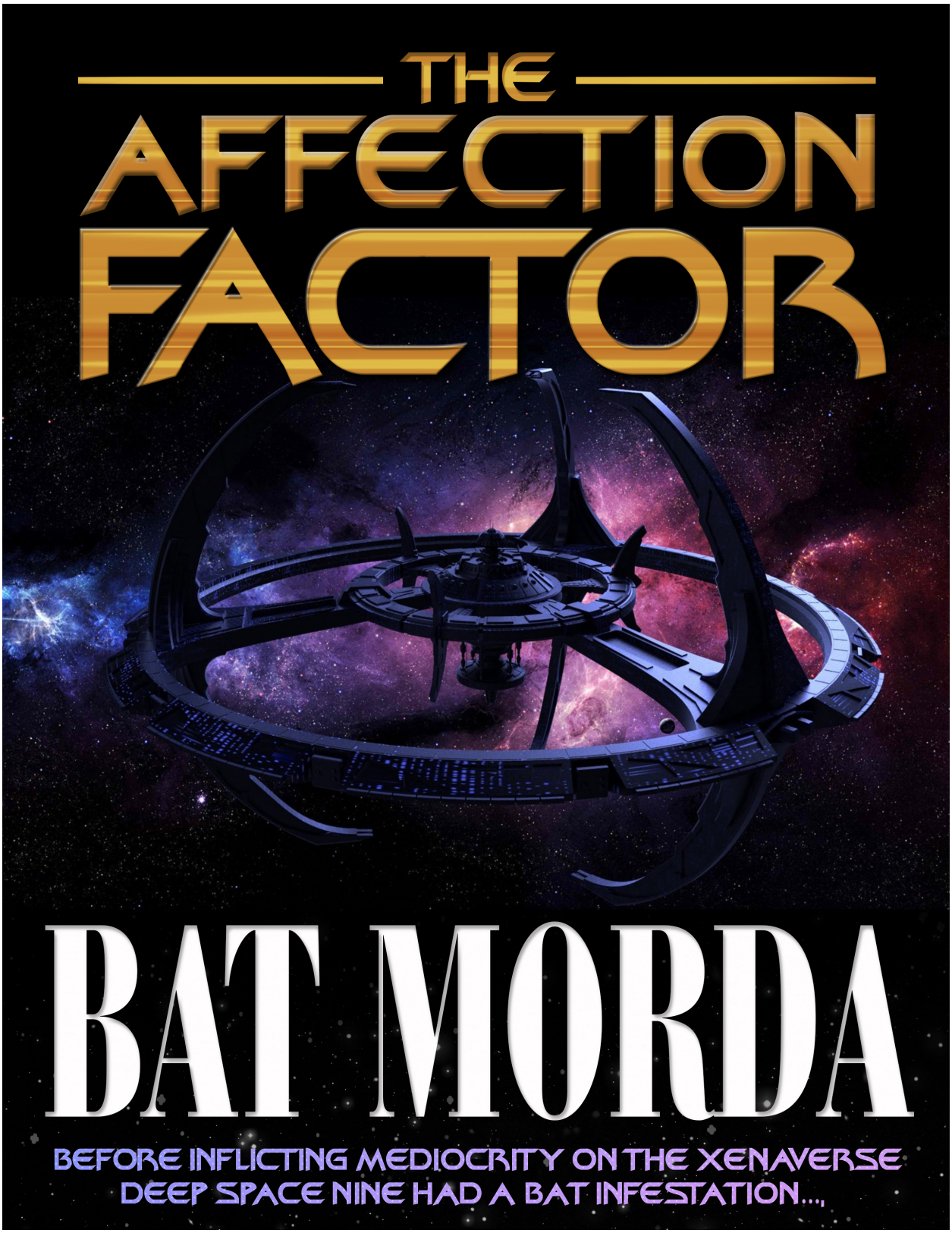
THE
AFFECTION
FACTOR
BAT MORDA
BEFORE INFLICTING MEDIOCRITY ON THE XENAVERSE
DEEP SPACE NINE HAD A BAT INFESTATION...,

GENERAL DISCLAIMER:

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The Affection Factor

By Bat Morda
Started 1996 ~ Finished 2018

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Prologue

Kai Winn tore through the temple library. She knew it had to be here, yet months of searching had revealed nothing. *I should have gotten it from Bareil when he was alive*, she cursed silently. *Where could he have hidden it?*

There was no way the Kai could be certain that the deceased Vedek Bareil had indeed hidden that which she sought, but she suspected as much. *Opaka's lapdog*, Winn spat. She lowered herself onto a stone bench and gazed at the shelves of books, scrolls, and tablets that made up the innermost library of the Kai's compound. Miraculously this room had survived the Cardassian occupation of Bajor. The private writings of Kais' dating back thousands of years had been preserved in this underground tomb, leaving a legacy of wisdom, instruction, and history for the Bajoran people.

Kai Winn had little use for wisdom or instruction, and her enthusiasm for history extended only as far as not repeating the mistakes of others. No, it was information she was after; details pure and simple, that would allow her to dispatch the threat to her reign that she knew was coming. Few Prophecies could be pinned down to *when* they would happen. The ancient words of Kai Tulano would have been no different had Kai Winn not experienced her future in a vision from the Celestial Temple Orb.

The elderly Bajoran shuddered as if from a chill at the memory of that vision.

A young woman with sharp features and piercing eyes stood at the dais of an ancient ceremonial fire. There was something un-Bajoran about her but she couldn't tell exactly what it was, everything hazy and soft focus. Winn watched, silent, as the vestments of Kai were presented to the young woman who smiled at someone at the far end of the ghostly room. Kai

Winn turned and was astonished to see Kai Opaka step to the dais to address the Vedek Assembly.

"Children of Bajor," Opaka began in a kind and quiet voice, "the darkness of the Cardassian occupation is over and a new age is dawning for our people. Sad that I cannot be with you, it is with profound joy that I present blood of my veins to guide us all into our new light."

Shaking herself out of the vision, Kai Winn gazed absently about the library. Kai Opaka was gone and the occupation over. Winn knew that events would be falling into place soon. One of her greatest fears was not recognizing those signs for what they were until too late. Her mind elsewhere, she saw the shelves, walls, and floor as only abstract shapes of light and dark, of positive and negative space, lines and planes converging then separating. It was by chance she noticed a small crack in the stone floor. She walked over to the crack and crouching down traced its line to where it ran under one of the massive bookcases. Kneeling on the cold floor, she removed the books and data crystals of the bottom shelf above the crack and felt a loose section of wood from the huge bookcase. Carefully prying up the loose piece of wood, she discovered a small hole that had been hollowed out of the stone floor. With a thin smile, she reached into the hole, sighing with pleasure as her fingers touched the heavy cover of a solitary book.

Easing the thin volume out of its hiding place, it took only a moment to see that this was indeed the book she sought. Only a moment more and Kai Winn found a name to attach to the woman of her vision, the woman that threatened to be her undoing. *Brenmarjen.*

Chapter 1

Jadzia Dax smiled. It wasn't often that Jake Sisko was so animatedly interested in visitors to the station. Major Kira was struggling to keep up with his rapid-fire questions.

"You mean you actually came from the same village as Jen Brenmar?" Jake asked, ignoring his dinner. "What about the other members of the quartet: Dobin, Keyla, and Tosh?"

Jadzia basked in the warm companionship that surrounded her. Dear Dr. Bashir sat on her left; the unsmiling Commander Worf was across from her, next to Operations Chief Miles O'Brien and his wife Keiko. It was so rare for all of them to have off-duty time together. Even Odo had accepted Captain Sisko's invitation to join him and his son Jake for the evening meal. Jadzia treasured these moments. With memories of seven lifetimes of such dinners, she was all too aware that each moment with loved ones was precious. Time and again, she'd been surprised at the loss of loved ones, the lives of friends cut short over so many years of living. She pulled herself out of her reverie to focus on the conversation between Jake and Kira.

"I honestly don't know, Jake. Ask them yourself when they get here," Kira replied, amused at his urgency. "It's been a long time since I've seen Jen, years." She stopped to think. "Almost seven and I'm sure we'll have some catching up to do. I'll see to it that you get a chance to talk to her."

Dax noticed something pass behind Kira's eyes as she spoke of her friend. It was doubtful anyone else noticed the brief look that, to Dax, said 'unfinished business'. Studying the powerful Bajoran woman, she recalled the dozens of times she'd seen that apprehensive look on her own face and the faces of others in the past 300 years. With centuries of experience tucked away in her memory, it was seldom Jadzia Dax was surprised or caught off guard by the behavior of others. The Trill made a mental note of her friend's fleeting look of anxiety. If something was troubling the Bajoran, Dax wanted to help if she could.

Kira had always been very private about her life before the Federation came to *Deep Space Nine*, the space station once in the orbit of Bajor, now in position near the wormhole. Dax, who had known Major Kira for over three years, knew she had been involved in an underground resistance movement. The Kohn-Ma, as it was known during the Cardassian Occupation, had fought fiercely for their planet's freedom. But Dax knew little else about Kira's history, her family, or friends, even though she thought of the Major as a close friend.

They gathered in Benjamin's sitting room. As Captain of the station, he and Jake had the largest quarters. A heating unit and a variety of cooking utensils scattered around the food preparation area reflected the elder Sisko's passion for cooking. His disdain for replicators at social feasts was infectious and everyone enjoyed his Cajun delicacies. Even Odo, who had no need for food, enjoyed the social interaction, and would often help by sautéing ingredients for the piquant sauces over the small fire. It helped to have another task to focus on when he didn't have much to contribute to the conversation. Now that the meal was over and all were relaxing over beverages, he was the first to respond when Jake resumed his barrage of questions.

"How long will they be staying at the station?"

"Jen Brenmar has requested a docking slip for a modified cargo ship for six weeks. She will arrive the day after tomorrow at 1700 hours."

"You actually talked to her, Odo?" Jake was visibly awed.

"No, she went through regular channels, but as Chief of Security, I make such things my business. With the recent arrival of the Klingon entourage for the upcoming negotiations, as well as the other three delegations, I was not sure we'd have the room."

"There are few docking slips available." Worf, the Klingon Commander concurred.

"Son, what is it about the arrival of this particular group of musicians that has you climbing out of your skin?" Benjamin asked with equal amounts amusement and concern.

"The music is just so good, Dad. It's hard to describe, you've just got to hear it."

"Consider it done. Computer, play Jen Brenmar recording..." Benjamin looked at his son for a request.

"*Bell dar Mai' z*," Jake interjected

"*Bell dar Mai' z*," Ben concluded.

The group of friends gathered in Benjamin's sitting room, save one. They listened for the most part with increasing awe to the haunting drum refrain accompanied by rhythmic strings, a heartrending wail of ancient Bajoran pipes, and a stunning vocal arrangement. The language was not known to any in the sitting room, except Kira, but the feeling of a love lost was clear to everyone. Worf did not try to hide his grimace of distaste.

"My God!" gasped Miles O'Brien holding his daughter Molly in his lap, "That almost sounds like Gaelic."

"It is quite good, yes" Julian commented. Keiko nodded her agreement.

Jake whispered over the music, "They play very old Bajoran instruments, and sing in ancient Bajoran as well as other languages."

Jadzia felt herself responding to the music on many levels. Since Joran (a previous host of the Dax symbiont) had been a brilliant musician –unstable, but brilliant– she could appreciate the complexities of the piece musically, as well as its simple beauty. She also felt the sadness and desire of the words that she did not understand.

"Who is singing?" she heard herself asking.

Jake answered. "Keyla is singing the melody and playing strings; Jen is playing the drums and singing the harmony. Tosh is on the pipes and Dobin is also playing strings." As the

song finished, it was hard to believe all of that music had come from just four people. Jake continued, “Jen does all of the arranging, but all four of them write.”

“Was that an original composition?” Benjamin asked his son.

“No,” Kira replied, taking a sip of rok'dejino, “It’s an old Bajoran folk song about the son of a noble who leaves his kingdom because he has fallen in love with the wife of his servant. Knowing the woman would never return his feelings of her own accord he chooses to leave rather than force the issue.”

“Clearly a cowardly thing to do,” said Worf, irritated by the cowardly music. “He should have fought his servant for the female’s love.” Kira was about to come back with an angry retort, when Dax gracefully broke in.

“While the song didn’t use Klingon instruments Worf, you must admit there was something about the rhythm that suggested a composition by Maltor.”

“Well yes, the drums were fine,” the Klingon admitted. “But the pipes were awful.”

“That’s really nice, Jake,” Benjamin cut in, hoping to avoid an argument about music or anything else between Worf and Kira, “but, forgive me for asking, that does not seem like your kind of music?”

Jake’s smile was devilish. “Just wait Dad. Computer, play Jen Quartet performance of *Bad Reputation*.” The room was filled by a string riff and the pounding drums recognizable as something from Earth.

“What is that?” Kira asked distastefully.

“That’s rock & roll…I think,” Benjamin answered uncertainly.

“You got it Dad; they even play old Earth music. Great isn’t it?” Jake asked all smiles.

“This is much better than the first selection.” Worf agreed, nodding his head in time to the music.

Jadzia again noticed something in Kira’s face. Something about the performance, or performers, was striking a nerve with her, and a sore one at that. This time even Julian took notice.

“You said you came from the same village as Jen. Were you good friends?” Julian asked carefully, when the song finished.

Kira didn’t answer right away; her eyes seemed to be looking somewhere else, a time and place in distant memory. When she did speak, she seemed to choose her words very carefully. Diplomacy never being her strong suit, which, in and of itself, was telling.

“We were good friends when we were young. We came from the same refugee camp but we didn’t really get to know each other until we served in the same Resistance cell. Jen was involved in communications, and we worked together frequently. She was responsible for sending and receiving coded messages from other drummers. There are half a dozen very old drum languages that Bajorans have been passing down family to family. Jen learned them from her grandfather. The drum signals could pass very far in the canyons and were often very hard to trace. Unfortunately, she was captured and sent to the labor camps for a time. I think she even had to work on this station, but that was before I arrived here.”

“That’s too bad.” O’Brien said quietly. Keiko reassuringly put her hand on his knee. Kira remembered that O’Brien knew firsthand what being captured by the Cardassians implied. “What happened then?” he asked.

“Fortunately for her, I guess, the Cardassians didn’t know about her knowledge of encryption or she would have been killed on the spot. Thank the Prophets she was not doing any reconnaissance when she was caught. I heard a rumor that she was eventually sent to Cardassia

Prime. All I know for sure is that after the peace treaty with Cardassia was signed, and prisoners of war exchanged, she eventually returned to Bajor. From what I understand, she's only been home for about six months. Frankly I'm surprised she's leaving Bajor so soon to come to this station."

"Maybe she just wants to see you?" Jake asked hopefully.

Kira shook her head sadly, "I doubt it, Jake. It's true we were very close at one point – but we didn't part on the best of terms."

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Odo sat at his console in the security office and frowned. He did not like seeing the name of Kai Winn appear on any reports, especially reports that might bring the Kai into the vicinity of… "Major Kira," he said into the air of his empty office.

"Yes, Odo, what is it?" Kira replied quickly via the stations comm system.

"Would you please come see me in my office? I have something here you may want to take a look at."

"Be right there."

Moments later, the doors slid open with a soft whoosh and Kira entered. The sparsely furnished room was dominated by the large desk and control console in the center. Odo was sitting behind his desk, eyes intent on a view screen in front of him. He looked up at Kira and started to vacate his seat. "That's okay, Odo, I'll look over your shoulder," she said as she crossed the room.

The walls of the central security installation were dark and nondescript, with the exception of the occasional flicker of readout lights on the station monitor behind Odo's desk. She rested one hand on the console, and the other on the back of Odo's seat, glancing at the shapeshifter before she looked at the view screen. "So, what's up, constable?" Odo did not look forward to putting a dent in her obviously good mood. It could not, however, be avoided.

"Well, this, Major," he said, turning the screen so she could get a clear view. "A report came in a few minutes ago. I thought you would want to know. It may have something to do with Jen Brenmar's visit to the station."

"Jen? On a security report?" Kira wondered aloud, her eyes scanning the view screen, intently studying the information that flicked silently across its surface. "I don't get it, Odo," she spoke after a moment of reading, "Why would the Kai want to prevent Jen from visiting the station? There is no mention of the rest of the Quartet; it just says Kai Winn would like us to refuse clearance to Jen Brenmar to board *Deep Space Nine*."

"I thought it odd myself." Odo replied, nodding at the view screen. He didn't want to make eye contact with Major Kira this close. He was afraid his response to her proximity would shine on his face like a beacon. After touching a few points on the desk to call up additional information, he continued, "I decided to do some checking, see what it was about your old friend that could interest the Kai." He briefly glanced at Kira and she nodded to him to continue. "According to the file on Jen Brenmar in Central Security, she was moved out of the general prisons on Cardassia Prime after a year and a half. It seems that the Cardassians discovered her musical abilities. She was sent to the household of Gul Dakmar where she lived for the remainder of her confinement, about five and a half years. According to this report, she was a 'houseguest' of the Gul, who apparently also had a passion for music. She orchestrated various musical recitals in the central complex and 'collaborated' with Gul Dakmar on some musical compositions. I find it interesting that the pieces of music he wrote after she came to live in his
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household were warmly accepted and admired by the Cardassian people. Nothing suggests he had any musical ability before Jen was moved to his accommodations. My guess is she was writing and arranging musical pieces for Gul Dakmar for which he, of course, was taking full credit. I believe most of the pieces were military marches. Gul Dakmar became more known for his military marches than his military leadership."

"She spent five years writing marches in a Cardassian household!" Kira exclaimed, stunned at Odo's revelation.

"Partly, yes," he replied with a nod. "There is more to this story, however. This report from Bajor's central security office is based on reports from intercepted Cardassian data banks. Jen herself filed a report while on the *Longevity*, the Federation science vessel that brought her back. It was sent to the Bajoran restricted security offices. It's classified, but I pulled some strings and managed to get a look at the report." He reached over to a data padd sitting on his desk and handed it to Kira. "This is not top security, but close enough, I think this may be at least one reason Kai Winn is interested in Jen Brenmar."

"Thanks, Constable," Kira said, accepting the padd. "Anything made of her Kohn-Ma involvement when she got back?"

"Like you, she was offered rank in the Bajoran militia. Unlike you however, she declined. She did accept a military discharge with honor and a commendation for valor."

"This must be some report. What's in it?" Odo had hoped Kira would not ask that. He shifted uncomfortably where he was sitting. Kira walked around the desk to face him. He took a deep breath and began.

"Jen reports that she spent a year and a half in a Cardassian interrogation facility. It was not the 'general prison' her non-classified file suggests. It was Section 51."

"The Death House?" Kira asked stunned at the revelation, her stomach contracting painfully.

Odo nodded, keeping his voice neutral. "The Cardassians were clearly after information that, after considerable torture, they realized Jen did not have. From there she was sent to Dakmar's, where, after a time, she managed to obtain Obsidian Order secrets and incorporate them into the marches she wrote."

Kira was incredulous. "And the Cardassians didn't know?"

"Apparently they never even considered the possibility that she was a Drummer; they just assumed she was a gifted musician. Her ability to write for so many instruments allowed her to incorporate the coded messages into the scores played by Cardassian musicians. The fact that most orchestras had several drummers allowed her to split the messages among them, further concealing them. I heard that Drummers often send messages backwards as well as forwards to confuse potential eavesdroppers. Furthermore, she would shift languages during a given composition. Of course, she had no way of knowing if her information was getting through to the Kohn-Ma or not, but it seems to have been effective; some of the information was used to definite Bajoran advantage. I suppose that would be worth a commendation for valor."

"Getting the Cardassians to send destructive messages," Kira mused, "I don't know if Jen is brave, or stupid. If she had been found out…" Kira shook off the image forming in her mind. "So how did she get the secrets?" she asked, shifting the subject.

Odo took a deep breath and continued. "Jen and MarTay, the Gul's wife had been lovers for approximately four years. Jen spent her first year and a half in the household acquiring MarTay's trust and composing marches for Dakmar. It appears that Dakmar did not know about the affair between his wife and the prisoner in his care. I doubt he even suspected it given how

severe the penalty is in Cardassian society. In short, Obsidian Order secrets were broadcast to the Kohn-Ma and the responsible party has been returned, relatively unscathed, to Bajor. It didn't take long for this report to make it back to Cardassia Prime. Gul Dakmar died mysteriously and his wife attempted suicide. She was not successful. She is now in a medical center near death awaiting a trial for treason. Naturally she will be convicted and executed."

Kira was dazed by the odyssey her friend's life had taken. "And Jen…"

"The Cardassians have requested Jen be returned to Cardassia Prime to appear as a witness at MarTay's trial. I suspect Kai Winn would like to send her there as a gesture of good faith. Sources tell me Kai Winn has asked Jen to go and she flatly refused. It would be difficult for the Kai to send Jen to Cardassia Prime if she is aboard *Deep Space Nine*." Odo finished.

Kira shook her head, "What would Winn have against Jen? What she lived through was bad enough, but to be sent back? She can't really think Jen would be returned after that unharmed?"

"I don't know what Kai Winn's reasons are, although I am very interested in finding that out. It seems clear though that she would like Jen out of the way. Jen coming back from Cardassia Prime safely does not seem to be her concern, nor would it be likely. Cardassians have strict laws against same sex unions, and she could be held over for trial for that admission alone." Odo allowed himself a cynical smile "I suppose the Kai would say 'It's in the hands of the Prophets'. Major, after what you mentioned last night, about your previous acquaintance with Jen Brenmar, I was hoping you might know if there is another reason for the Kai's interest."

"I wish I knew, Odo. Certainly, Bajor doesn't have the same taboo about relationships, and if the Kai is involved, I know it's not over anyone's love-life. Kai Winn's interests are all about power, and the acquisition and maintenance of it. Maybe Jen can answer that for us when she gets here." She nodded, picking up the padd to take with her, "If I think of anything, I'll let you know."

Leaving security, Kira's mind raced as she walked back to her post in Ops. She had known of Jen Brenmar growing up, she was a small child a few years younger than Kira, but the young adult she encountered in the Kohn-Ma cell was the Jen Brenmar etched into her memory: a striking young woman who spoke with quiet intensity, the impulsive, reckless woman who usually acted before thinking. Kira's memory strolled through the four years they served together and of the stolen moments when they were able to make each other forget that all around them was war. It all seemed like a lifetime ago. She remembered the fight, and Jen leaving with the others as the sun came up. As Jen shouldered her pack in the near darkness, Kira couldn't help but watch. Jen saw her, tried to smile, and unconsciously ran her fingers through her short brown hair. Kira noticed she'd been crying. Hell, she'd been crying too. Afraid she'd cry again, Kira turned and walked from the encampment. It wasn't until later that night that she learned Jen and the others had been captured. She tried to shake the memory off, unsuccessfully; her thoughts turning to what she knew of Cardassian torture, Cardassian prisons, and Cardassians. Four years as the lover of a Cardassian! She felt sick.

When the Major returned to Ops, her face was ashen. She held the data padd with the full report in her hand unsure if she could read it. Dax looked up from her station to see Kira exit the lift. As the Bajoran walked to her console, Dax watched her. "Kira, are you okay?" she asked softly.

"Yeah Dax, I think so." The Major replied absently. She had just gotten situated at her station when her comm badge signaled Sisko's voice.

"Major Kira, could you please come to my office?"

Kira sighed wearily and replied, “Aye, Captain.”

Dax leaned over as Kira passed on her way to Sisko’s command room. “Why don’t we have dinner tonight at *Quark’s,* on him?”

Kira appreciatively squeezed her shoulder. “Thanks, Jadzia.” Dax smiled at her as she walked into Sisko’s office.

The office of Captain Benjamin Sisko was sparse even by Starfleet standards. It was simple and austere, void of any personal artifacts, save for a couple of sculptures, an antique clock, and a baseball sitting on his desk. The walls were a cold gray, without any of the warm lights of Odo’s office. The Cardassian architecture was severe and drained whatever warmth might have otherwise existed in this room. Sisko looked up as Kira entered.

“Major, please sit. I’ve been getting a request for communication from the office of Kai Winn and I thought I’d better see if anything was going on before I talk to her. I know she doesn’t want to talk unless she has an agenda she is trying to further.”

“She has an agenda all right. I just came from Security. Odo has reviewed some interesting inquiries Kai Winn has made regarding Jen Brenmar,” Kira replied as she took a seat across from the Captain.

“Why would Kai Winn be interested in a Bajoran folk musician?” Sisko asked, puzzled.

“I asked the same thing,” Kira answered. “Apparently Jen was involved in obtaining some high-level security information indirectly from a member of the Obsidian Order and she broadcast the information coded in some musical pieces she was forced to compose. She disclosed this information upon returning to Bajor. The Cardassians want her to appear as a witness at a trial of the Cardassian she got the information from. Odo suspects, and I agree, that there is more to it than that, but we’re not sure what. Winn must have some reason to want Jen out of the way and is using this “good faith” angle to justify sending her back to Cardassia Prime, a trip that most likely won’t have a return ticket.”

“I see,” replied Sisko. “And since Jen Brenmar and her fellow musicians have requested the opportunity to visit our station to...” he glanced at information on his console, “make some musical recordings at our facility, I see no reason to deny them that opportunity. Do you, Major?”

“Not at all, Captain. I’m rather looking forward to catching up with an old friend.” That was not entirely true; Kira knew it as soon as she said it. However, she did not see any reason to go into detail with the Captain about it; at least not for now.

“Good then. Why don’t you stay here while I contact the Kai? I’m sure she’d love to see you, too.” Benjamin grinned. Kira returned his smile and got up to stand behind him as he touched the sensory pads of his desk console.

They both turned to the medium sized view screen across from the desk, the Bajoran and Federation logos replaced by the face of Kai Winn. “Greetings, Emissary,” she said.

“Greetings, Kai. I’m here with Major Kira.” Sisko stated pleasantly. “What can we do for you?”

“Greetings to you too, child.” The Kai nodded offhandedly to Kira. “Emissary, I hate to trouble you with so insignificant a matter, but a Bajoran citizen has made a request to board your station. She has recently returned from Cardassia Prime, a tragic victim of the war. Unfortunately, our psychological profiles suggest that she may be dangerous; she is showing some distressing signs of trauma. We would like to make sure she is mentally as well as physically healthy before she travels. Like many former Resistance Movement members,” she

paused here to look meaningfully at Kira, "she is much too headstrong for her own good and insists on going to *Deep Space Nine*."

"Perhaps a little change of scenery is just what this emotionally drained citizen of Bajor needs?" Sisko offered amicably. "Tell you what. I'll see that Doctor Bashir does a full psychological series on her when she arrives. If there is a problem, I'm sure he'll catch it."

"Thank you for your concern, Emissary. I appreciate the care and consideration you've always shown the people of Bajor. However, her treatment is progressing so well here, I'd hate to see her stop and have to risk starting all over." The Kai was clearly not going to roll over on this one unless absolutely necessary, confirming their suspicions of a hidden agenda.

"I appreciate your concern, Kai," Sisko said politely. "But if this citizen wants to leave treatment and does not come to the station, certainly she will leave treatment for another part of Bajor. It is important to the Federation to make sure all Bajorans know that this station is theirs. Denying access does not facilitate this view. Has she done anything illegal or violent? You did say she was 'dangerous'?" Kira made a mental note that the battle of wits between Winn and Sisko was proceeding right on course.

"No, not yet, but we fear a strong possibility exists. She has suffered flashbacks and often forgets where she is. She is also extremely paranoid and thinks that those who love and care for her mean her harm." The reply was fairly dripping with feigned motherly concern.

Is it paranoia if the people you think are out to get you really are? Kira thought to herself. "Then I don't see any reason to deny her access to this station," the Major said instead. "Dr. Bashir is well equipped to handle a variety of psychological trauma, as well as physical. If she is feeling that some on Bajor are out to get her maybe she will respond better to treatment off Bajor." Kira was careful not to show the enjoyment she was feeling at seeing the Kai flounder. "In fact, I know that the Bajoran facilities are taxed to the limit with refugees. I would think an extra open bed would be a blessing."

"How kind of you to think of others, child," Kai Winn replied coldly, venom in her eyes. "But Jen Brenmar is a national treasure to us. She has served her people valiantly and undergone tremendous horrors. It is now time for her to heal in the care of her people. Jen clearly does not know what is best for her. She needs her home and she needs to stay on Bajor." She began to raise her voice as her calm facade became visibly strained.

"I get the impression from you that she is not mentally competent and cannot decide for herself," Sisko observed coolly. "If that is the case I would be happy to have Dr. Bashir verify that fact. At that point, I will have no choice but to leave her in the custody of her family. If her immediate family no longer exists, than she will need to be placed in the custody of her next of kin."

"I think, then, that would be me, Captain," Kira replied solemnly. Both Sisko and Kai Winn looked at her, surprised.

"You?" Sisko and Winn responded in unison.

"Jen and I served in the Underground together, in the same cell for four years. Jen Brenmar was fifteen when she enlisted." Kira replied, looking at Sisko, then Winn. "We came from the same village before joining Shakaar's cell, and we both lost our immediate families. Now that her grandfather is dead, Jen doesn't have any blood relations. The Bajoran Military code states that in the loss of natal family, members of the same militia unit would be considered families, and family names may be adopted, although it is not required. I believe it's in Section Forty-seven, regarding military relationships, adoptions, and inheritance. Since resistance cell members have been granted military status. I am nearly five years older than Jen Brenmar so I'd

qualify as her guardian." Kai Winn did not look at all pleased so she quickly added, "The status of when and how the two of us served would be on our public records if you'd like to check...?"

"That won't be necessary, child," Kai Winn replied, resigned to losing this battle. "May you rejoice in the Prophets that your sister has returned," she looked at Sisko. "Emissary," she said with a nod of the head. The screen went back to the military insignias of Bajor and the Federation.

"Nicely done, Major. Was any of that true?" Sisko asked, grinning at his second in command.

"Actually, all of it, sir. I knew about the regulation provision but had no idea Winn would try to say Jen was incompetent. She walked right into that one. Interesting that the Kai didn't mention Cardassia, wouldn't you say?" Kira walked back to the opposite side of the desk from Sisko.

"Yes, quite interesting. Perhaps she is going to review her game plan before trying again. I would be disappointed if she gave up so easily." Sisko prepared to get back to the work of running the station.

"By then Jen will be on the station and perhaps a bit harder to pack off to Cardassia," Kira stood, preparing to leave the Captain to his work.

"Wait, Major," he called after her.

"Yes sir?" She replied, turning around to face him.

"I would still like to find out exactly what game Kai Winn is playing here. I get the feeling it could get serious, and I'd like to avoid that if at all possible. The last thing I need is trouble with the Kai interfering with the peace negotiations"

"I'll get right on it," she stepped through the door.

"Another thing…" Sisko added.

"Sir?" Kira poked her head back into his office.

"Would you like tomorrow afternoon off to greet your 'sister' when she arrives?" Kira smiled. "I'd also like to meet her. It isn't every day I meet the relatives of this station's exceptional crew," he grinned back at her.

"Thank you, Captain," she said, "I'd like that very much."

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Jadzia thought about Kira as she got ready to meet her for dinner. She had a few moments to refresh herself before heading to *Quark's*. She sat at the dressing table in her quarters running a brush through her long brown hair. *No need to change out of uniform*, she thought, *Kira will certainly be in hers*.

Kira. Something was definitely bothering her. She seemed agitated by the imminent arrival of her friend tomorrow. Absently brushing her hair, she spoke. "Computer, how many of Jen Brenmar's original compositions are in the library?"

"Twenty-four original compositions by Jen Brenmar are available," responded the unmistakably female voice of the main computer.

"How many have been recorded in the last six months?" Jadzia asked.

"All of them." The computer replied.

"Performed with her current quartet?"

"Please specify." The computer said flatly.

"Who are the other musicians?"

"Keyla Ris, Dobin Veran, and Tosh Sener."
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"How many of the compositions have vocal tracks?" Jadzia was warming to the idea of finding out a bit more about Kira's friend by the music available.

Again, the patient voice of the computer replied "All of them."

"How many compositions have the primary vocal track in Bajoran?" She started to pull her hair back behind her head to fashion into her usual ponytail.

"Fourteen."

"What other languages are the primary vocal tracks recorded in, and what is the numerical breakdown?" she asked, finishing with her hair and checking the results in the mirror.

"Five in Federation Standard, three in Klingon, one in Vulcan, and one in Gaelic." *Well then, it looks like Chief O'Brien wasn't that far off the mark,* Jadzia thought. Dax left her quarters, hands comfortably clasped behind her back, and headed out to meet Kira, her thoughts centered on a Bajoran who was comfortable composing in at least five languages.

When Kira arrived at *Quark's,* her thoughts were dark and memories weighed heavily upon her. Filled with conflict and contradictions, she was at once eager and dreading tomorrow's reunion, hoping that when she saw Jen it would feel like old times, at the same time, very much afraid of that possibility.

She saw Jadzia sitting in a quiet corner booth. Morn was passed out at a nearby table. It was early enough that the boisterous crowds that usually inhabited *Quark's* were either in the holosuites or busy gambling in the main area of the bar. Things would stay quiet here until people started spending their winnings. She sighed; they win their latinum, and then give it all back to Quark. As she approached Dax, sitting calmly with hands folded on the table in front of her, she noticed two things about her friend. Jadzia Dax always looked calm and at ease wherever she was, and she was always very, very beautiful. Jadzia smiled as Kira approached. "Hi," she said warmly. "Sit. I've taken the liberty of ordering you something to drink. I hope that's okay, from the looks of you this afternoon you could use it."

"Thanks Dax," Kira took a seat across from the Trill. "You're right about that. You said dinner would be on Quark. How did you arrange that?"

As if summoned, the proprietor approached the table. Quark was holding a thin tray, upon which rested two empty glasses and a tall, thin, and twisted bottle.

"Evening Major," he said, setting down the tray. He took the pale blue bottle and poured a small quantity of its aqua contents into one of the delicate glasses and handed it to Dax. She took the glass from Quark and slowly passed it under her nose. She shut her eyes and inhaled gently and deeply. Bajoran and Ferengi were both mesmerized. Dax opened her eyes and smiled at Quark, handing him back the glass.

"Thank you, Quark. That will be perfect."

"*Malduk kis 2253*, as you requested." He poured liquid from the bottle into the two glasses, filling each one halfway and placing one in front of each woman. He put the stopper into the ornate bottle and put it back on the tray.

"I'll give you two a moment before ordering dinner," he said and picked up the tray to leave. Still smiling, Dax laid a gentle hand on his arm.

"Quark, you can leave the bottle."

The Ferengi looked at her sharply, then sighed. He put the stoppered bottle back on the table. "If there's nothing else, Commander?"

"No, thank you, Quark. We'll order dinner in a few minutes." The Ferengi walked back to the bar, grumbling.

"Wow, I'm impressed," Kira exclaimed with a grin.

"Quark had to borrow a few strips of gold-pressed latinum in the Tongo game last night," Dax explained. "I told him I'd keep it to myself and not charge interest if he spoils me tonight. I made it clear when I got here that you are to be included in said spoiling."

They laughed and toasted each other before enjoying their drinks. Kira seemed a bit more at ease so Jadzia asked, "What was bothering you today?"

Kira looked up from her drink into Dax's eyes. She felt relaxed, safe in the total calm she saw there. As Kira studied the Trill's face, she almost saw pictures in the patterned markings that ran from above her friend's temples, down the sides of her neck and disappearing into her uniform.

"Kira?" Dax repeated.

"Oh?" she said shaking herself out of her reverie. *That must happen to Dax all of the time*, she thought, embarrassed. "Sorry. Jen's visit to DS9 has gotten complicated. For some reason, Kai Winn wants to prevent her from coming here at all. She even went so far as to imply that she's psychologically imbalanced – perhaps even dangerous. I also found out that my dear Kai is interested in sending Jen back to Cardassia as a public relations move. A trip that would certainly be one-way."

Dax looked at her friend thoughtfully. "Kira, you were upset about Jen's arrival before today. Something was bothering you last night at Benjamin's."

Kira was slightly taken aback. She should know by now that very little escaped the Trill, with wisdom born of over three-hundred years of living. She smiled and nodded.

"You're right." Pausing, she decided that to see the entire situation clearly, she would need Dax's insight. To get Dax's insight, she'd have to tell her everything. Kira hesitated a moment longer, then Quark appeared to take their orders. Startled by the Ferengi's silent approach, Kira stopped herself, afraid her vulnerability shone like a light on her face. Kira stared into her drink and Jadzia ordered.

"I'll have the relyisa with robotan legumes and I'd like the special salad as well."

Quark didn't take notes; he remembered everything. "What? No Klingon food tonight? Commander, I'm ashamed of you." He looked at Kira "How about you, Major?"

Kira was relieved. Dax had ordered some of her favorite foods, most likely to take as much pressure off her as possible. "The same," she said, not looking up.

"Coming right up," Quark nodded to the two women and walked away. It was only a few moments before the food arrived. This time, they were served by Quark's brother Rom.

"Major Kira, Commander Dax," he said to each woman as he placed their food before them. "Enjoy your dinner," and with one final toothy grin, "On the house."

They began to eat their meal in silence. Dax almost said something but thought better of it. She frequently looked over at Kira, who appeared to be putting her thoughts in order. Kira finally spoke. "Jadzia?"

The Trill stopped eating and looked over at her friend, her expression both caring and warm; she smiled with understanding and affection.

"When was the first time you fell in love?"

Her grin broadening, Dax considered the question. "I think the first time Jadzia fell in love she was too young to know it was into 'love' she had fallen. It was before Joining, he was another Initiate Candidate. With all the pressures and studying, nothing much came of it." Dax smiled at the memory. "Since Joining with Jadzia, there have been a handful of relationships, close ones, physical ones but not a lot of what I'd call a feeling of deep love. It doesn't happen very often. Of course, I have memories of a much longer list, including my previous spouses."

Kira studied the Trill's face as she considered her response and continued. "Have any of your female hosts been in love with a woman?" Dax did not alter her gaze as she looked at Kira, but she was beginning to put the pieces together.

"Joined Trill don't really consider lovers in terms of gender. Because I've got memories from all of my past hosts, every relationship has elements of being with the same and opposite sex." Dax paused for a moment, searching seven lifetimes of memories. "Emony Dax did have a relationship with another woman before Joining. They were in love, so I think the answer to your question would be 'yes'. When Lenara was here, I fell in love with her all over again, this time as Jadzia."

Kira inwardly flinched. She did not intend to bring up the painful heartbreak her friend had suffered the previous year. She was grateful when Dax continued.

"Let me guess, you're in love with Jen?" Dax asked pleasantly.

Kira started to laugh, somewhat nervously. "No, no, not exactly." Then, after an exasperated breath, "Once, maybe. We were very close when we served in the Kohn-Ma together. It was as you said, I think we were in love, but too young to really realize it. Things were really good, for a couple years or so, considering the circumstances. Then it got tense – we were young, probably didn't realize what we had – our relationship had pretty much cooled off. I thought she was showing signs of being interested in someone else, so I did the same. Jen got pretty upset and we had a big fight. She was nineteen when she decided to go on that stupid mission that got her captured." Kira thought a few moments before continuing, forcing by sheer will her last memory of Jen out of her mind. "There was something about what we had that really scared me, Jadzia. There is something about Jen that I've never encountered in anyone else. She was not afraid to look into your very soul, and was totally accepting of whatever she found there. But she is also reckless – reckless with her own impulses and other people's feelings. I never wanted anyone to get that close again. I was only starting to change my mind about that with Bareil, before he died. Having a lover is one thing, having someone become a living, breathing part of your soul is another."

Jadzia studied her friend. At thirty, Kira Nerys seemed so young, yet she'd lived and endured more than most people would expect in a humanoid lifespan. She tried, for the hundredth time, to imagine life and love as a monospecies, unjoined, with only one set of memories, only one perspective, only one frame of reference. Jadzia had Joined as an adult and had the memories of her childhood. But, sometimes, they seemed more distant than the memories of her hosts, dead for centuries, carried in the symbiont within her.

"And that Jen is a woman is somehow significant?" Dax asked, searching for more insight to Kira's single species perspective.

"Not especially," Kira smiled, amused at the thought. "But the bond we shared was slightly different from what Bareil and I had. There was less that had to be said, since we shared so many similar experiences. Jen was always a complex person, a collection of contradictions, but I always had an idea where she was coming from. There's more. I found out today from Odo that Jen was involved in something big. As I said, Kai Winn wants to send her back to Cardassia. The Cardassians want Jen to be a witness at a trial involving the wife of a Gul. This Gul was part of the Obsidian Order. Jen broadcasted secrets stolen from the Order to any one on Bajor that could tap into Cardassian music logs." Kira waited for Dax to respond.

Startled by the twist in the story and intrigued by this mysterious woman from Bajor, Jadzia asked the obvious question, "How did Jen get the secrets?"

“She and the Gul’s wife were lovers.” Kira replied pushing her plate away. She was unable to eat any more.

“I see,” Dax replied calmly. “This was during her incarceration?”

“Yes. She was kept in an interrogation facility for over a year, the infamous section Fifty-One. After that, she was moved to this Gul’s household where she spent the last five years. He had her ghost-writing marches for him. He was away from time to time. I don’t know how she got involved with his wife but she did. Apparently, his wife talked in her sleep.” Kira said with an edge creeping into her voice.

“And why is it you’re so tense about seeing her tomorrow? Because she was captured, it’s been six years, you’re feeling guilty, or because you’re jealous?” Dax asked, her tone void of judgment but clearly not letting her friend off the hook.

Kira laughed nervously, “I’m not jealous.”

“Of course not,” Dax said taking a sip of kis. “What do I know?” she finished under her breath.

“Look, Dax, I don’t know.” Kira replied, shaking her head. “A part of me is terrified things won’t be different between us, another part of me is sad because I know they will. I want her to be the same charismatic person I knew, even though it’s doubtful that we can be the same people together. But I also realize that with the ordeal she has been through, there is a very good chance there might not be any of her left I still recognize. And while I don’t want to believe the Kai, how could she return from all that and not be damaged?”

Jadzia reached over to squeeze her friend’s hand affectionately. “I don’t see that there is anything you can do until tomorrow, Nerys. You will see her, then get a chance to begin to find out how much both of you have changed, or stayed the same.” She studied Kira’s face, taking it all in. She was impressing upon herself that this is how Kira Nerys looked beyond the many walls and defenses that protected her day to day. Dax studied her nose ridges, the shape of her face and the honest distress in her eyes.

“The only thing seven lifetimes of experience would lead me to suggest is to first and foremost, be as honest with yourself as you can. You have your life now and she has hers; how much you and Jen want to get into your history is up to the two of you. Just don’t convince yourself you feel something if you don’t, and if you do...” She shrugged. “Personally, I’d recommend telling Jen, either way. One lifetime is much too short to keep things from the people you care about.” At this point Jadzia inwardly chided herself. It was only recently she had discovered the true feelings Curzon Dax had felt for her when she was in the Initiate Training program. He was lucky; he got a second chance to come clean.

A thought occurred to her and she asked, “Are you sure that she knows you’re on the station?”

Kira looked startled. “I assume she knows. It certainly wouldn’t be hard to find out, if she thought to ask. I don’t know what she’s been doing on Bajor for the six months she’s been back. Kai Winn said she was in some sort of treatment regarding her ordeal, but I don’t take anything Winn says at face value.”

Jadzia thought a moment. “This could be quite the surprise for her. Do you know where she’ll be staying on the station?”

Kira avoided Dax’s eyes, “Yeah, I looked into it.” Then, defending herself, “I was curious, okay! Anyway, Keyla, Tosh, and Dobin have all been assigned quarters on the habitat ring section A-Forty-Two, near the Klingon contingent. Jen has requested permission to stay on board the ship. After they dock tomorrow, they have requested the use of some rehearsal space.

They have offered to give several performances in exchange for access to various parts of the station for recording purposes. The first performance is at twenty-thirty hours tomorrow. Will you come?"

"Absolutely, I wouldn't miss it" Dax replied with a grin. "Will you see her before then?"

Kira shrugged "Yes, Odo and I will meet them when they dock. Kai Winn lost a fight with Sisko about her being allowed to come to the station. To appease Winn, Odo and I will escort Jen to sickbay where Julian will decide if she is psychologically competent. If she isn't, she will be placed in my custody."

"That could be interesting." Dax said taking a deep sip of kis.

Chapter 2

"Bajoran cargo vessel *No Regrets* successfully docked *DS9*, thank you." Dobin leaned back in his seat and turned to Keyla, "We're docked. You want to tell Jen?"

"Not really, she's been a virtual nerve bundle since leaving Bajor. Can't blame her though, I thought for sure we'd be stopped at the spaceport."

The pilot grinned at her in agreement. In his late twenties, Dobin Veran wore his brown hair cropped close to his head; a common work tunic and trousers covered his trim and muscular frame. While his hands were rough and calloused, they moved gracefully around the ship's controls. Keyla, slightly younger and considerably shorter than Dobin, rose from the seat behind the vacant co-pilot's chair. Like Dobin, she wore the traditional Bajoran ear cuff and ring in her right ear; she too kept her hair cut short. So blonde that it appeared almost white, her hair fell in soft layers as she leaned across her console and touched a sequence of keys. "Jen, Tosh, we're docked. We've been instructed to wait for Major Kira and the station's Chief of Security. Jen, you really seem to rate around here."

Jen Brenmar stepped through the archway and regarded her friends. "How nice of you to notice."

"Any chance of getting our replicator looked at while we're here?" Dobin asked hopefully.

Jen chuckled, "I swear, Dob, aside from music, all you think about is food. You've got enough credits to feed yourself while on board the station. But I'll see what I can do –"

A voice came through the outside speaker, cutting Jen off. "Major Kira Nerys and Chief of Security Odo of *Deep Space Nine* welcome you to the station." Kira then added under her breath, "I hope that wasn't too formal." Odo regarded her curiously as she tensely watched the outer air lock open. Kira smiled and acknowledged the three people she didn't recognize as they stepped through the air lock. There were two men and a woman who all looked about the same age, mid-twenties to early thirties, Kira estimated. All were dressed in serviceable tunics and trousers; clean, in good repair, but not fancy. The delicately-featured, petite blonde woman was shorter than Kira. She smiled and introduced herself then the two men as they stepped through the lock.

"This is Dobin Veran," Keyla said. The pilot grinned and nodded to Kira, then Odo. "And this is Tosh Sener," she nodded at the man with long black hair who appeared to be the oldest in the group. Kira distantly heard Keyla finish with "And you know Jen," as Jen stepped out of the lock and time seemed to freeze.

Jen and Kira studied each other. Jen, who was somewhat taller than Kira, had hair that was a very light brown and quite long and flowed loosely from her head. Kira noticed that she did not wear the traditional Bajoran ear cuff. Instead, she had a series of small silver hoops

evenly spaced along the outside edge of her right ear. Kira had noticed the same adornment on Tosh. While she knew that the woman standing before her was only twenty-six, her eyes were those of a much older woman. There was uncertainty and affection reflected back from the drummer's light green eyes. Jen walked between her friends and stood very close, almost toe-to-toe with Kira, for a long moment; then she smiled. "Nerys," she said softly.

"Bren," Kira smiled back, and found herself in Jen's embrace. As she felt herself returning it, all her prior apprehensions melted away. That warm embrace said friendship, unconditional friendship, and eternal devotion, nothing more. Jen softly kissed Kira's cheek before pulling away.

"It's good to see you, Nerys." She gestured to the others standing around and added, "You've met the band; Keyla Ris did the introductions." She looked at her friends. "Guys, this is Kira."

Kira turned to Odo. "This is Constable Odo, Chief of Station Security." Odo nodded his head slightly. Looking again at Jen, Kira continued, "Odo and I need to have a talk with you, Bren." Jen smiled as Kira stuck to the shortened version of her given name, it was at once an endearment and a sorely missed sign of familiarity. "Ensigns Sevek and Kalahan will show you where the rehearsal hall is as well as where you'll be staying." Kira motioned to the men in black and gold uniforms who stood a polite distance from the group. She looked at Jen's three friends. "They can answer any immediate questions you have regarding the station." She was surprised when the muscular man, Tosh, turned protectively to Jen.

"You going to be okay?" he asked with concern.

"I'll be fine, don't worry. We're on the station now." Jen playfully tugged at his black hair, which was almost as long as hers was. "Relax. Remember, Kira's family. I told you I expected there would be some sort of debriefing when we got here. Get settled in, set up the equipment. I'll meet up with you later for a sound check in the rehearsal hall."

"Do you need anything transported?" Kira asked helpfully.

"If we could get some grav lifts we'd like to move the instruments ourselves." Tosh turned to Kira. "Paranoid professionals. I don't trust transporters on ancient musical instruments," he added, grinning.

"Sure," she replied, nodding to Ensign Sevek. "Would you please see to whatever they need?" The young Ensign nodded and gestured to the musicians. They turned as a group and followed him.

Jen formally bowed to Odo and Kira. "Welcome to my humble abode, the *No Regrets*. Please come aboard. We can talk here if that's okay."

Odo nodded back with a small bow and stepped aside to let Kira through the air lock. Once inside the ship, Jen led Kira and Odo to an open area inside one of the cabins where several comfortable chairs gathered around a small table. The ship smelled faintly of incense, a pleasant smell preferable to the usual mustiness common in older ships. There was a bed against the far wall, with a stack of clothes neatly arranged on top. Kira remembered Jen's affinity for neatness and guessed that they were in her quarters. Several other containers of various sizes were set against the wall, Kira could read the labels facing her, *food, drums*, *recording equipment*; this was definitely Jen's room. "Please, have a seat," Jen invited, taking one herself. "So, what's up?" Jen sat back calmly, crossed her legs, draped one arm casually across the back of her seat, and rested the other on her knee.

"Any reason you can think of Kai Winn wouldn't want you to leave Bajor?" Kira asked taking her seat.

"Except for wanting to send me back to Cardassia, I can't think of a one." Jen answered amicably.

Declining to sit, Odo stood a short distance away from the table, taking in his surroundings. "Any idea then, why Winn would want you out of the way?" he asked casually, studying the furnishings in the neat cabin. He turned to Jen. "Permanently," he added meaningfully.

