

*Summary: Janeway's reaction to a mishap in engineering reveals the captain's hidden desires.
Content disclaimers: Takes place sometime in fifth season.*

MISUNDERSTANDINGS

by Lara Zielinsky

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Mess Hall...

"I have never been so embarrassed."

Tom Paris observed with some amusement the flush on the swarthy skin of his lunch companion, *Voyager's* chief engineer, B'Elanna Torres.

"I still can't believe it happened," she continued, muttering into her palms as she covered her face with her hands and rubbed to erase the renewed embarrassment clearly giving her skin, even over the prominent forehead ridges, a dusky rose pallor. "I could have killed myself."

"Or Seven," Tom noted unhelpfully, scooping another spoonful of Neelix's Leola root casserole.

The half-Klingon gave him a skunk-eye glare.

But he persisted. "Well, you could have. You did land on her after a fall over twelve meters!"

"Sh!" B'Elanna shushed him abruptly. "Yeah, but why did the captain have to walk in while I was still trying to get up off the floor? I promised her I was reining in my temper around Seven."

Tom shook his head. "If she thought you were attacking Seven, why didn't she just have Tuvok haul you both off to the brig?"

From what it looked like to her, she was probably thinking about it. But what she actually did was worse." B'Elanna shivered even now remembering the blue eyes going gunmetal gray and the small shoulders suddenly looking shot through with duranium. "She looked at both of us. And before I could say anything, she simply said, 'Lieutenant. Seven' in that shatterproof voice -- you know the one."

Tom nodded emphatically. He was familiar with the famed Janeway cuts-through-ensigns-at-warp-speed voice.

B'Elanna finished in a rush. "Then it was the damndest thing. She just spun on her heel and left engineering."

The doors to the Mess Hall opened and both Tom and B'Elanna looked over, spotting Lieutenant Commander Tuvok, *Voyager's* Tactical and Security chief, enter and collect a tray from Neelix with an economy of words.

The tray was not for him, they realized, watching him pause and scan the room. His dark eyes landed on Torres and she flinched.

Out of the side of her mouth, to Tom, she said, "Here it comes. I am positively done for."

Cmdr. Tuvok did not move. One eyebrow however angled far up his forehead then he turned and left.

Tom watched B'Elanna sink to the tabletop and soothingly patted her shoulder as she covered her head with her arms and groaned. *Man, would I like to be a fly in the Ready Room right now*, he thought.

Captain's Ready Room...

Sagging in her Ready Room chair, Captain Kathryn Janeway covered her eyes, groaned and rubbed her temples unsuccessful in her bid to clear her mind of the images it insisted on replaying.

She had gone to Engineering to discuss Lt. Torres's proposal for conduit refits throughout the engineering decks. While it was obvious the refits had to be done, the ship would have to drop to impulse for each period of the refit and remain out of warp as long as it took to install and align the new junction.

She forgot all about her purpose when she identified two bodies scrambling on the decking. Mustard shoulders to one jumpsuit uniform, a short bob of thick dark hair identified Lt. Torres. She was rearing back, gleaming white canines bared against her darker skin. Janeway's eyes slid to the other.

Where the engineer was stocky, this one was lean and long-bodied. A blue suit with gray shoulder bands down to both wrists hugged the curves like a second skin. It was Seven of Nine, a former Borg drone and now *Voyager's* Astrometrics officer. Janeway couldn't breathe as she noted the white-blond coiffure was askew, tumbled about pale features as she struggled with the half-Klingon officer. Borg versus Klingon was an evenly matched struggle, Janeway thought, in the next instant.

B'Elanna bucked forward, grabbing Seven's wrists and though no words reached Janeway's position, the deep growl was unmistakable. As if everything suddenly began to freeze in time, Janeway witnessed the next several seconds in slow motion. Seven's eyes went wide, and she grappled for Torres's wrists. The Klingon woman bared her teeth again, forced her arms up and out exploding Seven's hold on her, and landed with her palms outside Seven's shoulders and dropped her head. Janeway didn't see teeth connect with Seven's cheek, but suddenly both of the other women were icy still. Their eyes suddenly landed on her, one pair half-wild and dark and the other wide-eyed and crystalline blue.

