are getting the same treatment?"

"It's fairly likely," Chakotay decided.

As the door suddenly opened, Chakotay and B'Elanna both turned to the silver doorway. In the doorframe stood the same two Starfleet officers that had collected Tom earlier on. It suddenly dawned on B'Elanna how much time had passed, and she immediately concluded that it was time for Chakotay's debriefing to begin.

"Mister Chakotay, would you come with us, please?" One of the guards addressed Voyager's former first officer.

Chakotay stood, placing a hand on B'Elanna's shoulder. "I'll see you later," he told her with a smile.



"Good luck," B'Elanna wished him with a half-hearted smile, but with a genuine tone of voice.

Chakotay nodded his thanks as he removed his hand and strode across the room, exiting through the doorway with the guards. The door slid shut again, leaving B'Elanna alone with her thoughts.

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Sitting primly on the regulation Starfleet bed, Seven of Nine looked around the bleak room. White walls and sparse, adequate furnishing adorned the debriefing room, giving it a sterile, bare feel. Indeed, there was a smell of disinfectant in the air, as if the room had just been given a thorough scrubbing.

She was tired, tired of being held captive while she waited for Starfleet to finish examining her. They were far too interested in her half-Borg properties for her liking, but there was nothing she could do about it except wish she was free.

Something, some consciousness deep in the back of her mind, pushed at her awareness. She took a deep breath and willed it back with sheer force of mind, trying to drive it away, to clear her mind. For a moment, she succeeded -- but then the entity lashed back out against her, easily overpowering her feeble mental defences and sending her mind and senses into chaos.

Compelled by the being inside her brain, Seven exploded off the bed and flew straight out the door without pausing to look back. She turned right and ran as fast as she could down the corridor, not stopping, not thinking. She didn't know where she was going or why she was going there -- all she knew was that she had to escape from her confinement.

And so she did.

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Chakotay followed the guards through the intricate maze of corridors in Starfleet Headquarters. They walked in silence, and he supposed the guards had been commanded not to discuss anything with him.

Headquarters was eerily quiet, and he presumed it must be later than he had imagined.

Normally the building was bustling with activity, Starfleet officers tearing down the corridors with a purpose to their stride, delegations from alien races touring the building, and various Admirals leisurely walking around the building, in no hurry to get to their next meeting. But the corridors were almost empty, and the only people they had encountered so far had been other security guards.

Chakotay shook his head, sighing inwardly. How much of a threat did Starfleet think the Maquis were? Despite their past records, Chakotay knew the men and women that had served under him so long ago were now changed individuals.

And, at any rate, the handful of remaining Maquis certainly weren't enough to be considered a threat to the Federation, even if their intentions had been as Starfleet suspected they might be.

Following the guards down yet another corridor, they finally came to a halt outside a metallic door. One of the guards pressed the door chime, and almost immediately, an authoritative voice from inside the room replied, "Come."

Chakotay followed the guards into the large, airy room that lay beyond the doors. It was one of the higher floors of Starfleet Headquarters, with a spectacular view of San Francisco bay, easily visible through the large windows that lined the far wall.

In the center of the room stood a large, oval table, complete with comfortable looking gray chairs. Around the table, various members of Starfleet's admiralty were seating, talking amongst themselves, sipping at glasses of water, and scrolling through information on their PADDs that Chakotay imagined was his personnel file.

At one end of the table, Admiral Hayes was seated. Chakotay was vaguely familiar with the man, knowing only that he was in charge of debriefings. At the other end of the table, opposite Hayes, was the only empty chair, obviously intended for Chakotay.

"Mister Chakotay," Hayes acknowledged the former Maquis' entrance with a curt nod. "Please be seated." It was a command, not a request, and Chakotay obeyed, moving towards his chair, and seating himself in the comfortable gray chair. The armed security guards that had escorted him to the briefing moved to stand on vigil by the door.

There was a short moment of silence, as Admiral Hayes concentrated on the PADD in his hand, scrolling through it, before looking towards Chakotay. "Let's get started, shall we?" he asked. His tone was unfriendly, almost bordering on disrespectful, and Chakotay's fears about the debriefing were suddenly reaffirmed, as he realized that Hayes was not about to make this easy.

"Would you first, for the record, state your name, and former designation?" Hayes requested. He emphasized the word 'former' almost attempting to make a point out of the fact that he was superior to Chakotay.

"Chakotay, former Commander of the USS Voyager," Chakotay stated, trying not to make his tone match Hayes'. He appreciated the fact that he was no longer within Starfleet, and didn't resent it, but he disliked such a point being made of it.

"Right," Hayes looked around at his colleagues, then at Chakotay. Glancing at the data on the PADD, he then proceeded to ask, "Obviously, most logical place to start is at the beginning. How did you come to be in the Delta Quadrant?"

Chakotay looked slightly confused at the question, since it was common knowledge, but began to speak anyway. "We were in the Badlands, in conflict with Gul Evek. A distortion wave that we were unable to outrun hit us, and we found ourselves in the Delta Quadrant, having been pulled away by an array of some description-"

"Stop," Hayes instructed, raising a hand. "Did you attempt to discover from the 'array' why you had been brought there?"

"We had no time before we were all transported aboard the array and subjected to tests."

"What kind of tests?" Came the immediate response.

Chakotay sighed. "Compatibility. He was interesting in finding compatible humanoids that could take over his responsibility in caring for the Ocampa when he died."

"Why?"

"With all due respect, I don't see how this is releva-"

Hayes held up his hand by way of silencing Chakotay. "Please, just answer the question."

Trying not to show his irritation, Chakotay calmly said. "He felt responsible for the Ocampa, so he was attempting to find heirs to the position of 'caretaker' for their people."

"And what was the nature of these... compatibility tests?"

"Mainly biological," Chakotay supplied. "The Doctor later determined that there was also some probing on a mental level, but he couldn't specify exactly what... whether the Caretaker was looking for anything specific or observing something in particular."

"Right," Hayes mused for a moment, scrolling down through some data on the PADD. "Thank you, Mister Chakotay, that has proved... most useful. Now, jumping a little ahead, would you tell us about the problems in choosing a new chief engineer?"

Chakotay paused for a moment, resisting the urge to demand to know just what the importance of the question was. As far as he was aware, the debriefing was supposed to be on events of significance in the Delta Quadrant, not on minor events. And certainly not on their entire journey home. Nevertheless, he continued.

"Voyager's chief engineer was killed when they were hurled into the Delta Quadrant. We naturally had to appoint-

"We?"

Gritting his teeth in annoyance, Chakotay said, "I had already been made first officer by this stage."

"I see." He waved his hand. "Please, continue."

"We needed to appoint a new chief engineer, and we narrowed it down to two choices, Joe Carey and-

"Excuse me, excuse me," Hayes cut in, interrupting once more. "You say 'we narrowed it down.' However, isn't it true that Captain Janeway already wanted Joseph Carey, and was reluctant to even consider Ms Torres for the post?"

"If you already know this, then why are you asking me?" Chakotay managed, his tone low. This was frustrating, to say the least. It was reminiscent of an interrogation, when it was supposed to be a debriefing.

"We have our reasons, Mister Chakotay," Hayes said darkly. "You were saying...?"