Jen uncrossed her legs and placed both arms on the table. Looking directly at Odo, she said, "I seriously don't know. But I'm doing my damnedest to find out." She then turned to Kira, "Six months ago I was picked up by a Federation Science vessel along with some other newly-liberated political prisoners. While aboard the *Longevity*, I filed a report, which I'm sure you've read by now. After getting back home, to what's left of it anyway, I started trying to put my life back in order." She took a deep breath, fighting to keep painful information as direct and clear as possible. "I declined an invitation from the government to stay in the military, Shakaar was a little put-out, but I think he'll live." Losing a bit of control, she started to vent. "I'm almost as disgusted with the government as I am with our illustrious Kai. I think Shakaar will make a good First Minister, but I don't have any emotional glue left to hold anyone else's organization together."

"Go on" Odo urged her to stick to her narrative.

"Right, sorry. Anyway, I was given a series of medical tests and some psyche tests. That finished, I traveled a bit, took some time to meditate and think." Jen nodded to Kira, "you know, get the houses in order." She absently touched the many rings on her right ear, and seemed to calm down a bit. "As you see, I've been studying some history," she smiled.

"Then I realized I'd gone from never wanting to touch a musical instrument again, to desperately wanting to play. I traveled to the different refugee camps making music and reminding people there that they could too. We both know the people of Bajor weren't always so pathetic. It's unbelievable how many people – smart, good, bright people – are simply stagnant, waiting for the government, or the Kai, to do something." Odo made an expression that said if he had any eyebrows he would have lifted one. "I know, I know, stick to the facts. Finally, after about eight weeks of being back on Bajor, I met Tosh. We started playing music together. Then we met Dobin, and then Keyla."

"Was Tosh a heretic when you met him or is that your doing?" Kira asked. She belatedly realized there was not as much humor in the statement as she'd hoped.

Jen regarded her fondly, unruffled by the unintended insult. She smiled devilishly, and leaned in towards Kira. "To be precise, you absolutely breathtakingly beautiful hothead, you, Tosh was not a heretic when I met him, at least not open about it. I can't help it if he is impressionable and happens to listen to me when I rant and rave. I take full responsibility for his heresy." She sat back, smirking at Kira, who was blushing furiously.

Odo, who had been watching the exchange with amusement, spoke. "Heresy?" looking at Jen, then Kira.

"I follow a somewhat older view of our spiritual teachings. As such, I wear a more traditional form of ear decor," Jen answered. Odo looked at the differences in the ear decorations of the two women. Kira wore the familiar ear cuff on the upper rim of her right ear. A decorative chain attached to the cuff trailed down to the earring piercing her lobe. Odo had never seen a Bajoran wearing the silver rings piercing the length of Jen's ear. There were – he quickly counted – fifteen of them, in a graduated series with the largest hoop at the bottom of the earlobe.

"What Jen means, Odo, is that she subscribes to a very primitive form of spiritual teachings, before there were Kais and Vedeks, so she does not acknowledge the spiritual authority of either. Her beliefs are as antiquated as her music."

This time Jen looked genuinely hurt. "You think the music I play is outdated?"

Kira realized she'd truly wounded Jen and tried to soften her words with a smile. "That doesn't mean I don't like it."

Odo broached another subject. "When did you discover Kai Winn's interest in sending you to Cardassia?"

Still crestfallen and looking at the table, Jen replied. "Someone from Internal Affairs contacted me when I was in D'Kor province a month ago. I was taken to Central Processing again and given another set of medical tests. At this point, I started to get nervous. I decided to spend as much time as I could at what's left of the central library. That's how I found out you were here on the station. It was shortly after that, perhaps a day or two, that I received a summons from the Bajoran military office. They told me that I was going to Cardassia to be a witness at a trial. That was when I found out about what happened to MarTay. I reminded them that I was honorably discharged a mere six months earlier and they didn't have the authority to make me go anywhere. It was after I got a social call from one of Winn's aides, that I decided I needed to leave the planet. He tried to persuade me to go for the 'good of Bajor' and crap like that. I politely told him that the Cardassian legal system had nothing to do with Bajor, at which point he came very close to threatening me."

Jen paused for a moment to think. It was clear she was debating how much to tell and decided to go for broke. "When I came back from Cardassia, I took something. I mean, I took several somethings, but a significant something."

"Go on." Odo urged.

"You know the Cardassians stole all but one of the Celestial Temple orbs. Well I found one of them. I stole it back. As our illustrious spiritual leader put more pressure on me I decided to return it, but not to her and the main temple as I'd originally intended, but to one of the fringe monasteries. They are good people. And they were very grateful."

"Who?" Odo asked, interested in Jen's narrative.

"Just how grateful?" Kira asked suspiciously.

Jen looked from Odo to Kira, "The Lycene Order. They gave me this ship. No, I don't know where they got it. And it just barely got us to the station; if possible, I'd like to see about having some refurbishing done while we're here. Anyway, I filed a flight plan to come here day before yesterday. We were loading our instruments on board when I was picked up and taken directly to the Kai. She tried to talk me out of leaving. She said it was in the best interest of the peace agreement that I go to Cardassia. I told her that it would be a suicide mission and she said 'if that is the will of the Prophets'. I'm not making this up, Nerys. Something about me has the Kai seriously frightened and I don't know why. She told me quite flatly that she would arrange it so *Deep Space Nine* would forbid me passage and I'd live out my days in the psych ward if I didn't do as she requested. There was no one else in the room when she said this, of course, no witnesses. She finally said 'I hope the Prophets lead you back to the true path' and I'm sure that if the others hadn't been waiting for me, I would have disappeared this morning. I kept checking my status to make sure permission to board *DS9* hadn't been revoked. We left the surface as soon as we had clearance, but now that I'm here, I'm not at all certain of how to proceed. As my request stated, we're here to make some music. I'm very interested in the ambient acoustics of

the station. I just thought it best to put some space between Winn and myself while I wait to see what happens next."

Odo and Kira looked at each other then back at the woman sitting in front of them. "That is a very interesting story, Jen Brenmar," Odo said in his usual gruff way. "I mean no disrespect when I say I look forward to checking it out."

"No offense taken, Odo. I'd be suspicious of me, too. Please, by all means, investigate!" Jen replied. Then to Kira, "So, what's next on the agenda for me?"

"We'd like to take you to sick bay and let Dr. Bashir run a full set of diagnostics on you. Depending on how your psyche profile turns out, I might be made your legal guardian." Jen was confused but before she could ask Kira to explain Odo spoke up.

"If you don't mind I have one final question."

"Of course," Jen said looking up at him. Odo had been very neutral about Jen Brenmar. He normally disliked people in general until they proved themselves worthwhile. However, since Jen had been an old friend of Major Kira's, he gave her the benefit of the doubt and had feelings neither for her, nor against her. He was somewhat surprised to find himself growing to like this woman. She had one very important similarity to Kira. Like Kira, Jen treated Odo with respect and did not flinch at his unusual appearance. Jen had also been forthright and candid in her narrative. For her sake, he sincerely hoped she was being honest as well.

"Why have you declined quarters on board *Deep Space Nine*? The other members of your... band have taken temporary quarters here."

She thought a moment, considering how to put her feelings into words. "As I'm sure Doctor Bashir's tests will confirm, I haven't quite gotten over my stay on Cardassia. Section 51 is worse then you've heard. I was tortured, isolated, manipulated, raped, all the finest in Cardassian hospitality. They would control my behavior by manipulating my air, food, water, sometimes to keep me awake, sometimes to induce sleep, hunger, or anxiety. My days and nights were inverted, they'd make it excessively bright for weeks or pitch black for months."

"How did you keep your sanity?" Kira asked with genuine concern on her face.

"I'm not entirely certain I am sane. I hope Doctor Bashir can answer that very question." Jen answered with a smile that was not at all confident.

"And after the interrogation facility?" Odo prompted.

"Things were better at Dakmar's, but I was treated very much like a prisoner." She stopped for a moment, looking at Kira for any reaction to her words. Seeing Kira tense up at the mention of Dakmar, Jen sighed and continued. "I'll be the first to admit I'm paranoid. I'm okay for the most part during the day, but when it's time to sleep, I get terrified. Nightmares are bad enough in a place that I'm comfortable in, they are intolerable in a place that is unfamiliar. I am trying to get familiar with this ship, hence my request."

"I take it that none of the others were prisoners of war?" Odo asked.

"I don't think so. If they were, they're handling it much better than me. If they were in the Resistance at all, I don't know, we haven't really talked about it. All of us are trying to focus on the future of Bajor, not its past," Jen answered.

"Well then," Kira said, standing, "I guess we can escort you to Doctor Bashir."

Kira and Jen walked side by side. Odo walked behind the two women. Kira's arms swung purposefully; she didn't exactly march but she walked very crisply. In contrast, Jen walked with her arms clasped behind her back. She looked thoughtful, her mind somewhere else, keeping pace with Kira not by taking quick steps, but by letting her legs stretch with each step. Odo

thought for a moment that she walked almost like Dax. Jen broke the silence as they reached the turbo lift.

"Have you been okay since the Occupation?" Jen asked Kira tentatively. The trio stepped onto the turbo lift.

"I've been doing all right. You make some headway then have a setback. It hasn't been easy, but I think living up to this point means we'll live through the rest of it." To the empty air Kira said, "Deck 4," and the lift started to move. Standing side by side in the awkward silence of the turbo lift, the two Bajoran women occasionally cast a tentative glance at the other. The meeting of their eyes resulted in uncomfortable grins and short phrases of small talk. Kira couldn't believe how much Jen had changed. The gregarious, charismatic, young freedom fighter had become a much quieter, darker adult. Jen's hair had grown from the short military cut similar to what Kira wore now, to long tresses that fell unrestrained down her back and shoulders. Jen was thinner than Kira remembered. She was muscular certainly, she always had been, but she still had an aura of malnutrition common in returning war prisoners. There was a haunted look in Jen's eyes that disquieted Kira. Clearly, a fire that had once burned there had long been extinguished. Jen noticed the look of sadness that crossed Kira's face.

"I'm not exactly what you expected." She said this without reproach, looking directly at Kira.

Kira could feel the blood rush to her cheeks. "It's not that Bren, it's just that you've been through so much."

Jen smiled weakly and nodded, clearly not believing a word of it. "Yeah, we've both come a long way."

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Eating lunch near a kiosk in the Promenade, Captain Sisko updated in his old friend on his latest encounter with Kai Winn. Dax looked thoughtful a moment before speaking.

"Kira and I talked a bit about it last night. Do you have any leads on exactly what it is Kai Winn is after?"

"No, and believe me, Old Man, I wish I did. Winn is up to no good and the sooner I find out what it is the Kai wants, the easier I'll sleep at night." He chewed thoughtfully for a moment. "With the amount of trouble it took to get representatives from Bajor, Cardassia, and the Klingon Empire around a negotiating table, not to mention the Federation moderating team, the last thing I need it the Kai's interference."

"Do you think there might be a connection with the peace talks and Jen's arrival? The Trill asked, curious.

"I don't know. It's a long shot I suppose, but possible." Sisko put down is fork, frustrated. "It's been over a year since the Klingons withdrew from the Kittimer Accords and what I do know is that this is the first real opportunity we've had to lay a framework for peace. The Kai has been very quiet on the topic. She's never made it clear where she stands on this situation." He picked up his fork and resumed eating.

"Waiting to see how it turns out before picking a side, no doubt." Dax interjected.

Sisko nodded. "What was Kira's perspective on it last night?" he asked around a mouthful of food.

"Just 'girl talk' Benjamin. Nothing you need to worry about." Dax flashed a disarming smile.
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Sisko looked at his friend. “Sometimes I think I’ve gotten used to the new you, but then…”

Still grinning, she replied, “A man in your position needs to stay on his toes.”

He laughed and stood up. “Well, my friend, I need to meet Major Kira in sickbay and see if Jen Brenmar had any leads for us. Want to come?”

“No thanks, Benjamin. I need to get back to my lab and finish up the isotonic scans on some tissue samples Julian requested. I promised him I would get them to him today. I’ll be finished by the performance tonight. Are you going?” Jadzia also stood up.

“What? Miss entertainment coming from a source other than Quark? Not on your life. I’ll see you there, then.”

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Jadzia strolled into sickbay just as Julian was finishing his work for the day. “Well, hello Dax,” he said, sighing to himself as she approached. He’d grown accustomed to the disappointing fact that, regardless how much he wished otherwise, he’d never be more than good friends with the beautiful Trill.

Dax handed him a small data padd. “Here is the isolated genetic structure of the sample you gave me.” Julian noticed she was casually glancing around sick bay. “You’ll be happy to know they confirm your original predictions.”

“Great, thanks Jadzia,” Julian said, taking the padd from her. “Now I’ll be able to get started on that paper for the conference.” He looked quizzically at the Trill, “Are you looking for something?”

Jadzia caught herself and laughed. “I guess I am. Is Kira’s friend still here? I heard she was going to be meeting with you for physical and psychological profiles.”

“What? Jen?” he asked, puzzled. “No she left at least a half hour ago. The tests didn’t take long. She said she was heading to something called a ‘sound check’. She was done before Captain Sisko got here for the debriefing. To be honest, I think Major Kira made her a little uncomfortable, or vice versa. Kira was relieved when Jen left.”

Jadzia waited for him to brief the night staff on what would be required in sick bay that night. He gathered up a few data padds and was ready to leave. As they headed down the hall, Jadzia couldn’t help but ask, “So what’s she like?”

“Who? Jen?” Julian was clearly surprised at her interest in the Bajoran folk singer. “Well, I don’t know. She seems nice enough. More reserved than Kira, and not as fiery. I don’t know what I was expecting,” Bashir smiled, “I guess I thought she’d be more like our beloved Major…” he paused a moment looking thoughtful. “There’s something else there though. She’s fighting her way through a lot of trauma. Jen has recovered physically, now she’s got to work on the inside. I prescribed some medication to help, but for the rest, she’s got to do it on her own.” An odd thought struck Julian. “Why the curiosity?”

“I’ve been listening to some of her music. The dinner as Sisko’s piqued my interest. I really love it. You’ll be at the performance tonight?”

Julian was relieved. It was just the music. “Sure, I’m going. I was going to have some dinner first. Would you like to join me?”

She smiled at him. “*Quark’s*?” She knew Julian had been thinking of ‘his place’.

“Uh, sure Dax.” Julian answered, crestfallen.

“I’ll meet you there.”
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After finishing their dinner, Dax and Bashir made their way from *Quark's* to the turbo lift down the Promenade that would take them to the docking ring. A small hanger had been hastily converted into an amphitheater. There were a number of tables and chairs down in front near the stage. Behind that area was a large bar with bar stools and areas to stand and watch the performance. Julian observed with some disgust that it didn't take Quark long to get take advantage of an opportunity to make something profitable. It looked like 200 denizens of the station could fit into the room. A low stage had been set up toward the back of the room. A metal grate platform rose no more than a meter off the ground and there was an open area in front of the stage before the tables. The room was starting to fill with people. It took Julian a few moments before he noticed a good-sized table down front and a bit to the side where Kira, O'Brien, Keiko, Odo, Sisko, and Jake were sitting. Julian also noticed that there were quite a few Klingons gathering as well.

"Must have gotten tired of losing at Dabo," He said, nodding to a large group of Klingons as he and Dax took their seats.

"Why Julian, Klingons are intense music lovers. Don't let Worf fool you." Dax replied smiling, taking a seat next to Kira "Besides, I'm sure this is a nice diversion for the negotiating team after a long day of haggling."

Julian smiled, taking the seat next to her "Tell me about it. Some people say that peace talks haven't happened earlier because of the insurmountable task of getting Bajorans, Cardassians, and Klingons to agree on the shape of the negotiating table." Looking around, he noticed Commander Worf was missing from the officers assembled at the head table. "Where is Commander Worf, by the way?" he asked.

Sisko smiled. "He's in Ops, organizing the agenda for the tomorrow's session. I think he was looking for an excuse to avoid Bajoran folk music. I wouldn't be surprised if he regrets his decision; the entire Klingon negotiating team is here."

Quark approached the table. "Anything I can get for you folks before the hellacious noise starts? I'd be happy to put it on your bar tab." Ferengi didn't usually allow a 'tab' for anyone, but the senior officers of the station received special privileges. Unfortunately for Quark, they never took advantage of them.

"Funny, Quark," Odo said smoothly, "I don't recall you registering your temporary change of location with Operations?"

"What? To serve drinks at an informal concert? You've got to be joking." Quark replied, concern creeping into his voice.

"Me? Joke? About regulations? Really Quark, I think you're slipping," Odo replied icily.

"Now, Constable" Sisko said amiably, "I'm sure Quark had no intention of charging interest or special handling on anyone's tab. I don't see the harm in letting him provide refreshments to this fine crowd for the usual prices."

"But Captain," Quark complained "The extra work, the insurance – I'm not doing this out of the goodness of my heart..."

"Pity." Sisko replied "As you were saying, Odo?"

Before the shapeshifter could reply, Quark cut in. "Okay, okay, you win. No extra charges. I'll have Rom serve you." He could be heard muttering under his breath as he left the table, "How they expect me to make a decent killing, I don't know."

Jadzia looked at the platform. Two extensive and distinctive sets of drums were set up in the middle and rear of the platform. One set, starting at the center of the stage and moving to the
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left, appeared to be hide drum heads stretched across wooden cylinders of various sizes. Amidst the hide drums were metal cymbals of various sizes as well. The bank of drums to the right looked like wooden blocks of various sizes. A memory came to her at that point, one of Joran's she suspected. She thought she remembered drums of that type on the Trill home world, a hundred years ago.

There were other instruments on the stage as well. To the right of the drum set up were several stringed instruments. She recognized some of them as traditional Bajoran instruments, one or two that looked like something from ancient Earth, and another that looked like something used in Klingon ceremonies. To the left of the drum area were two more groups of instruments: another series of stringed instruments and a small group of various pipes. She saw a beautiful Bajoran bladder pipe and some woodwind instruments.

The lights began to dim; the assembled crowd grew quiet as attention focused on the stage in the center of the room. Four people, two women and two men, walked quietly and calmly to the stage and stepped up on it. Jadzia noticed that the woman who walked over to the drums seemed tense and nervous to the point of panic until she got behind the drums, at which point she visibly relaxed.

Dax studied the drummer. She was taller than Kira, with long, light brown hair that fell like a loose mane around her face and shoulders. Jen's features were sharp, her jaw line distinctive, and her pale green eyes penetrating. The Bajoran woman was simply clothed in a sleeveless tunic. She wore nothing on her feet. Her only adornment was the striking series of small rings circling the outside of her right ear. As Dax glanced at Kira and noted the differences in the ear decoration, she noticed Kira looking intently at Jen. Kira caught Dax looking at her and smiled.

Dax saw the man standing next to Jen had the same ear decoration; he too wore his rich black hair long and loose about his face. He and the other two band members were similarly clad in simple work clothes. Jen however, was the only one who was sleeveless and barefoot. Dax leaned over to Kira. "Why is she barefoot?"

"She plays some of the drums with pedals, using her feet. She used to say she didn't have enough sensitivity with boots on." A wry smile crossed Kira's crisp features. "As I recall," she continued quietly, "there wasn't anything wrong with her sensitivity."

The other members of the quartet picked up their instruments. The petite woman standing out in front, who appeared to be the youngest of the group, smiled warmly, looked at her bandmates, and spoke.

"Before we start, we'd like to thank everyone for stopping by. If at any time during the performance you feel like dancing or singing – please join in."

As Keyla finished her greeting, Jen tapped a quick rhythm with the two sticks she was holding and the performance began. The first four compositions were traditional Bajoran folk songs. Bajorans in the assembled crowd sang the familiar words softly to themselves and smiled. Kira sang as well, much to the hidden delight of Odo who, as was his custom, sitting next to her. They were songs of her childhood, sung together in the brief moments of family closeness during the Occupation, those dark years that were the only childhood she had ever known. The songs originated from a time long before the Cardassians raped her planet and decimated her people; songs of hope, happiness, and simple pleasures.

Dax noticed that even the people unfamiliar with Bajoran music were enjoying themselves. While she had long known music was universal, it nonetheless pleased her to see even the Klingon contingent, while not raptly absorbing the music, at least listening politely. She

briefly closed her eyes, focusing on the voices intermingling. Keyla's voice, in a much lower and stronger register than Jen's, was surprisingly powerful for her soft, willowy appearance. In another visual surprise, Jen, who looked stronger and roughhewn around the edges, had a voice that was startling soft and pure. Harmonies between the two women blended perfectly, balanced by Dobin's powerful and beautifully clear deep voice.

After the first folk composition, they took requests from the audience for the next three folk songs. Most of the crowd seemed happy and content to listen to Bajoran folk music all night, but Jen had other ideas. As they finished the fourth song, Jen appeared visibly relaxed and happy. She focused less on what was happening on stage and looked out into the crowd. In a moment, she spotted the table where Kira and the others sat. The rest of the band was taking a few sips of something to refresh their voices. Jen smiled and began tapping out a complex rhythm on the drums. Kira's head shot up and she looked at Jen, so did the other members of the band. Only Tosh followed Jen's gaze to Kira's table, and at Dax.

"What was that about?" Julian asked, leaning behind Jadzia's back to talk to Kira.

Kira smiled and shyly glanced at Dax before answering, "Oh, nothing, Jen's just checking to see if I remember my Bajoran drum language."

Jake was instantly interested. "Wow, a Bajoran drum language! What did she say?"

"I dunno, Jake," Kira said. "I didn't catch most of it."

"Really Major? The message wasn't that hard." Odo said, looking at Kira with some surprise.

She looked at Odo with stunned amazement. "You know the language?" she asked incredulously.

"Of course I do. When I worked under the Cardassians, they were most interested in intercepting any secret messages being sent or received by the station. It's interesting; while the Cardassians were here I never heard any."

"So what did she say?" Jake asked again enthusiastically.

"Well," Odo began glancing at Kira, "basically she said she was glad to see Nerys… and something about hoping the music wasn't too outdated?" He looked puzzled, then continued. "Then I believe she asked to be introduced to the gorgeous woman sitting next to Major Kira… if my decoding skills aren't too rusty." He looked to Kira for confirmation.

"Yeah I'd say that was it." Kira said, blushing slightly then, turning to Jadzia, said apologetically, "Perhaps I should have warned you, Jen is quite a flirt."

"Cool." Jake muttered under his breath.

"Sorry, Jake." Kira smiled at him, "She only flirts with women." Jake shrugged and Captain Sisko looked visibly relieved. Jadzia looked at Jen, missing Jake's disappointed shrug. The two women held each other's gaze for a long moment; then Jen realized that several members of the audience were watching the exchange; apparently, the Bajoran drum language was not as outdated as she thought. She looked away, slightly embarrassed, and readied her sticks for the next song as she etched the Trill's smile and wink indelibly into her memory.

"Ah, we'd like to change the pace a bit," Jen began. "I'm not sure if you folks have had enough to drink yet, but if not, I'm sure Quark can help you out. This is one of our favorite drinking songs, and the only thing Tosh can sing on key." There were a few laughs as the band whipped into a rousing rendition of *Klingon Women and Romulan Ale*.

The next few songs continued in the same upbeat and rowdy fashion. Tosh's rather unusual voice was well suited for the boisterous music. What he lacked in tone he made up for in volume, much to the delight of the Klingons in the audience. Julian was startled when Dax joined

in on a refrain. Seeing his surprised look, she smiled roguishly. “I just love Klingon ballads, don’t you Julian?” Dax felt the musicians pouring their hearts and souls into the music. All four were beginning to glisten with perspiration. Jen and Tosh were looking wilder as their loose hair flew about. Not just in her ears, the vibrations from the instruments as well as the amplification system had sound waves vibrating through everyone in attendance. Unlike everyone else, Jadzia Dax had a symbiont nestled in her upper abdomen. Another living creature that could feel the vibrations and enjoy the sensations coursing through her joined body. Dax responded with joy and enthusiasm to the sensations of the drums; bass tones especially. As Jen picked up a mallet and hit a gong behind her, Jadzia noticed a prominent mark that ran the length of her left arm. “Is that a scar?” She asked the doctor in a low voice.

“Yes it is. Courtesy of Cardassia I’m afraid.”

Kira, overhearing the exchange, also looked at the vicious white line on the underside of Jen’s forearm. She, too, had been roughed up by the Cardassians, but had only been threatened with the procedure that scarred Jen. She remembered her own terror as she listened to the screams of the Bajorans in adjacent cells who actually experienced it. Only the silence of the room brought Kira out of her dark reverie. The song had finished and Jen was waiting for the active crowd to quiet down before continuing. Kira followed Jen’s gaze to a grizzled old Klingon patriarch who stood, surrounded by other Klingons, dressed in traditional fur and leather garb. Fat, with long hair and even longer beard, he had a patch covering one eye and a deep scar that ran from the ridges of his forehead across his nose to the opposite ear. When Jen spoke, it was clear she spoke to him.

“We would like to do one more song in Klingon,” she began, “I heard it for the first time several years ago. It was a very difficult time in my life. This song gave me what I needed to get through it. I say this because it is a sacred song to the people of the Klingon Empire. I have taken liberties with it, changed it. Certainly, because I am not a Klingon, I am of Bajor, and to do it as composed would be disrespectful to the people for whom it was originally written.”

Kira heard Dax say softly, “she’s talking about the Song of the Dead.”

“It’s called *T’pak D’vorr Nmt,* or Song of the Dead.” Jen finished.

Kira looked again at the old Klingon warrior. His one eye had grown cold and stony. The Klingons around him had also grown quiet. They all stood with their arms crossed or thumbs hooked into belts, waiting.

“*Tough crowd*,” Kira thought.

The members of the quartet exchanged nervous glances. Jen swallowed once and nodded to Tosh. He began on the pipes a flurry of notes suddenly became a din of noise erupting from that one instrument. It no longer sounded like the familiar, plaintive wail. It was a furious, screaming roar. Jen came in on the cymbals, sounding like rain and thunder, and then pounded furiously on the drums. Then there was silence.

Keyla and Dobin started a familiar melody of mourning on the strings. Slowly, softly at first, Jen and Tosh began again. Before the ears of everyone, the two refrains melded into one. The Bajoran music took the chaotic edge off the Klingon hymn; the Klingon strains added power and vitality to the Bajoran music. Jen began singing flawless Klingon in a much lower register, then repeated each verse in standard for the benefit of all assembled.

Jadzia listened with interest as the two distinct forms of music played tug-of-war with each other. While the words were steady and clear, never straying from their intended cadence and rhythm, the music seemed to flow all over the place and appeared to hit the proper lyrics only by accident.

"I've never heard anything quite like it." Jadzia overheard Miles O'Brien say to his wife, Keiko. His tone of voice said that he was not sure if he liked the merger of Klingon and Bajoran music. Looking around the room, it was clear that most of those present felt the same way. The song ended powerfully, with Keyla singing high harmonies in her deep voice and Jen providing unexpectedly powerful melodies with hers, the lapses in rhythm becoming shorter. As the pacing quickened the power grew and when they finished the room was stunned silence. All eyes went to the group of Klingons and the ancient patriarch among them. He started pounding on the bar with his huge tankard, slow and loud. The rest of the Klingons joined in and erupted into bloodcurdling howls.

"Captain," Kira asked, concerned, "What's going on?"

"Relax, Major." Ben replied easily, "It's the Klingon tribute to the dead."

"In case there is anyone we've not alienated or offended yet," Jen began when it was quiet enough to speak, "We are now going to do some very old songs from Earth." She smiled at Jake Sisko. "We've been asked to do some from the late 20th century, America. Any Ferengi still hanging around might want to put something in their ears."

Her voice was audibly raspy. Jen took a sip from a tankard offered to her from a Klingon standing next to the stage. "We like to do these because they make us think of home."

Keyla put down her traditional Bajoran harp and picked up an odd-looking guitar. Dobin had done the same; his instrument only had four strings. Jen nodded to Keyla who began by strumming the guitar, creating an easy rhythm. After a moment, Dobin added a baseline on his guitar, and Tosh, still holding his pipes, began to play. An unusual sound, almost like another stringed instrument, flowed from the Bajoran pipes. After a few measures Tosh dropped the pipes to his side and began singing, his voice was ragged from the hard-drinking songs and sounded as spent as the world about which he was singing. He sang about hope, pity, and an absence of conscience that ravaged the Earth and brought it to its knees hundreds of years earlier. The chorus provided a clear parallel to Bajor.

So I walk up on high, And I step to the edge
To see my world below
And I laugh at myself, As the tears roll down
'Cause it's the world I know
It's the world I know

The song finished and the band proceeded to tear into several other compositions from Earth. Much to Kira's regret, she was given another opportunity to listen to *Bad Reputation*. As the beat picked up it was clear that people were having a hard time staying in their seats. Jadzia noticed her own feet as well as other toes tapping in time to the lively music. The performers themselves were not unaffected: Jen, sitting behind the bank of drums, was bobbing her head in time to the music. Dobin and Keyla were jumping around the stage, dancing. Even Tosh, the most sedate member of the group, was bouncing in time to the music. After the Earth songs, ranging from late 20th century to early 22nd, the band played some upbeat Bajoran tunes. This was followed by a traditional Vulcan ballad, played very up tempo. Finally, with the band, looking visibly exhausted, Jen announced the next song would be the last for the evening.

"I want to thank everyone for the support you've all shown tonight." Jen began between gasps for air. "We will be doing some more performing on this station during the next few weeks." The crowd erupted in applause.

Then Tosh spoke up. “This last song tonight is from Earth. Don’t let confusion about the lyrics trouble you, we didn’t get it ourselves the first time we heard it. It’s called *December*.” He nodded to Keyla, who began picking out a simple melody on the guitar. When Tosh began singing, Jen added a high thin harmony; the two voices seemed to blend into one.

Why drink the water, from my hand?
Contagious as you think I am
Just tilt my sun toward your domain.
Your cup runneth over again.

The drums then kicked in with an upbeat rhythm, Keyla strummed in time, and Dobin sang the chorus:

Don’t scream about,
Don’t think aloud

To which Tosh added,

Turn your head now baby,
Just spit me out

Dobin continued the chorus,

Don’t worry about,
Don’t speak of doubt

And Tosh finished,

Turn your head now baby,
Just spit me out

At this point Keyla and Jen sang high, backing harmonies. As the refrain played, heads were nodding and feet were tapping in all corners of the room.

As the next verse started, Jen moved to the wooden drums; she added emphasis to their hollow sound with a bass hide drum. Wooden drum and soft acoustic guitar were the only accompaniments to Tosh’s vocal:

Why follow me to higher ground?
Lost as you swear I am.
Don’t throw away your basic needs,
Ambience and vanity.

When the chorus returned and all instruments chimed in, people got up out of their seats, moved away from the bar, and danced. Several of the younger Bajorans and Starfleet officers and even a couple Klingons danced in the area in front of the stage. After two repeats of the chorus, Jen hit the cymbals and all movement of the dancers stopped. Keyla softly played the guitar and those gathered on the dance floor looked at each other, wondering if they’d done something wrong. When people were about to sit, Jen started the beat on the drums again, softly at first, enough to keep people from sitting, just swaying back and forth. She increased the speed and intensity and the dancers worked themselves into their previous commotion.

Jake looked across the table, "Dax, wanna dance?" Jadzia was visibly pleased.

"I'd love to Jake," she quickly got up to join him on the dance floor.

Keiko turned to Miles. "Hon?" he was still holding Molly.

Sisko leaned over to his Chief of Operations, "Go on, dance. I'll hold Molly." That, however, was not Molly's idea.

"Dance with me, Captain," she demanded.

"Yes ma'am," he bowed, and they joined her parents on the dance floor.

"Well, Major?" Julian looked sheepishly at Kira.

She smiled. "Why not." The song continued to its end.

December promise you gave unto me,
December whispers of treachery
December clouds are now covering me,
December songs no longer I sing

Even though the lyrics ended the four musicians on stage continued to play, improvising on the established themes until the dancers started to sit from exhaustion. Without warning, they unceremoniously put down their instruments, stepped off the stage, and politely greeted the well-wishers who crowded around to thank them.

Jen finally worked her way to the Captain's table; Sisko stood up to greet her as Kira did the introductions. "Jen Brenmar, this is Captain Benjamin Sisko"

"Captain, it is an honor to meet you." Jen replied, still holding her drumsticks, and trying to catch her breath. "I can't thank you enough for letting the four of us come to the station." As she spoke, she acknowledged the congratulatory smiles of those assembled around the table. As her eyes met Dax's, she blushed and shyly returned her attention to the Captain.

"The wonderful performance tonight was more than thanks enough." Sisko smiled broadly. "We've prepared a small reception on the observation deck…"

Before he could finish, a group of Klingons approached the table. Kira recognized the grizzled patriarch from earlier. His voice was cold and forceful.

"I am Remph Gor Tok. I would speak with the one who rewrote the sacred Song of the Dead." Odo and Kira exchanged glances, both expecting trouble. Sisko, who was standing next to Jen, made a move as if to stand in front of her. Dax was impressed as Jen gracefully sidestepped the Captain and walked up to the Klingon.

"That would be me, Remph Gor Tok." Jen said calmly, breathing now under control. In a quick movement, the old Klingon extended his arm and put his hand on Jen's shoulder. The other Klingons standing by simultaneously struck their open left palms with their right fists and held their hands in that position across their chests.

Remph Gor Tok looked down into Jen's eyes, studying them for a moment for any signs of fear or weakness. He had to be sure of himself before he said the words that could not be unsaid.

"For hundreds of years *T'pak D'vorr Nmt* has been sacred to my people. With it, we honor our fathers, and the fathers of our fathers who have died in battle." He glared at Odo and Kira who were starting to inch their way closer to Jen. Two more Klingons stepped up behind the security officer and Kira. Looking back to Jen, he continued, "To me it was *T'pak D'vorr Nmt* that had died. It was lifeless, recited only by rote, without the honor and dignity my fathers deserved. You have breathed new life into the song of my people. Never would I have expected such honor from someone who is not a warrior, yet I see it with my own eyes, and feel it with my

own heart. You *are* a warrior. I am old, my battles may soon be over, and I will walk with my ancestors. But before I do, I will get a recording of tonight. When it is time for me to walk with my fathers, your song will be played to honor me as you have honored all of the Klingon Empire and Bajor. You will answer to what I have said."

Seeing that Jen was being praised rather than a threatened, everyone at the Captain's table relaxed. Everyone except Jen, who hadn't moved since the Klingon put his strong hand on her left shoulder. She reached up her arm and put her right hand on his shoulder. With pale green eyes, she looked into the dark eyes of the old Klingon. In a calm voice, she replied.

"If I should ever have children, when they are old enough, so that they will remember, I will tell them of this night. Of the night I met the great warrior Remph Gor Tok. He was great because of his bravery and wisdom. Brave because the battles he fought, he fought without fear. Love for his people, his home and his way of life filled his heart so there was no room for fear. Wise because he understood that others who were not Klingon had the same loves. He was not afraid to see his fathers honored by others when he saw sincerity and truth in the honoring. He let them honor in the ways of their people, not his, for honor is honor, and truth is truth."

When she finished, Remph Gor Tok strongly clasped both of her shoulders with his large hands and shouted, "*Dak mal tie r'doom var tek!* You are of my blood now. From this day forward you will be treated by all in the Klingon Empire as a member of my family." In saying this, he held up a large, impressive, Klingon dagger. He handed it to her. "You will keep this."

Jen accepted the dagger, instantly surprised by its substantial weight. The Klingons were about to cheer and she shouted, "Hold it!" to silence them. She then handed her drumsticks to the old Klingon. "There, you are now a member of my band." After that, there was no containing the jubilance of the crowd, Klingon, or any other race.

The congratulations seemed to go on for hours. Every Klingon present greeted each member of Jen's band as family. Jen accepted the aggressive clasps on the back, the head butts, and gruff words of praise with good humor, talking with the Klingons in their native language. Kira noticed that Jen seemed more comfortable with the rough Klingon group than the Bajoran well-wishers. Tosh and Dobin seemed apprehensive about the rough attention while Keyla seemed to be basking in it. Kira surmised that Keyla was the most receptive of the group when it came to attention, period. The party in the concert hall gradually migrated to a spontaneous reception on the Observation Deck.

The observation "deck" on *Deep Space Nine* was actually three levels. The main observation room was slightly smaller than the concert hall, and used primarily for receptions for Starfleet dignitaries. Large windows along the side of the room allowed an unparalleled view of the space station and the ships docked at the upper three pylons. A smaller observation area existed above, accessed by a tight circular staircase on the side of the room, and was about the size of Ops. It was typically Cardassian in design. While Federation design simplified and streamlined the look of its architecture by covering infrastructure with panels, Cardassians reveled in the visible skeleton of building. Few things were hidden behind a panel when they could be observed. Even the turbo lift to Ops was open, allowing visibility into its workings. Finally, a much smaller observation deck was located at the very top, not much bigger than a conference room.

As the party wore on, Jadzia sought out the drummer. She enjoyed the opportunity to talk to the other three band members, all of whom she found delightful, but she wanted to greet the drummer and thank her for the evening. However, the elusive drummer seemed to have disappeared. Dax climbed the stairs to the second level of the observation deck and saw Jen

sitting alone at a table, looking out into space. She was about to walk over to her when she heard footsteps below signaling that someone else was about to use the stairs. Acting purely on instinct, Jadzia quietly climbed the stairs to the third level. She sat there for a moment taking it all in, the vastness of space, when she heard Kira speaking to her friend below.

"There you are. People are starting to pack it in for the night. Keyla, Dobin, and Tosh are having a great time. Don't you like your party?" Jadzia couldn't see, but assumed Kira had walked over to Jen and had taken a seat either next to or across from her.

As Jen looked out the window, Kira could again see a haunted faraway look in her eyes. She looked like a stranger, and her tense composure betrayed that she felt like one as well.

"The reception's great... it's just… never mind, not important." She waved off the thought.

"Come on Bren. I've known you too long to fall for that. What is it?" Kira was determined to get on more familiar footing with Jen. They had been friends for too long to become strangers now. Jen gazed out the observation window for a long moment before turning to Kira to answer.

"It's just hitting me now. Being back here on *Terok Nor* and all."

"That's the first time I've heard you speak Cardassian." Kira said, surprised at Jen's reference to the station.

Jen turned again to the window and laughed weakly, "Hard to believe I've spoken nothing but Cardassian for the past five years."

"Look Bren. I didn't say this before and I think maybe I should have. The fact is, I've been trying to come to grips with it myself." Kira paused and continued. "I just want you to know how bad I feel about what happened to you. I know mere words can never do it justice, but when I think of the hell you went through in that household, I… just don't know what to say. I – I just wish I could say or do something to take the pain away."

Jen turned to face Kira, eyes betraying interest as well as puzzlement. "I appreciate your concern Nerys, but I'm afraid I don't follow you. The 'household' part of it wasn't as bad as Section 51."

Uncomfortably, Kira tried to clarify herself. "I meant the episode with MarTay. I mean…" Kira searched for a way to delicately express herself and failed.

Jen almost chuckled. "Prophets, Nerys, just say it. You want to know why I was involved with a Cardassian."

"I was under the impression you'd been raped," Kira replied shortly. "That isn't exactly the same as involved."

"I'm very sorry Nerys, but I think you misunderstood, or misread the reports. Yes, I was raped, but that was at the 51 facility, by some minor Legat named Bosh. Dakmar's was a cakewalk compared to that place. MarTay didn't rape me. For that matter, she didn't even seduce me. Truth be told, I seduced her."

Kira was shocked. "Why?"

Jen turned to the window, her right hand absently touching the area below her left clavicle. "That's a very good question. I wish I knew for sure." Jen looked at Kira, and the incomprehension she read in her face. "I don't mean to sound arrogant but I was bored." She saw Kira's eyes narrow and grow cold. Jen shrugged.

"You were bored?" Kira asked, anger creeping into her voice. Her friend nodded.

"Bored in the sense that if I didn't find some way to occupy my mind, I'd lose it. Aside from writing for Dakmar, my life was pretty much that of your average prisoner on Cardassia.

Torture was no longer routine, but isolation was. Perhaps I thought that if I were close enough to anyone, MarTay for example, I might get access to... well things to keep me thinking. You know, data logs. I just wanted input on anything. Just for the sake of something to study, to look at, or to think about. And let's be honest, seducing a Cardassian into a homosexual relationship is no small challenge, you know how they are about same sex. I found out it's because of their ridiculously low birthrate." She shrugged again.

"You can't be serious." Kira said equal parts horrified and angry.

"Who knows Kira, maybe I just wanted to take risk big enough so that if I got caught I'd be killed on the spot, as opposed to the slow deliberate death I was experiencing." They were both silent for a moment before Jen continued. "You know what I think the worst thing about war is?" She didn't wait for a reply, "It's not what the enemy does to us that destroy us, it's who we become in the presence of the enemy that destroys us. I never loved MarTay but I wanted to make her love me. She was a diversion, I guess. How shitty is that?"

Kira was furious. She didn't know why and didn't want to consider the implications of her anger. She wasn't sure if her fury stemmed from Jen behaving exactly like the Jen Brenmar she remembered, or if this was a new, sinister incarnation. When Kira finally spoke, her voice was cold. "So I suppose that once the threat of Kai Winn dissipates you'll be leaving, since it's obvious you're here for nothing more than your own survival? Or perhaps a diversion?"

Jen looked at Kira with surprise. The Major's anger was expected but disappointing nonetheless.

"What the hell did I do to piss you off?" Jen tried to control the anger creeping into her voice and failed. Had the circumstances been different, Jen might have been amused that Kira still had the ability to needle her to anger. "You seem to be expecting something that apparently I'm not delivering. Mind telling me what it is?"

Kira felt as if she were back at the outpost arguing with Jen ten years ago. She hated her lack of control and discipline when dealing with this woman, hated even more the unresolved feelings that fueled her anger. Her mind raced as she fought to think of something convincing to say.

"Why the silence until now? I've been thinking about it, Jen. You're gone for years, you come back, and do you try to get in touch with me? No. Not a word until Kai Winn is breathing down your neck. Then I find out you're wanted at the trial of someone you seduced, someone who, by all accounts, seems to have attempted suicide because of you. All of this is happening at the same time we have important peace negotiations happening with the Klingon Empire, Cardassia, and Bajor. Don't think I haven't noticed that you're fluent in all three languages, and I know you have an uncanny sense for self-preservation. I want to know what is going on. If you're playing games with me, Jen, I'm warning you. You have one chance to tell me what is going on, and this is it."

"Oh get off it, Kira." Jen said, making no attempt to hide her anger. "MarTay didn't attempt suicide because of me. She tried to kill herself to prevent the Obsidian Order from having that privilege. And what is this about me not being in touch? It was you, beautiful one, who never wanted to see or hear from me again. 'Dead or captured', remember, Nerys? Do you know how many times I heard those words in a dank Cardassian cell? And what, you think I'm a spy? For who? Cardassia? The Klingon Empire? The Maquis maybe? When have I ever been to the Klingon Empire? Why would I help Cardassia? Look at what they did to me!"

Jen thrust out her arm, exposing the deep scar that ran its length. "You know as well as I do what kind butchers Cardassians can be. I hate them for what they did to us as much as you do.

Face it Nerys, this is your anger talking, period. I don't care what you've been told, but you know me well enough to know that my first loyalty is to Bajor. Everything I've told you since I arrived is the unadulterated truth. If it isn't the reality you were hoping for, well I'm sorry." Jen sat back and regarded Kira coldly. "Did you expect me to come back professing undying love? Is that what this is about? You wanna get back together? Assuage some guilt because our fight led to my capture?"

Kira stood up angry, ready to leave. Jen continued quickly.

"I'm sorry Nerys. That was low, even for me. The fact is, I've got three weeks to figure out what Winn is up to and why, provided, of course, I can avoid her until the Viss'r Vardel. If you think I'm asking you to help me, you're damn right. Look, I don't want to die. Not like this, not on Cardassia Prime," Jen implored, tightening her fist and covering adjusting the long sleeve of her tunic to cover the scar. "You don't have to love me, you don't even have to like me, but I hope you'll help me."

Still standing, Kira looked down at her friend. She needed space, time to think and realized she would have the luxury of neither. "I need to think about this Jen. But believe this, I don't love you, and I'm not sure I can like you, but I'll try to help you." With that, she turned and left.

Dax, who had been sitting in the observation chamber, realized she had been holding her breath and let moments pass before beginning to descend the spiral stairs. The top observation deck was dark and the stairs were in shadow. She felt a little guilty about overhearing the conversation between Jen and Kira, but realized that walking in on it would have been more embarrassing for everyone involved. Before she got halfway down, Keyla climbed the stairs from below and walked over to Jen. She hadn't seen Dax. Dax sat on the stairs and waited.

"Hey Jen, how's it going?" Keyla asked cheerfully. Still in shadow, Dax looked down the spiral stairs to the reception floor. Two female Klingons stood below, apparently waiting for Keyla.

"Well," Jen replied, "It's been a hell of a day." She looked out the window to the stars then back at the young woman standing across from where she was sitting. "I meant to say something earlier Ris," Jen grinned weakly up at the blonde woman, "you did a hell of a job tonight. I swear your Klingon is getting flawless. The more I hear your voice the more it amazes me."

"Thanks Bren." Keyla smiled broadly and leaned down to look Jen in the face. "You know that means a lot to me. But, I need to ask you a favor." She giggled, "I need to stay on the ship tonight. You can have the room I've been assigned."

The smile vanished from Jen's face. "What are you talking about?" Anger was once again returning to her voice "You think I'm going to sleep on *Terok Nor*? The same station where I worked in ore processing? Are you nuts?"

Keyla walked around behind Jen and began to massage her shoulders. "Oh, come on Bren," she pleaded, her voice low and soothing, "It won't be such a big deal. Look, I'm sure Kira won't mind you staying with her if you think the nightmares will be that bad." She shifted to massaging Jen's temples. "I wouldn't ask if it weren't important."

Jen looked up. "What, if I might ask, is so important that my emotional wellbeing goes out the window?" Keyla plopped down into the chair next to Jen and squeezed her arm affectionately.

"I've met a couple of women." She said, smiling slyly.

"I'm sure you can get to know them just as well in your station quarters." Jen was clearly not amused.

"Yeah, but the Clan's quarters are stationed on the same habitat level as we are, and Klingons can be so loud"

"Only when provoked. Are you planning to provoke these Klingon women into making loud noises?" Jen asked.

"I sure hope so." Keyla replied, under her breath.

"Prophets, woman! You've been on this station less than eight hours and already you're lining up hearts to break."

Keyla playfully swatted at Jen's arm. "Don't be silly. I'm not breaking any hearts. After all you're the one who got us all adopted into the family. Relana and Sokatr just want to… offer some Klingon hospitality to a newly accepted quasi-Klingon." At that point, Jen distinctly heard snickering coming from the bottom of the stairs in the observation deck below. "Besides Jen," Keyla gave Jen a wry grin, "maybe after this I'll be too exhausted to chase after the Trill I saw you drooling over."

Jen looked genuinely confused, "What's a 'Trill'?"

"The breathtaking brunette sitting next to Kira at the performance, that's all. I talked to her at the reception. Her name is Jadzia Dax and she is the Science Officer on this station. Very nice, I think she likes me."

Jen looked at Keyla a moment and smiled. "Don't we all? Fine, stay in the ship, have as much sex as you can stand. Just have everyone out of there, including yourself by 0800 hours. I guarantee I'm going to have a shitty night tonight, I'll be in a bad mood tomorrow, and I'm going to seriously need to crash."

Keyla smiled, leaned over, and kissed Jen on the cheek. "Thanks. You're a dear. 'Sides, you might not have such a bad night. Not as good as mine, of course." With that, she winked and left.

"Of course," Jen muttered under her breath. She looked back out the window, searching for answers somewhere in the stars. She was brought out of her reverie by a gentle voice.

"Excuse me?"

Jen turned her head to see the most beautiful woman she had ever seen sanding by the stairs. She was very proud of herself for not passing out or forgetting how to speak.

"Um, hi." Looking up into liquid blue eyes, she struggled to think of something else to say. "If… If you're looking for Major Kira, she stormed off in a huff about ten minutes ago."

Jadzia smiled and Jen was sure she'd faint. "Thank you, but no, I'm not looking for the Major. Actually, I was looking for you." Dax crossed the room and Jen offered her the seat across from her. Jadzia smiled. "I wanted to thank you for the wonderful performance tonight. You sang some of my favorite Klingon compositions. I've always loved their drinking songs."

"You're very welcome...?"

"Jadzia Dax." Dax supplied, offering Jen her hand in greeting.

"Lieutenant Commander, right?" Jen shook the offered hand, surprised at the coolness of the Trill's skin, and absently noting the pips on her uniform.

Dax smiled "Yes, but Dax, or Jadzia is fine."

"I'm Jen Brenmar, but I guess you already knew that. I've heard the party is breaking up?"

"It is getting quite late, and most of us have early duty tomorrow."

"Right," Jen said, trying to keep the disappointment out of her voice.

Dax looked at her. She had changed clothes since the performance. She was still wearing common work clothes, but she had added serviceable boots and a long-sleeved linen blouse. The beige sleeves of her blouse were loose fitting in the arms and gathered snugly around her wrists. Over that, she wore a dark green vest that complimented the black pants she wore. Rather than tucking the blouse into her pants, it was instead tied around her waist with a green cloth belt. Dax noticed the hilt of the Klingon dagger sticking out from the side of the belt. The Trill considered her options, looking at her a moment more before speaking.

"If you're not busy now, I was wondering if you'd like a tour of the station?"

"Now? I mean I'd love to, but didn't you just say it was getting late?" Inwardly Jen chided herself as her words stumbled over each other. *Just don't blush,* she thought to herself.

Dax smiled again, flattered and charmed by the bashful manner in which the blushing drummer's words tumbled out. "Yes, I did. But it is easier to get a sense of the station's harmonics when it isn't full of people bustling around."

Jen stood up with a grin, thoughts of Kira and Keyla a million quadrants away. "By all means, Jadzia Dax. Lead on."

Chapter 3

Vedek Danl of the Lycene Order tapped a few commands into the console in front of him. He was nervous. Even though it was a private console, he was not completely sure of his concealment, nor was he certain about his access codes. His brothers in the monastery had assured him the codes would work and, sure enough, they did. Danl carefully traced his way through the complex system. The Federation files were quite organized, in spite of the Cardassian mainframe housing them. He examined data nodes carefully, but not too closely, to ward off suspicion. Once he found the proper strand in the complex web of information, he entered his program into the console. It was not the Vedek's intention to damage any Starfleet files; his mission was to enlighten, not destroy. He was confident the program he turned loose in the system would be a nuisance and nothing more. He watched in awe as the program went to work. It sent out data strands and intertwined with the stations medical databases. The eleventh prophecy of Kai Tulano sat at the core of a new data web existing within the Starfleet data hub. Being careful to change code names, Danl left a subtle trail of tampered files back to the console he was using. There was no way to completely hide where the security breach had happened, the best he could do would be to cover his trail to leave the impression that he didn't know it was being traced.