Seven looked at her in confusion, then at Torres in concern. Then Janeway noticed the vague streak of blood on Seven's uniform as Torres pushed away from the blonde, and felt icy fingers grasp her heart in her chest. *The overtures of a Klingon mating ritual*, she thought.

Seven had not fought it. In fact she seemed a bit astonished that B'Elanna had stopped.

Janeway knew she spoke. It was her voice when the sounds came out, stilted and measured to impact like exploding warp cores. "Lieutenant. Seven." And then she could not stay a moment more, willing herself to turn around, and despite an almost desperate desire to run, only to walk firmly away.

Now, alone in her Ready Room, she relived it again, growing more mortified by the moment. Apparently Torres's on-again off-again relationship with Tom Paris was in one of its off periods. From the glint she remembered in B'Elanna's eyes as she looked up from that deck, sprawled all over Seven, perhaps the Torres-Paris affair had seen its last gasps.

She felt bad for Paris, whom she imagined even now, tipping back a draft with Harry Kim commiserating beside him.

Come on, Katie, be honest, a voice inside of her prompted in the silence. *You're not feeling sorry for Tom Paris.*

Janeway shook her head emphatically. But the voice persisted. *You're upset because B'Elanna got her. Yes, the One. The Seventh of Nine who stands alone.*

B'Elanna Torres is going to caress the body you've dreamed about for almost two years. You were a fool to wait.

"I wasn't," she murmured. "She needed time."

Her or you? You took too long.

"I didn't," she protested again, resting her head on her fisted hands. "She wasn't ready."

Sure as hell looked like she is now, the voice countered wryly.

"Oh God!" Kathryn Janeway hated it immensely when she had arguments with herself, particularly her baser self, which had been screaming for about two years now about its needs.

She wrapped her arms around her head and sank against the desk surface forlornly studying her own face's reflection in the polished obsidian surface.

Chime.

She looked up to see Tuvok stepping quickly into the Ready Room. "So, you've stopped knocking first, Tuvok?" she asked dryly, using the acerbic tone to cover the emotions still running rampant inside her that she didn't trust to *not* enter her voice.

Unperturbed, as she expected he would be, Tuvok responded, "That was my third chime."

Third? Her eyes widened briefly in surprise. "My apologies." She stood quickly, coming around the desk to meet him. "What can I do for you?"

He lifted the tray in his hands so that she could note it. "I persuaded Mr. Neelix to let me bring you dinner. We can discuss the matter while you eat."

"What matter?"

"I am aware of an altercation in Engineering between Lt. Torres and Seven of Nine."

"How?" She shook her head. "Never mind."

"Do you wish for me to take either one into custody? You have warned them both, particularly Lt. Torres, about making their conflicts physical."

Janeway closed her eyes folding her right palm across them briefly. She looked up once again. "You should do nothing," she said.

"Several crewmembers witnessed Lt. Torres's assault."

"I was there. It was not assault. It was... an accident. Seven won't want to pursue charges."

"Are you certain?"

Exasperation prompted her, though she had tried to simply order him. "They were *not* fighting, Tuvok. It was a *personal* matter." She opted for delicacy.

The Vulcan's brow shot up impressively and he said nothing more.

Janeway took her tray from his hands and stood in silence as he walked out.

* * *

Seven of Nine looked at the Doctor, *Voyager's* Emergency Medical Hologram, who served in the extended role of Chief Medical Officer. He was coming around the corner from his office when she stopped just inside the medical bay's doors. When his head swiveled toward her, he immediately smiled. "Seven. I'm surprised to see you. Your check up isn't until next week."

"I require your assistance," she stated, her voice slightly unsteady.

"What can I do for you?"

She moved her left hand, with the Borg enhancement, away from her left side presenting a tear in the fabric of her biosuit that in turn opened over a gash in the skin, torn between two of the bands of her abdominal implant.

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"Seven! For heaven's sake, lie down." Seven winced as the Doctor grabbed her and helped her lay on her back on one of the exam beds. "How did this happen?"

She looked toward the ceiling unable to look at the injury without feeling queasy. "I neglected to maintain my balance while working in Engineering."