"We narrowed it down to our two choices, Joe Carey and B'Elanna Torres. Both were skilled, highly talented engineers. In the end, B'Elanna was chosen once she proved her ability and initiative to Captain Janeway when she helped us-

"Just because of that?" Hayes chimed in. "You're honestly saying that you didn't put in a good word on B'Elanna's behalf?"

"Of course I did," Chakotay snapped, nearing breaking point. He was, by nature, a calm man, but Hayes' attitude was getting ridiculous. "But I didn't make her out to be anything she wants, I merely told the Captain that she was a highly talented engineer who at least deserved consideration. I did not push for B'Elanna, or use my position in any way to influence the Captain's decision. I merely demanded that B'Elanna be given equal consideration as Mr Carey. That's all."

"I see," Hayes said, calmly. "Thank you. Now then... could you please tell us, at the start of your journey, what were your feelings towards Mr Paris?"

"I disliked him because of what happened in the Maquis," Chakotay said honestly. "However, as time went on-

"I'm asking about at the start of your journey," Hayes corrected him sharply. "What were your feelings towards Mister Paris as you embarked on the mission back to the Alpha Quadrant?"

"I didn't trust him and I didn't like him," Chakotay said, thinking back to those days. "I had little respect for the man. He was too cocky for my liking, always so sure of himself. He took too many risks, endangered too many people. I didn't like his manner, his way of dealing with things, and people. I didn't like the fact that he placed little importance on some issues that I and others consider to be of value."

"So in short," Hayes said, as Chakotay finished. "There was no love lost between you and Mister Paris?"

"Essentially, yes," Chakotay agreed.

"Right," Hayes nodded. "What were your feelings towards him when he was believed to have committed a murder on the Banean homeworld?"

"I was disappointed in him," Chakotay said, thinking carefully. "He'd let down Captain Janeway and Voyager. However, I wasn't surprised. I was almost expecting him to mess things up, waiting for it to happen."

"Did you believe he did the crime before he was proven innocent?"

"Yes," Chakotay said, a note of guilt creeping into his voice. "I truly believed he did commit the crime. Captain Janeway and Tuvok listened and believe him when he told them he didn't do it. But I judged him on what I knew of his character, without looking at the evidence closely, or listening to his claims."

"Did you do that with many of the crew?" Hayes tone was harsh.

"Of course not," Chakotay replied quickly.

"So you singled out Mister Paris?"

"I didn't say that," Chakotay retorted.

"But you implied it," Hayes said, his tone still infuriatingly calm.

"No, I didn't," Chakotay said, his voice rising as he stared angrily at Hayes across the table, rapidly losing control of his temper. "I merely admitted that I disliked Mr Paris at first, and believed he committed a crime which he did not. That was a mistake on my part and I learnt from it. Can we please move on?"

"Very well," Hayes said, sounding very put out by Chakotay's request.

Attempting to calm down, Chakotay took a mouthful from the glass of water that was in front of him. This 'debriefing' was every bit as bad as he had expected or feared it to be. They were dredging up memories that he would have rather remained buried, and opening old wounds. He wasn't proud of some of the things he had done, and they were sure to mention all of them. Sighing, he looked up at Hayes, as the Admiral began to speak.

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B'Elanna played with a small, framed photograph of Tom, Miral, and herself in her hands. It was one of the few personal belongings she had brought with her, a memory of happier times, and a reminder of what it would be like again soon.

The distant look on her face was one of sadness as she thought of her family. At first she had dealt with the separation, but now with Tom also gone, things were worse. For the first time in a while, she was lonely. From an early age, B'Elanna had been almost anti-social, disliking the company of others.

Even in the Maquis, she had been a notoriously private person. There had been a few people with whom she would share more with than most, Seska and Chakotay amongst them, but even when she was with them, she had told little about herself. She even refused to allow them into her life beyond a certain extent.

Her time on Voyager had cured her from that, the isolation of the Delta Quadrant beginning to get to her. She had formed friendships with Harry and Tom, and maintained hers with Chakotay. Gradually, little by little, B'Elanna Torres had come out of her shell, and now left to her own devices, she found herself craving that companionship.

But more than that, she missed Miral and Tom. Being married to Tom had brought her more happiness than she had ever known, and Miral had just perfected their lives. Being without them when she knew there was a family who needed her was driving her insane, her feeling of responsibility kicking in.

B'Elanna was drawn out of her reverie as the door opened. Her head swung round to face the door, seeing who the visitor was. As her own debriefing wasn't until the next day, a visitor was unexpected.

In the doorway stood the holographic doctor, along with two security guards.

"B'Elanna," he entered the room with a few simple strides. "I need your assistance. Starfleet's given authorization for you to be released into my custody for a few hours as long as we remain on Starfleet premises."

"Doc, what's going on?" B'Elanna queried as she followed him out of the room, and down the hall, struggling to keep up the hurried pace the Doctor set.

"Seven's implants are... malfunctioning," the Doctor lied. He had never been an accomplished liar, but he wasn't about to risk anyone overhearing. Besides, now wasn't the time to attempt to explain it all to B'Elanna, especially since he wasn't entirely sure of what was going on himself. He knew it was deeper than a simple malfunction, but he couldn't be sure just how much deeper.

"What happened?" B'Elanna queried, slightly out of breath. Sudden exercise was a shock to her system.

"Seven's been behaving... strangely," the Doctor said. He was unable to describe it as anything else. "During her briefing, Starfleet determined that she was in need of a psychiatric evaluation, during which she lashed out."

"Any ideas? Theories as to why?" B'Elanna asked.

"None that I'd care to share until we've examined her further," the Doctor said, sharply turning a corner.

"Why do you need me to assist?" B'Elanna asked quickly. She narrowly missed running straight into a crewman as she followed the Doctor, her pace barely short of a jog.

"I'm a doctor, B'Elanna, not an engineer. You know Seven's implants better than anyone else, you're familiar with the technology."

B'Elanna was about to respond when they entered the medical Infirmary at Starfleet Headquarters, and her attention was taken by the struggling Borg on the biobed, held firmly in place by restraints. Two Security personnel stood by her side, carefully watching her every move. They looked relieved to see the Doctor and B'Elanna enter.

Startled, B'Elanna looked at the Doctor. "Was she like this when you left?" she asked, her tone concerned.

The Doctor nodded in response. "She was in a similar state when she escaped from her psychiatric evaluation. It's still a mystery to me as to how they managed to catch her. She may be struggling, but she still has her wits about her. With her intelligence, I would have thought she could easily escape from here. However, I'm glad that I'm wrong."

B'Elanna looked from Seven to the Doctor, then asked, "What do you need me to do?"

"Well, I was wondering if you could look over this..." the Doctor trailed off as he headed towards his workstation, with B'Elanna in tow.

The room seemed suddenly blurry to Seven of Nine. She blinked rapidly, allowing her eyes to adjust. Hearing hushed tones and picking up fragments of whispered conversation with her sensitive ears. Turning to her left, Seven saw the source of the disjointed words. The Doctor and B'Elanna were huddled over a console, intently discussing something, continually looking from Seven to their console and data PADDs.