Finally finished and his drink now empty, Vedek Danl wiped perspiration from the back of his bald head with his sleeve, walked away from the console and put several coins on the counter. "Thank you, for the use of your console, Quark. May the Prophets guide you."

Quark raised an eye-ridge at the generous quantity of coins sitting on the counter. "Anytime Vedek," he replied.

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Jadzia led Jen through several sections of the station. Jen's shyness began to subside as she conversed with the Trill, grateful for the lovely distraction from troubled thoughts about Kira. Jen was drawn to the Trill's easygoing warmth and sense of humor like a veta moth to fire. She smiled inwardly at the thought of the space station as a hive of veta moths, all its inhabitants hovering around the lovely Commander. At several of the areas where they stopped, Jen looked
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around, snapped her fingers above her head, listening. “What are you doing?” Dax finally asked. They were standing in a large runabout hanger. The runabouts were on deployment so the cavernous chamber was almost empty.

“Checking the acoustics,” Jen replied.

Dax considered Jen’s answer. “Wouldn’t you use damping blankets to create whatever acoustics you needed in a given environment?”

“Yeah, we could.” Jen began, happy to talk about a subject that coursed through her veins like blood. “Still, it’s nice to know what a space sounds like naked. If you start depending on damping blankets for artificial acoustics, everything starts to sound the same. I haven’t found anything yet to take the place of real, honest sound.”

Dax noticed immediately that Jen spoke about music and it’s creation with complete confidence. Her self-assurance in that area was similar in many respects to that of a Joined Trill. She spoke with certainty and passion about what she clearly lived for. *Joran would have been impressed*, Dax thought.

They continued through the station. Dax took care not to go near the areas that had formerly been Cardassian ore processing facilities. Jen noticed, but didn’t know if the omission was intentional. They entered an access way to the Jeffries Tubes. “Where to now?” Jen asked, looking at the various tubes than branched off from the small room.

“If you don’t mind doing some climbing, there are some turbo lift shafts that are being refurbished. It is one of my favorite places to play when I come here with my keyboard.” Dax replied, standing next to the tube she intended to take.

“I didn’t know you were a musician!” Jen exclaimed, happily surprised.

Dax smiled, knowing the conversation that was to follow. “I’m not, exactly. One of my former Hosts was a composer and I have his memories.”

Jen paused at the indicated tunnel and looked at Dax, her confusion clear. “Mind running that past me, one more time?”

Dax smiled at Jen’s honest confusion. More than once, she had tried to explain the concept of *Joined Species* to someone, only to have them feign comprehension. “Do you know what a Joined Species is?”

Jen shrugged. “A symbiotic relationship, right? Like anemones living on top of lava crabs?”

“Sort of. Thousands of years ago on Trill, where I’m from, symbionts existed separately from the humanoid population. A series of environmental catastrophes brought the two species together. By joining together physically, mentally and psychically, continued survival was assured for both species. Not all Trills are Joined, because there are very few symbionts compared to potential hosts. But some are, and it is the highest honor a Trill can receive.”

“So you’re joined? You have a symbiont?” Jen asked, still confused, eyes roaming over the woman standing next to her.

Dax nodded her head, “That’s right. Symbionts have a much longer life span than those of hosts. The Dax Symbiont is currently on its eighth Host, Jadzia.”

“Eight?” Jen was stunned.

“Yes, Dax’s first host was Lela, then Tobin, Emony, Audred, Torias, Joran, Curzon and now Jadzia.”

Jen started to look closely at Jadzia, “so where’s the Symbiont? If you don’t mind my asking.”

Unable to contain her laughter, Jadzia chuckled, “you can’t see it. It’s here,” she put her hand on her upper abdomen, just below her sternum, “It’s inside of me.”

Jen couldn’t help but stare at Dax’s flat stomach in wonder. “Does it hurt?” she asked quietly.

“No,” she said with a warm smile. “It is frightening when the symbiont is removed at the end of a Host’s life, but there is no pain. Nor is there any when the symbiont enters the new host.”

“And the music?” Jen asked, enjoying the sensation of getting lost in warm blue eyes.

“Joran was a composer. He was not Joined for very long though, only six months. Still, I have all his memories.”

“Let me get this straight,” Jen said, beginning to climb down the ladder in the turbo shaft. “You, Jadzia, didn’t compose music before Joining, but since Dax has Joran’s memories, now you can?”

“That’s right.” Dax replied, smiling as she descended the ladder after Jen. “I must say you’re picking up on the mechanics of ‘Joined Species’ faster than most.”

“Yeah, well I’m a quick study.” Jen reached the bottom of the ladder and stepped off.

“So who am I talking to?” Jen asked, puzzling through the problem.

Dax smiled warmly, “Both of us. Dax and Jadzia are fully Joined. I know it’s confusing but it’s both of us. If you wanted to say something to ‘Dax’ without ‘Jadzia’ hearing it, you’d be quite disappointed. We’re a package deal.”

Jen laughed. “My dear Jadzia, I may have a lot of desires, but keeping you out of the conversation isn’t one of them.”

“Kira was certainly right about you,” Dax replied, amusement threading her voice.

Jen stopped laughing. “Right about what?”

Dax smiled, “You’re a flirt.”

Jen smiled sheepishly. “I guess I am. Mostly harmless, but I suppose a flirt nonetheless. Not that I’d imagine you find being the subject of flirting a novelty?”

“You’d be surprised by how rarely I’m the subject of flirting. I think something about being of a joined species intimidates most people. Still, I suppose it’s just as well. Trills are notoriously aloof when it comes to sexual interaction, especially when the symbiont is mature, like Dax. Sex isn’t something we generally think about.” Jadzia noticed the look of disappointment flash across the drummer’s face, to be replaced by understanding and sadness.

After snapping her fingers over her head several times, she commented, “I hear you there. I can’t say real intimacy is something I’ve even tried to fathom since my capture seven years ago.” Shaking it off she added, “So what is it about this chamber you love so much.”

Dax looked at Jen and returned her smile. She had seen more wars come and go in 300 years than she cared to remember. While she had never directly fought in any, she understood the plight of returning veterans. She also worried that Jen had written herself off as dead, and as such wouldn’t really try to live. Just ‘existing’ was a difficult realm to maintain, with the associated depression and hopelessness often taking its toll.

“It’s so beautifully quiet. When you play an instrument in here, the sound goes straight up the shaft. From here to the top of the shaft there is very little degradation in the purity of the sound waves.” Dax regarded Jen, who was looking around the chamber.

“Jen,” Dax continued, as the drummer turned to give Dax her full attention, “I need to apologize.” Confusion clouded Jen’s features. “I overheard your conversation with Keyla. I also overheard your conversation with Kira. I’d been looking for you, to thank you, when I heard

Kira coming up the stairs behind me. I continued up to the third observation deck to give you some privacy. Unfortunately, it didn't work."

"Just how much do you know about me and Kira?" the Bajoran guardedly asked.

"Kira and I are close friends. It took a while for Kira to trust me but we've worked together for four years now. I had dinner with her last night and she expressed some apprehensions about seeing you again. She told me about your prior involvement and what she knows about what happened to you."

"I see," she said, still guarded. "So why are you telling me this now?"

"Because it was bothering me," replied Dax, "and because I dislike not being 'up front' with people, especially people I like."

"Well in that case," Jen said, relaxing, "don't worry about it. Of course, you're going to have to deal with Keyla on your own. And just for the record, I wasn't drooling. Well, not much anyway."

After having explored a considerable portion of the station, Jen and Dax were strolling along a deck in the habitat ring. They continued to converse amicably, and quietly, since the hour was very late – or very early, depending on one's point of view. Both women walked with their hands comfortably clasped behind their backs. They looked at each other and noticed the similarities.

"You usually walk with your hands behind you?" Jen asked.

Dax smiled, the drummer noting that she seemed to do that a lot. "Yes. Leela, Dax's very first host, was a legislator in the Trill Assembly. At first, she used to be quite expressive with her gestures as she spoke. She then noticed the other legislators copying her. Then she started keeping her arms still and letting her voice carry the full force of her message. It was quite successful. What about you?" She asked nodding to Jen's arms clasped behind her.

"Generally, on Cardassia, prisoners are transferred unconscious to wherever they need to go. They are either knocked out or put in stasis. Unless, of course they are *Tahl Ikto*, which means 'on the edge'. That implies that their nervous system is compromised to the point that stasis could kill them. I spent most of my time incarcerated as *Tahl Ikto*, which means I was awake when I was moved around. In such cases, they chain prisoner's hands behind their back. I just got used to walking that way." As Jen finished, they came to a door and stopped.

"So where does this lead?" Jen asked.

"My quarters," Dax answered.

"Why Jadzia," Jen exclaimed in mock surprise, "how delightfully forward of you." She couldn't stop herself from winking, happy that the beautiful woman standing next to her chuckled with amusement.

"I thought that after all the discussion of Tongo, you actually might like to play. Look at it this way. It's 0300 hours. I'm tired of walking all over the station. You've pissed off Kira enough to not be able to stay at her place, your guitar player is having wild sex on your ship, and you're stuck on a Cardassian station. Do you have any better ideas?"

"Now that you put it that way..." Jen smiled broadly, "Besides, I thought you knew that five of my top ten fantasies involved being in your quarters."

"And the other five?" Dax asked stepping through the door.

"You're on my ship." Jen followed her.

Inside the sitting room, Jen looked around. She wasn't surprised to see that it was immaculate. It was warm, comfortable, and eclectic. It was surprisingly spacious for accommodations on a space station. There were some comfortable chairs, a couch, a low table,

several plants, some nice artwork. Off to her left she could see what she assumed was the sleeping area, to her right was a counter with a replicator set into it. She noticed several Klingon weapons, and what looked like primitive artifacts on the walls.

"Nice place," Jen commented.

"Thank you. Would you like something to eat or drink?" Dax asked stepping behind the counter in the food preparation area.

"I'd love some Ceryllian tea if you're programmed for it." Jen asked hopefully.

"I can do one better. I happen to have some Ceryllian tea leaves here." Dax replied, sliding a panel and looking into the space above the counter.

"In that case would you happen to have a Garbo root?" Jen asked walking to the other side of the counter.

"You put Garbo root in your tea? Doesn't that make it bitter?" Dax asked taking down the proper ingredients.

"Not if you peel off the skin first." She walked to the counter where Dax was placing the ingredients. "Like this." She took the Klingon dagger out of her belt and delicately peeled the grey skin from the pungent root. "Then slice it really thin." Still holding the root in her hand, she took the dagger and sliced off several paper-thin wafers of root. "Now take the slices and put them in boiling water for a few moments. When they turn opaque, they are ready to be put in the tea. I'd only put one or two slices in a cup though, they're potent."

Jadzia took the delicate slices from Jen. As she turned to the replicator to request boiling water, she saw Jen wipe the Klingon dagger clean with the end of her cloth belt before placing it back in its sheath.

"You've been given quite an honor," she remarked, looking nodding at the dagger. "I believe that Remph Gor Tok is a revered member of the Klingon high council. He's serving as ambassador for the peace talks. Did you know that the *dahk'ta* he gave you is a family heirloom?" Dax asked, walking into the main room with two cups of tea.

Jen looked down at the dagger in her belt following her, "I didn't know… '*Dahk'ta*?' You speak Klingon? And here I thought it was just drinking songs," Jen smiled.

Dax smiled back. "Curzon Dax had some very good friends who were Klingon. He had a Klingon godson." Jen sat on the couch behind the table where Jadzia had set the tea. Jadzia sat next to her. Jen took out the impressive dagger and examined the hilt.

"You mean these are family markings then?" Jen asked, tracing the intricate patterns on the pommel and blade with her finger. Dax leaned over to look.

"Yes. The markings on the blade represent..." Jen turned the blade to show her both sides, "four generations. And this mark on the pommel..." she pointed to an inset stone and the markings around it, "are the signature of Mal Defra Tok, who made this weapon."

As Jadzia was pointing out the intricate details of Klingon weaponry, Jen couldn't help but study the Trill sitting next to her. An intricate pattern of brown markings started above each temple almost meeting across her forehead, down the sides of her neck disappearing into her uniform. Jadzia could feel Jen looking at her. She decided the feeling was nice. Still looking at the Klingon dagger she said, "They go all the way down."

"Pardon?" Jen asked, confused.

"My spots, they go all way down. That's usually the first thing people ask me, when they feel comfortable enough." Dax turned to look at Jen, who was blushing.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to stare. It's just hard not to. They have such a beautiful rhythm." Jen looked down.

After walking across the room to her sleeping area, she asked. “You don’t mind if I change, do you?”

“Not at all, go ahead.” Jen answered, still embarrassed.

“What do you mean by ‘rhythm’?” Dax called from the open doorway.

Still sitting on the couch, Jen replied, “Sometimes people see things in terms of light, or hue or saturation. I see things in terms of patterns. It’s like I see something and hear its pattern in my head.”

Dax came out of the bedroom. “So what do I sound like?” She was dressed in loose-fitting pajamas that tried not to entice the viewer and failed. Her pants were a soft iridescent grey material. The top was a loose fitting design with three quarter length sleeves, its neckline considerably more revealing than the Starfleet uniform, but not terribly threatening to a general sense of modesty. Her hair was down, falling loosely around her shoulders. She had taken her boots off as well. There were delicate spots on her bare feet. They did indeed go all the way down.

“Well considering I can’t see all of them,” the drummer said with a smirk before tapping out a complex rhythm with her hands on her lap. Dax closed her eyes for a moment listening. The rhythm was steady, but delicate, complex, and consistent. She gave an appreciative and approving nod.

The Trill had been standing with her hands behind her back. As she brought them to her front, they revealed a deck of cards in one hand, a fistful of dice in the other.

“Now, to Tongo,” she said resuming her seat on the couch next to Jen. “Normally we would be sitting across from each other to play, but until you get the hang of it you may want to be able to see my cards. Remember the goal is to confront your opponent when you’ve got a well-established hand. Acquiring is at three, selling at eight, if your hand is weak, you can always retreat. You want your cards to beat my dice. At the same time I’ll be trying to beat your dice.”

Jen picked up her tea and sipped it slowly. “Excellent tea,” she commented. After dealing the cards and dividing up the dice, Dax tried hers.

“The Garbo root is wonderful!” she exclaimed. “It gives the tea a mulled, spicy flavor. Where did you pick up the trick of boiling it?”

Jen smiled. “My Grandfather. He raised me. When the fighting would get bad near our province, he’d make the tea for me so I could sleep. Be careful, though, it can be quite a sedative if you’re not used to it. Jen sipped her tea appreciatively. “Perfect,” she added.

“I’m not too worried Bren, I’m not a lightweight.” Jadzia replied.

Jen smiled inwardly at what she assumed was Dax’s unconscious slip of the tongue. Names were sacred to the people of Bajor. For that matter, everything had some religious significance. But names were special. Everyone went by the family name; given names were only used by family or close friends. Jen guessed that few people on the station called Kira her given name of ‘Nerys’ and she had hesitated before using it when she had first seen her. Jen’s own name, Brenmar, had never felt quite right to her. She preferred her closest friends and family to call her Bren. Her friends complied, her family hadn’t but since none of them was left, it didn’t much matter. Still, Dax had called her ‘Bren’ and at that moment, Jen didn’t think life could get much better.

They had played Tongo for about an hour when the day’s exhaustion and Ceryllian tea caught up with the Trill. She felt relaxed and quite content playing Tongo and talking quietly with her guest. The conversation had dropped off; still the silence didn’t bother her. She knew

she should offer Jen the couch, get up, and go to bed but she didn't. Finally, she realized she'd nodded off for a few seconds when Jen gently shook her hand. The Bajoran's touch was warm, her hand calloused but gentle.

"Your roll Dax," Jen said softly. "And I warn you, you're doomed."

"Um…" Jadzia groggily replied.

"Or not," Jen shrugged.

Jadzia thought about getting fully conscious. Dax was also considering the advantages of full consciousness, but the warm abyss of slumber was seductively close. Dax and Jadzia decided that the warm, relaxed fuzz of Ceryllian tea was a much better place to be than sleepy consciousness. Her eyes closed, her hand relaxed, exposing her cards and her head slowly slumped over toward Jen.

Jen regarded the unconscious Trill sitting next to her and sighed. She was envious of the Trill's relaxed unconscious state, and amused by the situation as well. She glanced over to Jadzia's cup of tea to see it drained, with two large slices of root sitting at the bottom. Jen gently took Jadzia's cards from her hand. "Knew I had you beat," she said under her breath as she put the cards on the table. She sat back again and thought about what to do. Jen could go but she was sitting on a perfectly comfortable couch with an incredible view of space outside the large windows across the room from her. The Bajoran woman couldn't think of a more desirable destination were she to leave. Before she got much further with that thought, Jadzia slumped over onto her lap. She reacted quickly and caught her before she fell off the couch or hit her head. Jen put her feet up on the small table and crossed her legs. Jadzia grunted softly as she pulled her long legs up onto the couch and rolled toward Jen. Another sigh, and she was fast asleep. Jen sat there, legs propped up on the table stroking Jadzia's hair with her left hand, her right hand resting gently on her abdomen. She addressed the environmental computer, "Dim lights 90 percent." She sat there in the near dark looking into space, not unconscious, but at peace.

Hours later Dax woke slowly. She felt, rather than heard a steady heartbeat and breathing slightly out of sync with her own. Without opening her eyes, she searched her memory for clues to the change in her waking environment. She remembered the performance, the Tongo, the tea, and Jen. At that point, she was aware of a hand gently caressing her head and hair. She sighed at the pleasurable sensation and thought about going back to sleep. Then she was aware of an unusual sensation; Jen's hand was resting lightly on her abdomen. She noticed that her symbiont had shifted slightly where it resided in her abdominal cavity and was pressing against the warmth coming from the young woman's hand. Jadzia was surprised and pleased by its acceptance of the physical connection. As soon as she thought that, she realized it was simply acting in accordance with her own warm feelings, further amplifying them. When Jadzia finally opened her eyes, she saw through the dim light in the room, Jen's face above her. Jen's eyes were closed, head slightly forward. She was breathing steadily but not deeply enough to make Dax think she was asleep. "Jen," Dax said softly.

Without tightening a muscle, Jen slowly opened her eyes. "Nice nap?" she asked, raising an eyebrow.

"Very." Jadzia reached an arm around to give Jen an affectionate hug. "Thank you."

"Don't mention it," Jen replied. "I don't know when I've felt so rested, I should be thanking you."

"How long have I been asleep?" Jadzia asked.

"Almost three hours. By the way, I beat you at Tongo. I think you overdid it with the Garbo root so I had the advantage."

Somewhat reluctantly, Jadzia disengaged herself from Jen's lap and sat up. "And I thank you for not taking it." Jadzia smiled at the double entendre.

"Yeah, but next time..." Jen grinned back.

With a sleepy yawn she asked, "So what now?"

"My guess is it's oh-seven thirty hours. I hope you don't have an early shift," Jen began.

Jadzia shook her head. "I've got to be in Ops at 1000."

"In that case, you get some more sleep and I get to go to my ship and kick out two exhausted Klingons and one exhausted Bajoran, then possibly get some sleep myself." Jen thought a moment, "If you're interested, you're welcome to come by the rehearsal hall later."

Jadzia smiled. "I'd like that."

"In that case, can I ask you a favor?" Jen asked, somewhat tentatively.

"Sure." Jadzia got up from the couch and stretched languidly, causing the Bajoran lose her train of thought. She looked at her guest and noticed the small shake of her head to refocus her thoughts.

"Do you have any recordings of Joran's music? Or native Trill music for that matter? The older the better. And, when I say Trill, I mean symbiont too. I wouldn't want Dax to feel excluded."

"Don't worry about it. It takes a while to get used to but 'Joined' means fully integrated. There is no 'Jadzia' and no 'Dax', just Jadzia Dax. I'll bring some recordings by later. Didn't I mention that I collect 'lost composers'?"

Jen got up and walked to the door. "Thanks 'Zia, I appreciate it. Don't worry; I'll get the hang of it." Jadzia waited a moment at the door. Before stepping through, the Bajoran leaned forward and kissed her softly on the cheek. "You made a difficult night wonderful, thank you." She smiled and stepped into the hall.

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Julian and Kira walked side by side, each sporting an springball carrier over their shoulder. While they still weren't exactly good friends, they had been through enough together to meet somewhere along that path. For Julian, Kira had shown him his arrogance and condescension towards people he had mistakenly perceived as primitive. For Kira, Julian was a reminder that naive enthusiasm was something of which she had never had the luxury of enjoying. She was learning to accept it as a part of him, even as he fought to keep it, and she realized she had no real cause to resent him for it.

"After last night, I don't expect my serves to be very impressive." Kira commented as they strolled down the hall.

"Good," Julian replied good-naturedly. "Maybe now I'll have a shot at returning them."

Julian had met Kira at her quarters on the way to the recreation area. They had just rounded the curve in the habitat ring when they saw a figure step out of one of the suites down the hall. Stopping short, Kira and Julian both recognized the figure exiting the residence.

"What would Jen be doing visiting Jadzia at this hour?" the doctor asked, turning to his companion. Kira looked at him, irritated.

"Really Julian. Visiting? At this hour? She's wearing the same clothes she had on last night." She saw Julian's usually warm friendly expression grow stony as he realized what she was implying. "Come on. I'd love to hear her explanation for this."
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Jen stood outside of Dax's door for a moment after it closed, resting her head against the cool paneling of the hallway. She wasn't worried about Dax walking into the hall to see her still standing there. She knew the statuesque Trill had stumbled to bed and was fast asleep. When she got her bearings and made a mental map of how to get back to her ship, she lifted her head and turned around. Standing behind her were Kira and Julian, both frowning and silent.

"Hi, Kira, Doctor," she began, trying not to sound as groggy as she felt. "Good morning for springball."

"Really?" Kira asked, her tone somewhere between sarcasm and venomous.

"What's going on here?" Julian accused.

Jen looked at him, confused, and then noticed Julian was not so much looking at her as looking through her at Dax's door. Realization hit her like a lightning bolt.

"Oh, this?!" She exclaimed, indicating the door. "After you stormed off in a huff," she looked at Kira, "Ris wanted the ship for wild sex with two lovely Klingons she'd just met. She's like that, you know, so 'Zia comes up and asks if I want a tour of the station since she'd overheard you getting pissed at me as well as Ris asking me if she could have the ship and the Klingons to herself. Afterwards, we ended up here for Tongo. The Ceryllian tea had Garbo root in it, and Dax is a total lightweight – regardless of what she says – she fell asleep on me so I hung out. I've not slept yet. Can you tell? I feel like I'm babbling. Am I babbling?"

Kira could see the questions forming in Julian's mind. Thinking the encounter would deteriorate if they stayed to hear the answers in Jen's current state, she hurriedly interceded.

"Yes. As a matter of fact, you are babbling. We can talk about this later. Come on Julian."

With that, the Major turned and strode down the hall. Jen lost no time heading out in the other direction. Doctor Bashir stared a moment more at Dax's closed door before hurrying to catch up with Kira.

Chapter 4

As she walked to Ops, Jadzia scrolled through memories centuries deep. *To know who you are*, she reminded herself, *it is important to know who you have been*. Thoughts of Joran tugged uncomfortably at the corners of her mind as she considered compositions to copy for Jen. She focused instead on the young drummer, balancing the Jen she now knew with the Jen Kira had described. The haunted look in Jen's eyes completely vanished when Jen spoke of music or was similarly distracted. But there were other moments in their evening together where darkness seemed to cling to Jen like a shadow. It was almost as if the young Bajoran had signed a deal with Fate, knowing she was getting the worst of the bargain. A man in a Starfleet uniform passed her in the hallway. Dax greeted him with a nod and a smile, her thoughts turning to Starfleet and Julian.

She stopped by sickbay on her way to Ops, and was puzzled by Julian's behavior. He was obviously upset or angry about something, but wouldn't talk about it. Not that she'd asked. Jadzia liked Julian. He was naive, certainly, and arrogant but he also had a warm heart. She couldn't help but be flattered by his puppy-dog adoration. Still, she did not return his feelings in kind, something that seemed an endless source of frustration for the handsome young doctor. However, his abrupt manner this morning bordered on rudeness, which was unlike him and surprised her. She decided to wait until later and see if he were in any better a frame of mind. Remembering that he and Kira were playing springball this morning, she decided that he must

have lost. That would be a hard thing for him to take, having almost been a professional tennis player.

She smiled at Kira as she took her seat. Kira did not seem to notice her and continued with what she was doing. The Trill quickly checked the readouts at her station making sure that all system readings were normal. The logs of the previous shift recorded no anomalies; all was well with *Deep Space Nine*. Looking at Kira, Dax asked, "If there is enough room in the power gird, I'd like to recalibrate the sensor arrays in the science lab."

Without looking up, Kira replied crisply, "Of course," and continued with her task. Jadzia was about to ask if something were bothering her when she tried to stifle a yawn and failed.

"Get much sleep last night, 'Zia?" Kira asked coldly.

Dax looked at the hostile Bajoran with dawning comprehension. Jen had called her "Zia" the previous night, and somehow, Kira knew. Something in the Major's tone told Dax she had gotten the wrong impression about the night she spent with Jen.

"Well, not exactly," Dax began. Before she could finish, her comm badge sounded. It was Julian.

"Dax, there is a problem with one of the computers in sick bay. Can you reinitialize C four to fifteen from your station?" The request was formal but lacking the angry edge of her earlier encounter with the young doctor.

"Kira and Julian are both angry with me? This is not a coincidence," she thought.

"I'm running a diagnostic now. What were you doing when the system froze up?" Dax asked calmly, graceful hands keying in requests to the main system, quickly sorting through the data displayed at her station.

"I was searching the medical database, all the systems in my office froze up, and I've got some odd writing on the monitor instead of the database."

"I've found the problem Julian." Dax quickly sorted through the display of information. "It looks like the main system has been compromised. Possibly a virus, definitely a breech in the security grid. I don't think I can do much for you from up here. I'll be right down."

Kira quickly tapped her comm badge, "Odo, O'Brien, please report to sick bay." Dax looked at her questioningly, "I'm joining you, this could be serious. We can talk about the other stuff when we're off duty, okay?"

Jadzia nodded in agreement and followed her to the turbo lift. "Thank you," she said simply.

Arriving in sickbay, Kira and Dax found Operations Chief O'Brien and Security Chief Odo were already there. The three men were looking at the central of three monitor screens at the diagnosis command station in Julian's office.

"What happened?" Kira asked.

Julian glanced at Dax before answering. He was not as angry as he had been earlier, whatever was bothering him had been superseded by his current predicament.

"I was doing a search of the Bajoran medical database. I was looking for some information on Bajoran blood types and this happened." He nodded at the monitor above the console in front of him.

"What is it?" O'Brien asked looking up at the unusual script appearing on the screen.

"It's an ancient Bajoran formal script." Kira answered. "It looks like it's the eleventh prophesy of Kai Tulano. He was Kai over two hundred years ago."

"Two hundred and thirty," Dax corrected. "He was stranded for several days in the Denorios Belt and claimed to have had a vision. We assume now that he had an experience with the entities in the wormhole."

Kira turned to Dax. "That's right. You knew him."

Dax looked at her, "Not well, but yes."

O'Brien sat in front of the terminal. He keyed several sequences on the display controls. "I can move around the document but I can't exit from it. I assume all the monitors are showing similar symptoms?" He asked, looking at Julian.

"Well, no, the others are fine. This reference station seems to be the only one affected. But I've not made the request on any other systems." Julian replied.

"Then don't. At least, not until we know what's going on." O'Brien continued, "Probably just some kids, a prank."

"I don't think so, Chief. This is a Starfleet computer system after all. Besides, why would kids mess with a medical reference station?" Kira murmured, studying the monitor.

"What does it say, Kira?" Dax asked, "My ancient Bajoran is a little rusty."

"As is mine." Kira agreed, still looking intently at the screen. "If my interpretation is correct it says:

In the aftermath of darkness, the usurper will stumble.
The line of the Beloved One continues.
For the speaker of the dead will come from the hive of the pale ones,
Thrice marked and broken.
In a foreign tongue familiar words will be spoken and the
River of Bajor will once again move towards its proper course.

"What the hell is that supposed to mean?" O'Brien exclaimed, dumbfounded.

"You've got me there," Kira replied. "Prophecies tend to be a bit obscure."

Jadzia had been looking at the image of the document itself, not just the words. The scan was clear and crisp, but the document itself was clearly ancient; the words were handwritten in ink and a stylus, and a border of muted colors and patterns framed the words. Something was not adding up.

"Kira, where are the texts of the prophecies kept?"

"In the Temple Library on Bajor," she replied. "Why?"

"Are the original texts scanned into the library database or would a modern translation be uploaded instead?"

The Major looked puzzled and thought for a moment. "The original texts would be archived and the modern translation would be made available for database access." Realizing the implication, she added, "Which means that this scan of an original text had to come from the Temple Library."

O'Brien was not following the two women. "So? It came from Bajor? I thought we knew that?"

"Don't you see?" Kira said in a rush, "Not just Bajor – but the vaults of the Central Temple. Only someone with access to the original prophesies could have made this scan of an original text. I think that rules out kids. I'd better let the Captain know. This could be high level tampering if the security of the Central Temple was also compromised. This may have something to do with the peace negotiations. Odo? Why don't you start a trace to see where the break in was made?"

Odo turned in his seat next to O'Brien and looked up at Kira. He nodded and said, "As a precaution I think we should also pay close attention to our guests."

"The Klingons?" Kira asked confused.

"No Major, the musicians."

Kira looked puzzled "Sure Odo. Mind if I ask why?"

"Because I've not finished their background checks, they were recently on Bajor, and I would like to know their whereabouts on this station until this is resolved. Jen Brenmar certainly has the attention of a Kai. That alone is reason for concern."

Kira nodded in agreement. "You're right. Julian? Are you going to be okay with this terminal being indisposed for a while?"

The Doctor tore his attention away from the screen to focus on Kira.

"Sure," he replied. "There are enough other systems online. Besides, I find this a fascinating puzzle." He turned back to the screen.

"I'll work with Julian to see if there is anything we can come up with down here." Dax supplied helpfully. Kira nodded. Looking at Chief O'Brien, Dax added, "Can you start a trace from this terminal back to the source?"

"Yeah, soon as I find out if any other systems have been compromised. I'll run a level one diagnostic. I'd also better backup all systems in case this thing is contagious. I don't recommend trying to take the system off-line just yet or reinitialize, not until we see how this is configured. If this is a virus, it could spread to other systems if we're not careful."

"Okay. Why don't we meet at 1500 hours in Ops and see where we're at?" Kira suggested. Everyone nodded in agreement, then headed off to their specific duties.

Taking the seat next to Julian, Dax started to scroll through the puzzling document. Julian sat next to her with his arms crossed across his chest.

"I wonder why this was put in the medical file interface?" he mused.

"I'm not sure." she replied, adding, "but I'm glad to see you're in better spirits than this morning." Embarrassed, the doctor looked down.

"About that... I'm sorry Jadzia. I was rude, I overreacted, and it's none of my business anyway."

"What isn't your business?" Jadzia asked, puzzled.

"Who you sleep with," Julian replied tightly. Seeing that her confusion had only intensified, he added, "Kira and I saw Jen leaving your quarters this morning." It was Julian's turn to be confused when Dax started laughing.

"That explains it! Honestly, Julian, I would think you'd know me better than that. I only met her yesterday." She turned to the document once again and continued to smile to herself as she worked. "Still," she added, glancing over to the doctor "I guess I should be flattered. She is rather attractive. Do you really think she'd be interested in me?" She grinned mischievously to indicate the lack of seriousness in her musing.

Julian frowned. "Very funny. So what was she doing there all night?"

"What did Jen tell you she was doing there?"

Julian turned to his own monitor and continued to work as he answered. "She said you'd overheard her fight with Kira and a discussion she had with Keyla, the small blonde woman, took her on a tour of the station, and then played Tongo."

"That's basically it." Jadzia replied.

"And then you fell asleep on her?" Julian asked.

"Guilty as charged. Apparently, I can't handle my Ceryllian Tea with Garbo root." At this point Julian joined in Jadzia's laughter.

They continued to work for a while longer. Finally, Dax broke the silence, "Julian, I think I've found something."

"What is it?" he asked, leaning over.

She touched a few more keys and continued, "While we can't get the prophetic text off the system spine, by changing the configuration of this monitor, I can see how the program was constructed. There are areas like this one," she pointed with her finger to a schematic on a small side monitor, "this cursor is suggesting an open area in the program for input. I'll bet if all of these spaces were filled with the correct data the program would unlock."

Julian looked at the schematic on Jadzia's screen. "So it's been set up like a puzzle for us to solve?"

"Maybe. Tell me Julian, what exactly were you looking for when the system froze up?"

The Doctor reached over to a padd on the table and handed it to Jadzia. "These are the readings from Jen's physical. Look at the structure of her blood."

Dax frowned at the readout. "It looks like the blood cells are incomplete. Is this accurate?"

"Oh, it's accurate all right. I checked it twice myself. There is nothing wrong with Jen's blood. It's just a very unusual blood type. I know I've seen it at least once before since I've been here, but for the life of me I can't remember who it was. I was running a check on this sample when the database froze. There are probably only a handful of Bajorans with that blood type on the entire planet." He shrugged. "Jen didn't even know there was anything out of the ordinary about her blood. I'm not surprised, considering the state of the refugee camps, but it would be an easy way to check and see if she has any living relatives."

"I don't know why anyone would want to keep you from finding out more about Jen, but if this isn't a random malfunction, that could be a motive." Jadzia's mind raced through possible and logical scenarios. "Perhaps someone in Jen's family has something to do with the peace talks?" She stood up to leave. "I'll go back to Ops and set up an analysis grid to monitor this system. Maybe we can figure out how to fill these data nodes."

"Hmmm…" Julian said absently, looking at the schematic on the screen.

"Good luck Julian. Let me know if you make any progress."

Bashir, focused intently on the puzzle at hand, wasn't listening to her. Dax was almost out the door when Bashir called to her. "Jadzia, I am sorry about this morning."

She smiled at him as she left sickbay. "Don't worry about it Julian."

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Odo walked casually along the Promenade taking in bustle of activity around him as he went. He knew where he was headed and there was no need to rush. His quarry would most certainly be there when he arrived. He made a mental note of things that were as they should be, as well as any occasional anomaly. He noticed Jake Sisko hurrying toward him carrying a large tray filled with food and drink.

"Hi Odo," Jake said in greeting. "What's up?"

"The usual," Odo replied. "That's quite a collection of food. I've heard young male humans eat a lot, but I must say I had no idea."
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Jake laughed and looked down at his tray. “It’s not for me Odo. I’m helping Jen and the others with their recordings. I’m the official roadie now. They’re teaching me about sound recording and music, and I’m showing them around the station and helping with equipment.”

Odo looked at the tray laden with food. “And catering?” he asked.

Jake smiled and headed on his way, “Yeah, catering too. I’ll see ya later.”

“At least he’s staying out of trouble with Nog,” Odo thought as he continued down the Promenade.

Reaching his destination, Odo calmly walked up to the bar. “Morn,” he said in greeting to the large alien passed out on the barstool. As was his custom, Quark was behind the bar polishing a glass, contemplating business.

“Why Odo, how nice to see you. I was convinced you were actually that table in the corner,” Quark said sarcastically.

“Nice.” He curtly replied. “I hope you’re in as good a humor when you’re brought down to detention.”

“For what?” Quark said defensively “I’ve not done anything even remotely questionable.”

“I’m sure you are aware of the break in to the main computer system, locking up one of the units in sickbay?” Odo asked in good humor.

“I might have heard something to that effect. I still don’t see your point.” Quark had finished polishing the glass and stood with his hands on the bar.

“I suppose you won’t be surprised to know that the break in occurred at the computer access terminal, here in your establishment.” Quark’s expression said that he was indeed very surprised.

“That’s impossible. I checked the system myself, and he didn’t seem all that bright…”

“Who?” Odo interrupted.

“A Vedek came by yesterday and asked to use my terminal. He put down a nice piece of change for a drink, so I let him. No crime in that.”

“No,” Odo offered, “but being an accessory is. Considering the importance of the ongoing negotiations, some magistrates might even see this as conspiracy to commit treason.” Odo’s smile made it clear that he knew he had Quark by the lobes. Conspiracy and treason were serious charges, too serious for Quark to call Odo’s bluff.

Quark looked at him a moment before replying. “Well, he didn’t pay me to keep my mouth shut.”

“Not that it would matter, would it Quark?”

“As I was saying,” Quark continued, unperturbed, “it was a Vedek. You know – orange robes, hood pulled over his head. I didn’t get a good look at his face, but I’m sure the computer got a retinal scan. I’ll give you a copy.” Quark walked over to his terminal and hit a few keys. He came back with a small cylinder and handed it to Odo. “There you have it. That’s the guy who used my system yesterday. It’s got time codes and everything.”

“Why thank you, Quark. You’ve been almost helpful. Really you should be more careful about whom you let use your console,” Odo said as he turned to go.

“So much for doing a good deed,” Quark muttered under his breath as the shapeshifter walked away.

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The atmosphere in the command room was by Starfleet standards, informal. Benjamin Sisko had learned the value of incorporating the essence of Starfleet protocol without compromising the flexibility needed to maintain the efficiency of such a diverse command. It had not always been this way. Upon first arriving to the station as commanding officer, there had been a period of growing pains as the Starfleet and Bajoran crew learned to work as a singular team. The fact that a majority of station's denizens were civilians created further challenges still. There were not enough crew members to treat every unusual occurrence as a crisis, nor would that have been wise. The safety of the inhabitants of *Deep Space Nine* was insured by the crew knowing how to effectively and efficiently use their collective resources to provide security and freedom to this outpost on the galactic frontier.

The Captain sat in his seat at the lead of a long conference table. On his right sat Kira, Odo next to her, then O'Brien. On Sisko's left sat Dax, Commander Worf next to her, then Doctor Bashir. Sisko calmly regarded his second-in-command. "Are we ready for a status report, Major Kira?"

"Yes, Captain, we are. Chief, why don't you start," she said to the curly-haired engineer.

"Thank you, Major. I've been able to determine that the computer disruption was very focused. The only system affected was the one in Dr. Bashir's office. It's a very complex program however. I'm working on dissecting it, but my analysis won't be done until sometime tomorrow. I suspect there's a trigger that could launch a cascade effect and lock out other systems. I'll know more in a few hours." O'Brien touched an area on the control panel in front of him, and a schematic appeared on the large vidscreen at the end of the command room. Highlighting several points on the schematic, he continued.

"Dax was able to get a fix on the program's structure. It appears that there are several empty data nodes in the program. It would make sense that if the right information were inserted into these nodes, the central core of the program would reveal itself and unlock."

Sisko looked at his operations chief. "Have you made any progress on filling the spaces Chief?"

"No, sir. I'm running this prophecy through our databases but it'll take some time."

"Major, do you have any insight into this?" Sisko looked back to Kira.

"I might. The prophecies of Kai Tulano are not widely read. He was a religious historian and used his time as the Kai to rally for the preservation and protection of our cultural heritage. He composed only fourteen known prophecies. Most are obscure, but three of them have come to pass, including the discovery of the Celestial Temple."

Sisko nodded and asked, "Do you think that Jen Brenmar and her company have anything to do with this?"

Kira paused a moment before responding. "I don't know. I doubt she is responsible for breaking into the system."

"You sound certain." Odo said from his seat next to Kira.

"I am." She looked at Odo. "Look, I know Jen. This isn't her style. For one thing, she has never been very good at computer programming. She can barely fly a ship. She is not well versed in the prophets, nor does she have any interest in them. And I doubt she'd have any access to the original texts. Sure, it's possible she has a contact and got very explicit instructions, but to what end? Jen Brenmar isn't even remotely interested in prophetic teaching."

"Could it have something to do with the negotiations?" Sisko asked, looking at Worf.

"It would not make sense, Captain," Worf answered. "While the talks are proceeding slowly, they have not been disrupted by the inaccessibility of one computer station. If there were

a medical emergency and all medical facilities were off-line, that would be a concern. I must say that after last night the Klingon ambassador and his entourage are… renewed of spirit. Remph Gor Tok was most impressed with the Bajoran musicians and spoke favorably of them. If anything, our guests are helping the peace talks, not hindering them."

Sisko was relieved at this information, as it was very difficult to gain the favor of a Klingon using false pretenses. "Let's start with what we do know at the moment and work from there. Odo?"

Odo briefly glanced down at his data padd. "We know that the computer files were compromised several hours after last night's musical performance. The program was activated by the Doctor's query to the Bajoran medical database this morning. The system was compromised from a terminal at *Quark's*." Odo touched several sensor-keys on the table in front of him. An image of a middle-aged man in Vedek's garb appeared on the vidscreen.

"This is Vedek Danl of the Lycene Order. He is responsible for introducing the program into the main system. He left the station last night; right after the system was compromised.

"He's an unusual looking Vedek," Sisko commented. The middle-aged man in question had a shaved head with an ornate black tattoo covering the crown and back of his skull. He was very thin, with hollowed features. His robes of office that all Vedeks wore were of an unusual design. They were more utilitarian and less ceremonial. Aside from the color, Danl's clothes could have been borrowed from a farm laborer.

"The Lycene are an unusual order," Kira remarked. "They have been equally critical of the provisional government as well as the Kai. Most factions support one of the two and most religious factions at least avoid open criticism of the Kai. Traditionally, Lycenes have been the smallest order, the most secretive, and," she looked purposefully at Sisko, "the most militant."

"Is there any connection to Jen Brenmar or any of her companions?" O'Brien asked.

"Yes," Kira continued. "Jen came back from Cardassia with one of the stolen orbs. She traded it for her ship, a modified cargo vessel that was old, broken down and barely flying. While the Lycene order is outspoken, they are fiercely loyal to the people of Bajor. More than any other order, they support individuals and villages when governing agents get too bloated. They fought the Cardassians most directly and provided real assistance to the Resistance movement. Historically, they have been less concerned with how closely people follow the teachings of the Prophets than the quality of life Bajorans have available at any given moment. I can't really see Jen dealing with any other order. Did you contact them, Odo?"

Odo nodded. "Yes, and they say they haven't seen their missing Vedek. I'm looking into their recent activities now. It is clear that they are not allies of the Kai or the provisional government, but have not taken any direct action against either."

"You think the Kai may be involved in this?" Sisko asked.

"If there is trouble, the Kai's involvement is always a consideration," Odo replied with a grimace, "but there is no evidence, and the Kai is not a stupid woman. At this point, I'm not ruling out any suspects, but there isn't much to go on. The Kai may be involved, Jen may be involved, any member of her entourage may be involved, or it may be nothing more than coincidence."

"That reminds me of something Jen said last night." All eyes turned to Kira as she continued, "Jen said that she had three weeks to figure out what Winn was up to and why, provided, of course, she could avoid her until the Viss'r Vardel."

"What is Viss'r Vardel?" Sisko asked.

"It means Dark Silence. It is a period of meditation and reflection. The high Vedek Council and the Kai remain cloistered in the Central Temple for two weeks. They may not speak, and once the temple gates are closed no one goes in or out. Jen must think that the Kai will try to get her off the station before then. Viss'r Vardel starts one week from today. If the Kai is going to try something soon, she'd have to do it within the week."

"Are we any closer to finding out what it is the Kai is after?" Ben asked, searching the faces of his command staff.

Dax spoke up. "No, but I think we might have some clues." Now all eyes turned to the composed Trill. "What if the prophecy Julian triggered is itself a clue as to what's going on here? The Kai isn't well loved by many of the other orders on Bajor, but she has consolidated her power base so that she is someone to be feared. A rival faction such as the Lycene may be trying to anonymously expose the Kai's intentions."

"An interesting theory Dax, but we don't have any evidence." Ben looked at his old friend.

"I realize that, Benjamin," Dax calmly replied. "I didn't know Kai Tulano well, but I remember that he was not prone to evasiveness. He was straightforward and clear about his vision for Bajor as well as his concerns. If this prophecy is indeed a clue as to what is happening now, it shouldn't be too difficult to interpret. Another possibility would be to examine anything else he wrote that might be more specific."

Kira had been listening intently to what Dax was saying. It was hard to believe that the beautiful woman in her early-thirties had a memory reaching back centuries. Regardless of how Kira had felt that morning, Dax was too serene an individual to stay angry with for very long.

"We could try Dax, but it isn't promising. Anything from the Kai's personal letters or diaries would be kept in the Kai's personal library, available only to future Kais, unless it was published through the same body as prophetic teachings."

Sisko nodded to Kira. "Still, it might be worth looking into. Odo, you don't sound convinced that our new guests aren't involved. I take it you've discovered something in your background checks?"

"I wouldn't say it's a matter of 'finding' information, it is rather the lack of information that appears at all." Odo replied.

Kira looked at Odo. "I wouldn't think a lack of records all that unusual, Odo. The Cardassians were pretty thorough in destroying libraries and information centers."

"You're right to a point, Major," Odo replied, turning to look at her. "But what is so unusual is where the gaps of information are." He looked down at his data padd and touched a key. Instantly the likeness of Keyla Ris appeared on the screen. "For example, we have relatively complete records of Keyla Ris. She was uninvolved in the resistance movement for the most part, grew up in B'dal province, from a farming family. She had a sister and a brother who were killed during the occupation and has a surviving brother who is married with one child in B'dal."

Odo touched another key and another image appeared on the vidscreen. "Dobin Veran was formerly a fisherman from Duvriel on the coast of Claton. He was living in B'dal when he met Jen, Tosh, and Keyla. Five years ago, he joined the resistance cell of Tomet after the murder of his betrothed. He left the Resistance as soon as the Cardassians pulled out of Bajor."

Again, Odo touched a key. This time, Tosh's image appeared on the vidscreen. What was unusual was that there was not any written information next to the image. "This is Tosh Sener. We don't have any information about his background. It is my suspicion that Tosh Sener is an assumed name. I've run a search on the name and the closest matches were an Acolyte from the

Lomat province, who was, interestingly enough, a Lycene, Vladimir Sener died last year at the age of 127, and Dandilm Tosh who is currently wanted by the Bajoran authorities for murder. His age however, is fifty-two. I have not found records of any family name of Tosh."

Sisko looked at the vidscreen, then at Odo. "Is it possible that the real records of Tosh Sener were destroyed?"

"Yes sir, it is." Odo replied without emotion.

Sisko thought a moment, "Okay, what about Jen."

Odo touched another key on his data padd and Jen's image appeared on the screen. Kira studied Dax's calm features as the image of her former lover appeared on the screen. She couldn't be sure, but thought she saw a slight softening in the Trill's serene face. Dax glanced over at Kira, surprised the Bajoran woman was studying her so intently. Something in Kira's expression caused Dax to glance down, embarrassed.

Odo noted the curious exchange, and then began his report. "Everything Jen has told us from the report filed onboard *Longevity*, to her briefing upon arrival to *DS9*, has checked out."

"So she's not lying," Kira thought.

"What is unusual, however," Odo continued, "is the lack of information about her. Specifically, her lack of family history."

Kira spoke, "What do you mean Odo? I knew Jen's family."

"I don't doubt that, Major. What I mean is that the family name of 'Jen' does not exist any farther back then Jen Brenmar's mother."

"How can that be?" Kira was incredulous. "It doesn't make sense. I knew her grandfather Jen Fyre."

"No, it doesn't make sense," Odo replied gruffly. "There are several similar names in the Bajoran Record of Names and I am currently sorting through them. But, I suspect that at some point Jen Brenmar's mother, Moska, acquired the family name of Jen."

"Is that significant?" O'Brien asked, baffled by the social significance of Bajoran family names.

"It could be," Kira answered, more to herself than O'Brien. "Family names go back hundreds of years. New names are adopted in only the most extreme cases, like the union of families, or upon being cast out of a family." Kira's brow furrowed in concern, and before the question could be asked, Kira shook her head and continued. "I know Jen's family was not united with an existing family of Jen. And I strongly doubt they were outcasts. There has got to be another explanation."

Odo was uncertain but decided not to argue the point. "I also discovered a set of sealed records regarding Jen in the Central Database. I called in a favor and got a look at them. The records were from a village chronicle noting that an infant Brenmar was taken to the Dakarrian monastery where she was treated by the healers. I find it unusual that such an innocuous report would be classified."

Sisko sat in silence for a long moment. "Perhaps it is time we got to know our musical guests a little better. Odo, what is your general assessment? Are our four guests here to make music or trouble?"

"Clearly their purpose for coming to the station is twofold," Odo replied. "I think Jen's prime motivation was to get out of the reach of Kai Winn. Does that mean she wants to cause trouble? I don't know. They do appear very interested in performing and making musical recordings, as they requested. Jake has been with them all day. They have adopted him as

something called a 'roadie'. If they had ulterior motives while on the station I think Jake's presence would be troublesome –"

"Or a perfect alibi." Sisko finished.

"Yes, Captain. There is that possibility."

"Captain," Worf spoke up; his distinctive growl a polar opposite of the Captain's calm baritone. "We have not considered the possibility that these musicians could be Dominion plants. It is possible that the timing of their arrival is not coincidence and that the peace talks are their intended target."

"Jen is not one of the Founders." Kira said flatly.

"Have you seen her bleed?" Worf asked mildly.

"I think I'll drop by and see how our guests are doing for myself," Sisko said, interrupting what was building up to be an unpleasant conversation. "I don't think it's a bad idea for everyone to be on their toes, but let's not get carried away. Keep me posted on how this is going, but let's not forget that we have a station to run as well as archaic puzzles to solve. Doctor, you've taken a blood sample from Jen?" At the Doctor's nod he continued, "I don't think it would be a bad idea to draw samples from the others, just to be on the safe side. Unless there is anything else, I think we are finished here."

The command staff rose and began to exit. As was her custom, Dax was the last to head for the conference room door. "Wait a minute, Old Man." Sisko called to her.

"What is it Benjamin?"

"Something about this break-in doesn't fit," Sisko commented, sitting on the edge of the conference table. "Whoever did it was after our attention; it's a nuisance, but not dangerous. It doesn't fit the Founder's way of doing things." He shook his head, "What's your sense of Jen and the others?"

