

Summary: Seven's experiences during the episode "Fair Haven" (sixth season)

SEVEN'S HAVEN

by Lara Zielinsky

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Chapter One

"Computer, state the time."

Despite the thread of irritation present in the request, *Voyager's* steady feminine voice responded without any inflection. "The time is 1924 hours."

Seven of Nine *Voyager's* Astrometrics officer and a former Borg drone exhaled sharply at the information. Shifting her phaser to her right hand, she rubbed briefly at her left temple, tracing the outer edge of the optical implant arched over her left eye. The action dislodged several locks of her platinum blonde hair, which she pushed away and tucked behind her ear. Aggravation shaped the muscles of her bare shoulders and back.

The captain was late for their scheduled Velocity match.

"Computer, what is the location of Captain Janeway?" She rubbed her right shoulder then tugged the ebony fabric of her workout suit smooth over her waist.

"Captain Janeway is in Holodeck 2."

Seven sighed. This was the second day the captain had been engaged with Mr. Paris's Fair Haven program.

She felt a coil of energy that she identified as keen aggravation skim through her stomach and chest. "Computer, engage practice mode."

"Enter parameters for opponent."

Knowing her goal was to achieve victory over the captain, Seven requested to replay a match she and Janeway had played twenty days earlier, with a moderate response factor, so that Seven could adjust her choices, but the computer's moderate skill level would formulate the counter maneuver.

A silhouette of the captain appeared. Seven requested that the construct be given a denser substance. Kathryn Janeway frequently used her compact form as a way to obstruct the former Borg's movements. If Seven could easily step into the captain, the exercise would be an inaccurate gauge of her improvement.

She kept her phaser down, knowing that bringing it up would engage the program's routine, and studied the hologram. A fair representation of *Voyager's* commanding officer, Seven immediately detected those things that were not exactly like the captain.

Every hair was in place, which made the former Borg quirk a smile. Currently sporting a short, wash-n-go bob, the captain's auburn hair was almost always in slight disarray. A faint smile frequently shaped the smooth wine-colored lips. The construct's blue eyes held none of the variations indicative of the real captain's mood, shaded entirely the color of robin's eggs. Seven knew that gray appeared whenever the captain was concentrating intensely. Blue indicated she was at rest, calm, which truth told was almost never a proper description of the energetic woman.

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The eyes, too, normally focused on a specific person or object, were unnervingly fixed on a middle-distance point just beyond Seven's right shoulder.

"Computer, begin simulation." She raised her phaser.

The game disc appeared in the air between them. Simultaneously the captain came to life, tracking the red banded disc. Abruptly she fired, sending the disc tumbling toward Seven, the red band now a luminous blue.

A simple reflex of her hand and Seven repelled the disc, changing the blue band back to red as it keeled toward Janeway.

Back and forth, they played out the match, the two figures tumbling and rolling around the game's playing field.

Changing her reaction to a shot she remembered gave Janeway a point in their previous match, Seven took a chance and fired from beneath the disc instead of across it. The replaying Janeway stumbled over Seven. The solid figure knocked them both to the floor. Janeway sprawled over the larger, lankier woman.

On her back, Seven of Nine looked up into heated blue eyes, flushed cheeks and parted lips. No breath passed those lips and Seven felt her heart thudding against her ribcage, and the blood pumping forcibly through her head. Desperation laced her voice as she called, "Computer, freeze program!"

The auburn-haired woman instantly stilled above Seven. She felt a distinct pressure against her lower abdomen and moved from beneath the figure. "Computer, end program." The Velocity game deck vanished as did the recreated captain. Seven pushed to her feet and felt the chill of the air flowing from the ventilation system.

Confusion ruled. Her autonomic system was not returning to normal. Vaguely she still saw the captain's eyes inches from her own and her body set up an answering vibration. She wanted desperately to discuss her reactions with someone. Only two people came to mind.

Captain Janeway first. Almost instantly though she shied away from the idea, for reasons she didn't entirely understand.