By her bedside stood two security guards, eyeing her closely. Her arms were restrained, pinned firmly to the biobed by cold, metal restraints.

She tried to pull herself up further, but the metal holding her arms firmly in place made that impossible. "Why am I here?" she queried, directing her question at the Doctor.

The Doctor and B'Elanna exchanged a look before approaching her biobed.

"Seven?" the Doctor asked, doing a double take at the woman on the biobed. Her composition was surprising to him, and it seemed almost as though she had somehow recovered.

"Yes, Doctor?" Her voice was curious. "May I inquire as to why I am restrained?"

"You don't remember?" B'Elanna chimed in, looking at the Doctor.

"No," Seven said, her tone filled with confusion. "I do not."

"What's the last thing you recall?" the Doctor asked gently.

"I was in my allocated living area," Seven told them, thinking back. "I was reading a communication from my Aunt... and then..." she paused. "I recall nothing further."

"Interesting," the Doctor muttered.

Seven looked from B'Elanna to the Doctor. "What has happened?"

"You were sent for psychiatric evaluation halfway through your debriefing, from which you escaped," B'Elanna enlightened the former Borg. "They brought you here, and the Doctor began to examine you. Until a moment ago, you were struggling against your restraints, eager to escape again."

"Curious," Seven stated. "I do not remember any of this."

"It's possible that whoever or whatever has affected your implants triggered this minor loss of memory," the Doctor hypothesized, looking down at his PADD. He glanced apologetically at Seven. "I'm afraid we need to leave you in these restraints, in case you return to the way you were. In that condition you could be a serious harm to yourself or others."

"I understand," Seven said with a nod. For a moment, she looked temporarily concerned. "Did I... damage anyone?"

"You injured one of the security team," the Doctor supplied, beginning to scan her with a medical tricorder, carefully focusing on the data as it was collected. "He had a broken rib and a few bruises. Nothing I couldn't handle." He looked closer at some of the information the tricorder held. "Interesting..."

"Will you please pass on my apologies to him?" Seven requested. "I am... sorry."

"Of course," the Doctor assured her, looking up momentarily, before going back to work. He moved back towards the console, tricorder in his hand. "B'Elanna, would you assist me? You might want to take a look at some of this."

"Sure," B'Elanna agreed, following him across the room, leaving Seven to her own devices.

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Owen Paris sipped at the glass of water in his hand, carefully scrolling through the data on his PADD as he kept one ear open vigilantly to listen out for Miral in case she should wake requiring something. His young granddaughter had rapidly become the centre of his life; and she had quickly filled a gap of emptiness left since his own children had grown up.

For the first time in seventeen years, Owen Paris had finally taken a temporary leave of absence from Starfleet. His work had been the focus of his life for so long it had never been necessary to use up any of his allocated absence time. But now he had something to concentrate his efforts on, the care of his young grandchild.

As the door chime rang, Owen's head jerked up in surprise. His features grew contorted as he wondered for a moment as to who the visitor might be. No one was expected, and an unannounced visit was highly irregular.

Slowly, he rose from the chair, placing the PADD and glass on the small table by his chair, and quietly strode across the wooden floor, careful as not to wake Miral, for he knew just how loudly the sound of footsteps echoed on the wooden floorboards.

Surprise washed over Owen Paris's face as the door slid backwards gracefully to reveal his son standing there. He leant against the doorframe with one hand, the other raking through his thinning blonde hair that was in complete disarray.

A moment passed as the elder Paris regarded the younger Paris. Owen remained silent, not entirely sure what to say. He had been unaware that Tom was to be released so soon. Had he

known, he wouldn't have been surprised at all at his son's unannounced arrival. The one thing that had become painfully clear to him was Tom's evident love for his daughter.

Tom remained silent for a moment as they merely stared at each other. There were no greetings or pleasantries exchanged. Finally, Tom asked in a cold tone, "Where's Miral?"

"She's upstairs, sleeping," Owen responded, his tone calm. He stepped backwards from the door, to allow Tom to enter the hallway. "Come in," he offered, as Tom entered the hallway, and the doors slid shut behind him.

There was awkward silence for a moment, before Owen asked politely. "How are you?"

Tom gave his father a cold look. After a moment, he repeated his initial question. "Where's Miral?"

Without further attempt at talking to his son, Owen turned towards the staircase, leading Tom upstairs towards the room where his daughter's crib had been placed. It was becoming more and more obvious to both that there was now no love lost between them. Tom privately suspected that his father regretted this, far more so than he. He did, of course, feel slightly saddened at the sudden loss of their relationship, especially so soon after getting it on the road to recovery, but he knew that it would be hard, if not impossible, to ever forgive his father.

The sunshine-yellow room just off the top of the staircase struck Tom as familiar the second he entered it, and he quickly realized why. It had been his own nursery as a child. Memories of his own childhood flooded him as he approached the pine wood crib that stood in the middle of the room.

Peering over the edge of the cot, he felt instant relief as he saw Miral lying there, safe and sound. He had known, of course, that she would be safe, but he couldn't believe it until he had seen her for himself. Miral was too important to him to just take someone's word about her well being.

Miral lay asleep in the small crib, looking peaceful and content. One clenched fist was raised to her rosebud mouth, and her thin, shiny hair was in disarray. She lay on her side as if in fetal position. A yellow blanket half-covered her tiny body, having become tangled and twisted in the night.

Carefully, Tom lifted the child out of the crib and into his arms, holding his baby girl close. "Hey, sweetie," he cooed to her as she stirred, her eyes opening to gaze up at him. Before she could begin to wail, he gently rocked her, softly talking to her under his breath in a soothing tone.

Owen felt awkward, as though he were intruding on the reunion. Tom, however, seemed almost not to notice Owen Paris, focusing solely on Miral. He had missed his daughter terribly, and now that he finally held her in his arms again, he was almost reluctant to place her back in the crib, or into her carrier. Instead, Tom allowed the child to remain with her head resting on his chest, her body carefully supported by his arms.

Abruptly he turned to Owen. "Would you please beam Miral's things to our new place?" He asked coldly. "We've got temporary accommodation in San Francisco until B'Elanna's released. I'd appreciate your sending her things there."

"Certainly," Owen agreed willingly, smiling at his son. Tom didn't return it, just turned to look away.

"See you," Tom muttered after a moment, throwing a glance at his father as he moved to exit the room. The only thought on his mind was getting both himself and Miral out of his father's house. After Owen's actions, Tom no longer wanted to be within close proximity to the man.

"Tom, we need to discuss this," Owen said calmly, placing a pacifying arm on his son's shoulder.

Tom shook off his father's grip on his arm. "You don't understand, Dad. There's nothing to discuss."

"You really believe that?" Owen asked, his eyes probing Tom's for any hint of regret. To his dismay, he found none, only the look being returned by his son's cold stare.

"Yes, I do," Tom replied coolly, surprising himself at his own self-control. "You broke up my family, without even trying to keep us together. You could have tried... made some effort to keep us together. You could have pulled strings. You could have used your influence. But you took away my baby girl." He turned away from Owen, facing the door. "I don't want anything to do with you. I'm ashamed to call you my father."

Owen's heart sank as his son left the room. "You can't mean that, Tom," he argued, calling after him only to be cut off by his son.