"Do you mean do I think they're Founders?" Dax asked, casually crossing her arms. "I doubt it, but Jen is the only one I've spent any time with –"

Sisko cut her off in surprise "When did you find any time to spend with Jen? They only got here yesterday."

Jadzia smiled warmly at him. "I spent the evening with Jen after the reception last night. If she were a Founder she had every opportunity to replace me and she didn't."

"I don't mean that, Old Man. I know Jen isn't a Founder, Bashir did run a blood scan after all. But there are plenty of factions on Bajor that are opposed to any talks with the Klingon Empire." Ben smiled warmly. "Since you and Jen are already acquainted, I don't feel too out of line asking you to look into this. I'd ask Kira, but there is a history there… I want a second opinion, a set of fresh eyes that can look at this objectively. You seemed the natural choice after Jen's flirtatious drum intro last night."

"Sure," Jadzia replied smiling. "Besides, I was going to stop by the cargo bay later to see Jen anyway, I'll see if everyone would like to go swimming."

Sisko arched his eyebrows, "You already had a date to see Jen? Really Dax, I didn't think she was your type."

Jadzia's smile didn't fade. "I never said it was a date, Benjamin. And no, she isn't Curzon's type. She is far too articulate for Curzon. I haven't decided yet if she's my type or not." Jadzia turned to leave. "Was there anything else?"

Sisko stood, "Just one thing; let's be careful how we handle this with Kira. I don't know how she'll feel about you spending an obvious amount of time with Jen and the others."

Jadzia shook her head sadly, "Not to worry Benjamin. Kira and Julian have already gone ballistic. They saw Jen leaving my quarters this morning and collided with the wrong conclusion."

"This morning? You *are* working fast Old Man," Sisko grinned.

Jadzia flashed him a smile, turned, and left the conference room.

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Julian stared fixedly at the vidscreen console in his office. It had been a slow day in sickbay. After assisting in the birth of Lezonian twins things had gotten quiet. "Quite enough for me to be tortured by this insidious program," he muttered. The image in front of him was a clear scan from Tulano's two-hundred-year-old tome. The prophecy filled the central area of the page and a decorative border surrounded it. His eyes kept being drawn away from the text to the border. It looked like a filigree vine twisting its way around the outside of the page. Set into the green leafy vine were bright red and orange fruits. Tiny fruits were grouped in clusters a dozen or less and spaced irregularly around the vine. The level of detail in the work was astonishing.

"In the aftermath of darkness, the usurper will stumble," he said quietly to himself. "Darkness… darkness." He thought of things that were dark: night, eclipses, caves, evil, and hatred. Julian then considered what he knew about Bajoran prophecy. Sword of Stars was once used to describe a comet. Celestial Temple was the Bajoran name for the wormhole.

"Computer: Interface current program with subroutine Alpha-One. Mute all responses to invalid data; enter correct responses to open data nodes." Bashir addressed the main computer system.

"Program interface complete," the computer responded.

"Darkness," he repeated to himself. Darkness was such a simple word. Jadzia had said that Kai Tulano was straightforward. He thought a moment more. "Could it be that obvious," he wondered to himself as he said, "Cardassian occupation?" The words flashed quickly on the monitor and disappeared. Julian noticed that the word "darkness" was now noticeably dim on the translated vidscreen.

On a hunch, he tried saying random words, intently watching the screen. "*Deep Space Nine*." The words just sat there, unmoving. Thinking about Bajor, he tried "D'Kor Province." A flash occurred but none of the text went dim. "Kira Nerys," again nothing. Julian took several slow breaths, forcing himself to slow down and think. *Is Jen involved*? He wondered. "Jen Brenmar," the words flashed a bright white.

Looking back at the text, the phrase *speaker of the dead* was now dim. "That's more like it," he said with some degree of satisfaction. He was about to continue when a chirp from his comm badge interrupted him.

"Julian," it was Dax's voice. "What's going on? I've noticed a change in the text on your vidscreen."

"I've been working on the puzzle." Bashir responded proudly. "I tried some phrases; when I get the right ones, the corresponding text goes dim."

"Keep up the good work. There are twenty placeholders and you've already filled four of them."

"That's impossible Jadzia," Julian replied startled. "I've only got two areas of dim text here."

"According to this schematic of the program, you have four of twenty data nodes filled." You're obviously doing better at this than you think. I'll be down to look at it in a few minutes."
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When Jadzia arrived in sickbay, Julian was looking very smug. He smiled warmly as she approached.

"You're looking very pleased with yourself." Jadzia said as she walked over to the console.

"It's still a long way from solved, and I won't say I understand it, but I've made some headway," Julian replied, grinning from ear to ear.

"Julian, you are positively brilliant." Dax said, beaming.

"Why thank you, Jadzia."

"So, show me what you've discovered."

"Well," Julian turned to his vidscreen, "I now see why more place holders are filled than I have dim text." He pointed to an area in the border of the page. "These sections of decorative border are dimmer than the rest now. They all started out the same. This area," he pointed to a small grouping of light pink fruits in the corner, "must mean 'blood' because I saw that area dim after I said that word. These other two areas," he indicated them in the border, "must be 'D'Kor' and 'Jen Brenmar' but I'm not sure which is which. As for the text, the *usurper* is 'Kai Winn' and *beloved one* is 'Kai Opaka', the only other word I've figured out is 'religion', which is *river of Bajor*. I tried that after naming every river on Bajor I could think of."

Jadzia looked at the text on the screen. She read it quietly using the phrases Julian had indicated. "In the aftermath of the Cardassian Occupation, Kai Winn will stumble. The line of Kai Opaka continues. For Brenmar will come from the hive of the pale ones, thrice marked and broken. In a foreign tongue familiar words will be spoken and the religion will once again move toward its proper course." Jadzia sat silently for a moment. "Julian, have you tried the word 'family'?"

"No. Where do you think it fits?"

Jadzia pointed to the second line, "Right here where it says *line of Kai Opaka*."

The Doctor addressed the computer asking for a placement of the word. The screen flashed and that portion of text went dim.

"And how about here," Jadzia continued, pointing to the third line. "We know Jen recently arrived from Cardassia Prime." As soon as Dax uttered the words, the screen flashed and the text went dim. Julian read the translated text as it now appeared:

In the aftermath of the Cardassian Occupation Kai Winn will stumble.
The family of Kai Opaka continues.
For Brenmar will come from Cardassia Prime,
Thrice marked and broken.
In a foreign tongue familiar words will be spoken and the
Religion of Bajor will once again move towards its proper course.

"Maybe you should be working on this project." Julian teased.

"No, Julian," she smiled at him, "I'm afraid that's all I can help you with." She got up to leave. "I'm going to introduce Jen and the others to the wonders of holosuite swimming. Interested in joining us?"

"Thanks Dax, but no. I prefer tennis to swimming. Why don't you bring them by to see the puzzle? We know that Jen definitely has something to do with it. Perhaps she could help?"

Dax smiled slyly at the doctor. "I don't suppose you'll be running a general scan at the time, to see if anyone is nervous?"

He grinned back at her. "Couldn't hurt."

Chapter 5

Kai Winn sat in the singular quiet of her study and brooded. As she stared at the journal on her desk, the words on the faded parchment taunted her. Looking down at the handwriting, she sneered. Kai Opaka might have been well educated but she was certainly no match for her. Opaka could do no more, every action she could perform to thwart Winn's plans had already been taken. Her time was past, and Winn's was the present. Still, it was frustrating to read that Bajor's beloved Kai knew that she would not see the end of the Cardassian occupation, and that she knew her chosen, Vedek Bareil, would not succeed her.

"The beauty of reading prophecy lies in knowing how to bend the future to one's will," she reminded herself. Kai Winn was no stranger to creating her own future; her rise to power was a demonstration of reading the signs and seizing opportunity accordingly.

In elegant script, she made a few notes in a journal of her own. Nothing incriminating, just a few words to remind her what to look for in Opaka's journal. She scoffed again at the beloved Kai's book; the handwriting cramped and compact as if she were trying to save paper, as if the fine parchment of her journal had to be conserved. Kai Winn thought about her own handwriting; flowing, graceful, ornate. It had the power and elegance worthy of a Kai, not the utilitarian scrawl of a scribe that filled the dead woman's journal.

"The arrival of Tulano's Prophecy on the space station will coincide with the Speaker's arrival," she read aloud from Opaka's book. "She will be accompanied by three companions, a longing heart, joyful soul, and tortured conscience. Only after realizing the desire of her own heart will she be able to accept the role offered by the Prophets. She will find the strength she needs to take up her destined path in the company of one who will share the journey with her. My dear Bren, I wish you well."

Frowning at the words, the Kai glanced at her comm station. She'd heard about the appearance of the Tulano Prophecy on *Deep Space Nine*; very little happened on that station that she didn't find out about, eventually. She had three companions with her obviously "heart, soul and conscience" not that she thought it mattered who was what. That left the role of "one who will share the journey with her" to be determined. If Jen could be prevented from meeting that companion, she'd have less chance to discover her prophetic destiny. Kai Winn considered possible candidates for the role. Kira Nerys was the most obvious; the two women knew each other already. Her heart sank as she realized the companion could be more troublesome than the hot-headed Major could. Jen Brenmar did have connections to the Lycene Order. The fact that Vedek Danl was in hiding and had thus far eluded her was worrisome. Perhaps, like Kira, she had a fondness for Vedeks, but like Kira, it would do her no good. She smiled. Danl would be found, and when he was, his mistake would be a regrettable one.

With angry energy, she pushed herself away from her desk and stood. The Lycenes knew Jen's significance and like plotting subversives, they went behind her back to involve the meddlesome Federation on the station. Pacing her spacious chambers, her thoughts racing furiously, Winn decided that it all came down to a question of time. Jen Brenmar must be eliminated before she found out who she was, before the Federation found out who she was, and before anyone suspected she might be involved. Time was running out. If she did not get Jen out of the way soon, Sisko and his cohorts would decipher the prophecy and difficulty in dealing with the drummer would magnify exponentially. The soft toll of a bell outside her chambers interrupted her thoughts. "What is it?" she demanded, her irritation evident as she spoke to the still closed door.

"We've found Vedek Danl, your Eminence," the voice said.

"By all means, show the good Vedek in," Winn cooed with a level of kindness that was frightening. The door silently slid open and two acolytes with a very frightened looking Vedek entered the chambers.

"Why Vedek Danl, it is so good to see you. I've got a rather annoying problem and I was hoping you could help me solve it." She nodded to the two acolytes and they bowed and left the room. The doors silently closed and Kai Winn regarded the haggard looking man, a thin smile tugging at her lips.

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Captain Sisko could hear music coming from inside the cargo hold as he approached the door. Keeping to their word, the quartet had given a late morning performance on the Promenade. On his way over, he'd heard from shopkeepers that the music had been greatly appreciated by everyone but Quark. Apparently, they were pulling patrons into the Promenade and away from the dabo tables. Sisko smiled as he approached the door but halted when the music stopped abruptly. He heard the frustrated voice of Keyla.

"Wait, wait. This just isn't working. Jen, do you think you could hold off kicking in the drums until the refrain? I think Dobin and I need another verse to establish the melody. I feel like you're right on top of me." There was stifled laughter.

"What's so funny?" Keyla continued, to the sounds of more laughter.

"It's just that I never thought I'd hear you complain about Jen being 'right on top of you'," Dobin's smooth voice intoned. Keyla joined them in their laughter.

"You know Tosh, I'd be pissed were it not so true," Keyla replied. Sisko then heard Jen's voice, higher than Keyla's but in a lower register than her singing voice.

"I thought it sounded pretty good. What is it exactly that you want me to do? I'm not a mind-reader." The frustration in the drummer's voice was clear. Ben was about to walk through the door when he heard the voice of his son, Jake.

"You've been at that song for almost an hour. Why don't you go on to something else then get back to it and try something new?" the boy offered.

"You know Jake, you'd make a hell of a producer. Why don't we go for a take on *Barill Variel*?" Jen replied.

"Jake, which do you like better, the harp interlude, or the pipes?" Tosh asked.

There was silence for a moment before Jake replied. "Well, it's a Vulcan song, right? I think the harp makes it sound more Vulcan, but the pipes make it sound more Bajoran, more your own."

There was applause and Jen commented, "Okay, so maybe he's a born diplomat."

Ben decided the timing was right to enter the cargo bay. He was immediately impressed by the sight of the make-shift recording studio. The basic placement of the players and their instruments was identical to the night before, except there were now more drums set up and the other musicians had a wider variety of instruments around them. The instrument cases were serving double duty as seats and tables, arranged neatly in a wider circle around the cluster of musical instruments. In the center of the arrangement, a little farther away from the drums was a small recording console. Suspended from the ceiling of the cargo bay were several thin, flexible blankets about three meters wide by six meters long. They were twisted and contorted into unusual shapes overhead. Only the Bajoran musicians and Jake were present in the cargo bay, they appeared relaxed but focused on the task at hand. Jen greeted him as he walked over to the group.
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"Greetings, Captain. Come on in, have some lunch." Jen pointed to a tray that had a wide variety of foods from the Promenade. "We've been spoiled by vendors on your station."

"Thanks, but I've eaten," the Captain replied amicably. "I just came by to see how you were doing." Looking at his son he asked, "I trust Jake is showing you around?"

"He's doing more than that, Captain," Tosh replied grinning broadly, "He's been a big help in setting up the equipment and is a wonderful source of feedback. We'd like to keep him busy while we're here, if that's okay?"

"I don't see a problem with that," Sisko answered, smiling, "as long as he's able to keep up with his studies. Do you mind if I listen in for a while?"

The four band members quickly glanced at each other, and then Jen spoke.

"Not at all, Captain. Have a seat and make yourself comfortable. Just don't expect too much. This is practice."

"Got it," Ben said taking a seat on a drum case.

"Why don't we try just Jen and Keyla's vocal on *Barill Variel*?" Dobin asked, taking charge of the session. He positioned Jen and Keyla over a small recording unit. The two women stood facing each other and hummed quietly to each other, getting their pitch just right. Dobin continued, "Jake, could you start the playback with just the pipes and strings from the beginning? Count us in."

Benjamin Sisko was impressed to see Jake move over to the main console and touch several points on the screen. "In four," he said and waved his arm in a steady four count. He pointed to the two women, a flash went off, and the music playback began. Jen and Keyla stood, singing powerfully, all of their attention focused on the notes they brought forth. Benjamin noticed that the proximity of the two women to each other enhanced the feeling of intimacy in the music they were making. Their body language and voices played off each other when they looked at each other; notes in perfect unison were the result. There was a visible air of respect and comfort and intimacy between the pair. The song finished, and Benjamin did not realize he had been holding his breath. He exhaled slowly as he joined the other men in the room in applause. Jen and Keyla looked quite pleased with themselves; they hugged and quickly patted each other on the back. Jake, still at the console, touched a key, switching off the recording.

"Good going," Dobin congratulated the two women. Looking meaningfully at Keyla, he quipped, "See how nice it is when the two of you aren't fighting?"

"We weren't fighting, Dobin," Keyla insisted, "I just think the drums came in too early on *Skyline*. I did write it, after all."

Jen sighed, and then frowned at the blonde woman. "You're not going to let it go are you? Let's try this: Keyla, you and Dob just do guitar for the first verse. Rhythm and lead, or two leads for that matter. Tosh, when we come in on the chorus, keep it simple. A basic foundation, that's all I'm after. I'll try something different in the harmony. Captain, you might as well give Jake a hand as long as you're here. Just follow his lead, he knows what to do."

Sisko was about to protest when Jake's enthusiasm won him over. "It's easy, Dad. During the chorus we quietly rattle these, they make a cool sound." As he spoke, he handed him an unusual beaded gourd.

Dobin turned the recording unit back on, "*Skyline*, take nine, Benjamin and Jake Sisko on percussion, damping blankets off, in four…"

Dobin and Keyla began melodies on guitar, phrases of notes that were intertwined with each other. Keyla began to sing and Jen gracefully introduced the hide drums. Building the chorus, Sisko followed his son's lead with the beaded gourds and Tosh deftly added emphasis to

the rhythm on bass. For the second verse, Jen nodded to the Siskos to continue with the gourds as she added subtle rhythms on the wood drums until the next chorus. Another verse was performed with still more rhythm until the song ended with the same power as the chorus.

The look on Keyla's face clearly said she was pleased with herself. She turned to the Siskos grinning. "That was great! You guys are hired."

"No, thanks," Ben stood up, shaking his head and returning her smile. "I've got to get back to Ops. I just wanted to see how things were going." Smiling at Jake, he added, "That was fun though." As he reached the door to leave, he added, "By the way, I've looked over the requests you've made for places to record and I don't see any problems. I'm sure Jake can show you the best places to put the equipment." Then almost as an afterthought, "Doctor Bashir got a blood sample of yours Jen, but if the rest of you wouldn't mind, he'd like to run some general tests. Just to make sure everyone's in good health."

"Is there a problem?" Tosh asked, concerned.

"I don't think so," Sisko answered casually. "Just stop by sickbay when you get a chance." The four musicians exchanged glances and shrugged.

"No problem," Keyla assured the Captain.

"See you later Jake-O." Sisko smiled to his son and left.

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Several hours later as Dax approached the cargo bay she could clearly hear the boisterous sounds of a party coming from behind the hanger door. The door slid silently open as she stepped through. Inside, Tosh and Miles O'Brien were singing *That'll Be the Day* at the top of their lungs. Jake was sitting next to Jen behind her massive drum kit pounding away with her on drums, Dobin was playing bass, and Tosh and Keyla were on guitar. Miles was also playing a tambourine. When the song finished Miles and Tosh, panting and out of breath, clapped each other on the back amicably.

"For some reason, I think my singing is better when I'm drunk." Miles quipped.

"You sounded great. Nice job on the drums, Jake." Tosh said as he looked over to the grinning young Sisko.

"That was fun. Oh, hi Dax," Jake waved as he noticed the Commander entering the cargo bay.

All eyes turned to the Trill. "Hi guys," she said, smiling. Arching an eyebrow at the Chief, "Impressive vocals, Miles." The curly haired Irishman blushed slightly and busied himself with an exposed energy conduit. Dax crossed the hanger floor to the drum kit. "That was some playing," she smiled at Jake then turned to face Jen, "As promised, I put together a program of music from the Trill home world, and I've included some of Joran's compositions as well." She handed the woman sitting next to Jake a small transparent blue cylinder, about eight centimeters in length.

"Thanks, Dax," Jen said taking the program and putting it in the front pocket of her sleeveless tunic. Jadzia noted that again the Bajoran woman was barefoot. "Care for some Jum Jut, or something to drink?" she asked indicating a tray of fresh food.

"No, thanks," Jadzia said, looking dubiously at the food, "I had a big lunch. I came by to see if you'd like to go swimming," Dax looked around the room at the other band members. "Everyone is invited," she clarified.

"Swimming on a space station?" Dobin asked looking puzzled.

"It's a holosuite program." Dax replied.
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"What's a holosuite?" Jen asked.

Jake couldn't stifle his laughter "You've never even heard of holosuites?" he asked incredulously.

Jen started to blush and mumbled, "Well, I've been out of it lately."

"So, Jake what's a tongue drum?" Tosh asked amicably.

Jake stopped laughing and thought a moment. "I dunno," he replied, "a drum you play with your mouth?"

At that, the musicians and Dax started laughing.

Jake, made no effort to hide his embarrassment. "Okay, so what is it?"

Dax nodded to the wooden drums to Jake's right. "Those," she said, "They have tongue-shaped slats cut in them."

Jen looked at Dax, surprised. "You're a drum expert too?"

"No," Dax answered simply. She looked at Tosh, "It was a basic question wasn't it?"

"As basic as holosuites" the long-haired man answered with a smile.

"Care to join us Chief?" Jen asked as O'Brien replaced the conduit cover.

"Thanks, but no. I was going to take a look at your ship, see if your replicators just need a minor adjustment… I know you have a few other issues onboard as well. She is an old ship." O'Brien's natural coloring had returned, but he avoided looking at Dax.

"But you're off duty." Keyla protested.

"That's why I've got the time to look at your ship," Miles smiled at the petite blonde. "At least we need to prioritize the fixes you'll need while you're here. But if you don't mind Jen, I'd like to bring Molly down later to see the drums up close."

"Please do," Jen replied, flattered by the request. "By all means, give her some sticks and let her bang away. She can't hurt them. Here she can have these." Jen handed O'Brien the sticks she'd been using for the rehearsal.

"Thanks." Miles said gratefully. "Have fun in the holosuites."

Jadzia did her best to explain the basic functions of holo-technology as the small group walked from the far end of the Promenade to *Quark's.* Jake walked with them as far as the Ferengi bar. "Well guys, as much as I'd like to go swimming with you, I know my dad will have my head if I don't keep up with my studies."

"Yeah, right," Dobin teased, "your studies. I don't suppose the young Ferengi and that attractive dabo girl we passed on the way in has anything to do with your studies?"

Now it was Jake's turn to blush. "Well... ah... Nog and Bleeila. They're friends of mine. Bleeila is from Earth too." Keyla looked over at the young Terran woman standing next to the young Ferengi.

Jen saw the look on Keyla's face, leaned over and whispered to her, "Don't even think about it." Before Keyla could respond, Jen turned to Jake, "So we'll see you first thing tomorrow then?"

Jake smiled. "Sure. Um, before the performance tomorrow night, could I bring a few of my friends to the sound check?"

Jen quickly glanced at each of the musicians. "I don't think anyone would mind. We'll talk about it tomorrow, okay?"

"Great." Smiling, Jake turned to join his friends.

When he was out of earshot, Keyla turned to Jen with some annoyance, "I wasn't thinking anything, you know."

Jen looked down into the eyes of the younger woman standing next to her. It was easy to forget how much taller than Keyla she was because when they rehearsed she was always sitting behind her drums. Keyla had to arch her neck a bit to look defiantly at the drummer. The look didn't last long. The petite woman felt her knees get weak whenever she and Jen made direct eye contact. She was hopelessly in love with the older woman, and Jen knew it. "Yes, you were," the drummer said softly, and left it at that.

Jadzia led the four musicians to one of the holosuites upstairs at *Quark's*. Dobin and Keyla looked nervously at the row of ominous doors overlooking the Dabo tables below. They stopped at a door slightly apart from the others. "This is the largest of Quark's holosuites," Jadzia announced, "We get use of it because he still owes me a favor or two."

"Mind if I ask what a holosuite is before going inside?" Tosh asked, looking suspiciously at the door. "I heard someone mention them at the reception and I'm not sure if I'm interested."

Their host smiled knowingly. "What I think you heard about are the programs usually run in Quark's holosuites. This program is different." She paused a moment, deciding how best to continue. "Let me put it this way. A holosuite is a type of virtual reality chamber. It uses two main subsystems, the holographic imagery subsystem, and the matter conversion subsystem."

Jadzia punched a code into the console and the door to the holo-chamber slid open. The inside of the large room was flat grey with a series of round, shiny lenses on the walls, floor, and ceiling. The four Bajorans looked inside with interest.

Dax continued, "This chamber is covered with Omni-directional holo-diodes. By using highly articulated, computer-driven tractor beams and transporter-based replicators, an absolutely lifelike environment can be interactively programmed." Dax closed the chamber door. Tosh, the programs you heard about are most likely the sexual fantasy type. To hear Quark talk, writing them is his specialty. This program however, is mine."

She took a transparent blue cylinder out of her pocket similar to the one she'd given Jen, slid it into the control panel, touched a few keys, and then reopened the door. "This is a small lake on Vrillo Four. Tobin Dax loved to vacation there. I've been there once or twice and this is my favorite swimming spot." The cold grey door slid open again, however this time the flat grey walls and were replaced by a breathtaking meadow. An expanse of aqua grasses blooming with flowers of blue, purple, and orange continued as far as the eye could see. A placid blue lake could be seen a short distance from the door, Jadzia stepped inside and the others followed. When she said "close arch" the door disappeared and they were surrounded by meadow.

"This is incredible," Jen said in awe, looking around. Snapping her fingers, "The acoustics have even changed."

"It even smells like a meadow," Tosh added as he knelt down to touch the grass.

Jadzia nodded "Yes there are olfactory and auditory subroutines running as well as visual." The five of them were walking to the clear blue lake, the bank of which was dominated by a huge weeping willow tree. There was a large rock formation jutting out into the small lake.

"And we can really swim in that?" Dobin asked nervously. "Like it's water?"

"Of course," Jadzia answered, smiling.

"How?" Jen asked, still awed.

"A substrate force-field and the power of suggestion." Dax smiled, "You don't want to know all its secrets do you? It'd spoil all the fun."

Without any further prompting Dobin grinned and said "Last one in is a Nak Nar!" He took off running for the water, undoing his tunic and discarding it along with his boots, belt, and trousers as he went. Tosh and Jen were right behind him. In seconds the three of them were

splashing into the lake, naked save for their undergarments. Keyla and Jadzia laughed at the sight and sat near the edge of the lake under the shade of the willow tree.

"Aren't you interested in swimming?" Jadzia asked, enjoying the warmth of the sunny day. Puffy clouds roamed lazily overhead, but not enough to dampen the sunshine and warmth.

Keyla glanced shyly at the Trill, "I don't swim very well." She paused a moment before continuing, "And I've got a few bites on me that I'd rather not have the other's see."

Jadzia nodded knowingly "Ah yes, Klingons."

Keyla looked at her, surprised. "How did you know?"

"I overheard you talking to Jen last night. I was in the observation deck above you. I'm sorry, I was trying to get a break from the party and…" She shrugged.

"It's okay," Keyla finished for her, "I don't mind. Considering the people I travel with, I don't expect to keep many secrets." The blonde Bajoran fell silent, looking at her friends splashing in the lake before continuing. "Jen's the one I worry about. For someone who would rather I fall for someone else, she has many endearing qualities. I know one look at the bite marks and she'd go ballistic."

"For a group of people who haven't been together for very long, you seem close, like family."

Keyla returned the Trill's warm smile. "Yeah, it is like that. I know it's unusual. Actually, I think the chemistry is why we decided to travel together, except Dobin of course; his first love is music, always. I follow Jen around because I'm hopelessly in love with her. I suspect Tosh is too, but I'm not sure. If he is, I think it must be a brotherly type thing. More than once Jen has groused about Dobin and Tosh being the two older brothers she never asked for."

"Are you so sure Jen doesn't return your feelings?" Jadzia asked curiously.

"Yeah, I'm sure, but it's okay. I know I love Jen, but she thinks I'm just lusting after her. I was at first, but I lust after a lot of people." She grinned enticingly at her companion. "I sense I'm not what Jen is looking for, and that's okay too. I treasure her friendship, and I'm not a jealous person. If she changes her mind, great. If not, I'll lust after her anyway, regardless of what she says." Keyla looked intently at Jadzia before continuing, "You know, Jen and I are very alike in some ways. We both develop clear impressions of people very quickly. The only difference is that Jen is wrong most of the time." She smiled, "For example, you."

Jadzia looked surprised, "What about me?"

Keyla glanced at the lake to make sure the others were not in hearing distance, "Jen doesn't think you're available, I think you are."

"Well I don't have a significant other if that's what you mean," she replied evenly.

"There is a difference between being single and being available," Keyla continued. "Jen really likes you. She feels comfortable lusting after you in her own way because she's certain you're not going to respond. In her warped, battle-scarred mind, it's safer that way. If she found out you were interested in her as well, she'd be scared to death." Keyla shrugged. "I think that's what frightened her so much about me. I'm a bit on the direct side."

Jadzia thought a moment as she watched the drummer play in the lake with her friends. The young woman sitting next to her was certainly as direct as she'd claimed, asking questions that she hadn't really considered much herself. She considered the possibility that a professional curiosity about music could possibly be something more. "Are you concerned I'm going to scare Jen off, or that I won't?"

The Bajoran looked pointedly at Dax before responding, "All kidding aside Jadzia, I'm concerned that you're not sure. I don't want to see anyone's heart get bruised." There was no

animosity in her voice, but the usually playful singer was now serious. “Ultimately, Jen can take care of herself, almost too well I think. I’m sure you can too. I just don’t want you to realize you’re in over your head when you weren’t serious about swimming.”

“I appreciate your concern, Keyla, I’ll take it to heart,” Jadzia replied sincerely. At that moment, they noticed Tosh, Dobin and Jen running the short distance up the bank to where they sat. All three were wearing only their once piece undergarments which were soaked through and dripping wet. The thin light fabric clung to them, leaving nothing to the imagination. Dax couldn’t help but notice Keyla’s approving grin.

“Come on in guys,” Dobin said, catching his breath. “The lake is perfect. This is amazing.”

“I don’t know,” Keyla said hesitantly. “I’m really enjoying the view of the meadow.”

“Well at least check out that rock formation with us.” Tosh pleaded nodding over his shoulder to the formation that extended over the pristine water.

“Well, I guess.” The young woman was about to stand up when Jen caught her eye. She gave the singer a subtle shake of her head. “But you have to promise that you won’t throw me in the water.”

The two men looked crestfallen. When Keyla and Dax stood up, Dobin grabbed the Trill and was about to pick her up “But I didn’t promise not to throw Dax in!” he exclaimed in triumph an instant before finding himself flat on his back, looking up at the sky, the wind knocked out of him. Tosh, Keyla, and Jen were looking over him concerned, but giggling.

“Are you okay?” Tosh asked, extending a hand out to help him up.

“What happened?” he asked.

“You are one dense guitar player,” Jen said as the taller man helped him to his feet, “I think it was a Klingon hip throw, wasn’t it?” she added looking at Jadzia.

“Basically,” she replied calmly. “Sure you’re okay, Dobin?” she asked gently putting her hand on his forearm.

He smiled at her. “Yeah, I’m okay. I deserved it.” He then shyly glanced at Jen.

The drummer sighed, shaking her head. “Fine Dobin, go ahead.” He picked her up, threw her over his shoulder, and ran to the edge of the lake where he promptly threw her in.

“He’s worse than a kid sometimes,” Keyla said, shaking her head as she followed Tosh and Dax to the rock outcrop.

Tosh glanced back at her, “I think Jen wants to do some experimenting with some of the new songs. You know how hard that is when Dobin isn’t in a good mood.”

Keyla smiled and nodded to Dax. “He’s right. Dobin is such a purist. His whole life is music. Well, music and food. For some reason, he tends to resist experimenting with sound. Until he hears the results, that is.” A few moments later Dobin and Jen joined the others on the rock outcrop overhanging the lake.

Jen and Dobin sat with the others, freshly soaked and out of breath. “I still don’t believe it,” Jen said. “I could feel us climbing these rocks. I could feel the rock under my feet; we must be at least twelve meters above the surface of the water. How does that happen?”

Dax sighed. “I’m not an expert in holo-technology; my primary expertise is in exobiology, zoology, astrophysics, and exo-archaeology. But basically, a force-field is creating a ‘treadmill’ effect. The illusion of movement is created by the subtle changes in the scenery. Tractor technology is what makes swimming possible. Replicator technology is what creates the tangible parts of the experience.”

“So, you can have a program simulation of any environment?” Tosh asked.

"For the most part, yes. There are safeguards built in to prevent serious injury. There are programs that replicate real environments as well as other elements. Holo-novels are very popular."

Dobin chuckled, "You might as well explain that one too."

"Holo-novels are basically stories where the participant is the main character and the supporting characters and the setting are programmed. Garak is always trying to get Julian to tryout Cardassian Enigma Tales. Julian says they're like mysteries but without the suspense." Everyone laughed but Jen. That fact did not escape Dax's notice. After an instant Jen seemed to notice her silence and smiled with the others. Dax was not sure if it was the mention of Cardassia or Garak that triggered Jen's temporary withdrawal, but made a mental note to investigate further. She decided changing the subject might be a good idea.

"I hope I didn't hurt you, Dobin?" Dax asked, "Are you okay?"

Still smiling, he shook his head. "Naw, I'm okay. I've been dumped on my ass in the fishing boat quite a few times, but not quite like that. Where did you learn those moves?"

Attention fully back in the conversation, Jen looked on with interest. "Well," Jadzia answered, "Curzon Dax had some very good friends who were Klingon. I've kept up with the training because I enjoy the physical as well as mental exercise." Dax realized Jen must have explained Trill physiology Jen to the others; she'd already mentioned several of her previous hosts in conversation and had not been met by as much as a questioning glance.

Dobin nodded appreciatively "It certainly does the trick. Jen, it looks as effective as one of those Cardassian moves you picked up."

It was Jen's turn to smile, "Dobin, when will you realize that you always carry yourself as if you're still at sea. When you start to go off balance, you seriously overcompensate. It makes you very easy to throw."

Tosh whistled, "Sounds like a challenge to me. So Jen, are you saying Dax couldn't throw you?"

Dax as well as the others looked at the drummer with interest. She started to blush. "I'm not saying that, exactly." Jen replied, slightly nervous.

"What are you saying, then?" Dax asked, smiling sweetly. "Exactly?"

The Bajoran sighed, "I'm saying," she began, sounding more confidant, "that Dobin's original goal was to throw you in the water. He didn't succeed. I could." She smiled sweetly in return.

"Well then, prove it." With that, Dax gracefully stood up and looked down at Jen, waiting. Jen sat for a moment, looking up at the beautiful Trill. She then looked at each of her bandmates in turn. Accepting the Trill's offered her hand, she stood.

"Three bits says Jen dumps her." Tosh began the betting.

"No way, man. Jen's going swimming." Dobin replied, "I've got you covered." The two men looked at Keyla.

"I say they both get wet," she replied with a wicked grin.

The men rolled their eyes at the double entendre as they moved to the base of the rock outcrop. The only people standing at the edge over the lake were Dax and Jen.

The women stood about a meter apart. Dax's back was to the water below. Due to the angle of the rock formation, she stood uphill from the Bajoran giving the illusion that she was significantly taller than Jen. Jen moved toward her slowly, studying the Trill's calm, serene features. Dax stood relaxed, her arms at her side, feet shoulder's width apart, with her right foot slightly in front of her left.

Dax studied the Bajoran woman, moving closer to her. It was apparent that Jen was sizing her up, trying to anticipate her probable reaction to what might happen next. The beige undergarments she wore – shorts and a sleeveless shirt – were still wet from her swim and clung to her body. Jadzia noticed three deep, parallel scars that started at Jen's left shoulder and disappeared under her shirt. Because the shirt was wet, Jadzia thought she could see traces of the scars continue across Jen's left breast down to her abdomen. Suddenly, Jen dropped low, spun, and swung her leg out in a sweeping motion. While the leg sweep came fast, Jadzia easily jumped over it. The maneuver left Jen's back vulnerable. Jadzia capitalized on it and grabbed Jen from behind. Jadzia was just starting to pull Jen's arm into a back lock when she realized Jen had left her back open on purpose. As soon as she grabbed Jen's arm, she spun into Dax's arms and deftly grabbed Dax's hand. The two women stood with their faces inches apart. Dax was distracted by the intense color of Jen's eyes. She hadn't noticed the gold flecks mixed in with the pale green. She refocused her attention to the task at hand only an instant before Jen would have put Jadzia's hand in a Cardassian pinch-lock. Dax twisted her hips, at first into, then away from Jen, breaking free and twisting away from the Bajoran's hold. Jadzia was near the edge of the rock outcrop now. If she could get Jen to rush forward, the other woman's momentum might be enough to send her over the edge.

"Nice try," Jadzia said, amiably.

"Thanks," Jen replied, surprised that her skin was tingling from where it came into contact with the Trill's skin. Studying Dax's stance, Jen looked for another opportunity to get her arms around the beautiful Commander.

Just as Dax was sure she had the opening she wanted, she was surprised. Jen rushed forward as Jadzia had hoped, but when the Trill thought she was moving out of the way, Jen grabbed her around the waist and pulled her close. "You're going with me," Jen said quietly, and pushed off with her muscular legs from the edge of the rock outcrop, throwing herself backwards. She felt the drummer's strong arms around her waist but was unable to break free of the hold. As they fell, she was aware that the angle she and Jen were approaching the water was not ideal.

Bajoran and Trill hit the water horizontally. Dax would have belly-flopped had she not been flat on top of Jen. The Bajoran felt the sting of the water against her back and the force of the Trill landing on top of her. While she was delighted by the sensation of her arms around Jadzia and the beautiful woman's proximity, the sting of the water combined with the air being knocked out of her lungs was painful. Her mind went fuzzy and several seconds passed. Dax was treading water, holding her upright, questioning her.

"Jen! Are you okay?" Dax asked, concern evident.

Jen shook her head to clear the cobwebs. Then she noticed her arms were around Jadzia's neck. She decided to leave them there. She looked at Jadzia. Hair that was not confined to her ponytail was now plastered wet to the sides of her face, obscuring the delicate Trill markings. Jadzia was still radiantly beautiful, albeit rather disheveled.

"Prophets, you're beautiful," Jen murmured. Her eyes went wide with the realization that she'd spoken aloud. "I mean, I'm okay, just winded," she said clearly, doubtful that the Trill hadn't heard her previous mutterings. Dax had one arm around her waist holding her up, treading water with her other arm and powerful legs. She looked concerned, but she also looked pleased.

"Do you think you can swim? Or should I end the program?"

"Don't end the program." Jen heard herself saying, "It's wonderful, I'm okay." Jen cringed inwardly, *what the hell does 'it's wonderful mean?* She thought. With Jadzia's

assistance, Jen swam the short distance to the shore of the lake. Tosh, Dobin, and Keyla were wading into the water to help her. Jen took it all in as an observer, not a participant.

"Bren, are you okay?" She heard Keyla ask.

"I'm fine, just out of breath." She heard herself respond. Jen sat on the grassy shore of the lake, her feet still in the water, and took several deep breaths to clear her head. When her mind cleared, she took notice of the Trill sitting next to her. Jen looked down at her thigh. Her scarred wet leg stuck out from her wet undergarments, right next to Jadzia's wet leg in its Starfleet uniform. At that point, Jen couldn't help but laugh.

"What's so funny?" Dax asked, still catching her breath.

Jen looked at Dax's face, the wet hair plastered down in a thoroughly soaked uniform. "Do you always go swimming in your uniform?" Dax looked down at her wet uniform and joined in the laughter.

"At least I finished my duty shift," she replied. As Dax answered, Jen turned to face her. She couldn't help but let her eyes take in all of the soaked Bajoran. In her wet undergarments, she might as well have been naked. Jadzia did her best not to be obvious as she noticed Jen's muscular chest heaving as she tried to return her breathing to normal. Jen's nipples were erect; traces of her areolas were visible. Jadzia forced herself to glance away.

Tosh, Dobin, and Keyla huddled around the soaked pair, concern registering on their faces. Tosh studied Jen critically "You go a long way to prove a point Jen. That was stupid."

Jen looked up at him and frowned "Thanks for your assessment. Mind waiting until I ask for it next time?"

"Don't get mad at me, you could have been hurt. Are you okay, Dax?"

Dax, who had regained most of her composure, smiled. "I'm fine, just wet. Congratulations Keyla, looks like you just won a bet." Glancing at Jen, "Still I don't think a trip to sick bay would hurt, there is something there that Julian wanted you to see." Jen started to get up, became woozy, and sat down again.

"Dobin, would you mind getting my clothes for me, I'd like to walk to sickbay dressed if you don't mind," Jen said, hands on her temples. Dobin walked over to where he, Tosh, and Jen had disrobed earlier, getting everyone's clothes. The three of them quietly got dressed. Jen had moments of dizziness and needed to sit.

Dax was starting to get worried. With one arm protectively around the Bajoran's shoulders, she touched the comm badge on her uniform, and heard its affirming chirp, "Dax to Ops, I need five to transport to sickbay."

An anonymous voice responded through the comm unit "Acknowledged Commander" Before they dissolved into nothingness, Dax added one last command, "Computer, end program." The last thing Jen saw before transport was the lake on Vrillo Four fading to gray.

Chapter 6

Constable Odo moved silently through the hull of the ship. He was not worried about being discovered; he simply couldn't abide sloppiness. Boarding *No Regrets* had not been difficult. Even had he not been a shapeshifter, the Bajoran musicians were not sophisticated when it came to security. That fact puzzled Odo. He could not avoid the nagging feeling that they weren't exactly who or what they said they were, but he had found no hard evidence to that effect. Rather, aside from a few anomalies, evidence seemed to support their story.

Odo slid in his gelatinous form through an air vent and solidified in the main hold of the ship. He had already determined that *No Regrets* was the simple cargo ship it appeared to be.

There were no hidden weapons, no scientific or surveillance systems. After studying the guts of the ship, Odo decided a tour of the ship's interior might prove more useful.

The chief of security for *Deep Space Nine* was well aware that his actions were, by Bajoran and Federation law, illegal. Nagging suspicions were a poor excuse to search a ship, especially without evidence or a warrant. He shook his head in resignation. In all the years he had spent with humanoid life forms, he felt no closer to understanding them. They craved security but treasured personal freedom. They wanted crimes solved, but impeded that effort relentlessly.

The shapeshifter was less concerned about security and personal freedom than he was truth and justice. Laws changed depending upon whoever had the good fortune to be making them, but justice remained constant. Odo was not concerned with anything but evidence that supported or refuted the investigation at hand. He did not catalog facts about people or events that he investigated for future use. If it did not relate to his case, he put it aside, in thought and action. Odo doubted that humanoids had the ability to do the same.

Odo came to the bunk area of the ship, near the place where he and Kira had met with Jen earlier. In examining the hull structure, it was clear that modifications had been made to eliminate some crew quarters in order to make others larger. The sleeping berths were considerably larger than average for cargo vessels, with two on each side of the main passageway. Quickly scanning the first doorway and noticing a marked absence of detection devices, he entered.

There was nothing unusual about the room. It had a bed on one side, neatly made. There was a small crate by the wall next to the bed. The pile of neatly folded clothes on top suggested the crate doubled as a dresser. Odo noticed that several garments had been repaired with fishing line, leading him to surmise this was Dobin Veran's quarters. Several stringed instruments next to the bed supported that theory. Odo noticed few personal effects: a bit of fishing net, some small carvings, an eel skin belt, a box of recording chips, and some Federation script. Odo also noted a simple sculpture attached to the wall across from the bed. The statue was similar in style to meditative sculptures in the Bajoran temple on the station.

Across the passageway from Dobin Veran's room was the room of Keyla Ris. Odo made that assumption instantly. The bed was large and unmade, and the room looked as if it had been ransacked. Odo was clearly aware of the whereabouts of the young Bajoran the previous night and that she was in the company of two female Klingons. There were several guitars in the room as well as a Vulcan harp. Despite the general chaos of the room, her instruments were in their cases. A sculpture similar in design and manufacture to the one in Dobin's room sat on a small table next to her bed. Several personal effects also sat on the table. Among other things, Odo found a book of handwritten poetry. He quickly scanned its contents, and concluded some of the writings were future song lyrics. Other entries were accounts of actual or imaginary sexual encounters. Odo paused at one entry; Keyla was describing an experience she had shared with a man at some time in the past. Odo read the passage several times. While it had nothing to do with the investigation, he was spellbound by the words he saw on the page. It had taken sometime to accept his feelings for Kira. While he had a general understanding of physiology and humanoid relations, and was keenly aware of the fantasies Quark offered in his holosuites, this was the first time he had read a personal account of humanoid intimacy. He was a little stunned, as well as impressed, by the sheer force of the poetry and intensity of the emotions they represented. More recent entries were exclusively about women, Jen in particular.

Jen's room was next to Keyla's quarters. It was the largest of the three rooms by almost a third. Given that the drummer had secured the ship by smuggling the *Prophet's Tear* from Cardassia, he wasn't surprised she'd been able to claim the largest quarters. The small table and chairs were in roughly the same position as when he and Kira had talked with Jen. Kira's passion for rok'dejino did not appear to be unusual; there were four empty mugs on the table and a padd. He powered up the padd and noticed that it had been used most recently for annotating the musical pieces from the previous night's performance. Odo briefly scrolled through the other entries, found nothing of interest, and turned it off. He was not worried about leaving finger prints because he didn't have any, but was careful to put it back precisely where he found it.

Odo looked at Jen's bed. It looked as if it had been slept on, not in. There was a slight indention in the pillow, but the bed was made. He moved to the small console next to the bed, and accessed the ship's log as well as personal file, downloading them to the security mainframe of *Deep Space Nine*. He would review and delete the files later; the constable remembered everything, so did not need to keep information. A point of some contention with the protocols of Starfleet Security; he had argued on more than one occasion, that his security operation was more secure than Starfleet's precisely because he left no tangible evidence to be compromised.

Between the table, chairs and bed was what appeared to be a very old drum with a soft cloth draped over it. Odo lifted the cloth. The drum was short and fat in design. The drum head appeared to me made of hide, old and seasoned. Construction of the drum was primitive; Odo surmised it must be some sort of family heirloom. He pressed his hand to the side of the drum where the head met the body. After easing a tendril of himself inside the drum, he looked around. As he suspected, the signature of the drum's maker was burned into the side. It was so faded Odo had to slide over the area to detect which molecules of the drum had been damaged by burning. The name said *Brenmarjen*, nothing more. Odo took a small sample of wood from the inside of the drum near the faded scorch marks.

A military storage locker was at the end of Jen's bed on the floor. It was locked. Odo touched the lock briefly. He let part of his hand meld into the lock and slide into the latching mechanism. After several tries, he found the right combination and opened the lock. Before opening the lid, he noticed that the storage crate was slightly dirty. There were ridges in the surface of the crate, to make stacking similar crates easy as well as sturdy. Dirt was caked between the deep grooves. Odo scraped a small bit of dirt off the case, and held them in his hand. The dirt fragments vanished beneath the surface of the metamorph. The constable did not need containment units for samples; he was able to keep evidence free of contamination by storing the matter inside of his mass until he could transfer it to containment units in the science lab.

This locker contained a few personal effects. Odo surmised that this crate had been buried or hidden somewhere before Jen was captured and she had recovered it after returning to Bajor. Odo looked through the contents without picking anything up. In some cases, he eased a tendril down the inside of the case to get a look at the contents below. There were several bottles, sealed and dusty with age. One bottle had a Cardassian look to it. Odo read the label and saw that it was indeed Cardassian Kanar, a rather rare vintage at that. The other bottles were several different harvests of kis. One was Malduk. Constable Odo looked further and was surprised to find a traditional Bajoran earcuff and ring. It was more ornamental than the style Major Kira wore, and several of the jewels were missing. He took several material scrapings from this as well. Finally, he found an old photoimage. It was burnt in one corner, and was it not for the crease-resistant material, would surely have been wrinkled or torn. The image was of Kira and Jen from a time many years past. They both looked very young Kira had long hair, similar to the

style she wore when he first met her. Jen had very short hair, almost identical in style to the way Kira wore her hair now.. They were standing arm in arm, smiling. Kira held a large hand phaser, Jen a pair of drumsticks with a blaster rifle leaning against her leg. Odo put the photoimage back and closed the case, locking it as he did so.

Tosh Sener's quarters were similar in size and decor to Dobin and Keyla's. Odo noted that it wasn't as neat as Dobin's but not as messy as Keyla's. Like Jen's quarters, Odo noticed the absence of a meditative sculpture. He assumed that their observance of an older form of worship did not utilize such meditative sculptures. Several pipes of various sizes hung neatly in a rack on the wall opposite the bed. Several handmade baskets held personal effects: grooming items, a belt, and a knife. Tosh's clothes were folded neatly in a crate that looked like the type used to store explosives. Odo made note of similar dirt caked into the crevices of the crate and took samples. The crate was open with the lid propped against the wall. Odo looked at the crate lid for a moment. He tried picking it up and confirmed his suspicion. A thin seam wrapped around the entire panel, yet the panel was made of a single molded piece of material. After setting the lid down, he proceeded to work the hidden panel free. The contents of the hidden chamber puzzled Odo. They included an ornate ear cuff and ring, a red scarf, and a parchment with an ornate black design on it. Odo recognized the design it was similar to the tattoo on Vedek Danl's head. Odo made a mental note of what he'd found, and took an impression in his hand of the ear cuff. He would ask Major Kira about them later if he could not find the answers on his own. Finally, Odo noticed a small prayer book. It looked very old but well cared for. The inscription was to Sener and read, *"May the Prophets give you eyes to seek what we must find."* Odo put the book back and replaced the panel.

The rest of Odo's tour through the ship revealed little information of any significance. There were all the usual components of cargo ships: emergency food stores, engineering supplies, and medical supplies. The only additional cargo was the strings, drums, cymbals, and recording equipment components. Odo surmised that the bulk of the equipment the four Bajoran musicians used was with them in the cargo bay they were using as a recording studio, and that these components were spares.

When he felt he had seen enough, the Constable cautiously approached the air lock. While he had been so far undisturbed, he didn't want to take any chances. He morphed into one of the linkage units that docked the ship to the station and proceeded through the conduit to the science lab of *Deep Space Nine*.

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For the four Bajorans who had never experienced a transporter, the arrival in sick bay following the adventure in the holosuite was overwhelming. Having her molecules broken down, moved and reassembled had not improved Jen's dizziness; the others also looked a bit queasy.

Medical tricorder in hand, Doctor Bashir rushed over to the group and began taking readings as soon as they solidified.

"Dax, what happened? You're soaked!" He asked, scanning each of them in turn.

"Jen and I took a dive from a ledge in a holosuite. I landed on her; I think she might have a slight concussion." Jadzia replied, concerned.

Julian studied the readings of his tricorder. "Well you're right about that. The concussion is slight. Jen, see if this helps." With that, he waved a small silver instrument back and forth from across her forehead. Jen blinked her eyes a couple of times and sighed, relieved.

"That seems to have done the trick, Doc. Thanks," she said smiling.
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Doctor Bashir took a second look at the readings on his tricorder. “Yes, that does seem to have done the trick.” Then, looking at Dax, “As for you, I think your symbiont took a jolt. You may feel a bit uneasy tonight, but you should be fine by tomorrow. I’m afraid I can’t give you anything for that. If you still feel uncomfortable tomorrow, let me know.”

Dax smiled at him. “Thank you, Julian, I’m fine.”

After another quick glance at his tricorder, Bashir looked at Keyla. “If you don’t mind I’d like to give you a hypo of antibiotics.” His voice was gentle but his gaze was direct and very serious, “You have a bit of an infection.”

Keyla started to blush and nodded to Bashir, “Sure, Doc. Go ahead.” The questions then came fast and furious.

“Are you okay?” Dobin asked.

“What happened?” Jen demanded.

“I was afraid this was going to happen,” Tosh muttered.

“Really guys, I’m fine. To be blunt, it’s none of your business. I appreciate your concern, but stop it!” Keyla said, looking at each of them directly.