Her only other choice was *Voyager's* Emergency Medical Hologram. The EMH had been actively engaged since the ship's Chief Medical Officer had been killed in the incident that catapulted *Voyager* across 70 thousand light years into the Delta quadrant. The Doctor (who had yet to decide

on any other name in six years) had explored social development in order to improve himself and his interactions with the crew. By extension he had begun sharing his insights and lessons with Seven of Nine, who, since her own severance from the Borg collective, also had social development needs.

"Computer, locate *Voyager* EMH."

"The Emergency Medical Hologram is running in Holodeck 2."

Seven experienced a sharp desire to do violence to something. *What was so attractive about a fictional Irish town?* Taking a deep breath, she stood. "Computer, exit." When the doors appeared and slid open, the statuesque blonde left the blank holodeck, her composure gradually returning with every firm stride.

* * *

Fourteen hours later, Seven of Nine stepped away from the console in Astrometrics.

Acknowledging her fatigue she directed her path to her cargo bay "home."

The route to Cargo bay 2 took her past Holodeck 2, which brought the captain to mind once again. She paused outside the doors. It was mid-morning of the Alpha shift. "Computer, is Captain Janeway in the holodeck?"

"Yes."

Coils of energy flowed through Seven's muscles at the computer's response. Unreasonably she contemplated punching her fist through the control pad by the door, restraining herself visibly as a muscle ticked in her left cheek. Her throat tightened as she demanded, "How long has the captain been present in the holodeck?"

"Sixty point four hours."

Seven turned on her heel, retreating to the cargo bay. Stepping beneath the green glow and into her alcove, the blonde ordered a regeneration cycle of twelve hours. With a click, the program began. Seven's eyes slowly closed and her mind worked in quiet on the dilemma presented by Fair Haven. She was beginning to consider the inanimate program an enemy and wondered how to defeat it.

Chapter 2

Following regeneration, Seven returned to holodeck 1. It was 2100 hours, time for another scheduled date with the captain for Velocity. Holodeck 1 however was quite empty. Fatalistically she realized the captain would not be showing up for this session either.

"Computer, arrange replay simulation once again. Enhance Janeway character with the captain's personality profile and Velocity skill factors."

Clicks and a chirp preceded the appearance of Captain Kathryn Janeway three paces away, a phaser at rest in her lowered palm.

"Captain Janeway," Seven engaged the interactive routines.

"Seven of Nine." An elegant eyebrow lifted and the smaller woman turned toward the taller Borg.

"I wish to challenge you to a Velocity match, Captain."

The faintest of smiles answered, bringing one to Seven's face also. Then Janeway's cool voice responded, "All right. Let's get started."

Seven nodded, taking up a parallel stance to Janeway. "Computer, begin round one." Working off her energy, Seven played longer and harder than usual.

Seven bent double, breathing hard after a missed shot slammed into her chest. Programmed to be fully responsive now, the Janeway hologram suddenly drew up. Without her movement, the disc retreated to hover between the two figures.

"Why did you stop?" Seven asked, panting lightly.

"You're winded," Janeway answered, shrugging easily.

Used to the captain's utterly competitive fervor, the sudden lack of it startled Seven into glancing up. Calm blue eyes and a faint smile in a slightly flushed face prompted her stomach muscles to twist. "Thank you," she offered quietly.

Janeway moved, putting a hand on Seven's shoulder. The blonde jumped at the familiar gesture that was cooler than human temperature. *It's not real*, her mind barked sharply. Caught off guard, Seven turned and asked plainly, "Could I ask you something, Captain?"

The compact woman grasped Seven's shoulder in a reassuring squeeze, then settled cross-

legged on the floor. "Sure. What's on your mind?"

Seven also moved to sit and answered the inviting look coming from midnight blue eyes. "I am trying to understand human behavior."

"All right."

"What is the attraction of interacting with a hologram?"

"Imagination mostly."

"Why would you spend seventy-two hours in a holodeck program?"

"I... don't have enough information to answer that."

Seven sighed. She tucked her chin against her knees and studied the floor. "No, I suppose you would not."

"I'm sorry."

The plain response caught Seven by surprise again. When she turned her head, she found Janeway's face only inches from hers, breath caressing her face. "Captain, I--."