"Don't presume that you know exactly what I do and don't mean," Tom snapped angrily, fury quickly building up inside him. Even after all this time, his father was still the only person who could enrage him to such an extent.

"Tom--" Owen moved onto the hallway at the top of the stairs, following his son, though he knew only too well that his attempts were probably all in vain.

"Don't bother," Tom told his father, turning back to face Owen Paris from his position halfway down the stairs. He kept his voice low, and tried to keep himself calm, for the sake of the child in his arms. The last thing he wanted to do was startle his daughter by losing his temper with his father, no matter how great the temptation.

He hurried down the remainder of the stairs, acutely aware of the sound of footsteps behind him. Striding angrily towards the doorway, Tom wondered why he had even bothered to listen to his father in the first place. He had planned to not get into a debate with Owen, just to get Miral and get out.

Tom slowed as he reached the doorway, shifting Miral slightly in his arms to free one hand to access the panel to release the door's locking mechanism.

"Son," Owen began softly, placing an arm on his son's shoulder. The contact wasn't forceful, but Tom immediately halted. "Please, I want to talk about this. I want to make things right again."

Tom could hear the regret in his father's voice, the utter desperation in his plea. Slowly, he turned around to face Owen Paris.

"I'm sorry," Owen began honestly, obvious regret in his eyes. "I regret what happened... I really do, Tom. I'm not some kind of monster who wanted to separate your family. I was just doing what I thought was best, and now I'm paying the price in my relationship with you."

"How could you think that splitting up the best thing that ever happened to me was for the best?" Tom asked angrily.

Owen Paris sighed. "Tom, I didn't mean to. I didn't want things to work out like that. I didn't want all of this to happen. I just wanted what was best for Miral."

His father's words had the ring of truth to them, and Tom found listening to what Owen Paris had to say. Miral began to squirm in his arms, and Tom's attention was quickly drawn back to his baby girl. He gently bounced her in his arms to quiet her.

"How can I believe you?" Tom asked, looking from the child in his arms to Owen Paris.

Trying not to be taken aback by Tom's calm response, since he hadn't expected any, Owen continued his attempts to explain himself and justify his actions.

"Please believe me," Owen said, looking deeply into his son's eyes. "Tom, when you were young I didn't put my family first. That's a mistake I've been regretting ever since. And for the first time in a long while, that's exactly what I did. Miral was taken not because I wanted to hurt her or you... but because I wanted her to be in a safe environment--"

"Surely the best place for her would have been with her parents," Tom argued, his voice rising again.



"Maybe... maybe not," Owen sighed. "Tom, I don't want to argue this. I did what I thought what was best at the time, and I can't go back and change my actions, no matter how much I might like to. But I can still salvage my relationship with you, my son, and believe me, I want to."

Tom sighed. "I don't know if I can forgive you," he admitted, slightly apologetically. "At the moment I don't want anything to do with you. You took away my child without even trying to fight the orders to forcefully remove her. I don't know if there's anything you can say or do to right that wrong."

Owen looked pained as Tom turned to face the door yet again. Quickly, he asked, "Can we please sit down? Just to discuss this... to get a few things straight. Please, Tom?"

After a moment's thought, Tom surprised himself by nodding his agreement, and wondered to himself if maybe their relationship wasn't quite beyond help as he had thought it might be.

He entered the lounge in absolute silence, and seated himself on the vast beige couch, Miral still in his arms. Owen followed him, and sat at the small chair opposite.

There was a short silence before Owen began to speak.

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"I understand," Seven said to no one in particular, focusing intently on the far wall. "I will complete this task... yes, I understand."

B'Elanna stood by the former Borg's side, concerned at her increasingly worrying behavior. She would be unable to assist the Doctor further until he had determined the cause of her bizarre behavior, having already helped as much as was possible. She had taken the task of standing by Seven's bedside, waiting for the Doctor to finish his analysis so they could take some action.

Earlier on, Seven had acted normally, just as she had been doing before. But suddenly her behavior had altered drastically, and she had begun talking to no one in particular. B'Elanna had listened in case names had been mentioned, anything that would have suggested who or what had been the cause of Seven's sudden change. But it had been like hearing one side of a conversation, and B'Elanna could make neither heads nor tails of it.

At the other side of the biobed, a Starfleet security guard who had been assigned to the Infirmary met her eyeline. "Has she ever done this before?" he enquired, eyeing Seven warily.

"Never," B'Elanna said, sighing. She looked over to the workstation where the Doctor was hard at work, furiously tapping at the console, cross-referencing and investigating, trying desperately to find some cause for her behavioral change.

"I will comply," Seven said, her voice suddenly rising in volume. Her eyes darted around sickbay as she looked from person to person. Her fists clenched, and she began to struggle against the restraints that held her arms firmly in place, causing them to rattle violently.

"Sedate her," B'Elanna demanded of the Doctor, struggling furiously to hold the former Borg down on the biobed with the assistance of the security officers. Seven was strong, and B'Elanna knew only too well that she was more than capable of tearing the restraints right out if she were determined enough to do so. And in her current state of mind, it occurred to her that Seven might attempt to do just that.

The Doctor hurried towards the biobed, hypospray in hand, and pressed it to her neck. She grew limp immediately, slumping back onto the biobed. B'Elanna released her grip on the other woman's arm, watching her still form. She looked surprisingly peaceful, as though she were just sleeping deeply.

"Are you any closer to a solution?" B'Elanna asked, as she carefully input the command for the biobed's scanner to close over Seven's seemingly lifeless body. It was a security precaution. With Seven, there was no way of knowing just how long the sedative would last, and the extra layer of metal for Seven to pry off could buy them vital seconds to recapture her if she awoke and decided to attempt escape.

"I believe so," the Doctor called back, his tone surprisingly optimistic. "I think I've isolated the problematic subroutines within her implants, but I think I'm on the right path to a solution."

"Keep at it, Doc," B'Elanna said encouragingly, as she turned back to the unconscious Borg on the biobed.

"I intend to," the Doctor assured her, never allowing their banter to interfere with his work, even for a second. B'Elanna knew that he could multitask thanks to his additional subroutines, and often wished this were a quality she possessed, or could alter herself to possess.

Looking back at the Doctor, B'Elanna admitted, "We could be running out of time, Doctor."

"How so?"

"She's getting worse," B'Elanna informed the EMH, her voice heavy. "Before we sedated her, her... delusions were getting more vivid. Before, at least she had a few moments of normality before it set in again. But now..." she sighed. "I don't know what's wrong with her, Doc, but we could lose her. It might be irreversible if we don't act soon."

The Doctor interrupted his work for a moment to turn to face B'Elanna. "I'm working as fast as I can," he promised her. "I refuse to believe, at this point, that it's truly irreversible. Not until we've investigated further."

B'Elanna nodded, watching as he turned back to continue his research. She failed to see how he could be so optimistic at a time like this. He was, by nature, generally optimistic, but B'Elanna had seen enough of the data over his shoulder at intervals. She had quickly determined that the situation was serious. Whoever had tampered with Seven's implants had certainly known what they were doing.