Bashir quickly administered the hypospray and changed the subject, looking meaningfully at Dax before speaking. “As long as the four of you are here, we might as well get the blood tests out of the way.” He selected a different instrument and quickly touched it to the arm of each musician. “There is something I’d like you all to see,” Bashir noted the questioningly looks and added, “This way.” He indicated they follow him into his office.

He stood behind the desk with the large vidscreen and frozen Bajoran text. “This seems to have arrived shortly after your performance last night.” The four musicians crowded behind the desk. Dax took a seat near the entry system and Tosh took the seat next to her. The others stood behind them. Out of the corner of her eye, Dax saw Bashir enter a sequence in a separate data bank on the far side of the desk. With the door closed, she knew the vital statistics of all in this room were being closely monitored and recorded.

“I can’t read it.” Keyla said. “It looks like old Bajoran though. What is it?”

“It’s the eleventh prophesy of Kai Tulano” Tosh replied easily.

“Leave it to the religion expert,” Jen muttered.

“We know what it says,” Dax began. “Major Kira translated it for us, as you can see by the second monitor, but what we don’t understand is the border. You see, Julian has been able to replace words in the prophecy with, for lack of a better term, ‘definitions’. He has also replaced some parts of the border, but we don’t know what it means.”

Tosh looked over his shoulder at Jen. “What do you make of this, oh drum wizard?” Jen leaned over Dax’s shoulder to get a better look at the decorative border. As she did, her long hair, hanging in damp tendrils, brushed Dax’s cheek. Without thinking, the Trill gently brushed the other woman’s hair behind her neck where it would be out of the way. Dax felt her pulse quicken as she touched the drummer’s soft hair and warm skin; she was surprised she found the contact arousing.

Jen glanced back, smiling warmly, “Thanks,” she said softly and turned her attention back to the vidscreen. After several moments, she stood back and looked at Tosh. “I think I’ve got the language but I’m not sure where it starts, or if it’s forward or backwards.”

Julian looked puzzled. “What are you talking about?”

“The decorative icons on the boarder are drum notations. Kieshow is the name of the language, if you’re interested. It was the ceremonial drum language of Tulano’s time.” Jen again looked at Tosh. “Let’s give it a try.” With that, Jen started tapping out a series of rhythms on her

thighs with her hands the way Jadzia had seen her do in her quarters. Tosh sat back in his seat, eyes closed, listening intently.

"It's not making any sense. Try going the other way." Julian couldn't hear a difference in the tapping sounds but after a few moments, Tosh's face broke into a large grin. "That's it." Keep going, I think I've got the beginning."

A few moments more, and he opened his eyes, looking quite satisfied with himself. "Did you get it too?" he asked Jen.

"Yeah I think so. It starts at 'From the old city...' right?" Jen asked.

Tosh nodded, "I think so."

She continued. "Then we think it says:

From the old city, one will turn from the Prophets
To find the speaker must be
The liquid of life will identity confirm
Charges made are as false as pale death
Points of understanding in alignment
The gentle warlords will need comfort
Go to them and begin an age anew."

Jen finished reading and shook her head. "You see why I have so many problems with prophetic doctrine. This stuff is gibberish. I can't make heads or tails of what he's saying. How come some of the words are more faded than others?"

Julian pointed to several places on the vid screen. "These are places where we've figured out what the phrases mean. For example, 'aftermath of darkness' is 'Cardassian occupation', Kai Winn is the 'usurper', Cardassia Prime is 'hive of the pale ones', and you Jen, are mentioned as 'Speaker For The Dead'."

Jen looked at him with shock and disbelief. "Has to be someone else, a different 'Jen,' I don't even follow this religion."

Tosh smiled, "Regardless Jen, this religion seems to follow you. It says 'Brenmar-Jen' not 'Jen'. On familiar terms with a Kai; I'm impressed."

She glared at him. "Very funny."

"So why is an archaic prophecy on the medical mainframe?" Dobin asked.

Dax turned around to face him and explain. "Doctor Bashir was curious about your blood type, Jen," she glanced at the still stunned Bajoran woman. "As soon as he logged into the Bajoran medical databases to do some research, this program initiated and locked up this particular medical station. We can maneuver within the program but we can't exit it. We have been able to identify the program structure, and noticed these empty data nodes. We've treated it like decoding an encryption cycle."

"So how did the program get here?" Jen asked.

"A Vedek of the Lycene order installed the program; he's missing now. We think this might provide some clues as to why Kai Winn is so interested in returning you to Cardassia," Dax continued, gently. "Perhaps the four of you might be able to help us decode the rest of the message."

Tosh looked thoughtful. "Does Kai Winn know that you have this?"

Bashir frowned. "It's been our experience that she has a very good network of eyes and ears on the station. I'd have to assume that she does know about this."

"Then I'd bet she is very upset about it," the long haired musician remarked.

"Why is that Tosh?" Dax asked.

"Because the wording here is not the eleventh Prophecy of Kai Tulano that I'm familiar with. It is my guess that this is a draft from Tulano's personal notebook. Whoever had access to this would have access to any of the past Kai journals."

"I didn't know you were so well versed in traditional religious teaching, Tosh," Keyla commented. "I'm impressed." At the singer's comment, Jen's eyes darted over, regarding her companion suspiciously.

"Yeah, impressed." Jen echoed sarcastically.

"Don't be, my mom always wanted me to be a Vedek. She'd roll over in her grave if she knew I grew up to be a heretic instead." He winked at Keyla and grinned at Jen reassuringly.

At that point, Major Kira strode into sickbay, "Julian, I was wondering if..." she stopped upon seeing the group huddled around the vidscreen. "I can come back if you're busy." She glanced at Jen, and then turned her head, ignoring her.

"No, by all means Major, come in." Julian said, crossing the room to where she stood.

"Not necessary Doctor," she said stiffly. "I just wanted to personally bring to your attention a request made for medical supplies. The camps have not been getting the aid Starfleet promised through the provisional government. Shakaar is doing his best but was hoping you could send them something to hold them over until this latest bit of red tape gets cleared up."

"Of course, Major. I'll get some supplies together and have them sent down today." He beamed at the opportunity to help and look good at the same time.

Kira handed him a small padd. "This is the list of requested items I received from the Medical liaison at D'Kor. If there is anything you think should be added, you can contact him directly." With one last glance at the group, she added, "I'll leave you to your guests. Thank you, Doctor." She turned on her heel and exited.

Perhaps it was the mention of D'Kor, the Bajoran province where Jen and Kira grew up, or Tosh's mention of religious education that sent a chill down Jen's spine. A memory bubbled up, leaving her with the uncomfortable sensation that it was significant. She saw herself as a child, no more than eight years old, sitting on her bed in the tiny hut her and her grandfather, Jen Frye, called home. A Vedek came by to see her grandfather. She smiled as she remembered his bright eyes and scruffy appearance. Sitting on her bed, she overheard the Vedek's frustrated voice, followed by calm reassurances from her grandfather.

"…but she needs an education in the teachings of the Prophets…" the Vedek complained.

"She will have enough of the Prophets when she's older," Frye replied. "She is a child now, and for now I will try to teach her about the things in life that don't involve bloodshed."

"But she will grow up morally bankrupt if she is not taught the meaning of the Prophets messages…"

Rarely did Jen's grandfather raise his voice, rarer still did he speak in a harsh whisper, which was worse. The Vedek raised such an anger in the old man Jen was sure the sound of his reply would haunt her dreams forever.

"Young man," Jen Frye hissed, "my granddaughter will not be part of the moral bankruptcy spread by narrow minded orders such as yours that bend the Prophets intent to serve your whim. You leave her alone, and someday she will undo the damage you're sowing all over Bajor."

It was the certainty in her grandfather's voice that scared Jen. She was frightened then, but now, looking at her name in the text of Kai Tulano's eleventh prophecy, she was terrified. She shook her head to clear the memories from her mind and tried to focus on what Keyla was saying to her.

Keyla looked at Jen sadly. “You sure did have a fight. I don’t understand how some people can find you so irresistibly charming while others can’t stand you.” She squeezed Jen’s shoulder affectionately.

“It’s easy Ris,” Jen squeezed her hand in return. “You’re not thinking with both sides of your brain. Kira is.” Looking at the others, “If you guys don’t mind, I need some air, not to mention dry clothes. I’ll move the instruments into the tunnel areas for tomorrow and meet you there in the morning for rehearsal.” The others nodded. With a deep breath, Jen forced the memories out of her mind. She gave Dax’s shoulders a friendly touch as she stood.

“Thanks for the holosuite ‘Zia.” With that, she smiled to her friends and quietly left the room.

“What’s gotten into her?” Dobin asked.

Keyla looked at the exit Jen had taken. “It’s kind of disconcerting to not believe in religious doctrine when it mentions you by name.”

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When the rest of the Bajorans left sickbay over an hour later, Doctor Bashir was obviously pleased. “At last, we’re really getting somewhere, Dax.”

“Do you think unlocking the program will solve the mystery?” Dax asked.

“I’m not sure. I do know that we will know considerably more than we do now. Why don’t we see if the internal sensor scan revealed anything significant?”

Dax followed Bashir to a station just outside his office. “I was able to monitor the six of us from this monitoring unit.” Doctor Bashir entered a sequence into the console. Immediately a row of seven bars illuminated on the screen. One ended earlier than the others, another bar was very short. Finally, a third bar was comprised of two thinner bars, intertwined. “This is where Kira came in and left. I don’t think we need to look into her stats.” He touched a padd and the bar vanished. “This is where Jen left,” Bashir indicated the bar that ended significantly earlier than the others did. “And of course, this is you.” He indicated the slightly thicker bar composed of two thinner bars.

“Could you check the calibration?” Dax asked frowning at the display. “According to this, the biggest jump in pulse rate and stimulus level belonged to me.”

Julian smiled. “I’ll check the calibration if it’ll make you feel better, but I’m not surprised at the reading.” He pointed to the bar next to Dax’s. “You’ll notice there is a similar jump in readings in Jen’s bar at the same time. I think it was when she leaned over you to look at the screen before deciphering the border.”

Dax did not try to hide her embarrassment. “Oh, I see,” she said, blushing. It was impossible not to notice that the changes in Jen’s readings were as significant as her own. Trying to redirect the conversation, she asked, “Does that mean there isn’t anything significant to be gained by the readings? I assume they are all within relatively normal parameters.”

Julian, enjoying himself, replied, “Yes, all but two readings are in a normal range. I still think there is something here, though. Look at this,” he entered a command to amplify the top two bars. “This is me and Tosh,” he said indicating the top and bottom of the two. “I’m representative of the usual range of readings; unlike some people.” Dax returned his grin with a frown. The readings of the two bars were markedly different. One of the bars had a definite range of readings. The continuous line moved up and down the grid in some areas smoothly, in others erratically. The bar below it had a much more narrow range of readings. There was very little variation in the wave form of the bar.
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"Why is Tosh's so neutral?" Dax asked.

"I'm not sure." Bashir replied. "You and I at this moment have much more physiological variance occurring than is suggested here. I don't see any metabolic enhancers present in his system. There does not seem to be any sign of genetic anomaly. I think this might be psychologically induced."

"You mean meditation?" Dax asked.

"Or something similar. I think he was working very hard to remain calm. Sometimes that speaks louder than getting visibly excited. Right, Jadzia?"

"Nice," she replied tightly, then added a sweet smile at the doctor. She could expect him to tease her about this for some time. "What about this drop-off?" she asked pointing to Jen's bar, just before the drummer left the room.

"Classic panic attack," Julian replied. "I think Keyla was right about Jen's discomfort at being mentioned by the Prophecies."

Dax nodded, "You're right. Benjamin gets the same way sometimes."

"I'd think twice about getting involved with a religious icon," he muttered under his breath.

"It's getting late, Julian, and your wit needs work. I'm late for a workout. I'll see you tomorrow," Dax said as sternly as she could, heading for the door.

Julian chuckled to himself. "Pleasant dreams," he called after her as she strode out of sick bay. She didn't turn to acknowledge his remark but Bashir did notice a break in her stride. "My dear Jadzia," he said to himself, "I think I've found the chink in your armor." Then as he left sickbay, "I don't know why I should be happy about it though."

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Jen left sickbay with a sense of impending doom. She should be surprised to see her name mentioned so prominently in a religious text. *Should be*. The fact that deep down, she expected as much, terrified her. She then wondered if her lifelong avoidance of Bajoran prophecy was to avoid seeing herself. "*Prophets, but that's self-centered*," she thought passing *Quark's*.

"Jen! Got a minute?"

Jen turned to see Quark rushing out of his bar to greet her.

"Sure, Quark. What's up?" Instinctively she felt the pocket of her trousers to make sure her few slips of latinum were still there.

"Come in, sit, let me get you a drink," Quark began in a rush, leading her to the bar of his establishment. "What'll ya have? On the house, of course."

Jen looked uncertainly at the Ferengi. "What do they drink on the Trill homeworld?" she asked.

"The Trill have a fairly sophisticated palate." He looked pensive. "Come to think of it, Dax usually has food and drink from worlds other than her own. Ah, but she did request Pale Mead once. It came from the Hoobishi vineyard on Trill."

"I'll try that then," Jen shrugged.

"Coming right up." Quark cheerfully ducked behind the bar to fulfill the request. He put a thin fluted glass with the amber-lavender liquid in front of her.

"Before I drink this, you are going to tell me what it is you want, or I'm paying for it?" Jen looked Quark straight in the eye. "And I don't have the patience to be snowed," she added ominously.
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"Of course," Quark replied nervously. "It's just that you and your bandmates are scheduled to perform again tomorrow, right?" Jen nodded. "Well, I would merely like to offer *Quark's* as a venue for the performance."

Jen smiled at the Ferengi. "We are not charging admission to our performances and I consider a cover charge the same as admission."

Quark looked crestfallen. "That is most unfortunate. Still, I think that there would be enough interest to make it profitable." Jen was silent a moment considering, she smiled at the Ferengi.

"Okay, consider this. We do our next performance from inside the bar, over there by the Dabo tables. We record the performance. You would have exclusive distribution rights to that particular recording. You would need to pay Tosh, Keyla, and Dobin, and you won't be able to alter the recording in any way."

Quark looked suspicious, "What about your cut?"

Jen looked up towards the holosuites. "Me fee is we get unlimited use of a holosuite while we're here, for recording purposes." Quark smiled lasciviously. She added, "And you're going to teach me how to write the programs."

"And I get rights to what you record in the holosuites," Quark stated as a fact. "If recording is your intention…"

"No, you don't," Jen said flatly. "But I will write a song called *Quark's,* and you can have the rights to that."

Quark looked at Jen for a moment, stroking the outer rim of his left lobe. "Okay, it's a deal," he said in a neutral tone.

Jen leaned over the bar and gently traced the outer contour of his large ear. His eyes glazed over with pleasure. "Quark," she said sweetly, "don't screw with me on this, okay? If you find so much as one loophole and use it, I promise to come back and break every last thing in this place."

"You wouldn't," Quark said in mock surprise.

Jen downed the Trill mead in one gulp and sat the delicate glass on the counter. Taking a deep breath, she let out a very high resonating note. The glass vibrated a moment then shattered. Quark was stunned. "And that was quietly." Jen winked at the Ferengi and left the bar.

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Jadzia hurried from sickbay to her quarters; she had just enough time to quickly change clothes and keep her appointment with Worf. She and the big Klingon had grown quite fond of their training sessions together. In Dax, Worf found someone who not only understood his cultural background, but also deeply respected and admired it. Jadzia appreciated Worf's struggle to fit in at the station and come to terms with the duality of her species.

As she hurried up the steps to the holosuites, she heard Quark mumble, "You're late." She flashed him a winning grin in response, keyed in the entrance code, and stepped inside the chamber.

Her heart sank at the surroundings. Some time ago, she and Worf agreed that whoever got there first could set the terrain. "More water?" she mumbled, dismayed at the shallow swamp in which she now found herself. It was humid; she could feel the dampness clinging to her. Tall reeds sprouted from the fertile bank, and all around were the sounds of exotic birds. From her position on the bank, it was impossible to tell where the murky water grew deeper. To her left was a basalt rock formation jutting out of the swamp.
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"Computer, Mek'leth," she said quietly. The Klingon weapon materialized on the surface of the rock.

Dax had been working with the weapon for over a year, and was now almost as proficient in it as she was with her primary weapon, the Bat'leth. She decided the smaller weapon would be easier to wield in the uncertain terrain. She listened intently, trying to determine the Klingon warrior's location.

Generally, people thought of the Trill as having special abilities: more resilience, better hearing and eyesight, and supreme intelligence. Genetically they were a very resilient people, but the intelligence, eyesight, and hearing came from hundreds of years of experience. Jadzia was brilliant in her own right; the competition for Joining was fierce, and she had pushed herself harder than most. But the act of Joining bestowed no remarkable abilities other than memory. After three hundred years of living, she had a good idea what to listen for and what to ignore.

Skirting the basalt formation, she found herself enjoying this change of pace after the embarrassing episode in sickbay. Thus distracted, the Trill would have been taken completely by surprise had Worf not shouted,

"Moktor!" The Klingon battle cry echoed across the swamp as he pounced on her from above. She was thrown backwards into the soft mud of the bank, but gracefully rolled over backwards. She stood, her Mek'leth at the ready for his next attack. He quickly pulled a Mek'leth from the back of the armored sash he always wore and attacked. It didn't take Dax long to notice the water getting deeper as she moved backwards, parrying the Klingon's attacks. While Worf greatly out-massed the slim Trill, Dax had much more experience in hand to hand combat. She was a Vor-ta master long before Worf had even been born. She forced the Klingon to back up with some well-executed strikes with the rhodonite weapon, being careful not to cut him. She wondered why she hadn't tried the same maneuver when she wrestled with Jen on the rock outcrop.

"*Maybe I didn't want to get away from Jen*," her thoughts replied.

The slip in concentration proved to be a fatal error. Worf charged, hitting Dax with a blow full in the chest with his shoulder and sending sprawling into the mud. When she opened her eyes, the Klingon stood over her with his Mek'leth at her throat.

"Gogh-cha," Worf said simply.

"Movek," Dax replied, accepting his hand and getting up out of the mud.

"That was too easy," Worf observed. "Your mind is not on the battle."

"Maybe," Dax agreed with a slow smile, "but I wouldn't count me out just yet." With that, she deftly swept her leg behind his. He landed flat on his back but quickly rolled to the side. When he stood, Dax was nowhere to been seen.

"That is more like it." He cautiously approached the basalt formation and peered around the corner of the formation. Dax was there, but not where he expected. His first glance was at eyelevel, giving the Trill a split-second advance on her attack from a crouched position. It wasn't quite enough; she could not force his mass backwards, so found herself hard pressed to parry all of his attacks. It wasn't until Worf overshot a strike and hit the basalt with the Mek'leth that Dax had the opportunity to get behind the Klingon. She grabbed his arm, twisted it behind his back, and pushed him with all her might into the basalt wall. He hit the wall with a thud and she gently placed her Mek'leth on the back of his neck.

"Gotcha," she panted, out of breath.

"Movek," Worf grumbled into the wall.

"Computer, towels." She picked up the two towels that materialized on a basalt ledge and handed one to the Klingon. She mopped sweat from her face and neck while Worf used his towel to clean off the edge of his Mek'leth.

"Still think I'm distracted?" she said conversationally.

Worf looked at her. "Yes." Her eyes narrowed and he continued, "Dax, you usually don't need to depend on the mistakes of others. You create your own opportunities. Had I not misplaced that strike…" he left the obvious unsaid.

"Dax is not nearly as dense as humans, or Bajorans," he thought, then asked aloud, "I am curious as to what you find distracting."

Dax grinned sheepishly. "It's one of the musicians – Jen."

"Kira's friend?"

"Yes. I'm beginning to realize that I'm attracted to her, and it's a bit unsettling."

"I see," said Worf, now sorry he found himself in this particular conversation. "Does she return your affection?" He asked, not knowing what else to say.

"I think so, Worf, but I'm not sure." Dax answered honestly, leaning against the rough basalt. "She and Kira used to be very close and I don't know if she's resolved that yet." Then feeling guilty about the omission, added, "It isn't as if I've told her how I feel."

Worf's look of surprise was genuine. "Then you must make your desire known. Honor is difficult if the truth is disguised."

Dax smiled warmly at the Klingon's advice. "You're absolutely right, Worf. But before I let Jen know, I think I'd better have a talk with Kira first."

"And b*efore I try to figure out how to approach Jen.*" She thought.

"I am curious, Dax," Worf asked returning his Mek'leth to its sheath, "This Bajoran seems to have curried a great deal of favor with all of the Klingon's on the station. How did she do it?"

"You should come to the performance tonight, Worf. See for yourself."

"Perhaps Remph Gor Tok would like a break during the discussions?" Worf wondered aloud to himself. To Dax, he added, "I will try to be there."

"I'm sure you'll be impressed. Computer, exit." Dax said as they waked out the door.

"Yes. I would like to see for myself the person who can actually distract Jadzia Dax." Worf flashed a rare grin before turning to walk down the hallway.

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After storming out of sickbay, Kira walked. She did not have a destination in mind but she walked purposefully nonetheless. She rounded a bend leading to the main Promenade and ran into Odo, who was rounding the same bend from the opposite direction.

"Odo, I'm so sorry!" she said after the collision.

"Quite all right, Major," Odo replied in his usual gruff manner. "You seem to be headed somewhere in a hurry."

The Major looked at him and smiled. "I guess I do seem to be in a rush, don't I? Funny thing is, I'm not going anywhere. I think I just needed to vent off some steam. I'm sorry you're the person I ran into."

"I'm not." When she looked at him questioningly, he added, "I don't have any bones to break remember?" After a moment's consideration, Odo decided to be daring. "Why don't you have something to eat or drink at *Quark's* or the *Replimat*? I've noticed most humanoids go there to unwind."
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The two of them started walking toward the habitat ring. "*Quark's*!" Kira exclaimed in surprise. "The last person I want to see right now is that thieving Ferengi troll."

"I quite know the feeling." Odo concurred.

"Where are you heading, Odo?" Kira asked.

Odo thought a moment. He had been heading to his office, but that was the opposite direction. He was enjoying his conversation with Kira, so decided to deposit the samples from Jen's ship into containment cells in his quarters, and then give them to Commander Dax at the beginning of their next shift. She was most likely off duty at this hour anyway.

"I was heading to my quarters. It's about time for me to revert, and I thought a walk through the station might be a good idea before I retire."

Kira thought a moment. "I think turning in for the evening sounds like a good idea, too. I don't need another day like today."

"Is something troubling you, Major?" Odo asked as they resumed walking.

Kira looked up at him and smiled. "Not really Odo. It's just a personal problem, not something I'd want to bother you about."

Odo looked down at Kira. He would have tried to smile if he thought it would help. "It wouldn't be a bother Major. We are friends, after all."

Kira laughed in spite of herself. In an uncharacteristic move, she put her arm around Odo's waist and hugged him. "We are at that, my friend. Well, where to begin? I'm having a hard time reacquainting with Jen after all these years. She and I were close a long time ago. We had a bad fight, and then she was captured. I spent a lot of time accepting that fact, because I couldn't fix it."

"And now she's back, and you're uncomfortable?" Odo asked.

Kira nodded. "I don't know if I should try to put things back the way they were before the fight, which is what I spent a lot of time wishing I could do, or get angry with her all over again, which is what I seem to be doing." Kira sighed. "I don't want to not do something and regret it, but she's just so damn infuriating."

They were on the habitat ring with the activity of the Promenade far behind them. Without words they had agreed to walk to their quarters, taking the long way without using the turbo lifts. They had twenty minutes to talk in the sparsely populated corridors before reaching their destinations, and they enjoyed the silence together as well as conversation.

"I am by no means an expert on humanoid interaction," Odo began. "But I've noticed a preoccupation in humanoid relationships with trying to second guess the other participant. You're not sure of what you want or how you feel, so you try to base your response on what you think Jen is going to feel. Jen is most likely doing the same thing. Consequently, you're trying to outguess someone who is also guessing, regardless of what you really want to do. It doesn't sound very productive."

Kira smiled sadly. "I think you're more of an expert on 'humanoid interaction' then you give yourself credit for. You're right; I do need to figure out what I want, and what I want to do. I just wish I knew." Kira looked ahead and saw they were nearing her quarters.

"Odo, what do you think of Jen?" she asked as the two of them stopped outside her door.

"Major, I think that Jen Brenmar is as uncertain about your relationship as you are. Moreover, she is not only concerned, but also afraid of how you may choose to handle it. I don't think she can be very certain of who her friends are, and I think she knows it. That can be a difficult thing when you have reason to suspect others are actively plotting against you."

Kira opened the door and turned back around. Patting him affectionately on the arm, she smiled warmly. “You’re right, Odo, as usual. Thanks for the talk, my friend.”

He politely nodded his head. “You’re welcome, Kira Nerys. Goodnight.”

Kira watched him continue down the corridor. She leaned back into her quarters and shut the door. Her mind was a muddled mess. She lit several candles in her sitting room, dimmed the lights, and put some incense in a small brazier on her table. After changing clothes and getting some ginger tea from the replicator, she sat down to think.

She closed her eyes and let her consciousness fade. Her breathing slowed and the fragrance from the incense faded. She opened her mind’s eye and knew instantly where her subconscious had taken her. Her twenty-four year old self was back in the camp. It was early evening; she could feel from the weight on her back that she had just returned from a raid. She remembered putting the heavy pack down and entering the communal tent to get something to eat. A nineteen year old Jen was laughing quietly in the corner with Vleeta Norse. Vleeta was a crack sniper, immaculately proportioned, and beautiful in spite of the tattered clothing they all wore. Kira could feel the fire of jealousy burn through her like a proton torpedo. Jen looked at Kira and smiled, beckoning her to join them. Kira remembered the exhaustion she had felt, the quiet comfort she had anticipated back at camp. Sharing Jen Brenmar with Vleeta Norse was not what she had in mind.

Next Kira saw the inside of the small tent that was her home in the rugged outcrop of rock that was the latest temporary base. Jen entered the tent, concerned, but not patient. The whole petty fight played out as it did from time to time in her nightmares.

“What did I do *now*?” Jen complained.

“Nothing; absolutely *nothing*,” Kira retorted, her exhaustion getting the better of her.

“I just don’t understand why you’re so jealous. It’s stupid Nerys.”

“Of Vleeta? As if she has anything I want?” Kira shot back coldly.

“Oh, as if I haven’t seen you with Rotran, spare me,” Jen replied, not trying to hide the acid in her voice.

“Rotran is just a friend, Bren. Even if he wasn’t, it isn’t as if you’d care. Or notice.”

“And how does Vleeta differ, might I ask?” Jen asked sarcastically.

“Bren, you and I both know that Vleeta wants more than your friendship,” Kira said, barely maintaining icy control on her fiery temper.

“So? Are you saying I can’t be trusted to control myself?” Jen asked, anger rising in her own voice.

“I’m saying I don’t care what you do. But you’ve already proved that you can’t always be trusted.”

Jen was shocked and furious. “I can’t believe you’re bringing that up… *again*. Prophets, Nerys, that was before I even knew you! I can’t believe I have to put up with this shit.”

“Then don’t. I’m getting sick of going out on missions, taking some *real* risks, and then coming back to find you flirting with whoever is closest.” Kira winced at the memory. Even at the time, she knew she’d gone too far but couldn’t stop herself.

“Ah, so now I’m not doing my share for the resistance? I’m sorry I’m not out there torturing Cardassians with you, but someone has to stay at home and read the reports. Otherwise, you wouldn’t know where to find Cardassians to torture.”

Even in her meditative state, Kira felt her stomach drop. She had not known anyone in the Resistance Movement who had not done things they later regretted. What she had done in the name of freedom is what finally forced her to leave the movement. Many considered her a traitor

by accepting a posting in the provisional government. Doing what she knew was right, however, was more important than doing what was popular. Kira forced her mind to stay calm as she played out the argument to its tragic end.

"Brenmar, sometimes you are truly sinister." Kira said coldly, under her breath.

"What? You want me to go out and maybe get myself captured or killed? Is that how I can prove my devotion to the Movement and to you? Or maybe I can just get detained and tortured real good, then if I don't spill my guts you'll…"

"Trust me, Bren – you don't have the backbone for Cardassian torture. You'd last two seconds."

Jen looked at Kira with an odd expression. It wasn't anger, defiance, or hatred, but rather a stony look of resignation. "We'll see about that," she said quietly. Her tone sent chills down Kira's spine.

As understanding dawned on her, Kira laughed. "You can't mean Turk's reconnaissance mission? Jen, sometimes I might wish you dead or captured, especially when I'm really angry, like now, but even I know that's way out of your league."

Jen stood brushing her head against the ceiling of the low tent. "Dead or captured, eh? I'll see what I can do." Jen turned and stepped out of the tent. Before walking away, she looked back at Kira. "By the way Nerys," she said without anger, "I love you too."

Kira didn't need to hold back tears; she had cried them all a long time ago. She sighed at the unpleasant memory. It was hard to believe this was the same lifetime, it usually felt so far away – until Jen Brenmar's arrival.

She didn't know how long she had been sitting in near darkness when her door chime rang. She didn't really want to see anyone, but wearily shook herself out of her reverie.

"Who is it?"

"Kira, it's Jadzia."

Kira glanced at the chronometer mounted in the wall next to the door. It was later than she thought. She sighed, "Come in. Computer, increase lights 30 percent." Dax entered the Major's quarters. She was out of her uniform, dressed comfortably in a one-piece suit, looking as fresh and alert as she had that morning. *How does she do that?* Kira wondered gesturing to one end of the low couch that was behind the table.

"Have a seat."

Dax looked at her gratefully. "Thank you."

As the tall Trill walked past, Kira could tell that Dax had just showered; her fragrant hair was slightly damp at the ends.

"Would you like some tea?" Kira asked.

Again, Dax smiled. "Yes, thank you."

Walking over to her replication unit, Kira made her request and returned with two mugs of steaming tea. Dax took a sip before continuing. "I wanted to talk to you about... this morning."

Kira took another sip of her tea and regarded her guest. She had been a soldier too long to mince words. "You mean, talk to me about Jen."

Dax looked at her, with blue eyes that were open and inviting. Always calm, always serene. *Nothing gets to her*, Kira thought, annoyed.

"Yes, I suppose that too." Dax took another sip of tea.

"And I suppose you want to know where my relationship with Jen stands at this point, is that it?" In spite of herself, Kira was starting to get angry. Not necessarily at Dax, but she was not inclined to protect the Trill from her dark mood.

Jadzia shook her head. “My first concern is not about how you feel about Jen. My primary concern is how you feel about me.” That statement surprised the Major and she did not try to conceal that fact. “Kira, you are a very dear friend to me.” Dax continued, “I don’t want you to shut me out, especially not now. Besides, I’m a Starfleet officer. I am not at liberty to make or maintain relationships that would compromise the performance of my duties. Our relationship affects me and the performance of my duty as Chief Science Officer of this Station, surely you know that.”

Kira was a little dumbfounded. She had not expected Dax to approach the subject in this manner. “Are you saying that if I have a problem with a developing relationship between you and Jen, you’re going to call it off because it affects our working relationship?” She had been speaking sarcastically but Dax seemed to take her at her word.

“Well, I’d rather talk to you about it, try to work things out. I’m sure you understand that it would be difficult for me just to proceed as if nothing’s happened. I suppose we would have to decide if working together were still possible and if not, I’d be required to ask Benjamin to step in.”

The statement was not said as a threat, nor intended as such. Kira, however, knew that if she and Dax could not work together, one of them would have to be reassigned, and Dax did have a long-standing friendship with the Captain.

“Are you saying that you have feelings for Jen?” Kira asked.

Dax sighed, “Nerys, I honestly don’t know. I think I might, or at least the possibility is there if I want to explore it.” She took another sip of tea, thinking. “And I *do* want to find out, and see how Jen feels of course, but I don’t think I can pursue this if things are tense between you and me. What about you? Has your soul searching provided any answers?”

Kira leaned back on her couch. “Oh Jadzia, I wish I knew. I’ve been thinking, meditating, remembering… none of it seems to help.” She laughed to herself. “I even got advice from Odo about it.” Dax smiled and Kira sighed. “No Dax, I don’t love Jen, not that way, not anymore. I think I’ve been holding on to our history because I’m afraid that is all Jen and I have left. I’m not sure if there is the possibility of any future. I loved her too much back then to give her up entirely now but…” she shrugged. “I just don’t know if there is an ‘us’ anymore, even as friends.”

Dax looked thoughtful. “Sounds like you need to do some exploring with Jen to see if you have enough left that’s good for the foundation of a new relationship.”

“You’re right. It’s funny, she’s so intimidating now, and it scares me. She used to be so approachable.” Kira drained the last of her tea.

“But don’t you see, she still is,” said Dax, leaning toward Kira for emphasis. “She’s scared, that’s all. She doesn’t understand what’s happening, but is trying to appear calm anyway.”

Kira smiled. *I suppose it’s time to finally put this past to bed*, *and better to do it now before I think about it too much.* “I guess you’re right. I’ll make it a point to talk to her soon.” Winking at Dax, she added, “Provided the two of you don’t have a date?”

Dax blushed. “Not yet, I’ve been warned that if I’m too direct I may scare her off.”

“Then maybe I’ll put in a good word for you, Jadzia – provided you tell me why the two of you were soaking wet in sickbay.” Kira walked over to hug the Trill.

“Thanks, Nerys.” Dax returned the hug. “Now, as for the water…”

Chapter 7

Odo was surprised to see Kira in Dax's science lab the following morning, shortly before the shift began. Odo had hoped to get Dax's attention before the other requests of the day made their way to the science officer. The two women were drinking rok'dejino, talking and laughing.

"Am I interrupting anything?" Odo asked, entering the lab.

"Not at all Constable, come on over." Kira said smiling. "I'll see you later Dax, I've got to get to Ops."

"What can I do for you, Odo?" Dax asked, enigmatically smiling as always.

Odo put his sample containers on the counter. "I would like some analysis of these samples," he said simply.

"Okay." Dax said, "How about now?"

"Thank you." Odo replied, relieved. He did not want support staff involved in security measures.

The two of them walked over an analysis center. Jadzia sat behind the console and took the first of the sample cases from Odo. She put it under an instrument that emitted a red light, then tapped onto a thin tray the sample from near the faded inscription on the inside of the drum in Jen's quarters. Next, she slid the transparent tray into an opening in the console.

"Am I looking for anything specific?"

Odo looked at the analysis readouts on the display panel in front of him. "Nothing out of the ordinary: age, material, indigenous location."

Dax also studied the readouts. "Well it's wood from a Chotae tree. They are indigenous to several areas of Bajor, mostly in the south. I'd say this tree died about two-hundred years ago and was processed into something else about twenty-five years later. There are small traces of Tri-chloridebenazyn, which is often used as a wood preservative. Would you like to know anything else about this sample?"

Odo studied the readouts. It was as he had expected. "Any trace of burning?"

Dax touched several icons on the display screen and the red light shifted to blue. She nodded. "There are very minute traces of charred wood. I don't think it was due to fire damage; some other sort of heat maybe, but not quite as hot."

Odo nodded. "Good. Here's more." He handed her the various dirt samples. "I think these soil samples came from the same region and I'd like to check. Dax nodded, and then repeated the procedure of moving the samples from one container to another under a protective field before inserting them into the main console.

"I would say this sample and the other came from a cave near the D'Kor province; it has very high traces of Neitrium, which is common in caves of the area, but this grade is very pure. Pure enough, that I think there would be few places other than D'Kor it could have come from."

Jadzia looked at Odo with a neutral expression on her face. She did not appear curious about the samples, or about why Odo wanted the information. She assumed his queries were related to an ongoing investigation, and while it was easy to conclude exactly *which* investigation, it was not in the scope of her position to do so, unless asked.

"Next?"

Her query was one of neutral professionalism, and Odo was grateful the Commander took as much pride in the professional execution of her job as he did in his.

"This is the last one." Odo said, handing over the scrapings from the old earring and cuff in Jen's locker."

Dax studied her readouts. "There is gold, adamantine, and some minute traces of forax dust, all common elements in quality jewelry. There are also some tissue strands."

Odo was interested. “Enough to get a DNA sample?”

“Sure, would you like me to run a check?”

“Yes please, Commander.” Odo looked with interest at the readout; the information whisked by at a blinding rate then everything stopped.

“Shit.” Dax said, frustrated.

“What happened?” Odo asked.

“It was running a diagnostic check on the DNA and accessed the Bajoran medical database. Now it’s locked up with the same program that is on the terminal in the medical lab.” Dax shook her head, furious. “I should have expected this. How could I be so – wait a minute.” She pointed to the last line of data on the screen. “It found the correct match right before locking up. We know whose tissue it is.”

“Whose?” Odo asked eagerly.

Dax pointed to the screen “Kai Opaka’s.”

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Captain Sisko had been sitting at the head of the conference table in his ready room. He was struggling to maintain his characteristic calm disposition, but was not completely successful “We now have two independent systems locked up with this computer virus?” he asked, standing up and pacing.

“That is the situation Benjamin, but I wouldn’t call it a computer virus.” Dax said, frowning at the Captain’s outburst.

“Are we any closer to getting rid of this ‘non-virus’?” he asked coldly.

Julian spoke up, “As a matter of fact, Captain, we are.” Sisko looked at his Chief Medical Officer.

“Well, Doctor, I’m anxious to hear it.” Sisko sat back down.

Julian stood up and walked to the other end of the table where he then turned and nodded to Dax. She touched a key on the console in front of her. The vid screen behind Bashir illuminated with the Eleventh Prophecy of Kai Tulano. “We’ve analyzed the two sections of the prophecy and have filled most of the placeholders. In the first line *‘In the aftermath of darkness, the usurper will stumble’*, ‘aftermath of darkness’ is the Cardassian Occupation and Kai Winn is ‘the usurper’.”

“According to whomever wrote this program?”

“Yes Captain,” Julian nodded. “All of these keywords were programmed into the lockout.” He turned back to the vid screen, “As for *‘the line of the Beloved One continues,’* it means the family of Kai Opaka. *‘For the speaker of the dead will come from the hive of the pale ones’*, Jen Brenmar is ‘the speaker’, *‘the hive of the pale ones’* is Cardassia Prime. There are no place holders in the phrase *‘thrice marked and broken’*, and I don’t know what it means, perhaps the condition Jen was in when she was rescued. *‘In a foreign tongue familiar words will be spoken’* is the Julat. *‘River of Bajor will once again move toward its proper course’* is the religion of Bajor and Bajor’s future.”

“Isn’t the Julat a Klingon ritual, Commander Worf?” Sisko asked.

“Yes, Captain. It is a most honored tribute to the dead, reserved for the bravest of warriors and members of the High Council,” Worf replied in his usual gruff manner.

“Interesting that a Klingon ritual would be mentioned in a Bajoran prophecy,” Sisko mused.
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Bashir looked apprehensive, "There's more Captain. The decorative border to the page is written in a Bajoran drum language. Jen and Tosh deciphered it for us. It reads *'From the old city, one will turn from the Prophets'*; D'Kor is the old city, we don't yet know who it is that is turning from the Prophets. *'To find the speaker must be'* is another reference to Brenmar. *'Liquid of life will identity confirm'* is the blood test that started this whole thing. *'Charges made are as false as pale death'*, I've not the slightest idea what this is talking about. *'Points of understanding in alignment the gentle warlords will need comfort'* is '*Houses of Being'* and more talk of Klingons."

"Does any of this ring a bell?" Sisko asked Worf.

"There is no mention of Bajoran Prophets in Klingon histories, Captain." Cocking his head to the side, he continued. "However, it appears that someone of importance to the Klingon Empire is going to die. Perhaps Jen Brenmar, this *'Speaker For The Dead'*, will be involved in the Julat. I do take exception to any mention of Klingons needing comfort." Several around the table smiled in spite of themselves at the 'gentle warlord's' comment.

"So, we are missing three placeholders?" Sisko asked, changing the subject.

"Yes," Bashir confirmed. "The name of whomever it is that is turning away from the prophets, 'empty charges' and 'pale death'. As I said, we've made progress." Bashir was obviously happy with his accomplishments.

"Now that we are learning what it says, do we know what it means?" Sisko asked looked at Bashir then at Dax.

"As I've said, Kai Tulano was a fairly straightforward individual," Dax began. "He was writing in the appropriate language of his time. I don't think he was trying to be evasive. Clearly, I think he had an encounter with the beings in the wormhole and got a glimpse of this future. I think he is trying to warn us about what is happening."

"Yes Dax, but *what* is happening?" Sisko asked intently. Dax looked over the Bashir standing next to the illuminated prophecy.

"We know Kai Winn has had some problems since her elevation to Kai," Dax began.

"That's for sure," Kira said under her breath.

"Kai Opaka was clearly the most loved Kai in recent Bajoran memory. She did a very good job of providing spiritual support during the occupation. When it came time to elect a new Kai, it was well known Vedek Bareil was her choice." Dax looked over at Kira. She was not happy to bring up a loss that still hurt the Bajoran Major so deeply.

"Yes, he would have been elected had Winn not brought out suspicion about him being a collaborator. Had he not dropped out and had the charges been fully investigated, I'm sure he would have been made Kai," Kira said evenly.

"Kira, did Kai Opaka have any descendants?" Dax asked.

Kira thought a moment before answering. "Her husband was killed during the occupation. She had one son who was killed in the raid Bareil was accused of orchestrating."

"Did she have any siblings?"

"I don't know Dax. What does this have to do with that?" Kira pointed to the verse on the vid screen.

"I think that Jen Brenmar is mentioned in the line following *'the line of the beloved one continues'* is significant. She might be a relative."

Sisko looked at Dax. "If she is a descendant of Kai Opaka, she would be a big threat to Kai Winn. That would certainly explain the Kai wanting her permanently out of the way."

“Jen can’t be related to Kai Opaka.” Kira began, incredulous. “I knew Jen’s family. I think if she were related she would have told me.”

“Is it possible that Jen does not know?” Sisko asked.

Bashir spoke up. “I’m almost certain of that, Captain. If she does know, she gave no indication of that when Dax and I worked with the others in deciphering the verse. I think she was a bit shaken about being mentioned at all, but I don’t think it was because of a familial relationship.”

Sisko looked at Kira and asked, “Do we know much about the background of Kai Opaka?”

“She became Kai when she was twenty years old. Before that, she lived in the Dakarrian Monastery. I don’t know about her history before she became Kai, I believe she was an orphan.”

“Maybe that is something we need to look at.” Sisko nodded to Kira.

“I’ll get right on it,” she said.

“Does Jen know about your theory, Dax?” Sisko asked.

“No. I haven’t seen her since going over the findings with Julian.” She found herself starting to blush and scolded herself for it.

Kira spoke up. “I don’t think I’d tell her right now Dax.” Jadzia looked over at her friend. “I think we should know for sure before make those types of statements. Word is bound to get out about it; once it does, Jen’s life isn’t going to be the same. The threat of Kai Winn aside, who knows which factions of the provisional government will come after her to use against Winn. Some might try to persuade her to go into religious service, and I know she’d hate that.”

“You’re right, Kira; I won’t mention anything until we have something definite,” Dax reassured her.

“Captain?”

“Yes, Odo,” Sisko looked at his Chief of Security.

“I have reason to believe that Kai Winn may be changing her tactic regarding extricating Jen Brenmar from this station,” Odo stated simply. All eyes turned to focus on the metamorph. “Vedek Danl of the Lycene Order has been found. My sources inform me that he was picked up by several of Kai Winn’s personal attendants and taken to see the Kai. One can only guess at what might have taken place at such a meeting.”

“What is your analysis, Odo?” Kira asked.

“I would assume Kai Winn will do what we would have done; questioned the Vedek, and then try to use whatever information he might have to offer,” Odo replied. “If I get any more information, I will let you know. She’s bound to know we’re deciphering this prophecy and will soon know what she’s up to.”

Sisko’s communication badge chirped. “Captain, you have a private message coming in on subspace from Cardassia Prime.”

Sisko looked at his command staff assembled around the table. “I think we’re finished here for now. I want a progress report same time, next shift.” The officers stood up and started to file out of the room. “Dax, Kira, I’d like to see the two of you in my office when I’ve finished with this subspace.” Dax and Kira looked at each other quizzically then shrugged.

Captain Sisko sat down behind his desk and looked at the vid screen on the wall opposite him. He sealed the closed door for privacy and checked the encryption routine on his console. Whoever was sending the message was not leaving anything to chance. As a courtesy, he coded the response message for encryption to ensure complete privacy.

"This is Captain Sisko of the Federation Starfleet on board Space Station *Deep Space Nine*."

The image on the vid screen shimmered and the face of a female Cardassian started coming into view. Once the encryption routines meshed, the image became clear.

"Greetings, Captain. I appreciate your attention to privacy." Sisko nodded to the woman. She was thin and her features more delicate than any Cardassian Sisko had ever seen. She was oddly beautiful. A mutual acquaintance is on board your station. She may have mentioned me, my name is MarTay."

Sisko kept his surprise in check. "I must say that you're looking healthier than I would have expected," he amicably offered.

"It is precisely those rumors about my health I would like to discuss."

"I'm all ears," Sisko offered with a smile.

"Not here," MarTay replied. "Even with this level of encryption, I would be hesitant to say anything direct regarding the matter." The Cardassian woman looked thoughtful for a moment before continuing. "Let me just say that I believe several of the reports you've heard are false. But don't count on anyone in charge here at the moment to say so. Someone has made a deal, and for the time being is supporting falsehoods generated off-world. I will explain more later; I plan to visit the station the day after tomorrow. We can discuss this in detail then. It would be appreciated if my visit were kept as confidential as possible."

"You haven't given me much to go on, MarTay," Sisko commented dryly.

"I realize that Captain. But if I'm not careful now, I might not get the opportunity to speak with you in person. If you'll accept some friendly advice, I'd not approach the Cardassian government about this yet. It's only a matter of time before certain obstructions are removed. Also, there is a rather talented musical quartet on board the *Terok Nor*. Keep an eye on the rhythm section, Captain. There are forces at work that prefer trios. MarTay out." At that, the message cut off leaving the Starfleet insignia.

As soon as Sisko opened the door, Kira and Dax entered his office. He could tell that they were both curious about his subspace from Cardassia. *Their curiosity will have to wait,* he thought to himself.

"Kira, Dax please have a seat," he said, indicating the two chairs in front of his desk. When the two women had taken their seats Sisko looked at Kira. "Major, what repercussions could be expected if a living relative of Kai Opaka were discovered?"

Kira shook her head emphatically, "Captain, I don't think Jen is..."

"I know, Major," Sisko cut her off. "Hypothetically then? Humor me."

Kira took a deep breath. "Well, it would certainly stir up the provisional government."

"How so?" Sisko asked

"The provisional government is consumed with infighting. Shakaar is doing his best, and is a stabilizing force, but there are still problems. That's why Kai Winn has been able to consolidate more power. Kai Opaka would not have personally negotiated a peace agreement with Cardassia. She might have worked with the provisional government to do so but would not have taken the task upon herself. Kai Winn is wielding as much power as any branch of the provisional government. In some cases, more. If a relative of Kai Opaka's were to be discovered, and that relative had ambitions and views counter to that of Kai Winn, the provisional government could potentially be split in two. We've been too close to the brink of civil war for too long to withstand that kind of religious and political division. I'd say it has the potential to devastate Bajor."

Dax asked, “Kira, if Jen is related to Kai Opaka and has no interest in taking power away from Kai Winn, would she still be a threat?”

“As long as Jen is alive, she will be a threat to Kai Winn. Jen isn’t very good at keeping quiet about things that annoy her; she has a tendency to speak before she thinks. I think that Kai Winn suspects either that Jen is related to Kai Opaka, or simply doesn’t want to take any chances. I’ve no doubt that is why she was so interested in sending her back for MarTay’s trial. If Jen were to ‘disappear’ in Cardassian territory, the Cardassians would be held responsible. If it were later discovered Jen is a relative of Kai Opaka’s, it would just fuel the anti-Cardassian sentiment that is rampant throughout the government. In spite of the peace treaty Vedek Bariel negotiated, Kai Winn is at her core not terribly interested in lasting peace with Cardassia. She is also not fond of Starfleet's involvement, especially where you and this station are concerned,” Kira paused before adding, “Emissary.”

Sisko grimaced at the reference. “What would happen if Jen’s lineage became known and then something happened to her?”

Kira shook her head “That might be worse. I’m sure Winn would try to pin it on Starfleet. It won’t help relations between the two and would give the anti-Starfleet factions of the government a boost.”

“Assuming that she is a descendant of Kai Opaka,” Kira grimaced, so he added, “hypothetically of course, how would that effect relations with the Klingon Empire?” Sisko directed the question to Dax.

“Jen seems to be very sympathetic to the Klingons.” Dax glanced at Kira for conformation, who nodded. “Certainly the Klingon ambassador is very taken with her. I would guess that if she wanted to oppose the Kai, she could rally quite a Klingon force to assist her.”

Sisko shook his head. “I was afraid of that. I have not reported this to Starfleet, yet. Starfleet is going to consider this an internal Bajoran affair and direct our involvement to be kept to a minimum. Unfortunately, there is more to this than Jen Brenmar resisting Kai Winn’s request to appear at a Cardassian trial. Until I know exactly how much more, I don’t want Jen Brenmar or any of the others returning to Bajor.”

“Kai Winn has made it clear that she isn’t interested in any of the others.” Kira interjected, “but if she gets desperate she may try to use them as leverage, and I have to admit, knowing Jen, I think it would work.”

“In that case I don’t want her to get that opportunity,” Sisko replied. “I would like very discrete security teams assigned to them. I’d rather not have to tell them they might be in danger to avoid tipping our hand to Winn. As for Jen,” Sisko leaned back in his chair and palmed the baseball he normally kept on his desk, “we can’t do anything official to protect her. I know Starfleet won’t approve. So far, her best defense against Kai Winn has been to remove herself physically from Winn’s grasp. I think we should be prepared to get Jen off the station quickly.”

“And take her back to Bajor?” Kira asked surprised.

“No,” Dax replied catching on, “sightseeing. Right, Benjamin?”

“Something like that, Dax.” Sisko smiled. “Kira, as you’ve said, Viss’r Vardel starts in a few days. We have to make sure Jen stays out of Winn’s hands for at least that long. If Kai Winn is going to make another move to get Jen back, she has to do it before then or her hands will be tied for two weeks.”

“I’m sure Kai Winn suspects that we will have figured out what is going on by the time Viss’r Vardel ends.” Dax opined.

