

Geordie is My Friend



Short
story

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by

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Chief Engineer Geordi LaForge took a sip of coffee inspecting the little rest area at the Deep Space 6 station. It was empty and soundless. DS 6 hung in a quiet piece of the galaxy bordering Romulan space. Not like there was much trade going on with them.

He glanced at his notes from the AI conference. His presentation had quite an impact on the audience. Geordi

talked about his modifications to Hugh, the wounded Borg the Enterprise picked up a few months ago.

He squeezed his fists, remembering a red flushed face of one of the Star Fleet officers, just inches from his face, droplets of spit hitting him. Captain Hansen could not understand why Enterprise gave up on an opportunity to wipe out the Borg with the computer virus.

Geordi tried not to react at the time, aware that the man suffered personal loss from the Borg. But despite being parsecs and days away, Geordi's pressure rose. He wanted to defend himself, even if that meant using his fists instead of his brain.

A hand touched his shoulder making him jump.

"Geordi! You're already here." The warm voice of Dr. Beverly Crusher returned him to the present, relaxing him.

Geordi smiled, "Hi Beverly. I see your conference ended

too."

Beverly nodded, placing her pads and mug of steaming coffee on the table.

"Yes. I got loads of great ideas. How about yours?"

Geordi nodded, anger still stuck in his mind. "Yeah, it was a good one." He managed to utter words through clenched teeth.

"But?" Beverly leaned towards him.

"Hugh. I gave a presentation about Hugh, and people were wondering why we abandoned the initial plan."

Beverly nodded, grabbing her mug and taking a small sip. The glare of the hot cup drew his attention. His eyebrows lifted. Seen through his visor, the mug shone with the heat of the liquid inside, and Beverly sipped it. He wondered: does it hurt her?

Finished her playing with the overly hot mug, she placed it back on a table and finally answered. "Something similar happened to me, and we're talking about doctors. People who swore to do no harm."

Geordi nodded, still staring at her. Beverly's throat flexed, as she was swallowing something way more significant than that little sip she took. She was not telling him all.

An angry face flashed through his mind. He wondered: did she experience something similar to his argument? Geordi

remembered her being the most vocal against exterminating an entire species. And later, when Geordi got to know Hugh, he ended up grateful for Beverly's insistence.

He touched his cheek where spit hit him during the encounter with the angry Captain Hansen, wondering: will he mention him at all? Taking a deep breath, he changed the topic. "So, do you have any update on ETA of the Enterprise?"

"Eighteen hundred hours."

Geordi nodded. That gave them six hours of waiting. Plenty of time to ponder the guilt. This empty place did not provide any distractions. Unable to help himself, he circled back to the subject of Hugh. "Do you think we made a mistake?"

Beverly shook her head. "No. The Borg collective is a terrifying opponent, but Hugh ended up being an individual. Killing him, performing a genocide over the whole species would go against everything that makes us human."

A blaring alarm interrupted their coffee. Both of them lifted their faces up, searching for the hidden speakers at the ceiling, waiting for the commands.

Finally, the chilling words came. "Battle stations! Battle stations!"

Coldness filled Geordi. What if this is the Borg's attack? He shook his head, chasing away the guilt induced thought. No, it's Romulans. We're close to their territory, and they are tricky ones.

Beverly jumped up, nodding at him. "I'll head to medical to give them a hand."

Geordi nodded back. "I'll report to Engineering."

Both grabbed their stuff, leaving their steaming mugs.

"Lieutenant Commander LaForge, Chief Engineer of the Starship Enterprise, reporting!" The words left his lips as soon as he touched the closest communication panel.

"LaForge? Please report to Ops."

Geordi ran towards the command centre of the station, Ops, stumbling each time the station shook. He strained his hearing to catch the vibrations and hums of the station firing back. A smile flashed over his lips as he heard the faint buzz caused by the station's weapons.

The station's tremors jolted him, throwing him against a window. His face pressed against transparent metal, he could not help looking out into space.

He grabbed window frame, his knuckles going ashen, his whole body tensing. Through the window, he faced the corner of the giant cube. It flashed with green lights,

flaunting the ugliness, conduits, and tubes filling the surface. The cube was close enough to detect small craters on its dark surface. He stared at one, his mind refusing to accept what he saw, wondering instead about the lack of maintenance of the cube's surface.

The Borg.

His throat closing, he bent his head, staring at the station floor. He envied people with regular sight, they could just close their eyes when they did not wish to see something. He could not, not with the visor on. His chest tight, he let go of the window and rushed towards Ops.

The angry face of Captain Hansen from the conference flashed in his mind again. Geordi had a sinking feeling that man was right, with all his hate-filled words and anger-distorted face. People will die now, and he could have prevented that if he just sent that virus.

Head buzzing, he skipped down the corridors, working with the station jolts, keeping steady in his direction. In no time he reached Ops, barging through one of the doors and dashing towards the engineering station.

"Lieutenant Commander LaForge reporting."

The station's chief engineer glanced at him. "We lost power on level 8. Power conduits need to be manually rerouted."

