

Collective Reflections

by Sean O'Keefe 2013©

“Captain Picard.”

“Seven of Nine.” Picard looked her up and down and could not help but be impressed by her fine form. Her bio held that she was twenty-nine, but he could swear she looked physically younger. What aged her was the non-sense look in her eye. “Or do you prefer Annika now you're back on Earth?”

It was clear the former Borg drone was still having trouble keeping the annoyance she felt at the errors of others from showing. She could not help but correct him. “I was born on the Tendara Colony, Captain. I have only the memories of other assimilated Borg to educate me on this world – aside from the guidance I have had from Admiral Janeway and Commander Chakotay.”

The way she mentioned Chakotay gave Picard pause. For all Seven's severity, she softened a little at his name. Clearly an affection there. He shifted as he stood and cast a glance at the lectern. The lecture hall was only now just starting to fill. It would be a while yet before they would be needed.

“May I suggest we continue this discussion over a cup of tea? I believe they serve an excellent Earl Grey in the cafeteria.” With one final glance over his shoulder he added: “It appears we have plenty of time.”

Seven took him at his word and spun on a heel. “Perhaps some liquid nourishment would be advantageous

at this time.”

Picard smiled to himself and followed. He knew himself to be one given to flowery speech, but Seven spoke like she had swallowed not only a dictionary, but the entire Encyclopaedia Galactica.

Within moments they found themselves seated in the Academy's modest café with steaming cups of Earl Grey before them. Picard was curious that Seven had ordered the same brew as himself.

She picked up on this. “I am unfamiliar with this blend and decided to extend my knowledge of the beverage.” She lifted the china cup to her lips and sipped. After a moment's contemplation she added: “Average.”

Certainly not the word Picard would use, but there was a lot to be said for the eye of the beholder.

“I prefer Seven,” she stated. “Annika is nothing more than a distant memory for me.”

Picard nodded. It was still too easy for him to recall the days when he was merely a personality trapped within an altered body screaming to be heard and frustrated that he could not. Perhaps Annika's personality was truly lost after such a long period of time and being assimilated so young.

“Seven it is, then.” He gave her a polite smile. “What will you be speaking on today?”

The woman didn't even blink when she said: “The eventual assimilation of the Alpha Quadrant.” She said it with a certainty that appalled Picard.

All the same, he managed to maintain a poker face.

“I wouldn't open your lecture with that, Seven,” he said, trying to sound genial. “You'll be speaking to a room full of Starfleet Officers and cadets. The cadets more than anyone need to have some kind of assurance that resistance *isn't* futile.”

Was it arrogance in her eyes or simply certainty? He wasn't sure.

“Admiral Janeway *has* demonstrated an uncanny ability to thwart the Collective's attempts at assimilation,” she conceded. She quickly added: “Including your own.”

Diplomacy definitely was not this woman's strong suit, he thought. He turned his tea cup in his hands as nodded and said: “That room will be full of people who need to hear about your and Admiral Janeway's victories against the Borg. I would suggest you finish by giving them hope that they won't become another Locutus.” He didn't quite succeed in keeping the bitterness out of his voice.

At that Seven's eyes lit up. “Yes, Locutus. I remember him.”

“How is that possible?” Picard asked – practically a reflex action. Her words had unexpectedly stung. He set down his cup before he spilled it on himself.

Blue eyes met grey as Seven said: “Locutus was a personality that was created partially from your own and mostly from the Borg. When you were severed from the Collective you were not truly lost because Locutus and his knowledge had been uploaded to Unimatrix One. As an adjunct there I was linked with Locutus and learned a lot

from him and his experiences.”

The thought that he had been “backed up” by the Borg had never entered Picard's mind. He had always hoped that, once he was separated from the Collective that that would have been the end of it. With his mind no longer connected they would no longer have access to his knowledge. To now find out that it was all still available to the Borg horrified and angered him. “I had hoped that ...” Picard wanted to swear but was too much of a gentleman to do so, “*being* was dead and buried.”

Seven tilted her head to the side and studied him. “You are emotional about this subject. Don't be. Locutus is not you.”

Picard wanted to snap at her but her last statement brought him up short. Was she trying to comfort him? “How so?” he said tightly.

“Locutus was mostly a creation of the Borg. A useful fiction. It was a “personality”, which is the best word I can use to describe one who was not an individual yet still separate in purpose, that was created for a reason. They took elements of you and your knowledge, combined it with Borg and generated Locutus. It is no more you than the beverage you have consumed is still tea.”

He looked down at the remainder of his Earl Grey and wondered about that. He picked it up and let it slide down the back of his throat, warming his soul. All the same, he still had issues. “They can still use my knowledge against the Federation.”

Seven nodded. “Yes, they can. However, you are

just one of many Starfleet officers who have been assimilated over time. Not to mention Klingons, Romulans and Breen. The Borg were already well aware of most of what you knew. It is arrogant of you to think your participation alone led to the destruction of the ships at Wolf 359.”

Had the Borg led him to believe that *he alone* had be instrumental in the rout at Wolf? Was that knowledge meant to cripple him? Or was it simply his own guilt? It was a burden he still carried and yet, in the light of Seven's statements, an irrational one. He determined to rid himself of it. He gave her a genuine smile from the heart and said: “Thank you, Seven. I needed to hear that.” He glanced at the clock and realised they needed to get back to the symposium. “We should get going.”

As he made to rise Seven kept him seated with a simple look. “Captain, I want to thank you for reminding me that I, too, am more than the sum of my experiences with the Borg. It is something I've forgotten since I have been separated from the rest of my new Collective – my family – on Voyager.” A profound sadness swept over Seven's face, but didn't stay long. Her ever present resolve returned quickly. Picard mused that there was nothing this woman determined to do she would fail to bring about.

“Since your link was severed you have continued to grow and learn as an individual, as I did. Since meeting you this morning you have demonstrated to me the differences between Locutus and Picard. They are profound. While I am and probably always will be Seven

the being I am today is more Annika than I ever was when I was in the Collective. I am – happier.”

Picard was certain most of her happiness revolved around the Voyager crew, particularly Chakotay. “Perhaps you need to reconnect with them after the symposium,” he suggested.

“Yes,” Seven said with the certainty Picard had come to expect from her. He knew she would actually do it. “We should go.” With one fluid movement Seven was on her feet and waiting for Picard to join her. He mused that her strength was much more than just physical.

As they walked back to the lecture hall, Picard ventured: “Which one of us did you prefer?”

Seven gave him a cheekily raised eyebrow and said nothing.