"What is it, Seven?" Janeway draped a casual hand on Seven's hunched shoulder, and rubbed lightly at the blonde woman's tense muscles.

The flutter in Seven's stomach returned with a vengeance. She leaned into the other woman's touch and inevitably closer to the other's compact body. Their knees touched.

Seven's ocular implant caught a shift in the matrix, destroying the reality and forcing her to acknowledge the illusion she realized she had been caught in. "I... must report to Astrometrics. Excuse me."

Gamboling to her feet, Seven stumbled out of Holodeck 1.

Another voice broke the silence in the corridor. "Seven?"

The blonde's head shot up, blue eyes darting toward the voice. For an instant she thought the hologram had emerged from the holodeck. Then she identified tucked up red hair, and a plum dress.

"Seven, what's wrong?" Captain Janeway in Irish 19th century period dress stepped toward her and reached out a hand.

Seven shied away from the other woman's vague bewildered look, shook her head and, struggling with her composure, strode briskly away.

Chapter 3

Kathryn Janeway remained very still, watching *Voyager's* Astrometrics officer move out of sight. Her own emotions were still confused from her own experience.

She had a flash of Michael still asleep where she'd left him on the other holodeck. Another part of her barked at her, *Find out what's wrong with Seven. Be a damn captain again. You have had enough of fantasies.*

Movement inside Holodeck 1 gradually drew Janeway's attention away from the corridor where Seven had disappeared. Rounding the doorway, she stared at the figure still crouched on the floor. Reacting to her when she crossed the threshold, the figure turned.

Two sets of identical blue eyes rimmed with the bewilderment of gray met and held in silence. Janeway found her voice first. "What the hell is going on here?"

"Where's Seven?" asked the other.

Janeway shook her head. "Answer my question first," she demanded, advancing on the hologram with a Force Ten version of her 'Look.' However, it being herself she was trying to intimidate, the method used to cow dozens of green ensigns, and even a few admirals over the

years,
failed utterly.

She just found herself toe to toe with... herself. "Seven and I were playing Velocity. Then we sat down to talk."

Kathryn felt an unreasoned jolt of anger. Seven had been *_scared_*. "What did you do?"
"Just listened." The hologram's voice went wistful. "She's very sweet."

Kathryn wondered at the gentle tone. A twist in the pit of her stomach told her she did not, right now, want to know. "Forget it." Casting her gaze briefly upward, she ordered, "Computer, end program", bringing her eyes back down in time to see the holographic Janeway fade away.

Her own dilemma forgotten, Janeway wanted to know what had happened with Seven. Despite, or perhaps because of, the almost wild-eyed look on the blonde's face, Janeway decided Seven needed her help. The two women had not seen much of each other since the young Borg's unfortunate accident with a data overload. The situation had forced Janeway to beam onto the Delta Flyer to stop Seven's suicide run into an alien catapult *Voyager* had been negotiating to use to shorten her trip home.

Janeway had been desperate herself. The thought that the young woman was willing to die because she had lost trust in *Voyager*, in her captain, had upset the woman beneath the command mask. She remembered the entire incident and it still gave her nightmares now weeks later.

Janeway beamed into the Delta Flyer, a few meters behind Seven. The set to Seven's shoulders stiffened. They had a knack with each other about that, always knowing the other was nearby.

_ "Captain," Seven said coolly. _

_ Maybe that familiarity would help here, she thought, immediately thinking to go to Seven's side. She started forward but was rebuffed by a force field. _

_ "You came here hoping to stop me. You'll fail," Seven said. _

_ "Turn this ship around. That's an order." _ Come on, Seven, snap out of it.

"Your orders are irrelevant! I'm no longer under your command." Seven sounded almost as if her emotional pain was physical. Her voice strained to remain even. "You deceived me."