Sisko nodded. “I’d like to get to the bottom of this by then. I want to be ready. If a shuttle craft leaves the central temple compound, we have twenty minutes to get Jen off the station before we are in sensor range of the shuttle. By the time they see us, Jen will be out of reach. They won’t know when she left, I won’t know where she is, and Bajor will have our agreement to extradite her when all of the necessary diplomatic requirements have been fulfilled. Kira, I’d like you to be on standby to ensure Jen’s ship is out of sensor range in the event that we get surprise visitors.” Kira glanced at Dax.

“Me, Captain?” she asked.

Sisko glanced between the two women again. “Yes, you. You’re not Starfleet, and you would have a perfectly good reason to take Jen sightseeing while off duty. Is that all right, Major?”

“Of course, Captain.” Kira replied, her voice even.

“Dismissed, then,” Sisko nodded. Both women stood and made their way out of the room. As Kira stepped out the door, Sisko asked, “Dax, what was that about?”

Dax smiled at her friend. “Kira has some fences to mend; I think you’re forcing her timing a bit, but she knows she has to do it.”

“What about your timing, Old Man?” The Captain asked, smiling gently.

“I’m sure I don’t know what you’re talking about,” Dax replied in mock surprise.

“Are you seeing Jen again tonight?”

“No,” Dax answered, smiling.

“I’m surprised to hear that.”

“It’s because I’m having dinner with the Emissary, and I plan to tell him all about it.”

Sisko laughed. “I’d like that.”

Chapter 8

Odo was up early. Strictly speaking, Odo never slept; the time he spent in a gelatinous state was kept occupied by thinking. He found that early mornings and late evenings were best for taking care of investigative work. Once the standard duty shift began, his time was divided by the usual tasks of a security chief. He would consider and reconsider all elements to whichever case needed his immediate attention and it was not unusual for the metamorph to make great strides in solving cases during the early part of his day.

Intrigued by the quartet performance two days ago, he headed for decommissioned Turbo Shaft Seven. The musicians were scheduled to perform again tonight, and Odo wanted satisfy his curiosity beforehand. He did not expect the group to assemble for recording sessions for at least two hours, assuming they stuck to their previous schedule.

Odo entered the shaft, his presence acknowledged only by the automatic lighting as it responded to his arrival. He walked over to the large drum set in the back of the shaft and studied it intently. Looking around the shaft at the rest of the instruments, Odo noticed that the placement was similar to previous performances, making it clear where each member of the band would be positioned. Dobin and Keyla would be together on one side of the drums, Tosh on the other. Various harps, guitars, pipes, and other instruments were neatly arranged in their stands. Odo also noticed two beige blankets positioned on each side of the shaft. Upon investigating, he noticed that they were very thin and soft but held their shape when bent. A thin row of sensors lined each side and along the middle. Odo surmised that the recording unit controlled the damping blankets and modified their structural properties in order to enhance the acoustics of the chamber.

Finally, Odo gave in to his curiosity and walked back to the drums. Sitting behind them, he picked up a one of Jen's drumsticks resting in a holder to the side of the set. He had watched Jen closely during the performance. There was something about the playing of this particular instrument that intrigued Odo. He had begun to exercise his imagination more fully as he experimented with form and shape during the hours in his natal state and hoped the vibrations from the drum would provide further possibilities for experimentation.

Looking down at his hand holding the drumstick he morphed the other hand to match. Then putting the stick back into its holder, he completed the effect. Odo looked at the equipment by his feet. Each of the two large bass drums had its' own pedal and two more pedals attached to cymbals. Odo considered morphing two more legs, then decided against it; Jen had played the drums with only two legs after all. He hit the pedal of the bass drum and felt the vibrations of the sound waves emit from the instrument as well as the returning vibrations coming down the pedal back to his leg. He was pleased with the sensation and began randomly hitting various drums and cymbals.

After a few moments, he stopped and looked critically at the instrument. It was clear that the majority of the vibrations would be received on the other side of the instrument. There was no way to do that and play at the same time. He shrugged and played a bit longer. There was indeed the addictive element of fun to the instrument. Odo was not striving for tonal quality or tight rhythm, rather unusual variances in vibration that could not be heard, only felt.

He paused and was glad for it, as he heard the unmistakable sound of someone outside the shaft at the door. He glanced around briefly before deciding on a course of action.

Jen Brenmar stepped into the room and paused. She looked around. Everything was as she had left it the previous night when she set up the instruments, but something felt different. It was almost as if she could feel a distant ring of cymbals. She shrugged and crossed the small shaft to her drum kit. Sitting on the seat behind her drums was a folded beige damping blanket. "What the..." Jen mumbled surprised. She picked it up. As she did, a small metallic object fell out of the folds of the blanket onto the floor. Jen knelt down and picked it up. It was a communication device similar to the one Kira wore on her uniform. Jen looked at the device puzzled, then again at the blanket in her other hand.

"Couldn't be…" She tucked the comm badge into the pocket of her trousers. She then walked around the drum kit and set up the damping blanket near the ground directly in front of the base drums. She stretched the blanket the entire width of the drum set, curving it to the same arc as her kit.

Odo cursed furiously to himself. How could he be so stupid? He had completely forgotten about his comm badge. It was the only part of his appearance that wasn't him. He usually left his comm badge in security if he knew he would be morphing to the extent that he would not be able to contain the badge's mass within his own. He considered reverting at that point and explaining to Jen why he was there, but didn't. Embarrassment was not necessarily an exclusive humanoid emotion.

Jen brooded silently behind her drums. Kira's reaction in sickbay was not surprising, but disappointing nonetheless. Lack of sleep due to nightmares didn't make things any easier. Alone on *No Regrets*, the night cycle had been hell. Footfalls echoing off the floor of the cargo ship took her back to solitary confinement cells on Cardassia. The quiet vastness of space outside the ships viewports reminded her of the Dakmar estate. While her body was physically healed, the pain and fear always returned in sleep. She would find herself back in her cell, continually considering each move, each word she might utter in the never ending labyrinth of Cardassian

game-playing. Allies were never certain; peril and the threat of torture the only things she could count on. MarTay figured prominently in her nightmares, taunting her, forcing her to move the pieces in the chess game for her life.

The previous night's dreams added a new element of dread. She found herself in a modest palace, dressed in gold. A door slid open and attendants entered, bringing her food. Everything had been unusually pleasant until one of the attendants addressed her as *Your Eminence*. Jen ran to a mirror, only to see her reflection looking back, dressed as Kai. Quickly she turned around and the dream palace turned to a Cardassian holding cell, surrounded by the tortured bodies of nameless Bajorans laughing and taunting her. *Hypocrite,* they called her, *where are your beliefs now?* Jen tried to answer but found no voice. *Speak for us*, they insisted; but she could not. Jen reached to her ear, to feel the cool silver rings that always provided comfort, but they weren't there. Finally, Jen turned to run from the room and nearly tripped over the body of Kai Winn, dressed in prison rags and near death.

"Is this where you would leave me?" the Kai asked in a harsh whisper. "Where will you lead our people – here?" Before her eyes, the Kai died and dissolved into a bubbling mass, barely recognizable as Bajoran. Jen tried to shake off the unpleasant memory. She focused on nothingness, trying to get the memories to stop.

"Think of something else," she told herself quietly. She pictured Jadzia Dax in her mind's eye, remembering the feel of the Trill's fingers on her skin as Dax brushed her hair aside in the medical lab.

"Jen, as close as we are," she said to herself, "I'd be lying if I said I'd rather spend the night with you than a certain Trill I'm thinking of." She smiled. "It's okay," she answered, "I couldn't agree with you more, maybe the three of us could get together sometime." Laughing, she shook her head. "I'd settle for one of us and the Trill..."

Jen had set up the recording equipment the previous evening after leaving sickbay. It had taken some doing to position everything just so in the decommissioned turbo lift and she was looking forward to experimenting with the tunnel like sounds of the chamber. She decided to make use of the solitude and warm up before the others arrived. She might even have time to meditate.

She began as she always did, on drums. She keyed a sequence into the recording device and began to play. As she played, she could imagine the sounds of the other instruments playing with her. Rock & Roll felt the most cleansing when her mood was this bleak, so she focused on songs from old Earth. It did not take long for her head to clear and her body began to glisten with sweat. There was no room for mundane reality when she was making 'the big noise' as she called it.

From the first drum beat Odo felt exhilarated. As a damping blanket, he had been positioned directly in front of the main force of drum vibrations. Rather than reflecting the sound vibrations, Odo trapped them. He could feel the pluses of the driving beat over every square millimeter of his mass. He quickly realized that minute changes in his position could slightly alter the ambient sound in the room. Odo also realized that the changes had to be very minute. He could "watch" Jen from his vantage point and after one slightly obvious change in refraction Jen stopped playing and looked at him curiously. Odo was sure he'd been discovered when Jen tapped the side of her head, massaged her ears, and continued.

After laying down several drum tracks, Jen picked up Keyla's guitar. She checked it's tuning and made some adjustments. Holding the guitar, she sat down and leaned back against the bass drum, absently strumming chord progressions. After a few moments of this activity, she set

the guitar down, rose up and arranged herself into a seiza sitting position, then flexed her arms out and back several times while breathing rhythmically. Jen hummed a very low note and the whole chamber seemed to resonate with the sound. She then sat very still for several moments; head bowed, before gracefully standing up, shaking out her arms and legs, and walking over to reset the recording unit.

Reset completed, Jen began to play guitar as the recorded drum track replayed. Singing as she played rhythm chords on guitar, Jen desperately tried to force every ounce of disquiet circulating in her system out through her voice. The words of Sam Phillips came easily to the Bajoran.

I feel you closing in, a target on my skin,
I think you'll be there when I fall.
I may give love to you,
I might step right on through,
Fear might keep me from it all.

The act of making music gave Jen a release she could find no other way. In that moment she felt very close to a woman from a planet she had never seen, who died four-hundred years before she was born.

When she finished, she replayed the track again, first adding a bass line, and then lead guitar. When she had finished all the tracks, she turned to the recording unit and spoke two words. "Computer: Erase."

"I can't believe you did that!" A voice shouted at her from above.

Startled, Jen looked up to see Dax staring down at her from a doorway in the vacant turbo lift one deck above her.

"Dax! What are you doing here?" Jen shouted up at the Trill.

"I was listening to you. That was wonderful, why didn't you save it?"

Jen was about to shout back, and thought better of it. Her voice was ragged enough as it was. Instead, she started climbing the rungs up the side of the turbo shaft to Dax.

"Because," she panted, out of breath, "I can do better. I'm not warmed up yet. How long have you been here?"

Dax considered a flirtatious retort to the 'warmed up' statement, but reconsidered. "I had a feeling you might be recording here today, so I decided to stop by on my way to Ops. When I arrived, you were still on drums."

Jen looked embarrassed. "You could have said something."

"I didn't want to disturb you. What were you doing?" Dax asked gently.

"Just meditating, getting the houses in order, that sort of thing." Looking at Dax, she added, "It isn't like it is private or anything. I mean, I don't mind you seeing…" Jen sighed. "As you can see, I'm forgetting how to speak. Do you have this effect on everyone?"

Dax laughed. "Bren, I don't think I have that effect on you. But thank you. Did you write it?"

"No. I wish I had. Sam Phillips, a 20th Century Terran, wrote it." Jen smiled, "I've been listening to her music a lot lately; some things are so universal."

"I couldn't agree more." Dax returned Jen's smile with genuine warmth, soaking in the radiance of Jen's green eyes.

Dax shifted the conversation. “I had dinner with Captain Sisko last night, and he would like to invite the four of you to his quarters tonight for dinner after your performance. He wasn’t sure if he’d see you before then.”

Jen looked down the turbo shaft at the instruments set up below. “I assume Kira will be there?” Jen noticed her arms were feeling tired.

“I would think so. Is that a problem?” Dax asked quietly.

“It is for Kira.” Jen answered sullenly.

Dax reached out and gently touched the Bajoran woman’s face, turning her head until she faced the Trill. Jen felt a surge of adrenalin at Dax’s touch. “I think Kira is sorting things out. The two of you are going to have to talk about your future as well as your past eventually. Why not have a nice dinner, relax, then go somewhere and talk?”

“Is that your advice, oh wise one?” Jen grinned.

“As a matter of fact it is.” Dax said, still smiling. “But, I’ll be honest; I’ve got my own agenda. I’m suggesting this for purely selfish reasons.”

Intrigued by the Trill’s response, Jen leaned closer. “By all means, do tell?” She asked Dax softly as she succumbed to the urge to kiss the Trill.

She leaned forward towards Dax as the doors below opened and the sleepy voices of her band mates entering the chamber below were heard. Jen looked down; the moment was lost.

Dax looked down as well, when they both looked back up at each other, Dax looked disappointed.

“We can continue this conversation later.” Dax brushed a stray piece of hair out of Jen’s face and gently touched her cheek, before turning and leaving.

“Who was that you were talking to?” Tosh asked, looking critically at the third damping blanket as Jen climbed back down the turbo shaft.

Keyla laughed. “Who do you think Tosh?” then looking at Jen, she sweetly asked, “How is the dear Commander today?”

“Dax is fine Rissy, I’m sure she thanks you for asking.” Jen answered flatly.

“You could have asked her to join us.” Tosh added helpfully.

This time Dobin laughed. “Cut it out Tosh, Jen has enough trouble with her timing without added distractions.”

“You’re all in a feisty mood today, and there is nothing wrong with my timing.” Jen remarked, moving back to her drum kit, pausing to punch Dobin playfully in the arm.

“I think we’re still feeling triumphant about helping Doctor Bashir yesterday.” Keyla said, moving to the area where her instruments were situated.

“Yeah, we got all but three of the keywords in place.” Dobin added, rubbing his arm. “You’re mentioned twice.”

Tosh quickly shot Dobin a look of venom and then looked at Jen, concerned. Jen noticed the look. “It’s okay Tosh; I suppose I’m at one with my spiritual significance.” Then looking at Dobin, “I’m glad you guys were able to help the Doctor, but could we not go into this while we’re in recording mode?”

“Is there something you’re not telling us about this?” Keyla asked.

“No, Keyla, I’m not hiding anything.” She shook her head a moment looking for the right words. “It’s just that this whole topic makes me very uneasy. I’m not sure why. I didn’t come here for religious debate, that’s for sure.”

“Speaking of religion, why don’t we try *The Wood Song*?” Tosh asked brightly changing the subject.

"Nothing like throwing me in the fire first thing in the morning," Jen replied. "Say, where is our roadie Jake?"

Dobin laughed and picked up his bass. "Stop whining, Jen. I'm sure you're sufficiently warmed up." Dobin winked at Keyla. "Jake offered to pick up some breakfast for us; we saw him on the way here. Nice kid, that one."

"Jen, why don't you play guitar with me on this, you can record the drums over it." Keyla said, choosing a guitar for Jen.

"Sure. How do you guys feel about playing at *Quark's*?" Jen asked taking the guitar Keyla offered and checking its tuning. Her three bandmates looked at each other and shared shrugs and nods of assent.

"Sounds good. How did you work that?" Tosh asked.

"I had a little chat with Quark after I left sickbay. I've offered him the rights to the recordings." Jen looked at the faces of her friends, trying to gauge their responses.

Once again, Tosh spoke their thoughts aloud. "You made a deal with a Ferengi? Are you nuts?"

"Look," she said, trying to reassure him, "we're going to get unlimited use of a holosuite while we're here. Think of the potential! He is going to help us write the programs. We can perform in a stadium, a bar, a cave, underwater for that matter."

Dobin looked uncertain. "I guess it means we wouldn't have to lug the equipment all over the station." He offered hopefully.

Tosh nodded. "There is that."

"Besides," Keyla added, "we've not been concerned about the recording of our previous performances." A wicked grin crossed her face. "Maybe we should make him our manager? Give him the headache of seeing that we're not misrepresented."

"Why don't wait until we are misrepresented before we look for ways to avoid it?" Dobin countered.

"Fine," Keyla replied. "But it doesn't hurt to plan ahead." Looking to Jen, she added, "It'd be nice to dress up for the show tonight, any ideas?"

Jen thought a moment and smiled. "I've got just the thing. I'll visit an old friend after this morning's rehearsal and see what I can do. In the meantime, let's get ready for tonight. By the way, we are all invited to the Captain's cabin after the show for dinner." Then looking at Keyla, "That is the message the good Commander delivered this morning."

Keyla smiled. "I find it interesting that the Chief Science Officer of this station delivers messages for the Captain. Don't ensigns do that sort of thing?"

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Rehearsal had gone exceptionally well and Jen enjoyed the walk down the Promenade. She was very proud of her fellow musicians. Her voice seemed to be holding up and Jen made a mental note to thank Doctor Bashir for his assistance. Nightmares aside, she could not remember the last time she felt this healthy. She stopped in front of the tailor's shop and looked with awe at the display window. Floating in the dimly lit window was the most impressive garment she had ever seen. It was a black leather jacket, covered with intricate Klingon chain mail. The lights in the display shifted from reds to blues as the dark chain reflected complex patterns against the surrounding surfaces. Jen sighed; it was most definitely out of her price range.

As she stepped into the shop, she quickly took in her surroundings. One wall displayed bolts of exotic cloth, neatly arranged next to a pattern selection monitor. There were rows of
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finished clothes of various styles displayed in cases as well as hanging on display stands. Another wall was made up of many alcoves that stored various garments, all neatly folded. A patron was at the back of the store discussing accessories with the proprietor, so Jen busied herself browsing the inventory. Before long, a familiar voice greeted her.

"Jen Brenmar? Why, it is you!" Garak was standing next to her, smiling warmly. "I heard you were on the station, I hoped you'd find the time to visit. I don't know when I've seen you look lovelier. Freedom agrees with you."

"Truly, Garak you've reached new heights with flattery. That is one of your more endearing qualities, I'm glad to see you've not lost it." Jen smiled back. She looked around the shop, visibly impressed. "You seem to have done rather well for yourself. This is a nice shop, and the station doesn't seem so bad."

The Cardassian tailor also looked around his shop. He was not large by Cardassian standards, but Jen was certain he tried to appear less intimidating on purpose. "It's alright, considering the alternatives." He looked at Jen again, this time with a look of chagrin. "I never got a chance to thank you."

Jen studied him, feeling uncomfortable. "You don't owe me anything Garak. I'd say we were equal partners in saving each other's skin."

Garak nodded. "Yes, but I had more to lose than you."

Jen looked at him and smiled sadly. "Aside from your life Garak, what haven't you lost?"

"Why, as you've said, my gift for flattery and a biting sense of humor." Then, taking a step back from Jen, continued more brusquely. "So are you here for a social visit? Or is there something I can do for you?"

Jen looked up at the Cardassian tailor shyly. Garak had an impeccable sense of style and dressed accordingly. His suit was the color of Klingon blood wine with black and grey-blue accents. Garak was the one person she felt confident could help her.

Jen took a deep breath. "I need some new clothes," she confessed.

Garak's eyes widened in surprise, "I'm glad you noticed it too. I couldn't agree more." Then, looking intently at the young Bajoran woman, asked, "What sort of outfit are you looking for?"

Nervously, Jen looked around the shop. They were the only people in it. "I want to impress someone," she said, blushing. "I've been invited to Captain Sisko's for dinner tonight and…"

Garak smiled. "And the object of your affection will be there as well?"

Jen shrugged. "You could say that. I'm not looking for something to perform in, just something to change into afterwards."

Garak led her to the back of his shop. "Trust me Jen; you need performance clothes as well."

Jen looked at him in surprise, "So you did see the show?"

Garak didn't immediately respond. Instead, he began sorting through different garments, considering materials and design. Occasionally he held a garment up to Jen, critically evaluated the result, and then put it back.

"Of course I saw the show," he said after rejecting several items. "I didn't want to distract you with warm memories of our adventures together. I remember what a crush you had on me, so I decided to stay out of sight."

Jen laughed. "Very funny."

Garak held up yet another garment, but this time nodded and asked, “How about this? It’s Boulian silk, not quite as rare as the silk from the Thelonian system, but beautiful.”

Jen touched the shirt Garak held up. It was an iridescent blue, almost hypnotic, and shimmered slightly. After touching the sleeve experimentally, Jen frowned.

“Garak, it feels slimy. I want something that encourages touching not something that repels it.”

Garak sighed. “It’s silk Jen; silk is supposed to feel slimy.” The tailor shook his head and asked, “Care to give me a hint as to whom we’re trying to impress?”

“No.” Jen answered shortly. “You know my type. Figure it out.”

“Dinner at the Captain’s? She must be important.” Garak walked over to another area of the store. “Something tactile, not visual.” His eyes lit up. “I’ve got it.” Smiling broadly, his eyes raced over the shelves lining the inner wall of the tailor’s shop. Finding what he was looking for, Garak pulled a deep green garment from the shelf. He held it up to Jen who looked at him in disbelief.

“It’s beautiful,” she breathed. “What is it?”

“This is a genuine Shaktar fleece sweater,” Garak said proudly. “Guaranteed not to shed, by the way. Here hold this.” He handed her the sweater and went back to the rack of clothes. “These will be perfect with the sweater, with alterations of course.”

Garak held out a pair of black leather pants. Silver buttons adorned the outside seam on each leg, and a faint *bat’telh* design embossed into the soft leather glowed a deep green.

“A Klingon designer made these,” Garak continued, “I can’t think of anyone they’d look better on.”

Jen was stunned. “They’re incredible. Unfortunately I don’t have that kind of cash –”

“Tut, tut,” Garak cut her off abruptly. “You’re dealing with a Cardassian, my dear, not a Ferengi. You and I both know that there are things far more valuable than gold-pressed latinum.”

“Like connections?”

“Exactly.”

“I’m sorry Garak, but I no longer have connections. Dakmar is dead and MarTay will most likely be joining him soon.”

“Oh, really?” Garak asked interested. “Wherever did you hear that?”

“I’ve been requested to testify at MarTay’s trial. The request was forwarded through the provisional government, not to mention a personal invitation from the Kai herself.” Jen answered, absently touching the pants.

“Since when do you take government reports at face value?” Garak chided.

“Are you saying the report is false?”

“I’m saying that you don’t need to worry about your account with me. I’ve owed you for long enough, it’s only fair that you return the favor.” Garak led Jen to a curtained area in an alcove of the shop. “Why don’t you try these on?” He was about to leave when Jen stopped him.

“Honestly Garak, it isn’t as if you haven’t seen me naked. Stay here and help me get dressed.” Jen handed him the clothes and started to undress.

“Why haven’t you done anything about those scars?” Garak asked, noting the scars across her torso when she removed her tunic.

Jen removed her trousers and handed them to the Cardassian. “Because they reassure me that my nightmares are based in fact and not the result of a warped imagination.”

"I can't fault your logic," he said, handing her the leather pants and sweater. Once dressed, she stood facing him in the changing area. The walls shimmered and became reflective, surrounding Jen in mirrors.

"You look good; absolutely stunning for a Bajoran," Garak said, smiling. Jen was equally pleased with the results. The sweater was short, revealing most of her muscular lower abdomen, and the neckline revealed most of her right shoulder. As she stood, Garak busied himself with taking measurements.

"I'll need to take the pants in; they're supposed to be tight."

"Do you think it's too revealing?" Jen asked.

"In an understated way, it's exceptional," Garak replied. "Which mean's yes, it's too revealing, but you have the physique for it. Wait here." With that, he left the alcove, returning a moment later.

"Try these," he said, holding a pair of earrings for Jen to examine.

Jen looked at the dazzling earrings Garak held. They consisted of a tear shaped deep green stone that seemed to glow from the inside. The design was simple and elegant.

"What are they?"

"These are Water Emeralds," Garak answered, smiling. "They're from the Lowtan Bay in the northern hemisphere of Trill." Jen looked up sharply at the mention of 'Trill'. Garak continued, his eyes playful, "Commander Dax has admired them in the case on more than one occasion. I was considering giving them to her for her birthday."

"Then by all means, give them to her." Jen said, handing the earrings back.

Garak laughed. "Jen, my father used to say to me 'if you're going to catch a Vulcan sand fish, you've got to use the proper lure'. Are you fishing or not?" Before she could answer, he continued, "Trust me Jen, I know Dax will admire these more on you. She can't see them if she's wearing them now can she?"

"I suppose not. How did you know?" Jen asked as she changed back into her own clothes.

"You and Kira never were right for each other. While charming in her own way, the good Major is too…Bajoran."

"And I'm not?" Jen asked, joining Garak at the back counter to finish their transaction.

Garak studied Jen for a moment. His eyes filled with genuine kindness as he responded. "I can say in complete honesty that you're not like any Bajoran I've ever met." He tried to stay serious but smiled despite himself.

Jen couldn't help but return the grin. "You and honest are not two words that I'd use in the same sentence."

"I am so misunderstood. Now, for the others," Garak began making notes on a padd at the counter. "I've got some nice things that were on hold for a Zouthan merchant. He never picked them up and I was going to return them. I think I can put together some decent performance outfits. Let's see, we'll need boots, belts – accessories can make the difference between failure and success, you know."

While he spoke, Jen examined the contents of the display case below the counter. An impressive necklace caught her attention. The gems seemed to breathe with a life of their own. The stones were small and perfectly matched, radiating a deep blue. Light appeared to sink within the stones and then radiate back out from within, rather than reflect off the surface.

"What type of necklace is that?" Jen asked, pointing.

"That is an extremely rare Klingon gemstone called *Tu'path* or Blue Fire. It is very dangerous to mine and only occurs in certain types of volcanoes. The settings are pure latinum." Garak picked up the necklace and handed it to Jen. "Feel how light it is."

Jen felt the cool latinum in her hand and the icy smooth surface of the stones. "How much are you asking for it?" Jen asked, handing the necklace back.

Garak regarded the woman standing in front of him. The necklace was worth more than the combined value of everything else he had planned to give her. If this were anyone else, he would be on his guard. But he knew Jen well enough to believe that if he were being taken advantage of, Jen would be up-front about it.

"Make me an offer," he replied.

Jen did a quick inventory of everything she owned, including instruments, which she knew she couldn't sell. She was about to give up when a thought came to her. "How long since you've had real vintage Kanar? Not the synth stuff."

Garak paled slightly. "What vintage?" he asked.

"The third Thersian vintage; remember, after the long drought? I'll trade you a sealed bottle of Thersian Kanar, a sealed bottle of Malduk kis, and a half measure of Vulcan Brandy for the necklace. Garak, these bottles still have the dust on them from storage in the mud vaults."

"Agreed," he said smiling. He would have let her have the necklace for nothing, and thought she knew that. He did owe her his life, after all. Still, the spirits she offered would cover the expense of the clothes he intended to supply the quartet.

"Why don't you take this with you," Garak continued, putting the necklace into an elegant gift box. "I'll have the clothes sent over to your ship as soon as the alterations are done."

"Thanks Garak. One last thing?" Jen asked. "I need my other ear pierced for the earring."

"Why, so you do." As Garak took a small laser instrument out of a drawer, he noticed a figure standing outside his shop admiring the Klingon jacket, as most passersby did.

"Hold still," he warned, quickly bringing the instrument to Jen's left ear. "There, all done. Here, let me put the necklace box in a bag and you'll be all set."

Jen was about to protest and decided not to. Certainly, no harm done, and she wouldn't have to explain the gift box, should she encounter any of the others back at the ship. Before taking the bag, Jen leaned over and kissed the Cardassian tenderly on the cheek. She hugged him. "Thank you, Elim," she said simply.

"Thank *you*, Brenmar," he said in return.

Dax had been admiring the black Klingon jacket in Garak's window when movement inside the shop caught her eye. Someone who looked very much like Jen appeared to be hugging Garak and kissing him on the cheek. As they turned to leave the store, she realized it was indeed Jen, who was startled to see Dax entering the shop as she was leaving.

"Uh, hi Dax." Jen said cheerfully, holding a small black bag casually behind her back.

"Hi Jen. Doing some shopping?" She smiled.

Jen indicated the bag. "A little something for the Captain. You know, for the dinner, as a thank you."

Dax nodded in understanding, quite entertained by the Bajoran woman's surprise.

"I hate to run off but I've got to supervise the setup of the sound equipment. I look forward to seeing you later though." Then almost as an afterthought, "Um, so, Tosh had a great idea. If you're interested, we could do an Earth song called *Kashmir* if we had someone to play keyboard. We're not following the original arrangement, but a lesser-known one, and I've

uploaded it into the station's library. You've got a standing invitation to join us for a jam, anytime you want."

"I don't know about playing for the whole station, but I'd love to sit in with you guys."

"Well think about it. I'm sorry, but I really gotta go." Jen waved back at Garak a final time, winked at Dax, and took off down the Promenade, almost at a run.

Dax looked with interest at the tailor, who noticed her watching him and stopped waving. She approached the counter where he was working on a merchandise list.

"You and Jen old friends?" Dax asked.

Garak smiled, "We go back a ways. You could say we're kindred spirits."

"Really?" Dax asked intrigued.

"What can I help you with, Commander?" Garak asked, making it clear that his relationship to Jen was private. Dax didn't mind, Jen might be more forthcoming about the mysterious Cardassian.

"I'd like to get a new outfit for tonight," Dax began. "Something special, but not obvious."

"Let me guess," Garak chuckled, "tactile rather than visual?"

Chapter 9

The four Bajoran musicians relaxed on board *No Regrets*. The afternoon practice had gone well, and they were now trying to ignore the mounting excitement for their evening performance at *Quark's*. Something about performing in a small club like *Quark's* had an intense energy all its own and the quartet was not immune to its effects. Certainly, there was the pressure to do well; they were not performing just for themselves this time. To contain their nervousness, Jen and Tosh sat in meditation, Keyla wrote poetry, and Dobin slept. The chime of the air lock signaled a visitor and Keyla responded to it. Moments later, a startled squeal brought the other band members running to the main hold.

"What is it?" Jen panted, adrenalin surging.

"This! Can you believe it?" Keyla held a cream-colored blouse in one hand, and a deep purple bodice in the other. "These boxes were just dropped off from the tailor's shop. There's one for each of us. Oh, Jen you did it!" Keyla flung herself at a startled Jen, embracing and kissing her soundly on the lips before the taller woman could respond. Jen returned her embrace and kiss, although not quite as ardently.

Jen gently pulled away and smiled. "You're quite welcome." Then, looking at the other surprised faces added, "I told you I'd have a talk with an old friend."

There were four large gray boxes and one smaller deep red box. Dobin and Tosh found the boxes with their names on them and upon examining their contents, shared Keyla's enthusiastic show of gratitude.

"Are we done with the kisses for now?" Jen laughed and opened the gray box with her name on it. Inside was not only the pants and sweater she had tried on in Garak's shop, but a performance outfit as well. It consisted of plain black leather pants, ornate Klingon belt, and a black leather vest. The other band members each had two complete outfits in their boxes, one for performing, and one more formal, presumably for afterwards. All of the performance outfits were similar in color, if not design. Jen's had a definite Klingon edge to it, but the others were elegant examples of Bajoran design. Black pants were provided for all, while the shirts for Dobin, Keyla, and Tosh matched in color, the highlights reflected colors of the pants. A black

vest was also provided for each, but made of different materials and in different styles. Boots, belts, accessories, and undergarments were also provided.

"This is unbelievable," Tosh said, stunned. "I've never seen clothes this nice."

"I've never had a pair of boots that fit this well." Dobin added, trying them on, "How did the tailor know our sizes?"

"I wouldn't put much past Garak." Jen replied, smiling.

After discovering their evening wear was dramatically different from each other's, they decided to try the outfits on. Tosh had a suit of deep violet, with black shirt, boots, and belt that set off his hair nicely. Dobin's suit was less formal and in lighter shades of blue and green. The jacket had tails similar in style to the coats Quark favored. Keyla discovered a printed skirt in her box that matched the colors of the bodice, with the cream-colored blouse the look was soft and dramatic.

Jen had just finished dressing when she was interrupted by Keyla. "Jen, this red box has your name on it too."

Jen walked over to the box, noticing as she did so that Keyla reached out to touch her sweater. Jen smiled to herself, realizing the decision about the sweater was a good one. The red box, now sitting on the table, was the same style as those from Garak's shop. She opened the lid. A red rose lay on the delicate black paper, covering the garment beneath. A card was attached to the stem of the rose.

"I don't think it's from Garak," Keyla said, smiling.

"Unless you did more for these clothes than you're telling us?" Dobin suggested.

Jen was nervous. She reached out, hand shaking, and picked up the rose.

"What does the card say?" Keyla asked.

Jen opened the card and read it aloud. "It says, 'Bren, good luck tonight – break a leg'. It's signed…" Jen couldn't contain her smile, "'Jadzia'."

"Well, what is it?" Keyla encouraged Jen to open the folds of the shimmering black paper. Jen did so, and almost fainted at what she saw. The black Klingon jacket nestled majestically within the folds of the delicate black paper.

"Woah," Tosh breathed. "I think she really likes you."

"Then why is she hoping Jen breaks her leg?" Dobin asked.

"It's an old Earth expression for 'good luck', I think." Jen distractedly picked up the jacket and put it on, then turned to look at her friends.

"You look awesome," Tosh and Dobin said in unison.

"You're irresistible Jen, and dammit, I think you know it." Keyla said, moving over to Jen and picking the rose up off the table. She stood in front of the taller woman and gently put the stem of the rose through several links of the chain. "When you see Dax later tonight," Keyla said as she attached the rose to the front of the jacket, "give this back to her and she'll be as crazy about you as I am."

"Thanks, Keyla," Jen said, warmly regarding the smaller woman, and hugging her affectionately. "You're magnificent."

The others went back to preparations for the performance. Jen checked the time and decided she had time to deliver the vintage bottles of liquid delicacies to Garak before she needed to be at *Quark's*. She went to her quarters, leaving the door open behind her. She opened the locker at the foot of her bed and rummaged through its contents. Tosh came in and sat down on her bed, watching her sort through the trunk.

"What are you doing?"

"I promised Garak a taste of home in exchange for something. I want to pay him before tonight's performance. Can you grab me one of the gray boxes please?"

"Where did you get the bottles?" He'd never known what was inside the trunk.

"The Gul that I composed marches for had an amazing collection of vintage beverages. I had access to the mud vaults where they were stored and I put aside a few bottles for myself, should I ever manage to leave Cardassia." She moved some of the packing material from around the bottles, carefully reading the labels. "I must say they've come in handy, in some cases they are better than latinum."

Tosh retrieved the box and handed it to Jen, "How serious are you about the Trill, anyway?" he asked quietly.

Jen looked at him with a neutral expression. "What is serious?" she asked carefully picking up a bottle of Kanar and wrapping it in the grey paper. Her quick inventory revealed that she had two bottles of the Kanar, Malduk, and even Klingon Spice Wine. She had one full measure of Vulcan Brandy she intended to split with Garak, but decided to give him all of it. She also noted a couple bottles of Terran wine, from vineyards near San Francisco. She chose one of the Terran wines to give Sisko later and selected a Klingon Spice wine to add to Garak's payment. He had gone far beyond the call of friendship.

"She seems to like you." Tosh remained sullen.

"The feeling would be mutual in that case," Jen remarked shortly, carefully packing the bottles.

"Keyla's trying to be a good sport about this but she's hurting," Tosh added gently.

Jen's penetrating green eyes regarding him coldly. "You think I don't know that? What would you have me do? Lie to her? She's too smart for that and I won't do it." She stood to face him. "Generally, I appreciate your sibling concern, but you're crossing the line. Besides, I should be having this conversation with Keyla, not you."

"I'm sorry Jen, I didn't mean to pry. I'm just concerned about the group," Tosh said, backing down. "Have you considered that she might leave over something like this?"

"If Keyla chooses to leave the group, it's her choice. I won't like it, but I won't try to stop her. I want what's best for her. Same goes for Dobin and you, for that matter. I don't think she'd appreciate it if I feign feelings that aren't genuine in order to get her to stay, do you?" She looked at the dark haired Bajoran and her eyes narrowed slightly. "I assumed all of you knew that and felt the same way about me."

"We do…I mean, I know I do." Tosh searched for words. "I guess I'm not convinced that this is what's best for you. I'm afraid that the Commander may distract you from, I don't know, your destiny perhaps? With the prophecy and all…"

"The Prophecy is the last thing I want to hear about, Sener!" Jen retorted angrily. "If Jadzia Dax can distract me from it, she will have my unyielding devotion. Besides, since when are you concerned about Bajoran prophecy? Or have you forgotten what those rings in your ear are for?"

Tosh started to protest as Jen continued. "As a matter of fact, I've been impressed lately by your extensive knowledge of the prophetic body. Is there something *you're* not telling *me*? I've never had a hidden agenda with any of you Tosh; you of all people know that. Why am I suddenly feeling that you've not been as candid?"

"I don't know," Tosh replied nervously, getting up to leave. "I just wanted to let you know about Keyla, that's all." Jen watched as he left the room. Something wasn't quite right. She

had a tingling sensation at the base of her skull, a sensation she hadn't felt since seeing her name appear in the prophecy on the computer in sickbay.

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Kai Winn strode confidently into the inner sanctuary of the temple. She was alone; the attendants had discreetly withdrew at her approach. Sending Vedek Danl back to his monastery a broken man gave the Kai a sense of accomplishment that had been sorely missing the past few days. In his panic, he confirmed her suspicions that Jen Brenmar's fellow musicians did represent the "longing heart," "joyful soul," and "tortured conscience." The Vedek appeared certain of it. The question yet unanswered was the identity of "one who will share the journey." Winn was certain that the Vedek did not know who the "one" was, but that he suspected Kira Nerys. He had provided more details as to the nature of the relationship between the drummer and the Major from their days in the resistance. Still, the Kai had her doubts. Kai Opaka had written at length about the subject in her journal. She described the one companion as serene, playful, and wise. Those were not adjectives anyone would use to describe the fiery Major. Still, the Speaker For The Dead had often been described as someone wise beyond their years, centered, and comforting. Those words did not apply to Jen Brenmar. She smiled a thin smile. If the one companion couldn't be found, then bringing Jen back to Bajor was the most prudent course of action. The Vedek had been helpful there as well. Arranging an arrest warrant shouldn't be difficult. Still, it would be better to know who all the players were.

Kai Winn sat on a bench by the altar and leafed through Opaka's book yet again. She was missing something, of that she was sure. Opaka had written this journal as a gift to the speaker, yet the style was familiar. *Familiar*. Winn's eyes widened with understanding. *Of course,* she thought, *family*. How could she have missed it? As the realization dawned on her, she felt herself stand. Almost as if in a trance, she stepped up to the altar and opened the doors that housed the Tear of the Prophet.

Winn felt the room around her slip away. She was in a beautiful garden surrounded by the sounds of running water. She walked a short distance and stopped when she saw Kai Opaka sitting by a brook arranging smooth stones into a small pile. As Winn approached the seated woman, she looked up and smiled.

"I see you've found my book," Opaka said.

"Yes," Winn replied, feeling superior. It was not easy serving as Kai in the memory of the beloved Opaka. "I'm surprised you managed to hide Jen so well," she said smoothly.

"Do you see these stones?" Opaka asked. "They are so hard they can't be broken, even by a much larger rock. Yet they are so soft that over time, it only takes water to shape them. Bren has been hidden from no one save herself. When it is time for her to know and take her place, she will be ready." As she spoke, Opaka offered a smooth stone to Winn. As the Kai studied the hand that placed the stone in her own, it changed into a younger hand. When Winn raised her head, it was Major Kira who stood before her.

"Am I the one you seek?" Kira asked, laughing, her voice childlike and teasing.

"Are you?" Winn asked, hopeful.

"If you want to know my heart, you'll have to ask me," came the reply from behind her. Kai Winn spun to see Jen Brenmar casually sitting in the middle of the brook. "Tell me; are you so sure that the actions you take now are not also ordained? If I tell you Nerys is not the one you seek, will you believe me? Or assume that I'm trying to deceive you? Whose heart should you believe? You know yours to be dark, so how can you trust it? You don't know love. Can you even
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recognize it? You can't take back from the air a song that has already been sung. You may sing louder and more often, but won't the song in turn be sung by others and remembered?"

In a flash of white light, the vision was gone. With trembling hands, Kai Winn closed the door of the Temple Orb and walked back to her rooms. She walked slowly, the vision she'd just seen weighing on her like a heavy stone.

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The quartet gathered at *Quark's* an hour before show time. They dressed in a holosuite the served as a dressing room and could hear the steady increase in the ambient noise level of the bar. Dobin looked at Tosh nervously and asked, "How many decibels now?"

"It's about seventy-five. Right, Jen?" Tosh looked over at Jen who was adjusting her tight-fitting leather vest.

"Seventy-eight," she replied. It had been with effort that Jen put her apprehensions about Tosh aside. She reassured herself that she would make a point to talk to him later and try to resolve her sudden feelings of mistrust. For now, she was completely focused on playing music. Their style of performance depended on a great deal of musical exchange. That confidence and freedom could only happen if each of them fully trusted and believed in the others. If one of them started holding back musically, Jen was sure the magic they felt while playing together would fade.

"Have we finished our set list?" she asked.

Keyla stopped her breathing exercises to answer, "Not really. Jen, I think we should start with The Wood Song; just the stringed instruments, you on guitar as well, like we did in rehearsal today."

Dobin stopped pacing and added, "I agree. I think that the whole show should go in one direction, keep building, getting louder and more aggressive. The place is packed with Klingons, it's impossible to calm them down once they're up. I don't think we should try."

Tosh and Jen exchanged glances. "We have the potential to bring the house down." Jen said guardedly.

"Yes," Tosh added, "but does Quark have that kind of insurance?"

Jen thought a moment and added, "Well, he did ask us to play here…"

"I think we should end with *Kashmir*," Keyla suggested. "Jen, I think we should ask Dax to play it with us." The drummer's eyebrows shot up in surprise.

"It would blow this place apart," Dobin commented.

"We didn't rehearse it." Tosh remarked flatly.

"I appreciate the gesture Keyla, but…" Jen started, inclined to agree with the large man.

"It would be my way of welcoming her into our little family," the petite blonde persisted, looking on the verge of tears.

"Keyla," Jen began as calmly as she could, "I think you're getting carried away with this. We don't need to deal with it now, and I certainly don't have the time right now to list all of the reasons why I think you're overreacting." Looking down at the shorter woman, noting the unshed tears welling up in her eyes, Jen tenderly put her hands on the shorter woman's shoulders. "We are a quartet, okay? Nothing is going to change that." She shot a glance at Tosh who was eyeing her intently. "For right now, just focus on the music, okay? We can talk about the other stuff later; for now the only thing we need to worry about is Tosh singing off key."

"And Jen forgetting how to count," Dobin continued.

"Or Dobin forgetting the set list," Keyla said smiling, regaining her composure.
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"And Keyla stealing everyone's heart," Tosh added quietly.

A moment later, Quark popped his head into the holosuite. "I think we're ready for you to go on. This is fantastic. The Klingon's are drinking like crazy; I'm making a fortune." He shook his head in delighted disbelief. "Odo is even down by the stage keeping a path clear for you. He had to call in extra security."

Jen smiled and patted Quark on the back, "Glad to hear it, Quark. We were hoping to bring the house down, you don't mind, do you?"

Quark, giddy with excitement replied, "No, by all means, bring the house down." He followed the musicians down the stairs to the stage. From his vantage point, he couldn't see that the four Bajorans wore grins larger than his own.

As Jen neared the base of the stairs, she saw Odo and called out to him. "Odo!"

"Is everything alright?" he asked.

Jen pressed something into his hand. "Just fine, Odo. If you ever consider a career change, let me know." She squeezed his arm and proceeded down the stairs. Odo looked at the object and inwardly smiled. It was his comm badge.

At the base of the stairs, Jen tripped. As she'd expected, the station's command staff was seated at a table near the front of the stage. This time however, they were all out of uniform. When Jen saw Dax, she forgot she had one stair left and stumbled into Dobin who was in front of her. Had he not been there, her forward momentum would have carried her head first into the drum kit. "Careful Bren," Dobin said quietly, "you could break a leg doing that."

Doctor Bashir was the last to join the group of off-duty officers and had just reached the table when he saw Jen trip. As he took his seat next to Dax, he leaned over to her, his eyes still focused on the stage. "That's some outfit," he remarked.

"Yes, they all look good, don't they?" she replied looking at the stage.

Bashir turned to face Jadzia, smiling. "I was talking about you."

Dax smiled. She had chosen her new outfit with care. Garak had suggested the color, a deep, rich blue, and she liked the effect it had on her eyes. She had fallen in love with the material, a soft, smooth weave commonly called Vulcan Velvet. Her suit was one piece, a formed bodice that was strapless and backless, attached to a pair of rich black pants. Garak had been helpful and candid in his advice as to how to move and keep the bodice where it belonged. She had considered buying a necklace, broach, or other piece of jewelry to go with the suit.

"Trust me, Commander; there isn't an article of adornment in my shop that could compete with your natural attributes." Garak was adamant.

Jadzia had been flattered. It was the first time the Cardassian tailor had made reference to the pattern of spots that went from each side of her forehead, down the sides of her neck, and continued down either side of her body.

She smiled at Julian. "You look rather dashing yourself," referring to his casual suit, something she had given him for his last birthday. Everyone at the table had gotten in the spirit of the festivities and dressed up for the event. Quark had outdone himself on publicity. In the span of a few short hours, he had arranged for the performance to be holo-taped, as well as broadcast to viewers on the station and on Bajor. Many people beyond the station would be watching tonight's performance. Her thoughts were distracted by something she overheard O'Brien say to Captain Sisko.

"We even had to reroute the redundant environmental controls to the Promenade to bring them on line simultaneously. This place is packed."

"You're right about that," Sisko agreed. "The whole Promenade is standing room only. I didn't know there were this many people on the station. Odo has organized the security teams; I think he's got things well in hand."

"Especially since the entire Klingon contingent managed to get a spot inside the bar," Kira added. "I'd say the rowdiest elements of the audience are conveniently located."

"Yeah," O'Brien quipped, "right next to the stage. But Commander Worf is with them, he'll keep an eye out." Then, as if noticing the Major for the first time added, "That's a lovely dress, Major." Kira was wearing a loose-fitting dress; the colors shifted from reds to oranges depending on how it reflected the ambient light. It looked elegant, festive, and comfortable all at the same time. She had also redone her hair in the style she frequently wore for celebrations. It was combed down, softly framing her face, not swept back from her face in the severe military style she sported when on duty.

Embarrassed, Kira replied, "Thanks Miles. Nice suit."

Attention was refocused on the stage as Keyla's amplified voice permeated the bar. "Greetings. Same house rules, singing and dancing strongly encouraged. The set tonight will be a bit different from our previous performances. If you're hoping for gentle ballads and soothing lullabies I'm afraid you're going to be disappointed." The Klingon roar of approval that swept the bar was almost deafening. "That does not mean we won't be doing some ancient music," Keyla cast a mock frown at the nearest group of Klingons, who toasted her with their tankards in response. "We're going to start with something unusual. It's simply called *The Wood Song*. I say unusual because it's one of the rare occasions when we get Jen to play something other than drums. It's from Earth, late twentieth century, written by poet laureate Emily Sailers for her duo *The Indigo Girls*."

The crowd settled down in anticipation. Jen stepped out from behind her drum kit and picked up the guitar Keyla offered her. She readied herself and nodded to Tosh, who played an introduction on a Bajoran vocar. Jen followed with the song's main riff as Keyla added the rhythm. The ambient noise level of the bar, the entire station for that matter, dropped dramatically.

Dax watched the performance with interest. Something was different about Jen away from her massive drum kit. Here, with only a guitar separating her from the assembled crowd, she seemed more approachable, more vulnerable. The spiritual song was a surprising departure from Jen's professed cynical exterior. Clearly, there was more to this woman than had thus far been presented; a possibility the Trill found intriguing.

Kira had never heard the song before, and the chorus captured her attention:

And the wood is tired,
And the wood is old,
But we'll make it fine,
If the weather holds,
And if the weather holds,
Then we've missed the point.
And that's where I need to go.

It was as if the twists and turns of their friendship had been laid bare. It had been painful, it had been difficult, but those experiences had molded them into the people they now were. With so many years of history behind them Kira, decided she couldn't simply let whatever they might have deteriorate. After all, Jen was alive. That in and of itself was more than Kira had hoped for,

for many years. By the end of the song, Kira resolved to talk to Jen after the dinner at Sisko's and try to rebuild a friendship.

More than the previous performance, the set at *Quark's* focused on compositions written by the individual group members. They received a warm reception, especially Tosh, whose singing most resembled that of a Klingon. Several moments were reserved in the performance to showcase the individual talents of each member of the quartet. Keyla brought everyone to their feet with an extraordinary solo performance on guitar. Dobin played the traditional stringed instrument, the Ruvar harp for his solo, and Tosh played pipes. Kira was disappointed that Jen did not perform a solo as well.

After Tosh's pipe rendition of the Klingon standard *Blood and Honor,* the crowd started to shout requests. The quartet was happy to oblige. In some cases, the Bajoran performers didn't know the song and had the requestor sing it, then would fill in as they got the feel for the music. When someone shouted "*December,*" some people enthusiastically leapt to their feet for dancing.

By the end of the first verse, it was clear that the recording from the previous performance, now in the station library, had been reviewed by many. Tosh and Dobin worked their way into the crowd and had members of the audience sing along with them into the voice amplification units attached to their vests. It finally ended with one side of the room singing "*Don't scream about, Don't think aloud"* and the other side responding *"Turn your head now baby, Just spit me out."* The smiles on the faces of the performers made it clear that they were having the time of their lives. The music continued to get louder and more aggressive, but with a happy, almost jubilant edge. Finally, after about two and a half hours of performing, Jen stood up from behind her drums and addressed the crowd.

"We're going to have to call an end to all of this fun and frivolity," she said, gasping. The crowd roared back disagreement, which she shook off. "I can't thank all of you enough for making this such a great night for us." The crowd cheered. "We're going to close with an old Andorian drinking song called *Pass the Ale*." Jen was drenched in sweat. She only managed to speak by sheer force of will. Her hair was wet and clung to her neck in strands, and her leather outfit was slick with perspiration. She took several deep breaths and nodded to Keyla, who began the song on guitar. Only Jen, Keyla, and Tosh played instruments. Dobin sang and continued to wander through the crowd. The chorus was simple and in no time, he was joined by whomever he approached. Even Captain Sisko participated, to the rousing approval of the crowd. Finally, when the song ended, several Klingons started chanting "Jun'ta! One more!" As they did, they were beating their tankards on whatever surface happened to be closest – the walls of the bar, the tables, and chairs.