"You fell into something?" He scanned the broken flesh and frowned at the readings. "The panel that lacerated you had half-Klingon DNA." He offered a disapproving look.

"I was trying to stop Lt. Torres from injuring herself."

"Injuring herself or injuring you?"

"She fell from a catwalk 12.4 meters above the deck. I thought I would be capable of halting the lieutenant's descent." Dismayed, she paused. "I was incorrect."

"Lt. Torres's physiology is considerably denser than average," he remarked, running the tissue probe into the wound and knitting her stomach wall back together.

"I have... considerably better than average reflexes and strength, Doctor."

He examined her face and clucked. "When was the last time you had a full regeneration?"

"Three days." He arched a thin eyebrow at her. "My regeneration periods are frequently interrupted since the Borg children arrived," she admitted. "They have needs at unusual hours."

He ran the medical tricorder over her midsection and clucked again. Showing the readings to her, he said, "Well that explains it. You have depressed nanoprobe activity." Helping her off the bed, he diagnosed, "Get some sleep." She cocked her head at him. "Regenerate... uninterrupted for 12 hours and then call me again. I'm going to put a recommendation in your file that you be scheduled to off shifts for the next several days."

"But, Doctor--"

"You'll rest. Get someone else to play babysitter and regenerate. That's an order."

Seven nodded and left. The Doctor went into his office to log the incident, and his diagnosis into the computer.

* * *

Mezoti and Icheb protested their deposit, along with the twins, Azan and Rebi, into Neelix's care. The Talaxian was pleased to stand in for Seven though she did not explain why she made the request.

He arranged an overnight camping trip for the Borg children and Naomi Wildman on the holodeck, and told them ghost stories until they fell asleep.

Then he went to see the captain.

* * *

"She seemed really distracted, Captain." Neelix's fingers fidgeted while he stood in the captain's quarters, looking at Janeway, seated on her couch, her fingers tightly wrapped in a robe as she listened to his concerns. "She asked if I would watch the children for a few nights then left." He shook his head. "Don't get me wrong. I'm happy to do it. It just... struck an odd note coming from Seven."

Probably wants a night alone with her new lover, Janeway thought sourly, but did not let the words come anywhere near her lips. She patted Neelix's shoulder with her free hand. "I'm sure she's just giving the children new experiences. Someone must have suggested it to her."

She immediately thought of B'Elanna, who would know the inconvenience children would have to any romantic night plans. She brought herself back to Neelix but her smile was strained. "She knew you could do that best," she said with praise.

He smiled and primped a bit, just as she had known he would, and it diverted him completely. "Well, yes, I do have lots of ideas for the children's activities."

"You'd probably better get back to it then," Janeway put a firm hand between his shoulder blades and nudged him toward the doors.

"Good night, Captain."

"Good night, Neelix."

Janeway leaned against the door, then reluctantly pulled back inside.

She's neglecting her duties, Katie. The voice was back.

She's not. She's just in the throes of first love. It can be excused.

"I'll have to tell Chakotay to ease up on Seven's schedule, to give her any free time she requests," Kathryn realized aloud. "Computer, locate Commander Chakotay."

"Commander Chakotay is in his quarters."

Good. I can take care of this right now. Resolutely she exited her quarters, moving around the corridor to the quarters assigned to *Voyager's* first officer. Depressing the chime, she called, "Commander, it's Janeway."

"Come in." The doors parted, revealing the interior. Scanning the low-light main room, Janeway finally spotted Chakotay rising from the floor near his windows. "Captain. Good evening."

"Good evening. I hope I wasn't disturbing you."

"No, not at all. Just unwinding." He gestured her to the couch.

"Thank you."

"So what brings you by?"

"Ship's business. I hate to mention it but better we address it now before the schedules go into effect in the morning."

"You want to change your shift choice? You don't usually go on Gamma shift for another couple of weeks."

"No. Not for me. For Seven of Nine. And B'Elanna Torres."

"Seven and B'Elanna?"

Kathryn bit her lip, thinking hard about what she was about to do. *What had she wanted, as a young woman, when she first fell in love with Cheb Packer?*

To spend all her free time with him. All right. "Make Seven's schedule match B'Elanna's."