_ Janeway tried to talk her down. "There is no conspiracy. There is no Maquis rebellion. The Federation isn't planning to invade the Delta Quadrant." _

_ "I realize that," Seven said. "Because I finally uncovered your true objective." _

_ Janeway rolled her eyes. "And what's that?" _

_ Seven turned around accusingly. "Me." There was hardly a pause as Seven began, as she had earlier with her theory about the Maquis, presenting her evidence. _

_ "Stardate 32611: The Federation sends my parents to study the Borg Collective. They know my family will be assimilated. That was their intention." Janeway took a deep breath at that. She wanted to protest, even opened her mouth to speak, but Seven kept on with her 'damning' theory. A theory that damned Janeway and Janeway's role in her life, presented it as a malevolence rather than a benevolence. The loss of trust, something Janeway had worked hard to cultivate between them, hit her the hardest. _

_ "Stardate 48317: Voyager is sent to the Delta Quadrant with orders to retrieve me. When they reach Borg space Captain Janeway negotiates an alliance with the Collective in exchange for information regarding species 8472. They agree to give her Seven of Nine." _

_ "Stardate 51030: Janeway extracts the implants from my body to remove any knowledge I have of her agreement with the Borg." _

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Janeway remembered that moment, looking down into a face no longer Borg, but not yet fully human, yet tears of frustration coursed unheeded down too pale cheeks. Janeway had known then that she would never give the young woman back to the Borg. There was humanity there. She had to help Seven accept that. But Seven saw it so differently, Janeway lamented.

Seven's voice was sharp, concise as she continued. "Stardate 53329: Captain Janeway finalizes plans to use the catapult to deliver Seven of Nine to the Alpha quadrant where Starfleet will dissect and analyze the drone to gather tactical data to fight the Borg."

Seven looked hard at Janeway; the captain kept her chin down and her gaze steady in reaction. "I won't allow you to complete your mission. If necessary, I'll destroy the catapult--and myself."

Suicide_. The idea sent a shiver down the captain's stalwart spine and she grabbed carefully onto a nearby console. The Borg were going to take Seven anyway, she thought recognizing a small irony. Swallowing hard, she proceeded with soft caution. "You're right, Seven. There is a conspiracy here. But I believe it's a conspiracy of one."_

This caught Seven by surprise Janeway could see. The other woman's back stiffened and the half-cast glance held widened eyes. Taking advantage of the opening, Janeway pressed forward still unable to get closer because of the force field, but determinedly leaning hard on the surface of a station panel. "I've got a theory of my own. Your modified alcove threw your synaptic patterns into chaos and your mind can't make sense of all the information, so you're generating theory after theory in an attempt to bring order to that chaos."_

Seven didn't appear to like that at all. "Your reasoning is flawed. My alcove is functioning perfectly!" Her voice was strident, accusatory.

_ "What about you?" Janeway asked compassionately. "You're not a drone anymore. You can't always predict how Borg technology will affect you. You should be in Sickbay, not behind that force field. Let me help you."_

_ "No! I don't believe you!"_

_ "Of course you don't. Anything I say gets woven into your paranoid conspiracies. But you should believe me, Seven, because I've never lied to you. And I'm not lying to you now. You have to put your doubts aside and trust me."_

Seven wavered. But turned away.

Janeway looked down at the seated woman, and thought of everything that had passed between them. But Seven wouldn't look at her, still making the minute course corrections taking them on to an intercept with the catapult. So, slowly, taking her cue from Seven's own methods earlier, she began presenting her own evidence. The dates came easily, which mildly surprised her, but the moments were vivid, precious memories and she began to share:_

_ "Stardate 51030: Seven of Nine is severed from the hive mind. The Captain tells her not to resist--that she'll learn to accept her humanity. Seven complies, and slowly begins to embrace her individuality. Does she regret that decision?"_

_ "Stardate 51652: The Captain encourages Seven to develop her social skills. Seven insists it's a waste of time..but after further requests, she pursues it--and begins to develop her first human friendships. Did Janeway lead her astray?" Seven's hands stilled over the helm._

*_ "Stardate 52840: The Captain orders Seven to study her parents' journals. Seven claims they're irrelevant, but eventually she reads them--and rediscovers part of her own past." Seven's left hand dropped from the console. *_Am I reaching you, _Janeway thought._**

Please God, I hope so.