Quark, standing near the stage was frantic. "They're going to tear this place apart!" he shouted to Tosh frantically.

"You told us to bring the house down!" the large man shouted back.

"Do something!" the Ferengi screamed.

Keyla stepped to the front of the small stage and helped Dobin climb up. She looked at the crowd sternly and things got quiet. "We'll do one more song," she began and held her hands up to silence the cheers, "but only if you all behave yourselves." The din receded to tolerable levels. "I'd like to do another Earth song called *Kashmir*." The other three members of the quartet looked at each other and at Keyla with surprise and uncertainty.

"Keyla, don't…" Tosh growled.

Keyla ignored him. "However, to do it, we will need the help of someone who can play keyboards." A hush descended on the crowd as people looked expectantly at each other, hoping a

keyboard player would materialize. Keyla looked over at the Captain's table. "I hope you had a chance to learn it, Dax," she said. All eyes turned to the elegantly dressed Trill, as two hundred expectant audience members waited to see if they'd get their last song.

Jadzia could feel herself turning red in spite of eight lifetimes of experience and confidence. Not one to turn down a challenge, she quickly composed herself and stood up. "I did say I wanted to sit in with you guys." The crowd cheered enthusiastically.

She walked over to the edge of the stage and Dobin pulled her up. As she sat behind the keyboard console, he advised her quietly. "As you know, this starts quietly, but this stage isn't very thick. When Jen kicks the drums in after the first verse, it's going to feel like being hit by a graviton wave. Don't let it throw you, just hang on, and enjoy the ride." He winked and picked up his bass.

The Trill's mind raced. *Am I nuts?* She wondered to herself. Certainly, she'd gone over the music in her quarters; it had not been terribly difficult to learn, but playing a piece of music quietly to oneself and playing with others were drastically different situations. Before self-doubt overcame her, she saw Keyla nod to Jen behind her. Jen counted out the beat silently in the air and they began. Keyla played guitar and Dobin played bass. Dax's part wouldn't come in until the end of the verse, so she took a moment to look out into the crowd.

In hindsight, she realized that might have been a mistake. There were bodies and expectant faces as far as she could see. All three levels of *Quark's* were packed and the crowd extended all the way down the promenade. Dobin began to sing in a gentle voice.

Oh, let the sun beat down upon my face,
Stars to fill my dreams
I am a traveler of both time and space,
To be where I have been
Sit with elders of the gentle race,
This world is seldom seen
Talk of days for which they sit and wait,
When all will be revealed.

Forcing herself to focus on the music, Dax counted the beats and began to play. She deftly hit the chords on the keyboard in front of her, relieved that her timing was exact. She could literally feel the chords emphasize the down beat and compliment the rhythm provided by the other instruments. Again, Dax listened intently to the soothing lyrics, now joined by Tosh on an eerie bass harmony.

And my eyes fill with sand,
As I scan this wasted land
Trying to find where I've been

At those words, Dax steeled herself for the wave of sound she knew was coming. As Dobin predicted, the wave of sound and energy that erupted from the drums was startling. She could feel the vibrations blast her skin and radiate up her legs from the stage. She could feel the sound waves surge through the symbiont inside of her. It was incredibly loud and very exhilarating. That the keyboards were directly in front of the drums maximized the effect.

As she played, she could see why the four musicians from Bajor played to the point of exhaustion. Instinctively, she sensed the strong sense of communication and sharing. She could feel the positive energy emanating from the crowd and from the people on stage with her.

Musically, there was a gratifying sense of give and take. While they had not rehearsed together, she could anticipate where the others would improvise and provided a strong foundation for that improvisation. They did the same for her in return. There was also a lot of eye contact involved. Slight nods and grins from person to person passed the musical focus between them. Dax in particular needed to focus on Jen's drumming. Her powerful chords on the keyboard were needed to add even more punch to the driving drum beat. She felt that Jen, without rushing the tempo, was driving and pushing her to perform even better than she thought she could. She felt an almost intoxicating sense of unity and power. She had given up on understanding the lyrics, she focused on Dobin screaming and shouting incoherently, mesmerized by the yelling of the Klingons in the crowd.

When the song finally ended, everyone at *Quark's* felt spent. Dax looked over to Jen and saw her slump behind her drums. Tosh was at her side in an instant and held her up. "Are you alright?" she asked needing to shout to be heard above the din.

Jen nodded, smiling. "I just need to catch my breath. I'm good, honest." Looking up at Tosh, she added, "Hell of a show."

"I'll say," he confirmed, looking around the bar. As the patrons filed out, their looks were uniformly happy and exhausted. Some members of the audience were milling about close to the stage, and Tosh noted Quark frantically darting from one end of the bar to the other, shouting about something.

Dobin and Keyla hurried over to Dax, their triumphant smiles infectious. "You were great, Jadzia." Keyla said, quickly kissing her cheek. "I'd hug you but I'm soaked."

"That goes for me too," Dobin added. "I'd hate to ruin such an incredible outfit."

Jen was sitting up behind her drums now and laughed. "There you see, Keyla," she said panting in between the words, "and you said Dobin didn't have a fashion sense."

Tosh looked over at the Trill with a bit of reservation mixed with respect. "You were really outstanding, Commander," then looking up the stairs to the holosuite added, "we've got a mini-'fresher set up where we got dressed. We're going to have to get cleaned up before we come to dinner. Would you mind letting Captain Sisko know that we'll be there shortly?"

"Sure," she replied, smiling. "I'll see you at dinner then."

The quartet was in the holosuite, and had begun to undress when Quark burst in, furious.

"They've destroyed my bar! Who is going to be responsible for this?" he shouted.

Jen walked over to the Ferengi and faced him. She still had her clothes on but was about to unfasten her vest. "If you don't mind, Quark, we're trying to change here."

"Don't flatter yourself," he said dismissing her, "you don't have anything I haven't already seen."

Jen arched an eyebrow at the bartender. "Oh, really?" she said, and staring him straight in the eyes, undid her vest and took it off. The drummer smiled inwardly with satisfaction in seeing the Ferengi trying not to stare at her bare chest and failing. When she was sure he had gotten a decent view, she turned around and walked away.

"What happened to her?" he asked quietly, as Dobin and Tosh walked over.

Catching Dobin's eye Tosh, shook his head sadly and said to Quark in a conspiring tone, "It was pretty sad; a bar fight, actually."

Dobin, catching on to Tosh's intent added, "Yeah, she and the bartender got in a fight over her tab."

"That must be some bartender," the Ferengi mused.

At this point Keyla joined them and adopted the serious demeanor of the other two. “You mean ‘was’. He’s dead now. I don’t know how she did it; he was a big Tholesiun fellow. Jen does have quite a temper though.”

“Yes, quite,” Quark mused. Looking back up at the others, he reconsidered his approach and dialed back his bluster. “Well, we can talk about this later. Believe me; we will talk about this later.” With that, he turned and hurried out of the holosuite. As soon as he was gone, Tosh, Dobin, and Keyla burst into uproarious laughter.

“What was that all about?” Jen asked drying her hair.

The three conspirators looked at each other and laughed again. “Oh, nothing,” Keyla finally said. “We were just discussing your bar tab with Quark.”

“Don’t expect a bill anytime soon.” Dobin added.

As they made their way back down the stairs, the elegantly dressed musicians from Bajor looked nothing like the sweaty, exhausted foursome that had just made history in *Quark’s*. Quark was still in the bar, picking up broken glasses, righting chairs and tables, and looking quite lost. “It hasn’t been this bad since the Cardassians left,” he mumbled sadly to himself. Walking back across the stage Tosh looked at Jen’s drum kit.

“Shit, Jen!” Tosh exclaimed, looking at the drums. “This bass drum is totaled.” He bent down and removed the sturdy hide drum head. It was cracked and showed drastic signs of wear from the padded drum pedal.

“Drums, nothing! Look at my bar,” Quark snapped.

Jen, having heard the whole story behind the laughter, was not surprised that Quark looked for an escape route when she walked over to him. She put her arm around the shoulders of the Ferengi, the chain mail from her jacket rattling softly. She liked the effect. Putting a bundle of clothes on the bar, she said sweetly, “Could you be a dear and have these cleaned, then returned to my ship? It’s my performance outfit. Besides, I don’t see why you’re so upset; how many people were in your bar tonight?”

Quark glared at her. “About two hundred-fifty,” he answered cautiously.

“How many of those people had a good time? Just a guess mind you,” Jen continued, in a friendly fashion.

“I’d say most,” the Ferengi answered, still guarded.

“Think they’ll be back?” Jen asked, smiling. “Think they’ll tell their friends and family to ‘be sure to check out *Quark’s* when you’re on *DS9*.’ There were a lot of Klingons here tonight…”

“You can say that again,” Quark cut in sadly.

“I’d say that at least one of them will write a song about the event. Look Quark, you’re going to be immortalized and you know it. The damage to the bar is cosmetic; you’ll have it repaired in a day. Don’t you have some ‘Rule of Acquisition’ that tells you how to turn a loss into a profit? Where’s your marketing? Brag about the fact that your place got totaled by a bunch of rowdy Klingons – and that you’re still here to tell the tale.”

Quark brightened, “You know, you may have something.” Then, shaking his head, “But I’ll need proof.”

“What about this?” Tosh held up the battered drum head. “Got a stylus?” he asked.

Quark reached behind the bar and retrieved a marking stylus, then handed it to Tosh. The dark haired Bajoran put the drum head on the bar and began to write on it, speaking aloud as he did. “To Quark,” he began, “sorry we trashed your bar.”

Then Keyla chimed in, “Love, kisses, and dreams of latinum – ‘Quark’s Quartet.”

The other three Bajorans nodded approvingly. “We needed a name for the band anyway,” Dobin added. After Tosh finished his inscription, all four of them signed it. Jen handed the drum head over to Quark.

“No hard feelings?” she asked.

“Plenty, not that it would do me any good.”

“Good. Then don’t forget about my clothes.”

“Right,” he said absently, trying to hide his excitement about all the new marketing strategies and profit potentials.

It didn’t take long for the newly dubbed *Quark’s Quartet* to make their way to the Captain’s quarters. Keyla entered the Captain’s home first to applause and words of congratulations. Next entered Dobin, then Tosh, and last was Jen. As Jen greeted Sisko at the door, she handed him a dusty bottle. “This is for you,” she said, “from Napa Valley.”

Sisko’s eyes lit up upon reading the label. “A hundred-year old bottle of California wine, I’d never have believed it.” Then looking at Jen added, “By the way, you do look fantastic.”

Julian walked over to congratulate her. “I was wondering what happened to that jacket in Garak’s window. I must say it suits you. And the performance was outstanding.”

“Why thank you, Doctor,” Jen replied with a mock bow.

“It does look good, especially with those earrings.” Dax said, stepping out from behind Bashir.

Jen smiled at the Trill, taking a long box out of the inner pocket of the jacket. “This is for you,” Jen gracefully extracted the rose threaded through the chain on the front of the jacket and set it on top of the box as she handed it to Dax. Everyone gathered around to see.

Dax slowly opened the box. “It’s beautiful,” she breathed, holding up the necklace. The deep blue stones perfectly matched the color of her velvet suit. They drew ambient light from the room to the crystalline core of the stones and subtly glowed deep blue.

“I’m learning Ferengi. I started with the Rules of Acquisition. Let’s just say it’s my way of demonstrating rule number two hundred eighty-four.”

Dax looked at her with puzzlement, “Deep down, everyone’s a Ferengi?” she asked.

Jen shook her head, “No, it’s ‘no good deed ever goes unpunished’.”

Dax smiled, “That’s rule number two hundred eighty-five.”

“Damn, I thought I had those down,” Jen said with a shake of her head.

“Well, let’s start celebrating,” Sisko suggested.

The bustling activity of people looking for drinks, and heading to the counter to prepare the meal gave Jadzia and Jen a moment of odd privacy within the sea of activity. Dax handed Jen the necklace “I’d love to wear it,” she said, turning around.

Jen was confronted with a dazzling view of the back of Dax’s suit, or rather, lack thereof. The deep blue velvet next to the Trill’s light skin was a distracting combination. The Trill was wearing her hair down, so Jen gently pushed it aside, letting her finger’s softly brush against the other woman’s skin. *It’s as soft as it looks*, she thought as she felt her pulse triple. Concentrating on keeping her hands steady, Jen hooked the delicate clasp on the necklace, then with a hand resting gently between Dax’s shoulder blades, leaned close and whispered, “All done.”

Dax closed her eyes, enjoying the sensation of Jen’s breath on her skin, before turning around, eyes smiling.

“Thanks. I guess we’d better get to work.”

Jen was grateful for the distraction. *If I don’t do something else now*, she thought, *I’m going to faint.*

As with most of his gatherings, the Captain cooked. Everyone else helped, gave advice, or both. Conversation circulated among the gathering, with everyone finding time to talk to everyone else. Jen was impressed by the sense of family among the senior officers, similar to her bandmates. At one point, while finely chopping something called an *onion,* Kira walked over to join her.

"That's some necklace," the Major said, slicing some small peppers in the same area.

Jen shrugged, taking off her jacket and draping it over a nearby chair. She noticed, with a small smile, several eyebrows raise in appreciation of her ensemble. Just one eyebrow would have been sufficient, provided it belonged to a Trill, but she wasn't knocking the additional appreciative looks.

"You look great tonight Kira, I hope you know that."

"Thanks, Bren."

Jen smiled at the familiar use of her name. "Decide if you hate me or not?" Jen asked conversationally, picking up another knife and a pepper.

"I've decided it's impossible to hate you. And that you're right about me being a hothead," Kira replied smiling. "So, you ready to become the most famous drummer in Bajoran history?"

Jen laughed. "I don't think I need to worry about that. I'll be happy just to stay out of Winn's clutches a little while longer."

Kira's demeanor turned serious. With head down, she spoke quietly and with determination. "We're doing everything we can on that one."

Jen looked up from her chopping. "I know you are Nerys. I know."

Sisko came by to collect the onions and peppers. He complimented them on their culinary skill and added final touches to the late-night meal. When the various dishes were ready to his satisfaction, he called everyone into the main room.

The table was set with plates and utensils, various food dishes were arranged in an assortment of platters in the center of the table. The Captain took a seat at the head of the table, with Jake on his right. Jake held a chair out for Jen, who accepted it. Kira took the seat across from Jake. Odo sat next to her, as was his custom. He and Tosh were having an animated discussion about sound harmonics, so Tosh took the seat next to Odo. Keiko, Dobin, and Miles O'Brien were discussing fishing and the oceans of Bajor, so they took the three seats next to Tosh. Dobin found himself at the other end of the table, across from the Captain. Keyla and Dax arrived to the table at the same time. Keyla made a point of holding the chair next to Jen for the Trill, and then took the seat next to Dax, Bashir next to her.

Sisko opened a bottle of wine and poured everyone a glass. As the Terrans sampled it, their faces lit up with pleasure. The others regarded the burgundy liquid more cautiously.

"Wherever did you come across a bottle of hundred year old California wine?" Sisko asked Jen, smiling appreciatively.

"Gul Dakmar had two passions. One was pompous marches, the other vintage beverages," Jen answered, serving herself a sampling of the various Cajun dishes. "I had access to his mud vault and put aside a few bottles from time to time. I thought of it as payment for services rendered."

Kira was surprised to hear Jen talk so candidly about life in the Gul's household. She was grateful when Jake changed the subject.

"So just how many languages do you know?" he asked around a mouthful of food."

Jen took a sip of wine and thought a moment. “Do you mean reading and writing? Or just speaking?”

Jake nodded, “Both; start with what you know the best and work your way down.”

“Well, I learned the drum languages and several ancient Bajoran languages when I was a child. My grandfather had been a scholar in the days before the Occupation. We had a small keyboard in the house and he also taught me music theory; he had been a composer as a hobby when he wasn’t doing research. Anyway, before joining the Resistance, my grandfather helped me learn Cardassian. I didn’t know it at the time, but what I was learning was the ‘military’ Cardassian dialect. I discovered after my imprisonment that there is a ‘social’ Cardassian dialect as well, so I learned that too. I decided to join the resistance movement, thinking I could contribute something as a linguist.”

Jen paused a moment in thought. Her sculpted features assumed a faraway cast for a moment before she continued with her narrative. “My grandfather thought I’d be safer as a linguist, less likely to be captured and all.” Jen purposefully did not look at Kira as she spoke. “It’s funny, most of the languages I’ve learned, where while imprisoned. I studied Klingon, which I consider my most fluent after Bajoran and Cardassian. I also learned enough to converse and write in Vulcan, but I wouldn’t say I’m fluent. I can speak Gaelic but I can’t write it, I know a bit of Betazoid, and I can swear in Romulan. I started studying Ferengi when I got here.”

“That’s fascinating Jen,” Kira commented, “I never knew you were interested in languages, I just thought it was music.”

“Actually, I got interested in music *because* of my interest in language. It’s just another way to communicate. In my position in Dakmar’s household, I eventually managed access to the information I needed, provided it was for the purpose of writing pompous marches. I had some access to the Cardassian central library. I was able to study virtually all the music in it, as well as languages, in a limited capacity. To make these Cardassian Grand Marches unique and memorable, I would subtly weave elements of other types of music through them…”

“Among other things,” Kira commented under her breath.

Jen smiled. “Anyway, I spent as much time as possible learning whatever I could. It wasn’t really for the sake of learning, rather to keep my mind busy so I wouldn’t go crazy. Music and language were really the only things I had access to. I was hoping Commander Worf would be here. I would like some feedback on our Klingon phrasing.”

“Commander Worf has been rather monopolized by the Klingon ambassador of late. He headed to the Ambassador’s ship as soon as your performance was over,” Sisko replied.

“For a night of drinking bloodwine, no doubt,” Dax interjected.

Sisko continued, “But Dax speaks Klingon as well as any Klingon I’ve met; I’m sure she’d be delighted to help,” Sisko’s face broke into a wide toothy grin at his friend.

Jen looked at Dax shyly. “Really?”

Dax smiled, “Sure.” She smiled at Jen then looked at Sisko pointedly.

Jake’s curiosity satisfied, Jen had the opportunity to listen to conversations happening around the table. In looking down the table, Jen also had the opportunity to observe the beautiful Trill next to her. The deep blue velvet against the other woman’s smooth skin, and the revealing cut of the garment was embarrassingly breathtaking. Distinctive Trill markings were visible along the sides of Dax’s torso, partially hidden and enticing. At one point, Dax leaned over to quietly talk to Jen, her top shifted slightly, revealing more spots. Jen wanted nothing more than to get lost in the beautiful patterning.

“So, you and Garak are old friends?” Dax asked.

Jen smiled shyly, wondering if Dax noticed her staring. "I…um… don't know if Garak would admit we're 'friends', but I'd be that bold. I never really knew him very well. I met him once or twice at official functions at Dakmar's. I would work in the food preparation area with my good arm," Jen unconsciously flexed her left arm, once useless, now healed thanks to the attention of the Starfleet surgeons on board *Longevity*. "We…interacted several times after that and then he disappeared. I was relieved to hear he was aboard the station. I had thought he suffered a far worse fate…" Her commentary was cut short by an outburst of laughter form the far end of the table.

Miles O'Brien was wiping tears out of his eyes with his napkin. "You mean the fish spit on him?" He barely managed to get the words out, gasping for breath between renewed bursts of laughter.

"I'm serious," Dobin continued, laughing. "He was convinced I had some sort of phaser weapon concealed on board and insisted on searching the boat himself. I forgot to tell him the Kartola fish was still alive. It was huge, about a meter long. It spit all right; the venom got in the Gul's face, he lost his balance and went overboard like a rock. Cardassian armor isn't designed to float." Dobin took another sip of wine and continued, "The Cardie still on board the boat that stopped us ordered some of his men to jump in after Gul Dressik and find him. Wearing the same armor. Everyone sank like anchors."

"That's horrible," Keiko said, stunned at their laughter.

Dobin did his best to reassure her, "It isn't as bad as it sounds. The Cardie's were caught in the nets that we still hadn't brought in. We hauled them in and they were fine. The happy ending to this is that after that incident, they never tried to board us or search our ships at sea again. We had at least one refuge from the Cardassian overseer."

Jen leaned over to Dax, gently touching her bare shoulder to get her attention. "It's also where most of the resistance movement plans were formulated."

"At sea?" Dax asked. Jen nodded.

Jen turned her attention to the conversation between Keyla and Bashir. She listened with amusement as she refilled the wine glasses of Sisko, Kira, and Dax. Doctor Bashir was regaling Keyla with the saga of his graduating second in his class at Starfleet Medical. Jen suspected he had told the story many times. His delivery had a smooth cadence that suggested considerable practice. Jen noticed something unusual, Keyla hanging on his every word.

"During the final, I mistook a post-ganglionic nerve for a pre-ganglionic fiber. That mistake is what cost me the point I needed to graduate first." Julian concluded.

"But you got the assignment you wanted anyway?" Keyla asked.

"Yes, I did."

"So, results are what count. If you're living the life you want, I don't suppose it matters where you are listed numerically. They still call the person who graduated last 'doctor', don't they?" She asked innocently.

"Well, yes." Julian looked crestfallen.

"And it doesn't say on your diploma where in the class you finished?"

"Um, no." Julian was now desperate to change the subject.

"So, class rankings are pretty insignificant in the long run?" Keyla asked sweetly.

"I suppose so," Julian dejectedly answered. That was not the usual response he got from that particular story. Jen noticed Dax's smile at Julian's discomfort.

As dinner wound down, Jen turned to face the Captain. "Captain Sisko," she began somewhat formally, "I'll be honest and tell you…" she broke into a broad smile, "that this was

the most delicious dinner I've ever eaten." Her companions at the other end of the table echoed her remarks.

Sisko bowed his head and smiled at the drummer. "You are most welcome. My father thanks you, since they're his recipes. But my friends, we're not done yet. Why don't we retire to the sitting room for dessert?" As Sisko smiled, his teeth shone bright white against his dark brown skin.

As Jen walked with Sisko into the main room, she asked, "What was the name of that fish recipe?"

Dax, walking on Jen's other side laughed, "Don't ask for the recipe, I've been trying to get it for…" she looked at Sisko questioningly, "what has it been Benjamin, fifteen years?"

"It's called *Zydeco Catfish* and Dax is right – it's a secret family recipe."

With a chuckle, Jen nodded the rear of the Captain's quarters. "First door on your left," Sisko said easily as the others made themselves comfortable in the sitting room.

Having made use of the 'fresher', the drummer dried her hands on a guest towel. She was feeling equally exhausted and exhilarated. The performance, on top of all she'd experienced since arriving at the station were definitely taking a toll, but at the same time she couldn't remember the last time she'd felt this carefree. As the privacy door to the unit slid silently open, she was treated to a view of the stunning Trill standing just outside. She and Jadzia were about the same height; she gazed into blue eyes and wanted very much to get lost. There was amusement and mischief shining in those eyes as Dax took a step forward, the door closing silently behind her.

The guest facilities in the Sisko quarters weren't especially spacious and necessitated the two women stand close together. "This is cozy," the drummer observed wryly, trying to project a sense of confidence and ease she didn't quite feel. The privacy, the proximity, the scent of the Trill's perfume; Jen was convinced that her desire and uncertainty shone all over her features. Jadzia smiled, and Jen could tell she was trying to gauge if her forwardness was appealing or not. "Not that I'm complaining," she added hastily.

"Before Jake hijacks you in conversation, I wanted a moment to thank you for the necklace." Jadzia noted the dilation of the other woman's eyes as she leaned forward to kiss her. She moved slowly not just to prolong her own sense of anticipation, but also to afford the drummer an opportunity to make her feelings known if she'd misread the room.

The statuesque Trill needn't have worried; before she crossed half the distance between them Jen was there returning the kiss with full enthusiasm. There was only the briefest of hesitation as Jen's mouth opened slightly inviting Jadzia to deepen the contact. Bodies shifted and embraced as tongues were gently acquainted. It was over in an instant, leaving no question as to each other's intentions.

"That was nice," Jen whispered when they parted.

"No kidding," Jadzia agreed.

"I'd advocate for more of that," the Bajoran added seductively.

"Perhaps in a more fitting setting?" Jadzia backed up a step and the door to the 'fresher opened. With a last wink, she departed and joined the rest of the guests, leaving Jen to collect herself before following suit.

After returning to the sitting room, Jen took a seat next to Odo. As the guests sipped rok'dejino and ate dessert, conversation resumed in earnest.

"That was some bottle of wine," Sisko toasted Jen, finishing the last of his glass. "I can't thank you enough."

Jen smiled, “Trust me Captain, this cheesecake, and that magnificent feast is more than thanks enough.”

Kira looked at the elder Sisko questioningly, “What is that wine made of?”

“Fermented grape juice, if you can believe that,” Jen supplied.

“You’re kidding.” Kira looked at her, stunned.

“Well, they are very special grapes, Kira,” Benjamin offered. “The fermentation process is also unusual by Bajoran standards. Did you like the wine?”

“I did.” Kira nodded.

“How did you manage to get the bottles you collected off Cardassia?” O’Brien asked Jen.

Jen hesitated a moment before answering. “I had cultivated a few favors during my tenure there. There was also a lot of confusion at the time I transported to *Longevity*. Once on board I was rushed into surgery and there wasn’t much attention given to the bundle I transported with.”

Odo spoke up. “I was wondering why you didn’t perform solo in tonight’s performance?”

Jen looked genuinely surprised at Odo’s question. Before she could answer, her bandmates spoke up. “That’s a very good question,” Dobin began.

“I was wondering the same thing myself,” Tosh concurred.

“It’s not like we didn’t ask… beg for that matter,” Keyla finished.

“Okay, okay, I get the message,” Jen finally said, laughing at the outburst. “I just think that solo drum performances are a little showy. I mean, for sending messages that’s one thing, but musically… I don’t know. I didn’t think it was necessary.”

“It isn’t as if drums are the only instrument you play,” Keyla replied with determination. “You could have played guitar, keyboard, pipes, lute, harp…”

“You’ve made your point, Keyla,” Jen cut her off, trying to frown seriously and failing.

“You could play something now. I’ve got a small keyboard,” Jake offered.

“Wonderful idea,” Kira concurred. Jake jumped up to get his keyboard before Jen could stop him.

“Really guys, my voice is burnt. I would think you’d be sick of hearing us by now,” Jen managed, panic creeping into her soft voice.

“Yes, but the difference is that we’re going to stay nice and quiet so they can be sick of you all by your lonesome.” Tosh comforted Jen by leaning over and patting her shoulder.

The consensus of the room made it clear that a song was required; Jake came back with a small keyboard and placed it on the low table in front of her. Jen moved off the low couch and sat on the floor, keyboard in front of her.

“Well what do you want to hear?”

Dobin suggested, “Something mellow.”

“Like a lullaby.” Keyla offered shyly. “I’m so full from dinner; I could fall asleep right now.” She leaned against Doctor Bashir and closed her eyes; the doctor looked quite pleased with himself as a result.

Jen smiled, touched the keys of the instrument experimentally, and changed some of the settings on the small control panel. “Well, here goes…” she offered to no one in particular, and began to play. Her voice was surprisingly clear, considering the rigors it had recently endured.

So he’s retired, lives with his sister in a furnished flat
He’s got this suit that he never wears outside without a hat
His hair is white but he looks half his age,
He looks like Jimmy Stewart in his younger days

And honestly, I might be stupid to think love is love, but I do
And you've waited so long and I've waited long enough, for you

The song was simple and elegant. Sisko nodded to himself; it complimented the wine perfectly. Kira listened, puzzled at first by the lyrics. While she didn't understand some of the references, and was surprised that Jen had chosen this song, she liked the tune. She closed her eyes and soaked in her friend's clear voice.

My mother's calling, from where she's living up in Troy, Vermont
She tries to tell me a father figure must be what I want
I've always thought age made no difference
Am I the only one to whom that's making sense

And honestly, I might be stupid to think love is love, but I do
And you've waited so long and I've waited long enough, for you

The day I met him he was raking leaves in his tiny yard…

Dax studied Jen at the keyboard as she played an instrumental bridge to the song. She played with proficiency, but her graceful movements across the keys were not effortless. Jen closed her eyes while she sang; listening to an accompaniment only she could hear. When she played the more complicated note structure of the refrain, she looked at the keys intently. Dax puzzled over why Jen chose this particular song to play. *Is she trying to tell me something?* She quickly chided herself; *you're not the center of the universe you know*.

Something touched Jadzia about the song that went far beyond musical proficiency. She smiled, thinking fondly of Curzon, the previous host of the Dax symbiont. A man who had been in love with her, and who had only managed to tell her years after leaving his memories and symbiont to her.

Of course I know that, we've only got ten years or twenty left
But to be honest, I'm happy with whatever time we get,
Depending on which ever book you read
Sometimes it takes a lifetime to get what you need

And honestly, I might be stupid to think love is love, but I do
And you've waited so long and I've waited long enough, for you
And honestly, I might be stupid to think love is love, but I do
And you've waited so long and I've waited long enough, for you
And I've waited long enough
For you

Surprisingly, Keiko was the first to speak when the song finished. "That was beautiful, was it an Aimee Mann song?" she asked.

Jen was stunned. "You're familiar with her music?"

"A little. I studied music when I was younger. The instructor preferred her compositions to illustrate the lessons." Keiko supplied, embarrassed.

"I never knew you studied music!" Miles said, stunned.

Keiko winked at her husband, "There's a lot you don't know about me Miles O'Brien."

Chapter 10

The Captain's dinner party finally broke up. Kira and Jen found themselves escorting Keyla back to her quarters after the diminutive woman mentioned her exhaustion had made her uncertain of the location and Bashir had volunteered his assistance. Jen considered leaving Keyla to fend for herself, but her friend's panic at his obvious misreading of Keyla's flirtatious nature changed Jen's mind.

Jen smiled to herself thinking of the friendships forged that evening. Dobin had made plans to go kayaking with O'Brien in a holosuite and in return, offered to take the curly-haired engineer fishing on Bajor. Kira even made plans to play springball with Tosh.

"You look lost in thought," Kira remarked to her as they reached the Keyla's door.

"I was just thinking about the abundant supply of decent people you work with."

"They are at that," Kira nodded.

"I'd invite you guys in for something, but I'm too tired," Keyla mumbled sleepily, keying her access code into the panel by the door. "G'night." Keyla nodded to Kira as she leaned to kiss Jen on the cheek, and then stumbled into the room without as much as a parting glance as the door shut behind her. Surprised, Kira blinked, looking to Jen for confirmation.

"That's abrupt."

Jen shrugged. "She gets that way when she's tired. She did play her heart out tonight, after all."

"She seems to like you. How come you two aren't together?" The two women resumed walking as they talked, unconsciously heading toward the docking ring.

"Because, I like her too." Jen glanced down at Kira. "Besides, you of all people should see the futility of her infatuation."

"I think you're being a bit hard on yourself, Jen. Yes, you're –," Kira searched for the word, "– infuriating, but you've got one or two nice qualities as well."

"Thanks?"

"Still," Kira continued, "maybe someone with more experience would be better equipped to tolerate your rough edges. Someone with, say, seven lifetimes of it?"

"What is it with this station?" Jen laughed. "It's riddled with match-makers. I swear, between you, Keyla, and Garak…"

Kira looked thoughtful. "Maybe you come across as someone who is in desperate need of something, meets someone suitable, and then is unable, or unwilling to handle the rest?"

"Ouch." Kira's words stung. "And to think I assumed ten years might mellow you some."

"Not mellowed," Kira replied, "just aged." They had reached the outer air lock to Jen's ship.

"Would you like to come on board?" Jen asked opening the outer lock.

"What did you have in mind?" Kira asked with an arched eyebrow.

"I still play a mean game of 'Kosst or Balik'. I don't know what they call it in standard, 'To Be or Get Lost' maybe? Is your bluffing as bad as it used to be?" Jen asked.

"That sounds like a challenge."

"Maybe it was. Interested?"

Kira shrugged, laughing. "Why not?"

Once inside, Jen surveyed the main hold. "Might as well play in my quarters. It's the most comfortable."

"If I didn't know you better, I'd think that was a come-on." Kira remarked flatly, as she walked towards the ship's quarters.

Jen smiled. “Yes, but you do know me better than that, don’t you?”

“I’ll reserve judgement on that until I win a few rounds,” Kira quipped. She seated herself at the small table in Jen’s quarters where they had talked just after Jen’s arrival to the station. *Could that have been only a few days ago?* Kira thought to herself. Jen carefully took off her jacket, and put it back in the red box in which it had arrived.

“What are all the boxes from?” Kira asked, looking at the empty boxes strewn around the room.

“I traded with Garak for our new clothes.” Jen answered as she began rummaging through the storage crate at the foot of her bed.

“Was the jacket from Garak, too?” Kira asked with a raised eyebrow.

Blushing, Jen was grateful she wasn’t facing Kira as she answered. “No, it was from Dax.” She busied herself going through the contents of her crate. “Lemme see, I’ve got some Kanar, good vintage stuff, not the replicated crap Quark sells, some Klingon Spice Wine and some… ah here it is,” she held up a bottle proudly. “Malduk kis.”

“Excellent,” Kira grinned with approval. “By the way, do you still have your medal for valor? I’d like to see it.”

Jen put the three bottles on the small table and looked at Kira. “No, I don’t have it. Do you remember Foppie?” Jen asked.

“Your grandfather? Of course, I remember him! I always wanted a grandfather like that.” Kira began to open the bottle of Malduk kis. “I wasn’t sure if I should tell you, but I used to visit Foppie after you were captured.”

Jen smiled warmly, “I’m glad you did Nerys. I’m sure that made things easier for him.”

Kira smiled. “But you were saying,” she encouraged.

Jen nodded. “Right. I went back to D’Kor to see if anyone I knew was left. I didn’t expect Foppie to be alive; he was ancient when I left. I talked to some of the villagers still there; they looked at me as if I were a ghost.” Jen frowned, shaking her head. “Apparently, Foppie tried to tell them I was alive, that he knew I’d be back and they all treated him like a senile old man. I don’t know if he ever heard my drum signals, but I sent him a greeting for each of the festivals.”

Kira shook her head. “I don’t know if he did either. But he used to tell me that he was sure you’d be all right. He said your destiny was like a sword of stars and that there was not enough Cardassian blood to put out that fire. In light of your newfound status as a religious icon, maybe he was right?”

“Not funny, Nerys.” Jen retorted flatly.

“What about the medal?” Kira asked.

“I found where Foppie’s ashes were scattered. It wasn’t far from the caves where he had hidden the drums.” She nodded over to the large drum covered with a soft cloth. “That’s the drum he made. Anyway, I left the medal on his remembrance plaque. It was the first material thing of value I ever had to give him. I think he would have liked the gesture.”

“I don’t think anything could have made Jen Fyre prouder of you than he was in life, but it’s a nice touch.” Kira said, affectionately.

Jen then moved to another crate, this one was smaller and sitting under a stack of neatly folded work clothes. It contained several thick glass cylinders. Jen took four of the pale blue glasses out of the box and handed them to Kira, who set them next to the three open bottles.

“Want to use the Spice Wine for the neutral station?” Jen asked, picking up the largest bottle.

“Okay,” Kira agreed. “Then the Kanar is for a Balik and the Malduk is a Kosst.”

"Fair enough," Jen said taking the seat across from Kira. "You first," she added, pouring each a glass of the deep orange Klingon wine.

Kira took a sip of the wine and thought a moment. "I've got one. I saw Sk'tor a couple of years back when I was on Bajor and he actually partnered with Vleeta." Kira kept her expression neutral. Jen looked at her critically, studying her face and looking intently into her eyes.

"You did not," Jen said flatly.

Kira broke into a big grin. "You missed, have some Kanar." Jen shrugged and poured a small amount of the thick green liquid into the empty glass, next to her half full glass of orange wine. She took a sip of Kanar, savoring the sensation as the intoxicant eased down her throat.

"How long have they been together?" Jen asked.

"Since the Movement broke up. They even have a baby. You'll be happy to know that Sk'tor is a wonderful father. Vleeta has managed to take some of the rough edges off that bear."

"As I recall, Vleeta had her own share of rough edges." Jen smiled at a distant memory. "I'm sure Sk'tor had a leveling effect on her as well."

"Did you and Vleeta ever get along after I was captured?" Jen asked, curious.

"No," Kira answered simply. "She blamed me for your capture, and has hated me ever since. It would be nice if you got in touch and let her know you're alive."

Jen nodded sadly. "I will Nerys. I'm sorry, you know that people would put the blame on you. You didn't have anything to do with me getting captured."

Kira looked at Jen, guilt clouding her eyes, "I think that's still up for debate, my friend."

Jen nodded, deciding not to press the subject. "Okay, my turn." Kira took a sip of wine and acknowledged that she was ready for Jen's statement.

Jen looked at Kira and stated, matter-of-factly, "I've had sex with everyone in the band."

"Even the men?" Kira asked, with raised eyebrows.

"I said everyone, didn't I?" Jen replied.

Kira thought for a moment then smiled, "Then, I'd say you're lying."

"Okay you hit me; I haven't had sex with anyone in the band. Am I drinking," Jen grimaced, "or talking?"

Kira considered her options. Because Jen had been caught in a lie, she would have to drink a beverage of Kira's choosing or answer one question truthfully. The quicker Kira could get Jen drunk, the more questions she would ultimately have to answer. Kira decided to dispense with strategy. "You're talking," she said, and then her eyes lit up as a thin smile eased across her lips. "What are your aspirations with Dax?" she asked sweetly. Her smile intensified as Jen's face started to turn bright red.

"Besides rolling over and wishing her a good morning?" Jen grinned, unruffled by her own embarrassment. "She seems like an incredible person. I mean she's beautiful, but that goes without saying. She's smart, has a sense of humor, she speaks Klingon, what's not to love?"

Kira laughed; glad to finally feel like old friends with Jen again. The drummer threw back her in the laughter and in doing so, caused the midriff sweater to rise up on her abdomen. Kira stopped laughing. "Prophets! What happened to you?"

Jen opened her eyes and saw Kira staring at her stomach. Jen looked down at her abdomen at the three white parallel streaks running diagonally from under the soft green sweater into the black Klingon leather of her pants. As she sat up in her chair, the sweater moved back into its original position several inches above the waistline of her pants, concealing most of the scarring. "It's nothing, Kira," she quickly muttered.

"Bullshit, nothing," Kira shot back, then reached for the bottom of Jen's sweater and began to lift. Jen made no move to stop her. After seeing the extent of the scaring, Kira slowly lowered the sweater. She placed the palm of her hand on Jen's belly in a gesture of comfort before sitting back in her chair.

"How?" she asked quietly.

Jen turned her head to the side as she answered, unable to look Kira in the face. "Let's just say it was MarTay's way of establishing that I was not trying to entrap her in a sexual scandal."

"How, by killing you?" Kira was incredulous.

"Don't look for logic or reason in it, because there isn't any." Jen said, finally looking at Kira. "Cardassians are big on self-discipline and control. The fact that I didn't scream or try to stop her was very significant for MarTay. Once she was assured of my sincerity, we got along much better." Jen finished off the rest of the Kanar in her glass and poured herself another.

"What was it like?" Kira asked gently, when Jen had filled her glass.

"Sex with a Cardassian?" Jen looked questioningly at Kira, who nodded. Jen shrugged. "Like anyone else, it depends on the Cardassian. MarTay could actually be very giving, when she wasn't being manipulative. Male Cardassians are generally more aggressive during sex, more demanding. There are exceptions though," Jen smiled, remembering something fondly. "Generally, Cardassians are interested in tactile sensation. They want to be massaged, touched; in many instances, it goes as far as having joints and exo-cartilage realigned. Unlike Klingons, they rarely bite and when properly motivated, can be amazingly gentle."

"You sound like an expert," Kira noted, taking a deep sip of wine.

Jen looked at Kira, annoyance starting to creep into her voice. "It wasn't like it was my choice. Since you seem curious, I'll be blunt. I've been with three male Cardassians, including the one who raped me. No, the other two were not rape and one of those two was as pleasant as any woman I've been with. I've also been with seven female Cardassians, including MarTay. None of those experiences was particularly unpleasant; three – again including MarTay – were quite wonderful. And no, none of them could compare with you."

Kira blushed, embarrassed. "I'm sorry Jen. I didn't mean to… pry I guess, and I wasn't fishing for compliments. I shouldn't have brought it up. It's still your turn."

Jen smiled, tensions easing. "It's okay, Kira. If our places were switched, I'm sure I'd be just as curious and knowing me, half as tactful. Let's see, it's still my turn. Here's one. I've still got the photoimage from our field training," Jen said in her neutral 'game tone'.

Kira looked at her, stunned. "That's impossible." She shook her head in disbelief. Jen got up from her seat and went back to the crate. She extracted the worn photoimage, walked over to Kira, and handed her the old, partially burnt picture.

"I don't believe it. Look at us. You look so young, and your hair." She looked over at Jen, whose hair now reached well past her shoulders.

"I know," Jen said, smiling, "it was as short as yours is now. But not just me, look at how young you are. Hell, your hair was longer than mine is now."

Kira handed the photoimage back to Jen. "Didn't you seduce me during those field exercises?"

"I'm crushed you don't remember, Nerys. As a matter of fact, I think it was shortly after the photoimage was taken." Jen sipped her wine and studied her friend. "Sorry it happened?" she asked softly.

Shaking her head Kira answered, her voice cracking, “No, Bren. I’m sorry it ended messy, that’s all.” Then, regaining her composure, asked, “So, am I drinking or talking?”

Jen smiled softly. “Who was it, after me?”

Kira looked at Jen, studied her clear green eyes and sharp features. “I really loved Vedek Bareil,” she began. “Oh, but we had our differences. We used to argue about religion.” Kira smiled shyly at Jen. “I think you had more of an impact on me in that department than I’d care to admit. But Bareil was taken from me. He was fatally injured in a shuttle accident.”

“Wasn’t he next in line to be Kai?” Jen asked gently.

Kira nodded, fighting back tears. “Yes, he was. Kai Opaka had personally groomed him for the role of spiritual leader. Winn brought questions to light that forced Bareil to withdraw from the choosing or risk tarnishing Kai Opaka’s memory.”

“I’m sorry, Nerys,” Jen said softly.

“Me too, he would have made a good Kai.”

“No, I’m sorry you lost him,” Jen corrected.

“Tell me Bren,” Kira asked, redirecting the conversation, “do you remember Kai Opaka?”

Jen looked confused. “Of course I do. She was made Kai when we were little kids. I frankly don’t actually remember any other Kai. Winn didn’t take office until I was on Cardassia.” Jen’s expression turned to one of sadness. “I only heard sketchy reports about her death. MarTay told me she was dead, and was actually pretty nice about it. For some reason it really got to me. More than I’d have expected. I mean it isn’t as if I follow prophetic teaching or anything.”

“She was a kind person, Bren, and more than a spiritual leader.” Kira said gently.

“Yes, I suppose she was. I still miss her, I guess. I mean, here is a person I never met, who existed in a realm that didn’t really affect me directly and yet, I can feel a hole left by her passing.”

“I think all of Bajor feels it, Bren. I think we always will, even when someone comes to fill that hole.”

For over two hours, the Bajoran women quizzed each other and drank themselves into a stupor. Kira’s decision to dispense with strategy and simply ask Jen as many intimate questions as she could ultimately cost her; Jen saw to it that Kira had to switch between Kanar, Malduk, and Spice Wine frequently, hastening her inebriation. At that point, neither woman was very good at lying. After finishing off the Klingon wine, they found themselves sitting side by side on the floor, leaning against the side of Jen’s bed and drinking the last of the Malduk.

“You’re talking ‘isss time.” Kira slurred, slumping against the larger woman’s side to keep from falling over. “This is some *synth*” Kira muttered, shaking her head, “I can’t shake it off.”

Jen laughed, almost knocking her glass over, “This isn’t synthehol Nerys. This is real intoxicant. Whatever made you think it was *synth*?”

“Shit!” Kira exclaimed looking with newfound respect at her glass, “Thesssse are ressstricted substances then. No wonder I feel sleepy. Oh well,” she downed the contents of her glass, “what isss the connection ‘tween you and Garak?”

Jen, not quite a drunk as Kira, regarded her a long moment before answering. “If I tell you, it has to stay between us.” She put her arm around Kira’s shoulders to steady her.

“Fine,” Kira mumbled, snuggling comfortably against the drummer’s side.

"Cardassia has a very high infant mortality rate," Jen began. "As a result, physical unions that don't facilitate reproduction are strictly forbidden. The penalty for same-sex relationships is usually death." Jen glanced down at the Major, who was struggling to follow her conversation. "Of course, just because something is strictly forbidden, doesn't mean you can keep people from their basic nature for very long. Cardassians are like anyone else, and unfortunately for those who are oriented to their own gender, they have everything to lose. Once I realized MarTay's interest in me, and got her to act on it, she decided to use me as bait to discover the truth about other Cardassians. I'm not sure how Garak found out what was going on, but he did. He was a personal advisor to Enabran Tain who was head of the Obsidian Order. To buy his silence and insure his favor, MarTay 'loaned' me to Garak to alleviate rumors and discredit a pending investigation about our beloved tailor. You see, a male Cardassian getting caught having sex with a female Bajoran is considered quite erotic. And, if she's willing and conscious during the act, it's quite the conquest. Cardassians have very odd perceptions regarding sex."

Jen looked down to see Kira's response. Kira was leaned against Jen's side, snoring quietly.

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Odo was heading towards Security from the habitat ring when he noticed movement in *Quark's* and walked over to investigate. "Redecorating?" Odo asked gruffly, startling the Ferengi standing on the bar, hanging something on the wall above.

"Don't scare me like that Odo. I could have fallen." Quark said turning angrily to face the metamorph.

"Not likely," Odo retorted. "What are you doing, Quark?"

"Well now that you mention it, I am redecorating." Quark replied pleasantly, hanging the signed drum head on a peg over the center of the bar. Odo silently read the dedication.

"*Quark's Quartet,*" he said flatly. "Catchy name."

"Look, Odo, is there something I can do for you or are you just making up for the fact that you have no social life?" Quark hopped off the bar and began to pick up glasses as well as fragments of glasses from the tables, chairs and other areas of the bar.

"Actually, I was looking for Tosh Sener. I don't suppose you've seen him?" Odo looked around the bar., observing that it hadn't looked this damaged when it was full of people.

"He's up in the holosuite, packing up the instruments," Quark replied absently. "Rom! Get out here with that inventory list." The Ferengi turned to Odo, "If there's nothing else, I've got work to do."

"Of course," Odo said with a nod of his head. The shapeshifter turned and headed up the stairs leading to the holosuites.

Tosh was checking the tuning on his bladder pipes when he noticed Odo standing in the doorway.

"Hi Odo! If you're looking for Jen, I think she's retired to the ship for the night," Tosh offered in a friendly tone.

"Thank you, Tosh," Odo replied, in his usual gruff manner, "but I was looking for you."

Tosh looked surprised but grinned anyway. "After this evening at Sisko's, I'd think you'd be sick of talking to me."

Odo walked silently across the holosuite and sat on an empty drum case across from the dark-haired musician. He looked him in the eye as he calmly asked, "Does Jen know you're a Vedek?" Odo watched as the color began to drain from the young man's face.
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"What in the name of the Prophets makes you think I'm a Vedek?" Tosh exclaimed. The pipe player had regained his composure with remarkable speed and his surprised indignation appeared very natural.

"Tosh, I'll be blunt. I searched your ship. I found an elaborate drawing in a hidden compartment on one of your crates. I recognized the tattoo pattern from the file of Vedek Danl of the Lycene order, who broke into the computer system. I also know 'Tosh Sener' is an assumed name. I'm guessing that you're the missing Acolyte Sener of the Lycene Order. I assume that when you became a Vedek, your superiors decided for some reason that you should leave the order. Was it to locate Jen Brenmar?" Odo cocked his head and looked at the young man. Tosh was the largest of the group of musicians. He was more muscular than Dobin and appeared to be the oldest member of the group. Odo had noticed from the beginning that Tosh had been more protective of Jen and more hesitant around Starfleet personnel.

After studying Tosh's stony expression for a moment, Odo added, "I would also venture a guess that if you were to shave your head, you'd be sporting a similar tattoo to that of Vedek Danl."

"Have you told any of this to Jen yet?" Tosh asked quietly, defeated.

"No, I wanted to discuss it with you first. I'm interested in the part you play in this drama."

Tosh studied the shapeshifter's unnaturally smooth features for a few moments before responding. "You're right about my family name; it's not 'Tosh'. I was born Osht Sener, and yes, I was an Acolyte recently promoted to Vedek of the Lycene order. I didn't know that Danl was going to lock up the system here. I am familiar with the prophecy, though. Jen is the 'Speaker For The Dead', but she's also much more. I would be willing to sit down and talk with you and the Captain about this, provided what I tell you isn't disclosed to Jen until the proper time."

"Why don't you tell me what you have to say now?" Odo countered. "Depending on what you have to say, it might not be necessary to provide Jen with immediate disclosure."

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Jen tried without success to wake Kira. "Oh come on, Kira, you didn't have that many *misses*!" Frustrated, Jen tapped Kira's comm badge. "Odo, this is Jen."

Odo's response was immediate. "Yes, are you alright?"

"You'd better come to my ship. Kira's passed out drunk. She thought she was drinking synthehol and overdid it. Would you mind getting her back to her quarters?"

"I'll be right there."

It didn't take long for Odo to make his way to Jen's ship. He dispensed with pleasant courtesy and let himself on board by using emergency override codes in the airlock. Jen was not startled by his abrupt entrance.

"Is Major Kira alright?" Odo asked with genuine concern.

"She's going to be fine. She'll be sick in the morning, but fine after that. I hope I didn't wake you." Jen asked, looking at the shape shifter with concern of her own.

"No, I was still up." Odo looked at the unconscious form of his dear friend. "Should I take Kira to sickbay?" he asked. When Odo looked into Jen's face, he noticed that she looked different. Jen noticed the slight change in expression.

She smiled. "Yes, Odo, I'm drunk too. You're going to have to carry Kira. Even if you transport to sickbay, I'm afraid word of it will get around the station and I don't know who Kira
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will be angrier with, you or me." Jen struggled to keep the shape shifter's face in focus. "If I were you, I'd try to get her to her quarters as discreetly as possible. Call the doctor from there if you need to, and by all means stay out of her way tomorrow. The doctor can give her some stuff to help with the headache she'll have, but even so, she's going to feel pretty shitty."