"B'Elanna hasn't mentioned any projects she's planning with Seven."

"It's... only in the initial stages," Janeway added.

"Do I get to find out what the project is?" He smiled. "With those two it might mean an extra security detail in Engineering."

She waved it off. "That won't be necessary." Tucking her hand back under her chin and resting her elbow on the back of the couch she turned toward him.

He frowned but then shrugged. "Captain knows best."

She started to her feet, paused, then to Chakotay's surprise, sat back down again.

"Something else?"

"Has B'Elanna ever... talked to you about her..." Janeway flushed, unable to continue. "Never mind. The crew's personal life is not my business."

"The crew's well being is always your business, Kathryn." Chakotay countered, bringing her

back to the couch with a quick hand. "Now, talk to me. What is it about Torres?"

"Have she and Tom parted ways?" she answered his question with a question.

"They've hit a rough patch I have heard," he acknowledged.

She nodded. *So there was truth to the rumor.* "She has found someone else I think."

"Really?" So it was news to him.

"Yes. Only, I don't think... this person has any idea was being involved with a Klingon is all about."

"B'Elanna's in a relationship with someone who doesn't know? I find that hard to believe.

C'mon, Kathryn, that's absurd. Nobody's that blind."

"Seven is not blind! She's just... inexperienced."

"Seven?" Chakotay spluttered. "And B'Elanna? That's ridiculous."

Janeway shook her head. "I wish I hadn't but... I saw them... in Engineering. I'd forgotten all the stories about the violence in Klingon mating... but it was all there."

"B'Elanna... and Seven?" He shook his head again. "Seven's only dated that once --"

"When?"

"Do you remember the Kadi mission?" Janeway nodded. "She took it into her head, with the Doctor's help, to try dating. She went to Sandrine's with Lt. Chapman. It wasn't very successful, though the Doctor was sparse on the details."

Janeway's look of consternation gave him pause.

"It's all in the Doctor's report for those stardates if you want to read up on it." He shrugged.

"I... think I had better have a talk with Seven," she said slowly. "You say she hasn't tried dating since?"

"The Doctor reported that she told him she had found no suitable mates aboard *Voyager* and would 'no longer pursue the experiment'," Chakotay answered, offering Seven's own phrasing. "And it's a small enough ship, that I'm certain I'd be aware of any new relationship very quickly."

She nodded in agreement but said nothing, already distracted as she rose and exited the commander's quarters. She needed to figure out what to say and how to say it, for her coming conversation with Seven.

* * *

Janeway stood for several minutes just outside the doors of Cargo bay 2, slender hand poised over her comm badge, debating with herself.

What if Seven and Torres are here? She did not want to walk in on them as she had in Engineering.

She thought further about that. Perhaps Seven couldn't control where she acted on her feelings, but damn it, *B'Elanna* should.

A full head of ire propelled Janeway inside.

Pushing her hands through her hair, the captain walked slowly through the empty space. Immediately the vacant alcoves drew her attention.

All five of the units were active, their greenish readouts casting a strange rippling firelight over the area. She wondered which alcove served which of her young charges. The feeder plates were adjusted to different heights and she began a guessing game with herself. At the first, she crouched, feeling the edges of the equipment. Mezoti, she guessed, recalling the girl from a few encounters.

The next two were identical in height and must belong to the twin boys Azan and Rebi. She studied the last two more thoughtfully. The young male, Icheb, was of similar height to Seven. With a sense of need, she stepped into the fourth alcove, running her palm over the activation panel, stepping backward into the slender space. She knew it belonged to Seven, instantly flashing on a memory of standing here doing this exact same thing when the young woman had fled the ship in response to a homing beacon aboard her parents' derelict ship, the *USS Raven*.

Slowly Kathryn sank to the decking, pulled a knee against her chest and wrapped her arms around the black fabric. Forlornly she rested her chin on the top.

I've lost her again, Janeway thought with pain as she closed her eyes.

Long beats of silence passed.

I can't just sit here and wait for her. She could be gone... all night. Painful as it was, Janeway faced the possibility, and started to her feet.

The cargo bay doors slid open, freezing her in place.