_Janeway could feel a lump forming in her throat and she worked carefully around it. "Stardate 52841: For the first time Seven tells the Captain...thank you." Her own voice trembled. She could feel her eyes welling up. _Please look at me, _she thought._

Seven corrected her--softly. The blonde's voice washed over Janeway like a caress, so different from the accusatory tone of only a moment before. "It was Stardate 52842...0600 hours in the mess hall. We had just finished breakfast." Seven's eyes drifted over to her, blue beacons in the dim lighting.

_ "My mistake," Janeway said, smiling with all the affection in her heart. "Stardate Today. Janeway beams aboard the Delta Flyer. She reminds Seven of the bond that's grown between them. Seven lowers the force field and she decides to come home." _

Seven trembled. Hesitated. Janeway could almost hear the conflicting thoughts screaming for dominance in the former Borg's head. Time to try and make it simple.

_ "All I'm asking . . . is that you trust me again," Janeway said. Janeway willed the younger woman to consider nothing but what she had said. At last the force field fizzled. Janeway slowly stepped down into the pilot area._

_Their faces were mere inches apart as Janeway dropped to a knee and locked her eyes on Seven, willing the young blonde to look back. She smiled encouragingly then tapped her comm badge. "Delta Flyer to Voyager. Two to beam out." _

She had no idea how she remembered those stardates, nor just how it was that her heart only started beating again when Seven's hand gradually slipped into her own just as they were transported away. Relieved and exhausted, Kathryn Janeway had retired almost immediately to her quarters after carefully leaving Seven with the Doctor to repair what he could. The rest, Janeway had known, would just take time.

By leaving Seven alone, Janeway had hoped to grant the young woman that time. She considered their interactions would only be a painful reminder to the blonde of the incident.

Perhaps she had left Seven alone too long. She wished sometimes that she had found a way to command without getting emotionally caught up with each of her crewmembers. Ever since looking up from the floor of the Delta Flyer into Seven's face and seeing, as well as feeling, the fear and desperation rolling off the younger woman, Kathryn Janeway felt like she was about to walk into a minefield that could blow her own fool head off.

"Computer, locate Seven of Nine."

_ "Seven of Nine is in Astrometrics." _ The revelation startled Janeway. She had been convinced that Seven had been headed for the solitude of her alcove in the cargo bay.

Janeway stepped into the nearest turbolift and requested, "Deck 7." Emerging on the deck, she nodded at the few passing crewmembers about in the middle of Gamma shift. The doors to Astrometrics loomed ahead.

"Seven?" The Borg's hands stilled on the consoles as the voice reached her from the doorway.

"Captain." Seven turned and tucked her hands behind her back, giving her full attention to Janeway. The auburn-haired woman was still attired for the Fair Haven simulation and Seven felt a muscle twitch angrily in her right cheek.

Janeway stepped forward and studied Seven's face for a long moment before turning to look down at the console next to her. "What are you working on?"

"I am trying to find a shorter way through the nebula. The ship's systems are strained by the

radiation fluctuations."

"I see."

They were silent and Seven found it discomfoting. "I will have results to report at the staff meeting in the morning," she said for lack of anything else.

"You have been working pretty hard lately. Are you sure you shouldn't be regenerating?"

"I am functioning properly."

"We haven't had a chance to talk in a while." She didn't mention since when, hoping that Seven would just accept the fact and move from there. She was in luck.

"No, we have not." Janeway also sensed from the younger woman's cool tone that she resented that. *_Oh, boy, Kathryn Elizabeth, you've got some bridges to fix._*

"Why don't we schedule a velocity match for tomorrow?"

"Will you actually attend?" Seven questioned.

"What?"

"You have missed two scheduled Velocity matches in the last three days. Both of which you made with me over three weeks ago."

Kathryn blinked. "I did?"

"Yes." Seven looked away.

Janeway's protective instincts surged forward. "Is something wrong?"

Seven wondered how to respond. She did not want to hurt the captain, but in reality the captain had hurt her. "I have been in need of a friend to talk to. You have been unavailable."