"Aha!" the Doctor suddenly exclaimed, turning to look at B'Elanna. "I think I've found the cause... look at these readouts of Seven's brainwaves." He gestured towards a large graph on the monitor in front of him. "They're remarkably similar, but there are slight differences. And there are two of them."

"Doc, I'm an engineer," B'Elanna reminded him. "What are you saying?"

"Do you remember when Commander Chakotay's consciousness was separated from his body, and he took control of your body for a short time?" the Doctor queried. "You ejected the warp core whilst under the influence."

"I remember," B'Elanna said with a nod. "You're saying she's...." B'Elanna paused as she searched for the right word. "Possessed?"

"In short, yes," the Doctor replied. "It's remarkably similar to the readings of your own brain waves from the situation when Chakotay's consciousness took over your body."

"So who -- or what -- is it?" B'Elanna asked, looking at the Doctor.

"I don't know," the Doctor replied, turning to look at Seven's seemingly lifeless body on the biobed. "All I know is that there are two consciousnesses inside her brain, judging from her brain waves. There are quite clearly two patterns -- see for yourself." He thrust a PADD with yet another graph upon it towards B'Elanna.

B'Elanna looked closely at the data, taking it in slowly. Finally, she asked, "Why does she keep switching between personalities? Shouldn't this... thing just remain in control permanently?"

"Not necessarily," the Doctor said, beginning to walk towards Seven. "I'm hypothesizing here, of course, but my best guess would be that it only requires control some of the time. When it doesn't need to be in control of Seven's body, it could simply withdraw into recess, maybe deciding the best course of action. During this time, it no longer needs to be in control of Seven, so it isn't."

"Fascinating," B'Elanna murmured, gazing at Seven. "What do you think it is?"

"I don't know," the Doctor admitted, turning back towards the console. "And I haven't the least idea how to remove it."

B'Elanna thought for a moment. "Removing it... that's where you're going wrong, Doctor. We need to drive it out, using force."

"What would you suggest?" the Doctor asked. He scrolled through his data PADD. "The only options I could suggest would kill the patient as well as removing the consciousness."

"Let me see," B'Elanna asked, reaching for the PADD. "Maybe we could modify one of your ideas... what area has the consciousness manifested itself in?"

"It seems to be located in Seven's implants," the Doctor said, poring over the data. "I can only assume it has better control of the brain there."

"Very likely," B'Elanna said, scrolling through the PADD distractedly. Suddenly, her head jerked up excitedly. "Doctor... I think this could work. This one..."

"What?" A look of hope flashed across the Doctor's face.

"Here -- you suggested that an energy discharge could drive out the consciousness; however, it would more than likely leave the patient's brain dead," B'Elanna said, relaying the data from the PADD.

"The risk was too great," the Doctor protested.

"Well, what if we directed the energy discharge at her implants? The 'consciousness' is located there, so it would drive it out... but more than that, Seven's implants have a built-in device to deal with that. Upon a discharge that would affect the implant and would leave the person critically injured, the implant shuts off all pathways to the brain. Seven could be injured, and the implant would need repair, but there would almost certainly be no neurological damage."

"Almost certainly?"

"There's risk involved with any medical procedure, Doc," B'Elanna commented. "The risk is minimal, but it is still there. If you want to risk it, I can take responsibility..."

"No," the Doctor said. He sighed. "It looks like this our best chance at saving her. The longer we leave it in there, the more damage it can do."

"So are we going for it?" B'Elanna queried.

"Yes," the Doctor said firmly, with only slight hesitation. "I think it's a risk Seven would be willing to take."

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Kathryn unlocked her apartment door, stepped through, and slammed the door behind her, tired after a long, boring day at headquarters. She flipped on the lights, shrugged out of her uniform jacket, and slung it on the back of her armchair, which she promptly collapsed into.

She sighed and let her head loll back against the backrest, taking a few moments to rest and relax. Sitting in front of a desk for the better part of a day and doing nothing but edit and write reports had taken a large toll on her muscles, and they ached like hell at the moment. She was somewhat hungry, but didn't particularly want to bother with eating; she had too much work to do anyway and another few hours before eating wouldn't do her any harm.

On top of the work, the current state of affairs with the Maquis was pushing at her mind. She didn't know much about their situation, but what she did know bothered her. From what she had heard, they were all in for individual debriefings or hearings, were being held at Starfleet HQ until the procedures were over, and were being allowed no outside assistance.

No outside assistance. That meant that even she wouldn't be able to help them. And she was sure they would need help: it certainly hadn't seemed like Starfleet -- or the Federation, for that

matter -- was in any hurry to let the former outlaws off the hook, being far too preoccupied with their long-past war crimes.

No, all the Maquis -- especially Chakotay, she was sure, since he had been their leader -- would undergo a more-than-thorough interrogation and debriefing. They would be questioned to death, interrogated about their actions before and during their time on Voyager, and asked about the possibilities of a mutiny or any other sort of uprising. Kathryn knew their answers would be scrutinized down to the minutest little detail, with the review board searching through every sentence and every phrase for evidence that would implicate the Maquis as anything but Starfleet officers loyal to her -- and that would show that Chakotay had had every intention of staging a mutiny.

It wasn't true, she knew. There had been talk of a mutiny for a few weeks among some of the more resentful crewmembers, but Chakotay had been the one to put an end to it. She knew that, from the beginning, he would never have betrayed her -- and most of the Maquis had grown to share his loyalty given time. As for the ones who hadn't -- Seska and Jonas immediately sprang to mind -- they had met rather unpleasant fates, brought on by their own unfaithfulness.

None of the remaining Maquis would have ever done anything to hurt her or Chakotay. The problem was convincing the review board of that, which was a hard task in itself and was made harder by Admiral Nechayev's presence. She was a known Maquis-hater, and would do anything to get them imprisoned and dishonorably discharged.

And Kathryn couldn't even help them.

They were her crewmembers, and she couldn't even help them when they needed her. She didn't know any of the details surrounding their impending hearings, but she knew she would learn specifics soon, as the days led up to the first of the cases.

She highly doubted she would be allowed to do anything at all to assist... but perhaps doing some reconnaissance could help her see if there were any possible ways in which she could influence anyone. Though, given her status at the moment, she had doubts as to their effectiveness if there were any, and didn't hold high hopes for the situation to change with regard to her involvement.

But there was nothing she could do until she got to know the details, and that would take a while. There was no point in worrying about it, because simply worrying wasn't going to change anything; it was still going to take her the same amount of time before she could make any sort of difference, and she knew that. She might as well relax for a few minutes and then get back to concentrating on her reports.

She looked around her apartment for the millionth time. It bore a heavy resemblance to the one she'd occupied before leaving for Voyager's maiden mission -- however, that apartment had been repossessed two years after their disappearance in the Delta Quadrant. Her mother and sister had saved her personal belongings, and she had retrieved them on Voyager's return and moved them into her current apartment. Still, she did miss her old one somewhat...

This one was sparsely furnished, containing only the bare minimum of items necessary for living and a few odd decorations here and there to give it a more homely feel. The kitchen was attached to one side of the main room, and another doorway led to the bedroom and adjoining bathroom, which were a relatively large size.