"Captain Janeway?" Seven of Nine entered as Janeway looked up.

"Hello, Seven." Kathryn looked past the tall young woman. "Everything all right?"

"Yes."

"Do you have plans for tonight?"

"Yes."

"Oh. Well then, I won't, um, keep you." Thinking that Seven needed space to prepare for her date with B'Elanna, Janeway slowly headed for the door.

"Captain?"

Reluctantly she stopped and looked back with a vague longing in her eyes that she hoped Seven couldn't interpret. "Yes?"

"You may stay if you wish."

"No. That's. All right. Seven." Janeway started again for the door having clipped her words to maintain her calm. She paused at the threshold. "I just wanted to be sure you were okay. After your... encounter with... B'Elanna in Engineering... I thought... Perhaps? You might want to... talk?"

"I have already been to the Doctor regarding the incident, Captain." Seven indicated the tear in her biosuit through which now only healthy pink skin was visible. "She did not compromise my implants."

Janeway saw red, and clearly in her mind's eye she envisioned B'Elanna's face as her squeezing fists, which now flexed at her sides, wrapped around the dark woman's throat. Seven was marked. Possessed. *Dear God*. "Will you... be seeing... B'Elanna again?"

"Yes."

Closing her eyes against the pain, Janeway nodded. "Of course." She looked up at Seven's curious expression.

She realized she would miss seeing that expression. No doubt B'Elanna would be the one to whom Seven posed her myriad questions about humanity.

Oh God, I have to get out of here. She tore her eyes from Seven's face. "Well, it... sounds like you have everything under control. I... Good luck, Seven."

"Captain?"

But Janeway did not turn back again. She was struggling too hard with her composure as she strode quickly from the cargo bay.

Seven remained utterly still, busy trying to absorb her conversation with Captain Janeway. She realized that a lot of the conversation had gone unspoken, though she was at a loss to discover

this undercurrent text's purpose or meaning. It was a clamoring instinct when the Borg realized that Janeway had not said what she had *intended* to say when she first sought Seven out.

Perhaps she had heard of my injury. The Doctor would have informed her.

Seeing that I was all right was...

Not what she had hoped to see, Seven concluded the thought with much surprise. She had no idea how but she now knew that Janeway had not expected her to say she was all right. Or that she intended to see Lt. Torres again.

The captain's fading blue eyes had gone gray at that response as a matter of fact, Seven realized. Perhaps she thought that Seven was upset with Torres for falling on her. The captain was always looking out for Seven's well-being. Perhaps she felt that Seven might have been angry with Torres and refused for a period of time to work with the engineer.

It hit her stomach, the same feeling she had viewing Omega as it chain-reacted. An epiphany of sorts, and a sense that something impendently wonderful waited to be discovered.

If only she spoke to the captain again.

* * *

Janeway moved aimlessly through the corridors and found herself walking Deck 9, the first crew deck above Engineering.

"Captain?"

Her rank address made her turn.

B'Elanna Torres looked fresh from a workout, in a gray tanktop liberally spotted with perspiration. The compact Klingon woman walked up to the captain with a surprised smile. Janeway visually traced the muscles flexing in the dark skinned woman's bare arms as she casually gripped the ends of a towel draped around her neck.

"B'Elanna."

Torres fidgeted. "Captain, if this is about... earlier in Engineering... I swear it won't happen again," she offered earnestly. "I've never been so clumsy. Seven just --"

Janeway cut her off. "I hope you know what you're doing, Lieutenant. I trust it won't happen again in a public place?"

B'Elanna frowned. "Um. Yes. No. I mean of course not." She gestured toward her cabin. "Can I offer you something?"

"There isn't anything to explain, B'Elanna. Your personal life is yours. I'm just concerned about Seven. She's on public display enough as it is."

"Seven? She's... all right isn't she?"

"She says she's fine."

Janeway strode into the lieutenant's quarters behind B'Elanna, who had brow furrows deeper than several canyons back on Earth. The engineer was puzzled. She gestured to the couch, but to her consternation the older woman did not take the offered seat. Out of deference that meant she had to stand too, when she would rather sit after the 40 km run she had just completed in the holodeck.