Janeway was rueful. "I'm here now."

"I do not know that I can talk with you any more."

Ouch. Janeway ventured quietly, "Why not?"

"You have made it clear that you do not wish to continue our friendship."

"Seven, no." She really had been wrong to leave Seven alone. "I thought you needed some time after your accident to put things in perspective."

The ex-Borg frowned. "You are referring to the incident with the enhanced alcove."

"Yes."

"I have successfully put that behind me."

Janeway looked up into Seven's face and saw a calm countenance. "Oh."

"Did you not think I would recover?"

"The Doctor assured me he had successfully siphoned off a lot of the overload."

"I do not understand. Then why have you been avoiding me?"

Quietly, defensively, Janeway protested. "I haven't been avoiding you. I've been busy. So have you." But it wasn't entirely true. "Seven, could we... start over?" She took a deep breath and knew her physical needs were nothing next to making certain of Seven's mental health.

"You wish to resume our friendship?"

"Yes, I do." Janeway considered quickly. "Do you have plans for breakfast?"

"I will take my usual nutritional supplement before reporting for duty."

"Well, I'll walk you back to Cargo bay 2. Then, what do you say we meet in the Mess Hall before duty in the morning? About 0600?"

"That would be acceptable."

"Come on then." Janeway walked with Seven to the turbolift that would take them to Cargo bay 2.

As she stepped back into the cradle of the alcove, Seven looked at the captain who had been

silent on the walk. "You will not forget?"

"No, Seven, I won't forget." Janeway offered a bright, toothsome smile which Seven echoed.

"Good night, Captain."

"Good night, Seven."

Chapter 4

Janeway returned to her cabin and prowled the low light living room for a long time. *Well, you had three days away, Captain. And your crew missed you.* She shook her head. No, that wasn't entirely accurate. *Seven missed you.* In fact, not just missed. The young Borg had become convinced that Janeway did not even wish to be friends any longer.

She settled into her recliner, her eyes falling almost immediately to the small stack of books she had replicated of Irish poetry. *You forgot what reality is, Kathryn,* she chided herself. *Time to get back to it before you hurt someone else.*

Resolutely she collected up the thin volumes and walked over to the recycler. Carefully she set the stack down on the surface. "Computer, recycle."

Her door chimed. "Come in." She turned, surprised to see Neelix standing in her open doorway, and wondered why she had hoped it was Seven. "Yes?"

"Sorry to disturb you, Captain, but I thought perhaps you would like to know that we've organized a ring toss competition tomorrow in Fair Haven."

"Sounds fine."

"Are you going to enter?"

"I don't think so."

"Are you certain, Captain?"

"Yes, Mr. Neelix. Thank you." She leveled her gaze carefully on him, tired and more than a little annoyed that he would presume quite so much.

"All right." He started to back out. "1300 hours if you change your mind."

"I'll stick to reality for a while."

That seemed to do it. Neelix abruptly excused himself, the formality back in his voice. "As you wish, Captain."

Reality was pleasant. Breakfast with Seven the next morning was quiet, but comforting. The young Borg never did touch on the incident on the Delta Flyer, but Janeway could feel their bond returning slowly as they talked about the nebula. Seven reported that she had indeed identified a course change that would take them to the edge of the gaseous cloud more quickly. "Be sure to give the corrections to helm this morning," she suggested. "We'll all be happy to return to normal space more quickly I think."

"Yes, Captain." Janeway smiled; Seven's own lips quietly mimicked the expression. Seven committed the smile to memory and had a flash of the last time they had been this close. In her mind's eye, her hand closed over Janeway's on the older woman's bent knee in the Delta Flyer.

She looked down at the table to the captain's hand laid lightly over hers. The former Borg blinked as a sudden vision of kissing the captain invaded her mind. Vividly.

"Seven?" The blonde refocused and slipped her hand from beneath Janeway's.

"Thank you for breakfast, Captain."

"My pleasure, Seven." The two stood, taking their trays to the recycler.

Seven could not deny that breakfast with the captain had improved her mood considerably. It seemed that they were indeed back to being friends once again.