A medium sized dining table sat in the middle of the living room, surrounded by four chairs in case of company -- not that she'd ever had any, of course: the chairs were just there to make the table look complete. Kathryn rarely ate there herself, preferring to take her dinner -- if she ate any -- to the more comfortable couch or armchair that she was sitting in, both of which faced the window. The wall was adorned with a few paintings: one of a huge, windswept plain; another depicting a vase of flowers sitting on a table; yet another a starkly captured image of a beach landscape with palm trees waving in the wind.

If she stared at the beach photo long enough, it was easy for her to slip further and further into dreamland, until she could imagine herself peacefully relaxing on a similar one, basking in the sun, away from annoying Admiral Nechayev's, rain, and dreary desk jobs. Oh, what she wouldn't give for a sunny beach right now, instead of San Francisco's damp, gloomy sky...

The beeping of the computer terminal adjacent to her armchair abruptly brought her out of her reverie. Sitting up straight, she swiveled the chair to the left and keyed the screen on.

Gretchen Janeway appeared on the screen. Kathryn's mother's face was lightly wrinkled, her white hair sprinkled with a few remaining strands of auburn, but there was still the nobility and warmth to her face that Kathryn, when little, had always tried to bring out. Now her mother was older, her features more aged, but she still had the same air about her.

"Mom!" Kathryn exclaimed, surprised. She hadn't been expecting to hear from anybody, much less her mother. But the chance to talk to someone was welcomed, and she smiled heartily.

"I didn't think you would be calling," she said, her voice still carrying a tinge of surprise to it.

Her mother smiled warmly, and the affection Kathryn had so treasured as a young girl flashed in her eyes again, cheering Kathryn to the heart.

"I thought I'd check up and see how my oldest little girl was doing," Gretchen said with a laugh in her speech.

Kathryn rolled her eyes, a good humor washing over her in spite of everything. "Mom, in case you didn't notice, I'm not exactly little anymore," she admonished lightheartedly.

There was a twinkle in Gretchen Janeway's eyes. "You are to me."

"Mo-om," Kathryn groaned half-warningly, trying to sound annoyed and failing miserably, the corner of her mouth turning up slightly despite her best efforts to stop it.

"Okay, okay," Gretchen acquiesced. "But seriously, Kathryn, how are you? You don't seem too good."

Leave it to her mother to start worrying about her health. "I'm fine," Kathryn reassured.

"You certainly don't look it."

"You don't mince words, do you, Mom?"

"No, but then, neither do you. Now come on, when was the last time you ate something?" Gretchen's calm face belied her concern.

Kathryn thought back over the past day. "I had something earlier this morning and a snack later on."

It was Gretchen's turn to sigh worriedly. "You, my dear, need to eat. Seriously, Kathryn. You're losing weight and I'm worried about you."

"I know, Mom, I know," Kathryn placated. "I will, promise. I just have so many other things to take care of at the moment that I can't really be bothered with eating right now..."

"You can't just go hungry, you know. Now promise me you'll start eating something -- or I'll have to send Phoebe down to drag you home for some dinner."

Kathryn smiled slightly in spite of herself. "Okay Mom, I promise." And she resolved to try and eat; she knew her mother was only trying to help and felt that she should make an effort. Whether the effort would be realized was a different matter altogether -- Kathryn knew from experience that simply finding time to eat was a bigger problem for her than actually eating.

"...Good," her mother was saying as Kathryn returned her attention to the screen. "So tell me, what's so pressing that you can't be bothered with eating?"

Kathryn's head slumped down to rest in her hand, her elbow being propped on the table. Here was a chance to admit her worries about the Maquis situation, to bounce her thoughts off a willing sounding board. And yet, she wasn't sure how to explain it.

Kathryn sighed. "I don't know, Mom," she admitted. "I guess... I'm just worried." She let her head sag further and briefly massaged her temple with two fingers, then looked up and waved her hand in a helpless gesture.

"I mean, the Maquis are all facing trials and possibly imprisonment and all I can do is sit here and watch... I don't even know much about it." Some part of her was aware she was rambling on, but she ignored it and continued anyway. It felt so good to at last get it all out of her system.

"I'm not allowed to help them in any way -- Admiral Paris won't explain it -- and I'm starting to really get worried... I mean, if they don't want me helping them by saying how exemplary their service was on Voyager, then I can't help thinking that they don't want me involved because they want to convict all of them without influence. There are some ways I can push buttons in the brass, but I don't think it'll get me very far..." She sighed again. "I guess ultimately, no matter what I try and do, they're on their own. And having them on their own is exactly what's bothering me."

Kathryn finished her speech, glanced at the monitor and abruptly realized her mother had been patiently listening while she had babbled away. She immediately felt sheepish for subjecting her to her own personal problems.

"Sorry, Mom," she said with a wry smile. "I got so caught up in talking about this..."

"You need to talk about it, Kathryn," Gretchen replied. "I'm glad you did, but I really don't know what to say..."

"Don't worry, Mom... I'll deal with it, somehow -- but thanks anyway." She paused a second and changed the topic. "How are you and Phoebe doing?"

"We're fine," Gretchen said. "Phoebe's busy with her work as usual, but she stops by occasionally to say hello when she's not gallivanting around the quadrant on one of her business trips."

Kathryn smiled. "That sounds like Phoebe, all right -- always off on some crazy excursion."

"It certainly does. Sometimes I wonder how she manages to find the time to do anything at home, let alone pop over here for a visit."

"Good question." She paused again. "And how about you, Mom -- how are you?"

Gretchen gave her one of those 'oh, come on' smiles. "You know me, Kathryn -- hanging out at home, cooking, gardening, reading. It's quite relaxing, actually. You should try it sometime. It's much less stressful than running around commanding a starship."

That got a sad grin out of Kathryn. "I may be a captain, Mom, but I don't have a starship to command anymore, and sometimes this desk job of mine can be worse. Although I did take up gardening, believe it or not."

"Really?" Gretchen was actually surprised. "You, gardening?"

"Yeah Mom, me gardening. I guess those 'basic gardening skills' you and Dad taught us actually came in handy. Though there's not much for me to garden over here."

"That's true. We'll have to do something about that." Gretchen took a deep breath. "Actually, Kathryn, the reason I called was to give you some slightly sad news."

"What?" Kathryn was instantly alert. "What happened?"

"Don't worry, Kathryn, it's nothing earth-shattering," her mom reassured, then backtracked. "Well, it may be very upsetting to you..."

Great, Kathryn thought. Now she's having second thoughts about telling me.

"Okay Mom, you've gotten me worried now," she said. "What happened?"

"Remember Molly?" Gretchen asked. She could see by the look on Kathryn's face that her daughter did. "Of course you do. Well... as you know she was getting very old... I think finally her body started to quit on her... we had to put her down yesterday. I tried to call you but you weren't home, and the Doctor thought it was best if we just proceeded as fast as we could to save her pain."

"Oh..." Kathryn's hand covered her mouth in sorrow. Molly had been her best friend for years, since the moment she had 'rescued' her from a litter of puppies. Even upon Voyager's belated return, Molly had jumped on her the moment she saw her, so happy was she to see her old owner again. Kathryn hadn't been able to keep the dog with her in her new apartment, so she had left her with her mother, where Molly had been living for the past seven years after Mark had had to give up the dog, in the hopes of seeing her whenever she visited her mother's house.