Janeway started pacing and talking. "B'Elanna, I know you usually have more restraint than you showed in Engineering today, so I'm going to chalk it up to hormones--"

"What?!" B'Elanna tossed off her towel. "I fell... Granted it was stupid but..."

Janeway looked stricken. "Seven didn't mean to provoke... Sometimes she has no idea how she comes across."

"Seven made a choice too, Captain."

"But I'm certain she didn't have any idea of the implications of her choice, B'Elanna. You have to be the careful one."

"I swear I wasn't fighting." Torres distinctly felt insulted and barely restrained her urge to tell the captain that. "I did *not* tell Seven to get under me, Captain."

"You can't take advantage like that, B'Elanna!"

"Take advantage? What exactly do you think happened in Engineering?" Completely confused, Torres sought clarification the only way she could; she went directly after it.

The captain's expression spoke volumes. Slowly her cheeks went pink before she spoke. B'Elanna had almost never -- make that definitely never -- seen the captain embarrassed.

"It's not my business," the captain said. B'Elanna felt the brittleness as each word fell from the captain's wine-shaded lips.

Torres, who accounted herself a fair judge of human nature -- she had certainly been around enough to know a few -- guessed Janeway was as embarrassed as B'Elanna. *But what did the captain have to be embarrassed about?* "Captain, this is going to sound like a stupid question, but why are you blushing? I'm the one who fell the distance of three decks."

"Fell?"

"Yes. I fell three decks. But I'm all right. Seven caught me."

Almost immediately on the heels of relief passing over the captain's face, B'Elanna saw unease follow. "Captain?"

"B'Elanna, I don't think Seven knows you weren't..."

"What? If she hadn't tried to stop my fall, she wouldn't have found herself flat on her back."

"I think she thinks that something else was going to happen," Janeway explained. "You scratched her."

B'Elanna nodded. "Of course I scratched her. We kept falling all over one another trying to get up."

"I think she thinks you were initiating... mating."

B'Elanna was taken aback. "Mating? With the Ice Queen? Not a chance."

"Seven is not an Ice Queen, B'Elanna. She has feelings and... she's planning to see you again."

"You think Seven is attracted to me?" B'Elanna knew enough from all the times watching Seven around Janeway that that was as blind a statement as the captain had ever made. Which could only mean one thing: "Captain, are you in love with Seven?"

The direct question had the equivalent effect of a level four stun-blast on the usually stolid captain. She sank to the cushion of B'Elanna's couch with a vague breath.

"You *are* in love with her. Captain, why haven't you done anything about this?" Janeway's head was in her hands and B'Elanna frowned. "Come on, captain, it's not..."

"Not what?" Janeway's head shot up, her eyes flashing. "Not unheard of? Not a hard decision? Not what, B'Elanna? I've thought about this from every angle. It's impossible."

Oh, boy, this was bad, B'Elanna thought. "Captain, *Voyager* has proved over and over again on this trip that absolutely nothing is impossible. We're 30,000 light years from anything resembling the simple life of a Starfleet vessel, or even the stability of a Federation home. You can't think it's *normal* to live alone out here?"

"This isn't about me." Torres rolled her eyes at that pronouncement, which, even Janeway admitted, was consummate avoidance. "Okay, it's not entirely about me. Seven's..."

"Seven's what? She's a big girl, Captain. You were just thinking she might be in love with me."

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Why can't you see that's as false a reading of the situation you've ever done? She's an adult, she knows her own mind, and though she may not recognize the emotion -- a valid consideration I admit -- she *is* in love *with you*."

The formidable captain seemed to shrink at that pronouncement, replaced by the woman whose shoulders slumped and face flushed.

Outside the doors to Lt. Torres's quarters, Seven of Nine raised her hand to activate the chime. The computer had reported this as the captain's whereabouts and Seven was aware of a considerable level of trepidation as she announced her presence.

"Who is it?" Lt. Torres's voice came through the door.

"It is Seven of Nine, Lieutenant. The computer reported the captain is located in your quarters."

Inside her quarters, Torres cast a 'see what I mean' look at the captain, who frowned. "Just a minute, Seven," she called back through the door. Modulating her voice so the Borg outside could not hear, she addressed the captain. "Do you want to see her, Captain?"