She was still smiling when Harry Kim, *Voyager's* Alpha shift Ops officer, peeked into Astrometrics around mid-shift. "Seven?"

"Yes, Ensign Kim?"

"I was wondering if you would like to... have lunch with me?"

"I am in the midst of several recalibrations of sensors. Perhaps another time," she replied succinctly.

His face fell slightly. "I noticed you haven't visited Fair Haven yet? I thought I might show you around?"

Seven regarded him quietly. Perhaps she could see the captain in the simulation, she thought, looking forward to the mere possibility of seeing Janeway again. "Just for lunch," she acceded.

"Great." Harry nearly stumbled as he backed up when Seven came at him through the doorway.

Seven was disappointed to find Janeway not present in the holo-simulation, but became intrigued by the interplay between the holo-characters and the *Voyager* crewmembers. A competitive game called Ring Toss started up and 'betting' ensued. She observed and when a round of new competitors was lined up, she found herself, with Mr. Kim's support, stepping forward.

It was a simple game, but the brief feeling of being the center of positive attention encouraged her to continue. Seamus, the village lush, approached her.

"Incredible aim ye have there, lass."

"It is a simple concept," she responded, tossing yet another just to the right of the center post.

"Only one I've seen shoot as well is the captain," Kim offered from over at the bar.

Seven's ears perked up. "Perhaps the captain will accept a challenge." She immediately envisioned the captain and herself sharing the holo-grid and playing while they talked. The simple image made her smile unknowingly wider. If she improved her game, perhaps the captain would consider inviting Seven to join her the next time she entered Fair Haven herself.

"Keep practicing," Seamus suggested.

So she did. Almost half an hour later, she was making the center post on nearly every toss.

"Incredible, lass," Seamus complimented.

"I have superior eye-hand coordination," Seven replied concisely.

"And a prettier eye and hand ha'n't e'er been seen," he flirted. "Makes a man faint of heart."

Seven recognized it for what it was and felt bemusement. "We should sit down then." If the captain considered imagination so important, she would perfect hers.

Suddenly there was a cluster of people across the room, with Paris, the Doctor and Kim at the center. Michael Sullivan, the tavern's bartender had apparently imbibed too much, which Seven considered an odd thing to program into an open simulation.

Then she realized that Mr. Paris had not programmed Sullivan to drink as the bits of conversation became clearer, and louder.

"Where is she, Tom?"

"Where is who?"

"Katie O'Clare, o' course." Seven frowned at the name; she wondered who that was. From the look on Tom's face he was also wondering. Sullivan saw the confusion and clarified. "Your friend. Where is she?"

Paris frowned and leaned close to the Doctor.

"Do ye know where she is Tom?"

"I don't know. Why don't you back up and tell us what happened?"

"Three days. The best three days of my life. Then she just up and disappeared."

Three days? Seven had a sudden sinking feeling she knew who "Katie" was. From Paris's and

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the Doctor's face, they did as well. Paris suggested to Sullivan, "Maybe you misinterpreted things. We're all friends here. Maybe she was just being friendly."

"I thought me and Katie were in love." Sullivan fixed his beer-soaked eyes on Paris. "Where is she, Tom?"

"I don't know."

"Ye do!"

"I don't."

"You don't think I'm good enough for her, do ye?"

"I didn't say that."

"Ye dinna haf t'." Sullivan lunged at Paris and Seven found herself suddenly the corner observer of a good old fashioned barroom brawl, as Paris, Sullivan, Kim, the Doctor and everyone else started throwing punches and wrestling.

In silence Seven slipped toward the exit. *Three days. I thought me and Katie were in love. Where is she?* _ Sullivan's words rolled over and over in her head. Seven knew with sudden certainty that Sullivan had been the distraction that had kept Kathryn Janeway away from their scheduled Velocity matches.

Suddenly, Seven envisioned the captain in the arms of Sullivan. For some reason she could not explain, the dull ache in Seven's chest intensified. She exited the holodeck, uncaring that her cheeks were flushed and her eyes shined with unshed moisture.

TO BE CONTINUED