Geordi nodded, his eyes fixing at the woman's rank pips. She was just a lieutenant. She typed furiously, her eyes

fixated at the console. "Go with Ryb on level 8, and help him. We'll transport you."

Geordi glanced at the console, noting the skill used by the station Chief to solve the problem. She had this.

He looked around searching for the transporter pad before another jolt threw him off his feet. Someone grabbed his biceps firmly, holding him upright.

Geordi stared at the hand holding him. Chill spread in him. The hand barely emitted warmth. With his visor, alive humanoid glowed with the warmth of their bodies, except only a few species. The Borg was one of them. His eyes shoot towards the creature's face, noting the absence of the implants and two protruding antennas on top of the male's head.

"This way." A tall, muscular Andorian nodded at him.

Geordi nodded back, the tension leaving his muscles. Andorians evolved on a cold planet, where keeping warmth inside your body was a more significant problem than cooling down. With a smile, he joined in the mad dash toward the transport pad.

The attacks intensified, making the station floor all wobbly and bouncy. Tension returned to Geordi's muscles while he fought to stay upright.

Reaching the pad did not help. The floor still wobbled, and the officer at the engineering station did not bother even to

look in their direction. Geordi opened his mouth, ready to yell at the officer when the familiar transporter field enveloped him.

Geordi crawled deeper into a station wall, pulling at the hot conduit, ignoring the pain. He tugged, trying to bend the conduit into the new connection.

The station stopped shaking. Geordi crawled back out from the wall, glancing at a lamp, flashing red. The attack was still continuing, and stillness could only mean they were being boarded. He clenched his teeth, taking a deep breath. At least it will be easier to work.

He dived back into the wall, determination pumping new strength into his limbs. Tugging the conduit harder with one hand, while other was gripping the hot connector, he finally bent the conduit into the connector, hearing it latch. He could not shake off the hope of the Enterprise arriving in the nick of time.

Finally finished, he scuttled out of the wall. Paralysing pain enveloped his burned hand. He fanned it to ease the agony. A movement grabbed his attention. His head whipped towards it.

A Borg drone.

Before he could even open his mouth, Ryb yelled, grabbing a phaser rifle and sending a burst after burst towards the

drone. Geordi's insides clenched. The phaser blast only caused the drone's shield to shimmer. It didn't even slow its progress. The Borg had already adapted their shields. Through the flashes, Geordi noticed the drone's hand rising.

"Ryb, cover!"

Geordi rolled on the floor in a nearby nook. Ryb yelled, still firing shot after shot.

"Ryb! Take cover!" Geordi screamed again. The shimmers of drone's shield intensified. It was coming closer. The first shots of a Borg phaser, with its recognizable frequency signature, passed by Geordi.

Desperate, Geordi lifted his upper body, screaming louder. "Ryb--"

Ryb's yells stopped. A quiet gurgle followed. Footsteps approached Geordi's hiding spot.

"Take cover." He completed his last warning in a soft voice, slumping back into his nook, staring at the opposite wall and not seeing it. His chest tightened. If I'd just sent that virus.

Taking a quick breath, Geordi's head whipped left and right, searching for a phaser. He would rather blow his head off than be assimilated.

No luck.

Remembering hot power conduits in the walls, he crawled on the floor, trying to reach the nearest hatch. Glancing down the corridor, his visor met the legs of the drone. Swallowing hard, Geordi stood, ready to face his fate. A few more drones lined up behind the closest one. There was no escape.

Before his glance could reach the face of an attacker, the drone grabbed him, pulling him into a hug. Geordi felt gentle but firm pressure from hands dotted with mechanical parts. His nose ended up close to the drone's neck. A cloud of familiar Borg smell enveloped him, a mechanical oil mixed with the undertones of decomposition. Tensing, he waited for nanobots injector, wondering: will it hurt?

Instead, he heard soft words. "Geordi is my friend."

The drone released him, moving away. His eyes glued on the drone's face trying to recognize the exposed parts. Who is this?

He stumbled backward, eyes still glued to the drone's face. The drone turned away from him, dragging his glance with it. Another pair of hands filled with mechanical parts grabbed him, pulling him into a gentle hug, declaring friendship.

His brain numb, Geordi stared at the face of a new drone, trying to find anything familiar.

Drone after drone approached him, hugged him and declared friendship. His glance moved from face to face, desperately searching for anything familiar.

But the faces were ones of strangers. Geordi took a deep breath. He tried to look at the drones still waiting to hug him, searching for the familiar face of Hugh. This strange behaviour must be connected with Hugh. Maybe I can use this to stop an attack?

Yells and screams announced the group of Starfleet officers approaching the corridor. Phaser blasts filled the air around him. He felt the gentle push of newly activated drone's shield. The drone released him, facing the sound and phaser blasts, in sync with its fellow drones.

Surrounded by drones, he could not see Starfleet personnel. Visibility got worse when drones' shields started shimmering in response to Federation phaser blasts. Moving his head left and right, he attempted to see what was going on.

He froze. Through the thong of the bodies he spotted one drone lifting its hand and shooting back: killing his fellow humans.

"No!" he screamed.