And now Molly was dead... gone forever.

With a jump she became aware that she had gotten lost in thought and that her mother was still sitting there watching and waiting.

"Sorry, Mom," she said for the second time. "Just... thinking about Molly. She was such a good friend to all of us. I guess I didn't imagine this happening so soon. I'm a little shocked."

"I know. We all are. But it always happens eventually, and we have to deal with it. And who knows, maybe you'll get another dog sometime."

"Maybe," Kathryn said absently. "I hope so."

They were both silent for several seconds, then Kathryn broke the silence slowly.

"Mom, I really hate to run on you like this, but I have to get going... I have piles of work to do and a bunch of reports to write up..." Inwardly she wished she didn't have to cut the connection, but she knew she couldn't delay her work any longer.

"Mom, I'll call you soon, promise, okay? And I'll come and see you ASAP, as soon as I've got this job a little more in order. I really want to sit down and have a nice long visit with you and Phoebe."

"Okay, hon." Gretchen gave her a warm maternal smile. "I love you, dear."

"Love you too, Mom."

Kathryn cut the connection and leaned back in her chair with a sigh, allowing herself the luxury of reminiscing about Molly for a few moments, and a particular instance popped into mind.

She and Phoebe had been washing the dog, intent on giving her a bath and getting her cleaned up. It had been a nice, sunny, warm day in Indiana, and they had been scrubbing a struggling Molly outside, using a large tub, a bucket and sponge. It had taken them a while to get Molly into the tub in the first place, and they had finally started to make some progress in cleaning her. Kathryn had been in the process of washing the soapy water from her fur as Phoebe held her down, and she had been almost done when Molly suddenly bucked.

She had never understood what had prompted Molly to jump like that. But the dog had, and had proceeded to leap out of the tub, knocking Kathryn and Phoebe over, and had galloped away at full speed before they could catch her. It eventually turned out that she hadn't gone far -- just around to the back of the house -- but by the time she and Phoebe had recovered and managed to find Molly, she had succeeded in getting herself all muddy with dirt again, and was standing there wagging her tail at the two of them and panting as if she was giggling.

Phoebe had thrown up her hands and gone inside, laughing, and Kathryn had soon followed her, but she couldn't help looking upon that day with a fond sentiment inside her. And to the present day, the memory had remained that way.

With an effort, she pushed herself out of her thoughts. There would be time to muse later. At the moment, she had work to do.

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"Are you ready?" B'Elanna queried, glancing over to the Doctor at his workstation.

"Almost done," he confirmed as he picked up a tray of instruments and placed them by the biobed. "I'm ready when you are."

"Okay," B'Elanna said, picking up one of the circular devices. "I'm administering the surge." She looked at the Doctor. "Just a small charge at first... that might be enough."

"Understood," the Doctor said. He punched the command into the computer, then looked at B'Elanna. "Charging to -- twenty?" He glanced at B'Elanna for confirmation.

"That should be about right for the first charge," B'Elanna said. Carefully, she picked up a cylinder from the tray, and raised it to just above Seven's Borg implant. Positioning it accurately, she pressed the button that would release the charge. A small, blue current flowed freely from the bottom of the instrument to Seven's implant. The limp form of the woman jerked upwards slightly, but there was no other sign of change.

"No response," the Doctor reported as he monitored her brain waves. "Should we try a larger charge?"

"Yes," B'Elanna said, then added as an afterthought, "You do realize that the higher the charge, the higher the risk?"

The Doctor nodded in confirmation. "Charging to thirty," he said as he carefully put in the commands.

"Okay," B'Elanna said. She placed the instrument back over her temple, then released the charge. This time the blue current was brighter, and the reaction from Seven was more noticeable. Her almost-lifeless body arched upwards as the current made contact with the implant.

"Almost," the Doctor said optimistically, looking from the fluctuating brain wave patterns to B'Elanna. "The brain waves were decidedly weaker... one more should do it."

"All right," B'Elanna said, carefully adjusting the dial on the instrument in her hands.

"Charging to forty," the Doctor informed her.

B'Elanna placed the instrument near Seven's temple once more, then administered the charge. The reaction was instantaneous: Seven's body arched from the biobed, seemingly in pain, as the charge flowed into her implant.

"Yes!" the Doctor declared exuberantly. He turned to B'Elanna. "The second set of brain waves disappeared completely. It worked."

"Great," B'Elanna said, throwing the instrument into the tray. "Now we just have to save the patient." Quickly, she picked up an engineering tool and began repairs to Seven's implant, while the Doctor hurriedly ran the tricorder up and down over her limp body.

"I think she's all right," the Doctor said, a note of relief creeping into his voice.

"That's more than I can say for her implant," B'Elanna said, standing back as she looked at the Doctor, having finished her evaluation of Seven. "Well, she'll be okay. This will take a lot of repairs, but she'll be as good as new by the time I'm finished."

The Doctor smiled once more, relief evident in his features. For a hologram, he could be surprisingly human at times. "I'm sure she will."

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"Let me get this straight," Hayes said calmly, leaning forwards. "Mister Tuvok created a holodeck scenario of the Maquis mutinying and taking control of the ship?"

"Yes," Chakotay replied, his tone monotonous. The debriefing was getting beyond a joke, the questions becoming rapidly more pointless and more personal. Chakotay was almost certain that



this wasn't the correct way in which to handle a debriefing, although he had to admit it had been a long time since his last one.

"And he believed that this was a real possibility -- the Maquis taking control of the ship?"

"At the time, yes," Chakotay sighed.

"And did you?"

"What does that have to do with it?" Chakotay asked, slightly irritable. "It didn't happen; what do you want to know?"

"Did you think the Maquis might take over the ship?"

"I don't see--" Chakotay began, only to be cut off by Hayes' harsh voice repeating the question.

"Did you think--"

"This has nothing to do with--" Chakotay snapped, only to be cut off again.

"Mister Chakotay, you're out of line," Hayes informed him, raising his voice. Various admirals who had been sitting idly staring into space out of sheer boredom now sat up straight, paying attention to the discussion. "Now answer the question. Did you think the Maquis might take over the ship at the time?"

"It was possible," Chakotay grudgingly allowed. "But it never did happen. I don't understand why this is important."

"It's not for you to question me," Hayes said, bristling, as his authority was challenged once more. "Do I make myself clear? This is the last warning I will give you, Mister Chakotay. Any further insolence on your part, and you'll be dealt with most severely, I can promise you that."

"Insolence?" Chakotay shook his head in disbelief.

"Mister Chakotay." There was a definite threat embedded in his voice through the harsh tone of voice, and Chakotay took heed. "Now, why did you think the Maquis might have taken over the ship, or at least attempted to do so?"

"A lot of them were unhappy with the circumstances that had caused us to end up in the Delta Quadrant, and were immensely dissatisfied with the fact that they had been forced into Starfleet. For the first few weeks, I heard rumors that some were considering it, but they were just talking big. No one ever attempted anything, and I never heard any rumors after the first few weeks."

"Very interesting," Hayes said, scrolling further down the PADD, then looking back up at Chakotay. "Now tell me, did you ever consider taking over Voyager?"