"I've probably confused the hell out of her."

"This is as good a time as any to clarify things. Besides, consider my quarters as neutral territory. It might make it easier on you both."

Janeway groaned softly and covered her eyes. "I can't believe I'm going to do this."

B'Elanna patted the captain's near shoulder and then ordered the door open. "Come."

Seven walked in. Her biosuit had not been changed and Janeway's eyes drifted to the tear and the bare skin beneath it as she took in the whole of the young blonde's appearance with a lingering look. "You wanted to see me, Seven?" she posed as evenly as possible.

Ignoring Torres, Seven studied the captain before speaking. "Captain, I believe that our conversation in the cargo bay was left unfinished."

"How so?" Janeway knew she sounded vaguely unsettled, but hoped that Seven, in her inexperience, would not pick up on it.

"It became clear to me, after you left, that you had not... engaged in the conversation you wished to have." Seven puzzled through her explanation. "I am not certain what prompted that analysis, however, I believe it to be accurate."

B'Elanna interrupted, "That's called 'intuition' Seven."

Predictably, Seven challenged that. "I do not possess 'intuition', Lt. Torres."

"All Humans do, Seven," Torres replied back calmly.

Janeway acknowledged what that realization meant. If Seven was acting on intuition, her return to Humanity was much further along than previously believed. The confusion which now shaped Seven's soft features beckoned for Janeway to explain it. "I know it doesn't feel like it but you were correct. I... I didn't tell you exactly what I had come to say." She shrugged. "I wasn't exactly sure I knew *what* to say. In the end I was mistaken anyway. Can you forgive me for confusing you?"

Seven's head tilted to the side as she contemplated the captain's words. "Forgiveness suggests you have done something in error."

"I did. I assumed you were acting improperly and for that assumption I ask forgiveness."

"Acting improperly? It is not improper to seek to prevent the injury of another crewmember."

"No, it's not," Janeway said. "I believed you and the lieutenant were engaging in... mating." Janeway felt a flush immediately bake her cheeks to a hot red.

Seven blinked. "You believed I was planning to copulate with Lt. Torres in the middle of Engineering?"

"That's what you do with someone you love." Seven arched her brow in surprise. "Not the 'in Engineering part'," Janeway clarified. "The other."

"You believed I was in love with Lt. Torres?" Janeway nodded. "What made you draw such a conclusion?"

Aware of the former Borg's tenacity, Janeway sighed. "My perceptions."

"Why would you perceive I am in love with someone else?"

Janeway's head shot up. "Someone *else*? Then you are in love with someone?" Her eyes met Seven's and almost presciently she watched the young woman's lips move.

"Yes, captain. I am in love with you."

Janeway's stomach thumped against her ribs and her heart palpated rapidly. She gasped a little in disbelief and in relief. "With me?"

Torres smiled. *So Seven does know her own mind after all*, the half-Klingon marveled. "I think you two should talk," she said quietly. "I'll leave. You can stay here."

"I do not wish to put you out, Lieutenant."

"Trust me, Seven. You should do this here rather than anywhere someone else could find you." She paused when she caught the captain move out of the corner of her eye. "You might want to catch her, though. I think she's about to fall."

With that, Torres exited quickly, sealing her doors so no one, like Tom who generally had carte blanche to enter her quarters, would disturb the two women trying to handle Seven's admission, and Janeway's as-yet-unadmitted admission, and where they should go from here.

Janeway was, indeed, about to collapse on her feet. *Seven, in love with me? Dear God, can this be happening to me?* Her knees wavered.

Suddenly strong, long arms were wrapped around her torso, lowering her cautiously to the couch. At that touch, her body, which had been craving it forever it seemed, went into overload. Blackness clouded her vision and she closed her eyes.

The warm firm bosom under her cheek seeped into her senses first and she startled awake. "I believe you blacked out, captain," Seven revealed, even as her fingers traced over the captain's jaw.

"I haven't done that in years." Janeway admitted. "I've never been so embarrassed," she mumbled.

Seven's lips closed the space between them and settled tenderly over her own.

THE END