But it was too late. Drones finished the scuffle and returned to hugging Geordi.

Some of the drones moved away following their

programming, leaving the clear sight to the corpses in Starfleet uniforms. Geordi swallowed hard, unable to drag his eyes away from his dead comrades.

Geordi closed the hatch and sat facing Beverly. She squeezed the seat with her knuckles white, staring at the floor.

"There, we'll have life support for four more hours. That will keep us until the Enterprise arrives," he announced.

Beverly showed no sign that she heard him.

"Beverly?"

She whispered. "They would stop hugging me to kill. No amount of pleading stopped them."

Geordi shifted uncomfortably. The little voice in his head resumed its accusations. Repair of the life support on the shuttle pushed the insistent voice back for a while, but Beverly's comment helped it return with a vengeance. The image of Ryb's accusing dead stare flashed in his mind, tightening his chest, his throat. If he could just do something to get rid of this guilt.

"At least Jean-Luc will be happy," snarled Beverly.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, he wanted from the start to send something to the

Borg through Hugh. Remember?" Beverly finally looked at him. "The original plan was to kill ..." her voice trailed into silence.

Geordi shifted again. That voice of his guilt reappeared, nagging still, pointing out that neither Ryb nor any other humanoid would die if he just sent that damned virus, instead of going all soft at the machine. You will be held responsible, whispered his guilt.

He nodded, avoiding Beverly's eyes. "During the conference, after my talk, Captain Hansen approached me, and asked me what right we had to give up on the virus plan." His voice cracked, barely allowing him to finish.

He lifted his head meeting Beverly's stare. She was the most vocal opponent of the initial plan. "Now I wonder if maybe he was right."

Beverly rubbed her forehead. "Captain Hansen? I know him. He had a brother studying the Borg. They disappeared ages ago, and he took over his brother's research with one goal in mind: revenge."

She looked away. Her lips clenched, her knuckles white from squeezing the chair. "I don't know, Geordi. I know that Borg kill people. But still, it seems wrong to exterminate a whole species, even when they're our bitter enemy. How can you call yourself human and do something like that?"

Involuntary laughter escaped Geordi's lips. "Tell me, what is easier? Pretending that you're moral even when you do something wrong, or watching the enemy stop hugging you just to kill another person? Or worse, assimilate them."

Beverly broke. She let go of the seat, almost folding in two, burying her face in her hands, sobbing. "I don't know. I don't know."

Sobs shook her, somehow melting Geordi's numbness. His chest hurt. Why did they survive? Why didn't they die with all the rest? Tears filled his eyes. He knew he deserved death. After all, he did cause this massacre.

Blinking away the tears, while the visor transmitted a perfect image of his surroundings, he admitted to himself that he would still do the same with Hugh. He saw him become an individual; an innocent, young boy.

Geordi turned his head towards a shuttle window. A face flashed in his mind. Hugh's trusting wide-open eyes, soaking up every one of Geordi's words, even smiling. Hugh adopted human values, he became an individual.

The Enterprise crew expected parts of Hugh's individuality to spread through the Borg collective. They hoped the same change will influence other drones, motivating them to demand the freedom from the slavery of the Borg collective.

"I tried to stop them. I was telling drones, those creatures

are my friends, don't kill them." Beverly whispered, her face still buried in her hands.

Geordi faced Beverly, his mind pregnant with the ideas. "At one point they started using stunners and assimilating people instead of killing them. I guess that was their answer to our pleading," he answered in a faraway voice.

It fitted. Hugh's knowledge spread through the Collective, just not the way they expected. Individuality could not win, and it made sense. The Borg Collective has to have something to suppress the individuality of the assimilated people.

Beverly slammed her fist in the shuttle bulkhead, making Geordi jump in surprise. She stared at her bleeding knuckles, mumbling softly: "Yes."

Putting his thoughts aside he looked at her. She shivered, roughly rubbing her bleeding knuckles, like she was trying to remove her own skin. He glanced around the shuttle, using the infrared part of the spectrum, checking the temperature of the walls. Beverly's shivers were not caused by the cold.

He cleared his throat. "Maybe we can turn this around."

Beverly's eyes shot to his face, her face contorted in a crooked smile. "Make this attack not happen?"

"No, no. See, something did spread from Hugh. Not the individuality as we hoped, but something deeper, an

emotion. A feeling of friendship towards us."

Beverly bitterly laughed. "I noticed that."

"Wait." Geordi lifted his hand. "What if we develop a method that will make Borg, the whole Borg collective, see all of us as friends? What if we develop something that will turn Borg into friendly neighbors, instead of this menace?"

Beverly stared at him, forgetting her bleeding hand. "How?"

"I do not know yet. We will have to work on it, find the solution. Get some more drones and try to do with them as we did with Hugh. We have to figure out what actually happened when Hugh was re-assimilated." Geordi's thoughts were all over the place. He was already working on the problem.

Beverly nodded. He could see a smile appearing on her lips, her nods increasing the tempo. "Yes. We could develop the way to coexist with the Borg."

Grinning at her, Geordi nodded back. They survived for a reason.

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