"What?" Chakotay exclaimed. "No! This is ridiculous."

"Well, it makes perfect sense," Hayes pushed. "You were their leader... if anyone could have organized this, you could have. And you knew that."

"Yes, I knew that," Chakotay said. "But I didn't want to take over Voyager, and I never would have. And quite frankly, I'm insulted that you would even ask me such a question."

"Why are you so insulted?"

"Why do you keep asking me about why I feel a certain way?" Chakotay asked. His tone was pleasant enough, but he had obviously hit on a sensitive spot, as Hayes immediately reacted.

"Mr Chakotay, this debriefing is over."

The other admirals assembled all turned to look at Hayes in slight shock.

Chakotay was unsure of what to say. Pushing back his chair, he rose, walking towards the guards who stood by the door.

Hayes turned to him as he did so. "Your hearing will be sometime during next week. We'll contact you with a date as soon as we have confirmation."

"Hearing?" Chakotay looked horrified at the prospect.

"Yes," Hayes said, with a smug look of contempt on his face. "Since you seem so uncooperative right now, we're moving this to a hearing."

"Sir, with all due respect," Chakotay began. "Why do you want me to be given a hearing?"

"War crimes," Hayes said shortly, looking at Chakotay. "I'll see you in front of a panel of judges next week. You're dismissed."

"But sir--"

"Dismissed," Hayes said, his voice raising dramatically in volume, echoing through the briefing room, and leaving Chakotay in no doubt as to whether this was open for discussion.

Silently, he followed the guards out of the door, in single file.

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"Good as new," B'Elanna said, snapping her tricorder shut with a snap and placing it back in the instrument tray. "If there are any further problems, or side effects that I haven't compensated for, you know where I am."

"Thank you for your help," the Doctor said genuinely.

"My pleasure," B'Elanna said as she left, giving Seven one final glance.

Picking up a hypospray, the Doctor filled it, then moved to the biobed, gently pressing it against Seven's neck. It emitted a hiss, and in just moments, Seven began to come around.

"Do... Doctor?" she asked, propping herself up slightly on the biobed and taking in her surroundings, regarding the sickbay with slight confusion.

"How do you feel?" the Doctor asked, immediately going to her side, helping her to sit upright.

"I feel fine," Seven said, looking slightly confused. "Has there been an accident? Why am I in Sickbay?"

"You don't remember?" It was the Doctor's turn to look confused. Quickly, he asked, "What's the last thing you remember?"

"I remember you giving me a hypospray to rest... you were concerned as to my excessive fatigue," Seven recalled. "And then... I remember nothing further."

"I don't remember..." the Doctor began, then trailed off. "Are you talking about when we were at threat from the Sernaix?"

"Were?" Seven raised an eyebrow.

"Yes, we left the Sernaix behind... we're back home, on Earth," the Doctor stated, breaking the news as gently as he could.

There was silence for a moment. "I do not recall this," Seven stated, her tone unusually shaky. "You... you say we have returned to the Alpha Quadrant?"

"Yes," the Doctor confirmed. "We made it back to Earth... the debriefings have been going on for a while now. You were taken... ill... in the middle of yours."

"I was ill?"

The Doctor debated inwardly how much to tell her, but quickly made up his mind. Seven was naturally inquisitive and would not stop digging for the truth until she had gotten to the bottom of it. "There was a second presence in your mind... a second set of brain waves."

"I do not remember," Seven said quietly.

The Doctor was silent for a moment. Picking up an instrument, he carefully began to run it over the side of her face. Seven could feel the slight pain lessening under the attention.

"I have a theory," he told her gently. "I believe that the presence in your mind was Ozymandias." He watched Seven's face for a reaction.

"I see," she said slowly. "I believe that would be a logical assumption, Doctor."

There was silence for a moment, as the Doctor continued his work quietly.

"There we go," the Doctor cheerfully intoned as he drew the instrument away from her face and turning it off, causing the blue beam of light it was emitting to abruptly vanish. "As good as new, if I do say so myself."

"Thank you for your efforts, Doctor," Seven said. "I... appreciate your attention."

"My pleasure," the Doctor smiled as he set about tidying the sick bay. Hours of research and the complicated procedure and repairs had left the room cluttered, data PADDs scattered about, and medical instruments stacked high in the tray where they had been abandoned after usage.

After a few seconds, he paused. "Seven, is everything all right?"

She raised an eyebrow. "I believe you are the physician, Doctor. You are more capable of answering that question than I."

He let out a holographic sigh, and rested on the biobed, looking at her. "Physically, Seven, you're fine. However... otherwise, you appear..." he paused as he searched for a word. "Distracted."

Seven was silent for a moment as she admired, not for the first time, the Doctor's surprisingly accurate intuition. Her naturally logical mind immediately hypothesized that it was merely his putting into words the behavioral changes his subroutines had noticed. However, it was still surprisingly reminiscent of human behavior.

"I am... unsettled," Seven admitted, slightly surprising the Doctor. He had gotten to know Seven well during their time in the Delta Quadrant, and he knew from first hand experience that she was usually reluctant to admit any kind of weakness, and sometimes even failed to identify it as such.

"How so?" the Doctor queried, prompting her to elaborate.

"I have no recollection of three months of my life," Seven said, her tone slightly confused. "Much has occurred in these three months, and I am finding it challenging to adapt."

"It's a lot to deal with," the Doctor agreed.

"Indeed," Seven said. She paused for a moment, before continuing. "I find it disconcerting... I can still sense the presence in my mind."

"You can?" the Doctor looked suddenly worried. "Maybe I should run some te-"

"That isn't necessary," Seven informed him coolly. "I know it may be difficult for you to understand... but I'm in control."

"If you're sure," the Doctor said. "Seven, you've been through a lot. Make sure you are in control... and please take it easy for a few days. Get your strength back up."

Seven looked as if she were about to protest for a moment, but then thought better of it. "I will comply," she agreed, lying back down on the biobed, as the Doctor returned to the task of returning the Sickbay to its former state.

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"...and now we turn to our latest item: an update on the fates of those who served on board the starship Voyager during its seven-year journey through the Delta Quadrant."

The reporter paused, taking a large breath and briefly glancing at the PADD in his hand.

"First, we have been informed by the admiralty that the former members of the Maquis who were integrated into Voyager's crew will each have an individual hearing sometime in the near future to determine, based on the details of their service on Voyager, what their future will be. At the moment, we have no indication whatsoever of any possible decisions." He paused again.

"Secondly, those few personnel who were members of the crew of the USS Equinox and served under Captain Ransom before being forced to transfer to Voyager have all been convicted of conduct unbecoming officers and are currently serving time in the Federation penal colony located in New Zealand. We have no idea what the duration of their sentences will be; however, it is speculated that they will not be leaving anytime soon."

The announcer gave a small smile.

"And last but not least, Voyager's captain, Kathryn Janeway, who was also being detained with other members of her crew pending debriefing, was released some several days ago and is currently holding a desk job at Starfleet Headquarters. No word on whether this is permanent or simply a temporary solution."

One more pause, and then he smiled again.

"This concludes our broadcast. Thank you for listening and watching, and have a good evening."

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