Odo bent down and picked up the snoring form of Kira Nerys. She mumbled incoherently and threw her arm around his neck, shifting position.

Odo settled Kira into his arms and regarded Jan. "Will you be alright?"

"I'm fine; I'll sleep it off and be good as new tomorrow." She winked at the metamorph. "I've always handled intoxicants better than Kira.

As the Constable turned to go, Jen followed him to the main hold. "Really Odo, don't worry about Kira. Let her sleep this off and she'll be fine. Trust me, I know about these things."

Jen watched Odo carrying the sleeping Kira off the ship, then turned, and headed back to her quarters, intent on sleeping as well. As she walked toward the open doorway, she misjudged her distance and walked soundly into the bulkhead. She watched the hallway spin about her for a moment, then touched two fingers to her forehead, above her left eye. They came away bloodied. Her red fingertips were the last thing she saw before passing out.

Odo paused outside the airlock; the station traffic was nonexistent due to the lateness of the hour. Still holding Kira in his arms, he glanced up and down the empty hallway, deciding on a course of action. Quickly he headed to his own quarters. He would have less of the station to walk through, and if he were lucky, he wouldn't encounter anyone.

Upon reaching his quarters without incident, Odo confirmed the time: 0245 hours, according to the station computer. Odo realized that he'd spent more time talking with Tosh than expected. Still holding Kira, Odo settled onto the floor of his quarters, letting his mass form a cushioned support for her. He considered waking doctor Bashir. If the doctor were able to revive the sleeping Kira, he wouldn't need to report the incident to the Captain. If Bashir could do nothing for Kira, Odo would have to inform the Captain of Kira's incapacitation if his hunch proved accurate.

Before seeking out the newly discovered Vedek, Odo had gone to his security office to check for responses to queries he had issued that afternoon. As he had hoped, one of his contacts in the Bajoran provisional government had responded. A request for Jen Brenmar's arrest was making its way through the bureaucracy. Odo suspected that as soon as the order for detainment had been finalized, an envoy would be dispatched from Bajor. The Kai was getting desperate; her time was running out. He tapped his comm badge.

"Doctor Bashir."

"Yes, Odo. What is it?" came the doctor's sleepy reply.

"Would you please come to my quarters with a medikit?"

"What's wrong?" Bashir sounded more alert.

"Major Kira has had a bit too much to drink; I think you should see her." Odo kept his tone neutral.

"I'm on my way."

It didn't take long for the doctor to arrive at the Constable's quarters. The door opened instantly, and as Bashir approached, he was brought up short by what he encountered. Kira lay on something looking very much like a low couch, but with a head. It was Odo.

"By all means Doctor, come in." Odo said stiffly.

Julian realized he'd been standing in the doorway, preventing the door from closing. Bashir quickly crossed the room, taking out his medical tricorder as he did so. He quickly scanned the Major and looked at Odo's face, which emerged from one end of the 'couch'.

"Do you know what's she's been drinking?" Bashir asked.

"I noticed an open bottle of vintage Kanar, kis, and Klingon Spice wine on the table." Odo answered.

"That would explain it," Bashir commented, taking a silver cylinder from his medikit and passing it back and forth across Kira's forehead. "Especially if it was the same caliber as the wine Jen brought to Sisko's. Her blood alcohol is very high, clearly not synth. How was Jen?"

"She was conscious." Odo replied flatly.

"Yes, well," Bashir began. Kira started to regain consciousness, too groggy to be surprised by her surroundings. "How are you feeling Major?" Bashir asked cheerfully.

She was still quite inebriated. "Not very good I –" Kira was interrupted by the chirp of her comm badge.

"Major Kira, this is Sisko." Kira cringed at the crisp volume of the Captain's voice.

"Yes, Captain." She tried keeping her voice level.

"A shuttle has just departed Bajor from the Central Temple complex. It's Kai Winn. You've got twenty minutes to get Jen's ship out of here."

"I'm afraid Major Kira isn't flying anywhere." Bashir responded before Kira could speak.

"Bashir?" Sisko said, surprised. "What's going on?"

"I'm fine, Doctor," Kira began.

"No, you're not, Major." Bashir retorted, then to Sisko, "I'm sorry Captain, but Major Kira isn't in any condition to fly. I'm with her in Odo's quarters. She and Jen have been catching up on old times with a good deal of alcohol."

"I see," Sisko said, clearly annoyed. "I'll get Dax then. Constable I'd like you to prepare a reception for Kai Winn. And Major, I'd appreciate your help. When you're feeling up to it."

"Yes, Captain," Kira replied, glaring at Bashir.

When the Captain broke the comm link, Kira got up angrily from Odo, took a step towards Bashir, and promptly fell down, her head spinning.

Bashir bent down, injected her with a hypospray, and looked at Odo, who had morphed into his usual humanoid form.

"You see? I do know what I'm talking about."

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"Dax! This is Sisko; I need you to wake up, Old Man."

"Yes, Benjamin," Dax said to the empty air of her dark bedroom. She was a light sleeper and Sisko's urgency was more than enough to wake her.

"I need you to get Jen and her ship away from the station. Kira can't fly, I think she's drunk, and Kai Winn's personal shuttle craft left Bajor a few minutes ago. Odo warned me that an arrest warrant was in the works, and the provisional government seems to be getting more efficient. You've got about eighteen minutes."

Dax sat up. "I'm on my way, Benjamin. How long do you want us to stay away from the station?" She was already mentally formulating what she'd need.

"There hasn't been any activity in the Gamma Quadrant; you should be fine out there for a few hours. I'll let you know when the coast is clear."
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As he spoke, Dax had gotten up and quickly dressed. She put on black stretch pants and quickly slipped into a Klingon smock that tied in the front. She stepped into a soft pair of short boots and ran a brush through her loose hair.

"Be careful, Old Man. At the first sign of any Jem'Hadar or Dominion activity, I want you back on this station. I'm not going to help Jen out at the cost of her safety or your own."

"We'll be fine, Benjamin," Dax reassured her friend. "I'll wait to hear from you." She tapped her comm badge, breaking the link with Sisko. "Ops, this is Lieutenant Commander Dax, I need emergency transport."

"I already got the call from Sisko," O'Brien's calm voice responded. "Nice time to go sightseeing. Would the command station of Jen's ship be acceptable?"

"Thanks, Miles. That would be perfect." Dax smiled, relieved.

Dax materialized in the command station of *No Regrets*. She quickly keyed in a comm link to O'Brien at Ops. "Releasing docking clamps."

"You look clear from here. And, Commander, I've done a scan of the ship. Jen is sleeping in the main hold. Seems a pity to go sightseeing without a passenger."

Dax took a moment to scan the control panel. The controls were of a standard configuration for a cargo vessel. "Thanks Chief. I'm engaging impulse thrusters now," Dax replied, fingers swiftly moving across the controls. "I'll see you sometime tomorrow."

"Have fun." Dax heard O'Brien say before she keyed in the coordinates to take her through the wormhole. She swore she could hear him smiling.

After reaching the Gamma Quadrant, Dax quickly scanned the long-range sensors for any signs of company or activity. Assured that *No Regrets* was quite alone in this sector, she keyed an alarm sequence into the sensor arrays. If anyone dropped by for a visit, she'd know about it with enough time to prepare a suitable reception. Rising from the pilot's seat, she walked back to the main hold area to look for Jen.

The ship was small and Dax found the drummer lying on her back on the floor, just inside the doorway of her quarters. Noticing a thin trickle of blood trailing from her forehead above her eye down the side of her face, she turned and hurried down the hall looking for the 'fresher. As required, a medikit panel was clearly marked just outside. She grabbed the contents and returned to the Bajoran's quarters.

The mini-tricorder confirmed her suspicions that the cut was superficial. She dabbed at the cut with a medisponge to remove the blood and mend the wound. Jen seemed about to open her eyes but instead heaved a sigh of deep sleep.

"Sleep it off," Dax said quietly as she lightly traced the side of Jen's face with her fingertip and stood, momentarily considered lifting Jen onto the bed and decided against it. It would only wake her and she seemed comfortable where she was. Instead, she took a pillow and the coverlet off the bed and propped up Jen's head, then tucked her in on the floor.

As she turned to leave the room, something on the table caught her eye; the distinctive bottle of a rare vintage Kanar. Seeing a glass on the table containing a bit of the greenish liquid, Dax picked it up and poured what little was left of the bottle into the glass. There wasn't much, but it would help pass the time until she would be able to return the ship to the station.

Making her way back to the pilot's console, Dax took a sip of Kanar and looked around. A padd, stylus, and assorted programs sat neatly arranged on the console across from her. Dax glanced at the padd as she picked up the program and smiled. It was a set list from the evening's performance. All of the entries were written in a simple clear style, except for the title of the closing song, *Kashmir*. This was added by another hand, with several ornamental

embellishments. Hearts and love signs were drawn around the entry, to which the straightforward print responded, '*very funny Keyla*'.

Dax noticed the program of Trill music she had given Jen in the player. She removed it and chose a program cylinder with the name *Sam Phillips* printed on the side. She interested it, and the sound of a strong female voice filled the command area.

I left my conscience like a crying child
locked the doors behind me and put the pain on file
broken like a window I see my blindness now

I need love
Not some sentimental prison
I need god
Not the political church
I need fire
To melt the frozen sea inside me
I need love

Driving into town tired and depressed
Like a flare, the streetlight bursts an S.O.S.
Peace come to my rescue I don't know what it means

I need love
Not some sentimental prison
I need god
Not the political church
I need fire
To melt the frozen sea inside me
I need love

As Dax listened to the music, she sipped the Cardassian Kanar and savored both the warm sensation on her lips and the warmth of the music.

"I'm glad to see you appreciate vintage Kanar as well as Sam Phillips." Dax spun in the pilot's seat to see Jen, rumpled but conscious, leaning against the bulkhead.

Dax glanced down at the half empty glass of Kanar she held, its bright green color tinting the clear glass. "I didn't want it to go to waste, and I didn't think you'd mind. You looked like you'd had enough."

"I'm glad you did, and I'm happy to see you making yourself at home." Jen replied, flopping into her seat behind the empty co-pilot chair.

"I'm surprised you're already conscious. You drank enough of this to keep you out for days." Dax handed her the glass. Jen took a small sip and handed it back.

"The Kanar didn't stand a chance. The neural antioxidants Doctor Bashir gave me seem to have helped. Is there a reason the ship has moved? Last time I looked out this window I had a great view of *Terok Nor*." Jen asked, glancing out the window in front of them.

"Let's just say you're missing the surprise party Kai Winn was planning for you," Dax replied, smiling.

Jen looked concerned. "I'm thrilled, but I must admit I'm surprised Starfleet decided to get involved."

"Starfleet isn't involved," the Trill replied calmly. "I'm off duty. As you can see, I'm not in my uniform; I had planned to give you a brief tour of the wormhole and Gamma Quadrant and left before Benjamin could stop me. Granted, I wasn't expecting you to be inebriated, but some things can't be helped."

Jen looked thoughtful and then smiled knowingly "I see. Kira was supposed to get me out of the way, only Winn acted sooner than expected, and because our beloved Major was too drunk to fly, Sisko called you, briefed you on the situation, and you decided we had better keep our date with the Prophets."

Jadzia smiled taking another sip of the Kanar "You could put it that way."

Jen touched the bandage over the cut on her temple. "Dax, do you realize that you seem to be making a habit out of saving me?"

"Now that you mention it, I seem to be saving you from yourself," she replied passing the glass.

Jen smiled. "Maybe someday I'll be able to return the favor." She toasted the Trill, took a sip, and passed the glass back.

Dax looked perplexed. "You mean save me from myself?"

"No," Jen said, enjoying the tingling sensation of the Kanar as it played on her lips. "Save you from me."

Dax arched her eyebrows, a small smile playing at the corners of her mouth as she looked at Jen. "Are you so sure that's what I want?" she asked quietly.

Jen grinned warmly at the Trill. "Now who's the flirt?"

Without taking her eyes from the Bajoran's face, Dax put the glass of Kanar on the console, gracefully stood, and leaned over to Jen. Resting her hands on either side of Jen's chair against the console behind the Bajoran, she slowly lowered her face to a few centimeters from the drummer.

"I have a secret for you, Bren," Dax said softly, her eyes smiling. "Trills don't flirt."

With that, she gently touched her lips to Jen's. The moist warmth of their lips mixed with the tingle of the Cardassian liquor and shot waves of adrenalin through both women. Jen kissed with a restrained eagerness that Jadzia found irresistible. With eyes closed, Jen was aware of every sensation rushing through her: The softness of Dax's skin and mouth, her scent, the playfulness of her tongue. Jen gently touched Dax's silky brown hair; not confined to its usual ponytail, it cascaded softly around the Trill's face. Jadzia responded ardently to the kiss and caresses, returning them with hunger and little restraint. There was an understanding this time around, no longer uncertainty as to where the women wanted to go, and it was freeing.

With strong arms, Jen embraced Jadzia's body and held her close, gently touching the Commander's face, ears, and neck as she kissed her. She was rewarded with even more unrestrained passion from the Trill. Dax knew what she liked and was delighted at the degree that this young Bajoran woman was turning her on. Lips, face, and throat were all caressed by Jen's gentle kisses. When her mouth found Jadzia's ear lobe, the Trill was no longer breathing, but was gasping in short pants of air.

Finally, Jen pulled back enough to regard the Trill. She felt wonderfully lost in the liquid blue eyes returning her gaze. "This is so much better than in the 'fresher," Jen said softly, her voice teeming with emotion.

Jadzia smiled. "Well you did say five of your top ten fantasies involved me on your ship." Before Jen could respond, she continued, "Oh, that's right, you're a harmless flirt. Sorry I forgot."

Jen smiled back at her. “Trust me, my fantasies can’t compare with this reality. Oh, but you’re a Trill with no sex drive. Yeah, that’s it.”

Dax leaned in and kissed Jen again, beginning at the clavicle and moving up the jugular vein to the base of the drummer’s ear. Between kisses she managed, “Interested… in seeing… just how little… sex drive… I have?”

“Yes,” Jen whispered very softly, need and desire clear in her voice. The Bajoran stood and walked backwards towards her quarters on the small ship, kissing and caressing the Trill as she went.

When they stumbled into Jen’s quarters and reached the bed, Jadzia eased her backwards, sliding her elegant hands under the Bajoran’s sweater, pleased she had not changed clothes since dinner at Sisko’s. Dax was delighted with the soft texture of the sweater and the powerful pulse beating beneath Jen’s warm skin. She enjoyed the soft sensation of the woven material underneath her fingers as she caressed the drummer through the fabric, as well as the feel of the sweater on the top of her hand as she touched warm skin underneath. As she eased the sweater higher, Jen flinched. Puzzled, Jadzia looked first to Jen’s face, then to her abdomen; the pain of memory was clear in the drummer’s eyes as Jadzia gaped with disbelief at her torso.

“I’m sorry, Jadzia. I didn’t know how to warn you,” was all Jen could say as she fought to keep her voice from breaking. Running diagonally across her hip and disappearing under her sweater were three very deep, distinct parallel scars. “It’s almost as bad on my back,” Jen added. Dax had thought there might be scars on Jen’s chest, after seeing her in wet undergarments in the holosuite, but had not expected the damage to be this extensive.

“It’s alright,” Dax whispered as she leaned close, moving her head to Jen’s left shoulder. She softly nuzzled her neck for a moment. “It’s alright,” she repeated, and gently pulled the sweater up and over Jen’s head. Gently, Dax pushed her down on to the bed and let her hair brush against the Bajoran’s skin. To Jen’s astonishment, Jadzia kissed the first scar, tracing its length across the drummer’s muscular torso, flicking her tongue across it in places. Her loose hair lightly brushing against Jen’s skin produced a sensation somewhere between a caress and a tickle. Jen closed her eyes, reveling in the sensations. Jadzia kissed the other two scars in the same fashion, moving to her neck, before finding her mouth once again. They kissed deeply for long minutes. Dax felt something wet on her cheek and pulled back. A single tear was tracing its way down the drummer’s cheek.

“Thank you,” Jen said simply.

Jadzia caressed the Bajoran’s face and kissed the tear away as well.

Sitting up, Jen reached for the tie in the front of the Dax’s shirt. Undoing it, she eased her hands inside and tenderly touched the Trill’s back, then her breasts, greedy hands gently exploring the Trill’s flesh. She slowly slid the shirt off Dax’s spotted shoulders and let the grey garment fall to the deck of the ship. Jen sat there a moment, not moving, not saying anything, staring at Jadzia. “What is it?” Jadzia asked, concern creeping into her voice.

“It’s nothing, except that you are so beautiful. Your spots… they’re exquisite,” Jen stammered, eyes wide with disbelief.

Jadzia smiled and climbed onto the bed with Jen, gently running her hand up the length of Jen’s inner thigh, enjoying the soft feel of the black leather pants, caressing Jen’s hips, butt, and thighs through the soft Klingon leather.

“I’m glad they meet with your approval,” Dax whispered as she slowly began to unbutton the fasteners along the outside seam of Jen’s pants. “But there are more where these came from.”

Jen responded by reaching hungrily for the Trill. In a matter of moments, the rest of their clothing joined the gray tunic and green sweater on the deck. For the first time since deciding to kiss the Bajoran, Dax felt apprehensive about what she wanted to happen next. Faced with the nervousness and excitement of being with someone for the first time she hesitated and looked at Jen, almost as if suddenly seeing her clearly.

"Are you okay?" Jen asked, sensing Jadzia's apprehension.

Dax laughed, enjoying the sensation, "I can't believe I'm actually nervous."

"I don't think that's so odd. I'm kinda nervous too," Jen supplied helpfully.

"What I mean is that I've got 300 years of memories. I simply don't get *nervous*."

"Is it me?" Jen asked, sounding concerned. Dax looked at her, confused. "Because I'm Bajoran? A possible religious icon? What?" Dax smiled warmly and leaned in to kiss Jen again.

"It's not that Bren," Dax said softly. "Sometimes I have trouble turning off my analytical mind; just one of the idiosyncrasies of being this particular Joined Trill."

Jen propped herself up on an elbow. Looking down, she gently caressed Dax. She traced the lines of freckle like markings that ran from the sides of the Trill's beautiful face, over the collar bone and down each side of her torso. "You could try," she said, leaning down, kissing the hollow area of the collarbone where it met the shoulder. Encouraged by Dax's pleasurable moan, Jen kissed the lines of Trill spots down to her stomach.

"That feels wonderful." Jadzia sighed. With ardent lips, Jen continued to trace the exotic spots as Dax gently caressed Jen's back. The articulation of Jen's spine was similar to that of the bridge of her nose. Dax caressed the ridges and moaned softly and the exquisite sensation of Jen's long hair softly caressing her torso.

When Jen reached the base of Dax's abdomen, she noticed an unusual horizontal slit a short distance above her pelvic area. She caressed the area gently.

"Is this where Dax lives?"

Jadzia laughed. "I suppose you could say that. That is where the symbiont enters during a Joining. But at this point the symbiont is actually farther up in the abdominal cavity."

With one hand sliding up the outside of Jadzia's thigh, across her stomach to her breast, Jen began slowly caressing the downy hair between Jadzia's legs with the other. As Jadzia murmured encouragement, Jen kissed the symbiont orifice. Jadzia did not expect Jen to do that, nor did she expect the intense feelings of pleasure that she derived from it. On two separate levels, she could feel the stimulation of her pleasure centers. Her skin tingled from the gentle contact and sent waves of sensation directly to the symbiont inside of her. Her heart pounding, Dax felt a surge of synaptic activity between Host and Symbiont. Everything was intensified, her awareness as well as her desire. At that point, she felt something she had never experienced, nor had any of the previous Dax hosts. A frightening ripping sensation rushed through her as she felt the reassuring calm of her symbiont.

A Trill Symbiont is a thick, short, slug-like creature. While it consists of a basic trunk, it also has several shorter anchor-like appendages, which in turn have many cilia like roots, which keep the symbiont stable inside of the Host. Jadzia realized that the Dax symbiont had pulled one of its internal anchors free. As Jen explored the soft wetness between Jadzia's legs with her fingers, she continued to kiss the area around the slit on her abdomen. She was surprised to feel the flesh move, and even more surprised to feel movement inside. Jadzia was sure she'd explode.

For a Joined Trill, the Symbiont dispassion for sexual intimacy is something to be put out of mind during sex, but a present part of the Trill psyche nonetheless. Now however, Jadzia was experiencing a strong curiosity on the part of her Symbiont. Void of the usual emotional

damping Dax supplied, Jadzia struggled to contain her ecstasy, even as she could feel the frightening sensations of the loose anchor moving inside of her. The wetness between her legs intensified as her arousal increased. This encouraged the Bajoran to move with a steady rhythm, thus increasing her sense of lust and desire. Like the most perfect of vicious cycles, the lack of symbiont dampening intensified everything, from her wetness to the depth of her panting, driving her pleasure forward, far beyond any sense of self-regulation.

As Jen kissed the Trill's abdomen, she felt the two folds of skin part. A small flat appendage began to work its way out. It was pale gray in color, and glistened slightly. It had many smaller appendages attached to it and resembled an oblong sea anemone. The cilia like fibers moved in unison.

"And this is Dax, I presume?" she breathed softly to it. The magnitude of sensation was almost overwhelming. As Jadzia felt the warm air touch the cilia of her symbiont anchor, she bit her lip; Jen gently kissed the small section of slowly undulating cilia, her eyes shot up in alarm as Jadzia cried out. It took a moment for Jen to realize that the Trill was not in pain, rather the opposite. Jen continued to explore Jadzia's vagina with her fingers, the gentle rhythm giving way to a more forceful movement in and out of the Trill's body. Quite intent on her own pleasure, Jadzia was moving against the Bajoran with an increasingly forceful rhythm, making it clear exactly what was required of the moment.

The flat section of cilia slowly started to recede back into the Jadzia's body and as it did, Jen gently drew her tongue along its length. Jen had expected Jadzia to cry out again, but she did not expect the intensity of the orgasm that was the result. Jadzia's entire body shuddered as her vagina contracted in strong spasms. The pleasurable sensations emanating from her own nervous system as well as that of the symbiont that shared her consciousness was almost too much for her. When the forceful panting slowed to heavy breathing, Jadzia opened her eyes she looked down her body to Jen, whose face was still hovering near her abdomen.

"My dear 'Zia," Jen said with a smile, "I'm not done with you yet."

Before Jadzia could respond, Jen had lowered her face to the warm, wet area between the Trill's legs. Again, she tried to stifle the cry of delight that escaped her throat as she felt Jen's tongue caress her labia then slide easily into her. She began to rock her hips back and forth as Jen easily stroked with her tongue, caressing with skill and delight. Proficiently and unhurried, the Bajoran increased the tempo until in a matter of moments she was again riding the crest of orgasm. Her entire universe was her connection to the woman between her legs; she arched her back, offering herself completely to that union. She continued to climax and re-climax until at last, she felt completely and utterly spent. It was all she could do to focus on her breathing to avoid losing consciousness. Movement of her limbs was out of the question. Slowly, Jen stretched out to lie alongside of Jadzia, wrapping her arms protectively around the exhausted Trill and with a contented sigh buried her face in the nape of Dax's neck. "You have no idea what you've just given me," Jadzia said softly, when she could finally speak.

"An orgasm, I hope," Jen chuckled.

"I have never felt like this before…" Jadzia began.

"Don't worry, you're young," Jen interjected.

"…in over 300 years," she concluded.

"Does that mean you'll let me do it again?" Jen asked nibbling on the lower lobe of Dax's ear.

With a sigh, Dax rolled over, tucking Jen beneath her. "Later, definitely," she said, noting as she gazed into the Bajoran's eyes the fire that smoldered beneath the surface. Determined to

fan that fire into an inferno, she kissed Jen gently at first, intrigued by the taste on Jen's lips that she knew was her own.

As she focused her attention on the drummer's lithe body, memories of Torias and Curzon came flooding back. Delighting in the sensation of Jen's nipple hardening in her mouth, she did her best to put the intrusive memories aside. It was fundamentally important for her to find her own way, to try as much as she could relate to Jen as Jadzia and less as Dax. Like with any new partner, she was willing to feel awkward at times for the sake of discovering her own avenues of pleasure. She did her best to take Jen's advice and refrain from constant self-analysis. As Jen enthusiastically responded to her kisses and caresses, she found that task surprisingly easy.

The fire of Jen's desire fully ignited, Jadzia's instinct proved accurate. She reacted on impulse alone and discovered she was pleasing Jen, fully and repeatedly. Finally, the two women rested together, Jadzia lying on top of Jen, resting her head on the drummer's muscular chest.

Looking up, Jadzia gently traced the outline of the Bajoran's ear with her finger. She gently touched the fifteen small silver rings. "What do these mean?" she asked, her voice a contented purr.

Jen lay back on the bed and caressed Dax's head, playing with the long tresses of hair. "Do you mean earrings in general or the difference between me and Kira?"

"Either. –Both. I love hearing the sound of your voice. It has something to do with the *pagh*, right?"

"Right. Have you ever had your *pagh* examined?" Jadzia shook her head.

"I didn't think I had one," Jadzia smiled. "I'm not Bajoran -after all."

"You're certainly not that," Jen grinned devilishly. She sat up and faced Jadzia, gently grasping her right earlobe. "Everyone has a *pagh*." She squeezed and Jadzia flinched; it didn't really hurt but the pressure against her ear was unusual.

"Don't think about it," Jen whispered. "Just relax."

Dax closed her eyes, trying to enjoy the odd sensation of the energy coursing through her.

Jen then closed her eyes, opening herself to the impressions she was receiving. "This is interesting," she continued, "Dax has a pagh as well, I'm seeing two together, only slightly out of synch." She let go of Dax's ear and laughed. "It's no use - you're feeling too good right now for an accurate reading."

Dax smiled. "I'm not surprised," she said dreamily, cuddling close to Jen. "So, what do they mean?"

"Well," Jen began, once again stroking Dax's hair as she talked, "they represent the fifteen houses of being which are: self, family, spirit, expression, friend, partner, duty, service, exploration, ambition, pleasure, sex, creation, home, and acceptance. When someone who follows the 'old religion' turns ten, they are given their first ring, here on the bottom." Jen pointed to the largest ring pierced through the base of her right earlobe. "They spend the next year meditating and learning about the 'self' and try to put their understanding in some sort of balance. The next year, they are given their next ring for 'family,' and study the differences between family and self. Granted, children also learn about home, duty, pleasure and all the rest of it, but in a spiritual sense, the focus is just on the first two, and understanding when self and family are in balance. This continues until the person is twenty-five and they are given their last ring, 'acceptance'. Now they are supposed to have the tools and understanding necessary to keep their lives in balance."

"How is that different from the earring Kira wears?" Dax asked, rolling on top of Jen, resting her head on top of Jen's chest listening to the beating of the drummer's strong heart.

"I think that the contemporary religious practices are essentially a watered-down version of the traditional. The bottom earpiece represents 'family', and each family has a different sign. The top cuff represents unity with the rest of Bajor and the universe, and the chain represents everything in between. I think people got squeamish about all the piercing," Jen chuckled. "Balance is important but so much more emphasis has been placed on the so-called 'teachings' of the Prophets. I was overjoyed at the discovery of the wormhole and the beings that live there. While many saw it as evidence to support their beliefs, I saw it as proof that people are putting too much of their destiny into the hands of others." Jen shifted position, effectively rolling on top of Dax and kissed her tenderly. "So, when do we go through the Celestial Temple, anyway?" Jen asked looking deeply into Dax's blue eyes.

Dax returned the kisses with renewed ardor. "We're already there," she said smiling and Jen was too distracted with renewed passion to ask what she meant.

Chapter 11

"She's been taken where?" Tosh shouted at Kira, furiously pacing *Deep Space Nine's* security office. Kira, sitting behind Odo's desk, looked at the angry musician and took a deep breath. She reminded herself that her headache was her own fault for assuming that Bren was serving syntohol, *like every other civilized sector of the quadrant*.

"Look Tosh," she said evenly, wishing her headache would go away, "you don't need to yell. Dax took her to the Gamma Quadrant to keep her away from Winn. Odo is dealing with the Kai as we speak and I need to go join him."

Odo and Kira had been on their way to meet the Kai's shuttle when they encountered Tosh looking frantically for Jen's ship. Odo quickly explained that Jen was no longer on the station and the dark haired Bajoran went ballistic. Kira thought he might need to be restrained when she finally managed to talk him into accompanying her to Odo's office to discuss it.

"You don't understand Major. Jen *can't* go to the Celestial Temple."

Kira shook her head in puzzlement. "Nothing happens, Tosh. I've been through it myself. Prophets Tosh, she's with Dax! And believe me, Dax isn't going to let anything happen to her."

Tosh took several deep breaths. Kira didn't know the prophecies and obviously didn't know he was a Vedek; Odo must not have had time to fill her in. "Major, are you familiar with the ninth prophecy of Kai Re'tor?" Tosh asked, trying to be patient.

"A little," she replied defensively.

"Re'tor wrote that 'First of the dead will pass through the temple gates, to speak for the rest, to the end of tomorrows'. Kira, do you believe that Jen is the Speaker For The Dead?"

"I don't know, Tosh."

"Let me put it to you this way, Nerys," Tosh said with eyes of stone boring into the Major. "Jen *is* the *Speaker For The Dead*. If she passes through the temple gates, she isn't going to come back; if Dax is with her then she's lost too."

"You can't know that for a fact, Tosh," Kira responded, concern creeping into her voice. "Prophecy is wide open to interpretation."

"For all our sakes, I hope you're right," Tosh said, calming down. "Jen's religious significance aside, why is the Kai here?"

Kira considered a moment before telling Tosh the truth. "An arrest warrant has been processed for Jen… as well as the rest of you."

"I suspected as much. Nerys, I've talked to Odo, and I have an idea. If the Kai can be kept on the station for a while, Odo and I may be able to get some evidence to spell out exactly what's going on here. We can't do that if Winn takes us back to Bajor in restraints. We're going to need your help." As if to give the Major proof of his sincerity, he pulled his black hair to the side and showed Kira the back of his neck.

"I had no idea!" Kira gasped at the sight of a black tattoo running up the back of his neck, disappearing into his hairline.

"You're not supposed to," he replied, turning back around. "You and Odo are thus far the only ones who know."

"Why haven't you told Jen?" Kira asked, still stunned.

"You know how much Jen trusts Bajor's spiritual leadership; if she knew I was a Vedek I doubt she'd have two words for me. That wouldn't help me fulfill my appointed task."

"Which is…"

"And the speaker shall have four companions. In heart, soul, conscience, and life, together in the revelation of the self shall the ones who are gone find their voice." Tosh shrugged.

"Kai Re'tor again?" Kira asked.

Tosh nodded. "Yes, same prophecy, earlier stanza. My order believes that I am the conscience. It is my duty to see that Jen comes to understand who she is and to see that she accepts it. Only that can't happen until everything is in place or the Prophecy won't unfold as it should. I'm certain Dobin is the soul and Keyla is the heart… and I think you're the companion, the life."

"*Me!*" Kir exclaimed, "That can't be. There's no way. It must be Jadzia."

"It can't be Jadzia, Nerys. She isn't Bajoran, and the prophecies are specific when they mention off-worlders."

"Can't they be a little less specific in this case?" Kira pleaded.

"No. But, perhaps. We'll know more if Odo and I are successful in our search on Bajor."

Kira nodded, her head still swimming from the flood of possibilities unleashed by the Vedek. "What are you looking for on Bajor?" She asked as they stood to leave Odo's office.

"Opaka's journal."

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Quark finished filling out the form. "I guess that takes care of that, Major," he said, handing the padd back to Kira. "If there isn't anything else, I'd like to go back to bed now; I can't believe you actually work at this hour." Quark was still in his bed clothes, even louder and more garish than his usual suits.

"Thank you, Quark. If there is anything else, I'll let you know," Kira said, stepping aside so the Ferengi could pass.

"Just see to it that there isn't anything else." Then with a nod to the three Bajoran's in the holding cell he said, "When you see Jen, tell her she owes me one."

"Bye, Quark." Dobin, Keyla, and Tosh responded in unison.

"I still don't see why we're confined," Keyla complained.

Kira looked at the two musicians in the holding cell. Dobin had been hastily awakened, Keyla had been rudely interrupted, and Quark had supplied the complaint to lock them up.

"Look, Keyla," Tosh said to the younger woman as if he'd grown tired of explaining it; "Odo and I need to get to the surface of Bajor. We've got to find something and bring it back.
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We don't want the Kai there when we do it. If the Kai arrests us we'll all be heading back to Bajor."

"Don't be such an ass, Tosh," Keyla snapped, annoyed at the patronizing tone the piper had taken.

"Keyla's right Tosh, lighten up," Dobin joined in. "Besides don't you think that a station runabout will gather attention heading to the surface shortly after the Kai's arrival here?"

"He's got a point there, Tosh," Major Kira concurred. "The Kai isn't stupid. She's going to expect you to do something."

"So, don't use a runabout." Keyla offered.

"And do what?" Tosh snapped, "Fly?"

"Not only are you occasionally an ass, Tosh Sener," Keyla said, trying to be patient, "sometimes you're a dumb ass. It isn't as if I'm not worried sick about Jen too. Are you forgetting I'm madly in love with her? Lighten up and trust that Dax will take care of her." Then remembering her suggestion, she added, "If we can't use a runabout, let's use another ship." She held up her hands to silence the questions she knew were coming. "Are you forgetting that we've got a station full of 'family' surrounding us? Reylana and Soktor weren't happy about being interrupted this evening, but I'm sure they'd arrange a trip for you to Bajor on their ship."

Dobin and Tosh looked at each other. Dobin spoke first, "Admit it Tosh," he said grinning. "She's a genius."

"If the Kai comes looking for us," Keyla began, beaming at Dobin's compliment, "she's going to notice you're not locked up with us."

"We can tell the Kai that we're still looking for Tosh, if it comes to that," Kira suggested. "But you're going to have to work quickly. We won't be able to stall her for very long."

Tosh nodded. "Understood."

Kira hurried to Ops. As she stepped off the turbo lift, she saw Kai Winn with two attendants talking in a heated voice to Odo and Sisko. Miles O'Brien was standing at his engineering console, taking in the scene with some amusement. Kai Winn was visibly surprised to see Kira.

"There, you see. I told you that Major Kira didn't take Jen anywhere," Sisko said in a calm voice. "Now, if you'll just step into my office I'm sure we can discuss this matter civilly."

Kai Winn turned angrily to Kira. "Where is Jen Brenmar?" she demanded, grabbing the Major's right ear and looking intently into her face.

Kira answered in a neutral voice. "She is with Commander Dax. They had plans to visit the Celestial Temple, and I assume that's where they went."

"I have a detainment document for her arrest," Winn purred to Kira. "If you are involved with assisting her in any way it will be serious trouble for you."

Kira met the Kai's gaze without fear. "I am an officer of the Bajoran Militia. If there is an arrest warrant out for Jen Brenmar, it is my duty to see to it that she is presented to the proper authorities for due processing."

Winn smiled at Kira. "I'm glad I have your support. Commander, get them back here!" She snapped angrily at Sisko.

"The *Captain* can't do that, your Eminence," O'Brien announced from his station, emphasizing Sisko's correct rank. All eyes turned to the Chief Petty Officer.

"Jen mentioned some problems with the ship's long range communications systems. I had one of my crews check it out and they found this," he held up a ragged piece of hardware. "I was going to replace it personally, but Commander Dax and Jen left before I had a chance."

"Your Eminence," Sisko offered pleasantly, "I'm sure they will be back in a day or so. You are welcome to stay here if you like..."

"I don't have that much time, *Captain*," Winn replied, shooting an angry glance to the O'Brien. "Viss'r Vardel begins the day after tomorrow and as the spiritual leader of my people, I have preparations to make."

"We would be happy to hold Jen here until the ritual is finished," Sisko offered.

"I'm sure you would," Winn glared from Kira to Sisko, "but it looks like it will have to do. In the meantime, I also have warrants for the arrest of Dobin Veran, Keyla Ris, and Tosh Sener as accomplices. I will take them with me." She smiled darkly with a look of satisfaction.

"What are the charges?" Kira asked.

Kai Winn motioned to one of her attendants, a beefy fellow and clearly a bodyguard, he handed her a data padd.

"See for yourself," Winn said flatly.

Kira took the offered padd and quickly scanned the screen, then handed the padd to Odo. "I'm sorry, but you can't have them," Kira said simply.

"What?!" Winn verged on apoplectic. "You have no right to deny me…"

"I'm afraid I do, your Eminence," Kira began. "Dobin and Keyla are being held in our detention facility. We're still looking for Tosh. They are charged with inciting a riot, destruction of private property, attempted assault, and lewd and lascivious behavior." At that last charge, Sisko and Odo looked at Kira questioningly. She met their gaze and simply said, "Keyla."

"These charges are more serious than being an unwitting accomplice," Odo commented. "Since this station is owned and governed by the Bajoran government, they will need to face the charges here first. Once a magistrate has heard the matter, they could then be sent to Bajor. I'm sure you could expedite things, your Eminence, and we could get a magistrate here in as little as eight hours."

Kai Winn regained her composure. "I will contact Bajor. Keep me apprised of the situation here, Captain," she nodded to Sisko. "I will be in the temple."

Sisko nodded his head to the Kai, "Yes, your Eminence."

As soon as the Kai left Ops Sisko turned to Kira and Odo. "What in blazes is going on here?"

"We could be very close to getting to the bottom of this, Captain." Odo replied gruffly. "If the Kai remains on the station for a few hours I may be able to get you the evidence you need to put this entire ordeal behind us."

"Fine. Do what you need to do, within reason."

"Of course." Odo nodded to the Captain, turned on his heel, and headed to the turbo lift.

"What about the others?" Sisko asked Kira. "I trust those charges aren't for real?"

"Oh, they're for real alright. Quark filed them ten minutes ago." Taking a small data padd out of her pocket, she added, "I've also got his retraction right here, to file at our convenience."

"Good work, Major." Sisko turned to O'Brien, 'We still have the problem of communicating with Jen and Dax."

"Not exactly, Captain." O'Brien shrugged. "While the long-range *communication* devices are out of operation, their long-range receiving devices are fine."

"What do you mean?" Kira asked the chief.

"I mean, that I opened a channel to *No Regrets* the moment the Kai walked in. I thought they might be interested in what was being said. They can hear us fine; they just can't

communicate with us." Then, with a devilish grin Miles added, "I'm sorry Captain, didn't I make myself clear?"

Sisko couldn't help but laugh. "You did just fine Chief. You'd better watch yourself, stunts like that could get a man promoted."

"Ah, not me Captain. I like my job just fine." Miles replied, beaming with pride.

"Where are Jen and Dax anyway?" Sisko asked, looking at a display panel.

O'Brien nodded, "Just where Kira said they'd be. On the other side of the wormhole. Shortly after she reached the coordinates near the relay station, Dax set up long range sensor parameters and activated the automatic warning systems. There hasn't been any activity in the control section of the ship for several hours now." O'Brien sighed, "Can't imagine what they're up to."

Kira looked intently at the floor to hide her grin; O'Brien became fascinated with the ceiling paneling. Sisko, visibly uncomfortable with intimate speculation regarding his mentor, cleared his throat. "Well…"

Sisko was relieved when the chief cut him off. "Captain, a Klingon ship is requesting removal of the docking clamps. They said they've done some minor repairs and would like to take the ship for a test run around Bajor to make sure everything is in order. It's not procedure, should I give them clearance?"

"I didn't think Odo could make it to the ship that fast." Kira said under her breath.

"I guess you have your answer, Chief. Let Bajor know it isn't an invasion, just a systems test," Sisko replied, nodding at Kira. "Oh and Chief?" O'Brien looked up at the Captain. "You can close the connection to *No Regrets*. If anything develops, we'll let them know. I hate to interrupt…"

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Jen and Dax didn't actually get any real sleep, but they did occasionally doze in each other's arms. They were exhausted, but content and very happy. Jen suggested food when the grumbling of Dax's stomach became more than she could bear. They sat, lounging next to each other on Jen's bed, wrapped together in the bed covering, sipping rok'dejino and eating dry service rations.

"This is terrible," Dax complained, biting into the hard cake of compressed nutrients.

"It's not as bad if you dip it in the rok'dejino," Jen offered. "We've had some trouble with the replicator, as you can see. It'll do most liquids alright; it makes a mean cup o' rok', but it doesn't have soups down yet, and solids are out of the question."

"Why don't you get it fixed?"

Jen couldn't help but grin at Dax's grimace around a mouthful of food. "It isn't as if I bought this ship. I was desperate to get off Bajor and I would have taken a canoe if it could have left the atmosphere. O'Brien is working on it; besides it's so entertaining to watch you eat."

"Receiving audio communication from *Deep Space Nine*." The female voice of the ship's computer intoned. Jen looked at Dax puzzled then shrugged.

"Play communication, main system," Jen said, addressing the ship's central computer.

"…have a warrant for Jen Brenmar's arrest," came the icy voice of Kai Winn over the ship's sound system.

"What are the charges?" Sisko asked surprised.

"Jen Brenmar is charged with the theft of a religious artifact, a Tear of the Prophet, from the Lycene Monastery," Winn stated with a victorious edge to her voice.
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"That bitch!" Jen exclaimed, putting her rok'dejino down, then clenching her fists, "I *gave* the orb to the Lycene monastery. That's how I got the ship."

"Calm down," Dax said reassuringly, "we were expecting this remember. That's why we're here. Just listen."

"I would like to oblige," offered Sisko pleasantly, "but Jen Brenmar is not on the station at this time."

"Kira's hiding her, isn't she?" Winn accused with venom. "This won't work. When the Provisional Government hears about the obstructionist tendencies of Starfleet, and the subversion of the Bajoran officers that serve under Starfleet Command, even Shakaar himself won't –"

"Kai," Sisko offered, trying to remain pleasant, "why don't we go in my office and discuss this. I assure you Major Kira hasn't taken Jen Brenmar anywhere."

"Don't lie to me Emissary," Winn spat, "I know Kira is in league with Jen. I tried to warn you before, Jen is dangerous."

Jen looked up at Dax, "Am I dangerous?" she asked.

"Not particularly," Dax replied with a kiss.

"…and you …" Winn was about to continue her raving when Sisko broke in.

"There, you see. I told you that Major Kira didn't take Jen anywhere." Dax and Jen listened to Sisko's reply and the rest of the conversation. They smiled sheepishly at O'Brien's speculation as to their activities. Then Jen's expression grew serious.

"You mean we are seriously on the *other* side of the wormhole?" she asked, incredulous.

"Of course. Where did you think we were?"

Jen grew quiet. A million far away thoughts raced through her mind, none of them making any sense. At once she was relieved and somewhat let down by what she decided. "Then I can't be the Speaker For The Dead," she said with a note of finality.

"Why is that?"

"Because it's written that the Speaker For The Dead will journey to the Celestial Temple and remain inside, as a representative of the Bajoran people for all time. I'm on the *other side*; that must mean that the Prophets don't want me."

"Good," Dax said smugly, cuddling close to Jen once again. When Jen looked at her questioningly, she added with a smile, "I don't like sharing."

"Sure, you don't. Just how many host's memories are you sharing your psyche with?" Jen asked teasing.

"That's different."

Jen laughed. "When do we have to go back to the station anyway?"

Dax sighed, which sent a ripple of warm air across Jen's chest. "I think another three or four hours would be enough to get Kai Winn off the station."

"Good," Jen replied with a grin, "I don't like sharing any more than you do."

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"Message coming in on subspace, Captain" O'Brien announced from his post. "It's heavily encrypted, someone's being secretive."

"Thank you, Chief," Sisko replied from where he stood at Kira's station in Ops. "Patch it through to my office."

When Sisko entered his office and closed the door Kira turned to O'Brien. "What is that all about?"

"I dunno, Major." He looked down at his console, "It's coming from a fairly small ship."
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Kira looked down at her own console. “Someone’s in a hurry as well. That’s a Cardassian warp signature.”

“Major Kira?”

Kira looked up startled by Sisko’s voice. “Yes, Captain?” Sisko nodded to his office and Kira followed his lead, exchanging a confused glance with O’Brien as she headed up the stairs. Once inside, Sisko leaned against his desk and folded his arms.

“We’re going to have to orchestrate a delicate reception, Major,” Sisko said as soon as Kira activated the door closure. She looked at him and nodded for further information. “That was MarTay on subspace,” Sisko held up his hands to silence the questions he knew were coming, “I know she’s supposed to be dead, or almost dead, but she isn’t. She’s on her way here to help straighten out this mess, and to get some answers herself. I’ve asked her to slow down a bit and give us a chance to get Kai Winn back to Bajor before she arrives.”

“The sight of a Cardassian ship right now would send Winn into an absolute panic, not to mention upset the delicate Bajoran, Cardassian, and Klingon balance in the negotiating room,” Kira agreed.

“How long until Odo finishes his current ‘mission’?” Sisko asked.

Kira shrugged. “Tosh said they’d only need an hour or so, and the Klingon ship is faster than a runabout. It only took them two hours to get to Bajor.”

“Good. As soon as the Kai leaves, open a channel to Dax and have her head back to the station. That will give us a bit of time to prepare a reception for our guest. Brief Commander Worf on the situation, explain that this has nothing to do with the peace negotiations. I’d rather not get the Klingons involved if I don’t have to.”

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“That’s pretty close Odo, but a little more red,” Tosh critically studied the elaborate robe draped over his muscular frame. Satisfied with the results, he nodded to the statuesque Klingon at the transporter controls. “All set, Soktor. See you in about an hour.”

Tosh and Odo materialized in the garden just outside the main temple. Tosh walked confidently across the meticulously manicured grounds, made his way towards the temple, quickly crossed the walkway to the main entrance, and then headed for an auxiliary building off to the side. Once inside he touched several places on the wall panel and a door slid open. He spoke in hushed tones to his garment as he descended the now exposed stairs. “We’re heading down to the main library,” Tosh told Odo, who in the form of an ornate Vedek’s robe could not speak. “It should only take a moment to find the right diary.”

With his head down, Tosh strode purposefully down the corridor; nodding to the few acolytes he passed on his way. He was dressed as a visiting Vedek, and a high ranking one at that; he did not anticipate any challenges.

Following a maze-like series of corridors, Tosh reached his destination. He keyed the access code into the door frame and silently stepped inside. Odo instantly noticed a change in the humidity and pressure of this room. The corridors that had led them here were hewn from the bedrock under the temple above. The stone walls had been dimly lit, and had the usual musty chill of a cave. This room however was different. While the walls and ceiling were the same stone, the lighting was better and equipment was in place to maintain the temperature, humidity, and barometric pressure of the room. Tosh looked around the room to make sure no one else was present. He took off the ornate Vedek robe and set it on the table. Odo morphed into the familiar form of the constable.
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"Where do we start looking?" Odo asked. Tosh quickly scanned the titles of the various books and scrolls neatly stacked on the shelves. He frowned.

"This isn't even close," he said, looking around. He noticed a small room set into the side wall of the library. "Let's try that alcove over there."

Odo joined the Vedek in reading the titles on the spines of the scroll cases and books. "It doesn't seem to be here," Odo said with genuine disappointment.

"According to the titles on these other books, it should be here. Unless…" Tosh quickly left the alcove and started studying the floor. "I had a vision once, in the temple," he explained as he searched the floor. "In the vision I found a hiding place…right here!" He exclaimed kneeling down to examine the crack and hidden compartment under the heavy bookcase. "Blast, it isn't here. That must mean the Kai has it. Prophets guide us."

Tosh heard footfalls and quickly ducked behind a corner, repositioning Odo as a Vedek robe as he went. Two acolytes were hurrying toward the library.

"Where is this break-in supposed to have happened?" the first acolyte asked.

"I was told to check the library. We're supposed to watch out for Starfleet personnel or someone from a newly formed religious cult." An older female voice replied with assurance.

"Aren't those the musicians?"

"Yes, two men, and two women. I was told that we don't have to worry about the leader, Jen Brenmar, but the other three we have to watch out for."

The acolytes passed, and Tosh breathed a sigh of relief. Checking around the corner, he proceeded with caution down the corridor. It didn't take long to reach the stairs that led up to the main temple complex. Tosh and Odo were no longer alone in the hallways. The numbers of acolytes and other Vedeks, while still few, were steadily increasing. Walking with a sense of purpose and familiarity with his surroundings, Tosh quickly entered the complex of rooms leading to the Kai's chambers. *Figures,* Tosh thought to himself after peeking around the last corner leading to the ornate door of the Kai's quarters, *this was going too smoothly*. A single attendant stood outside the Kai's door. Tosh knew his plan wouldn't work if the Kai were on Bajor because there would be more guards surrounding her suite. With the Kai on *Deep Space Nine*, only one attendant was necessary to notify potential callers that the Kai was unavailable. Feeling time work against him, Tosh quickly devised a plan to get inside the door. Taking a utility knife from his pocket he quickly cut his palm, not deeply, but enough to insure enough blood to cover his face. He dabbed the blood from his hand on his head, nose, and eye and staggered to the door, as if he'd been beaten.

"Help me," he croaked to the attendant.

"What happened?" the attendant asked, shocked.

"The intruders…" Tosh wheezed, "On their way to the library… two men and a woman…dressed like acolytes." Then, looking unfocused into the eyes of the attendant added, "…Go, I'll be fine. It's only…a flesh wound."

"I'll send some help." The attendant hesitated for a moment before taking off down the hallway. Once the attendant was gone, Tosh stood up and hurried to the door.

"Make it quick," he muttered to his cloak. Odo extended a tentacle of himself into the lock mechanism of the door. Four lights quickly blinked in succession and the door opened. A quick survey of the interior revealed that they were alone in the Kai's quarters. Tosh quickly threw off the 'Odo Vestments' and the metamorph solidified into his customary shape.

"Look for the study," Tosh said, heading for one end of the suite. Odo headed in the other direction. The Constable quickly visually scanned each room he entered. Most were sparsely

decorated or furnished. He had just entered what he thought was the Kai's bedroom when Tosh ran to him with a book in his hands.

"I've got it. Let's go.

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Jen and Dax sat side by side in the command area of the small cargo ship. They had only just resolved to get dressed when they received word from *Deep Space Nine* to return to the station. After their ration and rok'dejino break and the resumption of previous activities, Jen noticed with amusement that a decanter of the beverage had been knocked off the small table by the bed and landed on Dax's clothes. This was not noticed until the two women decided to get dressed.

"What happened here?" Jen asked picking up the stained shirt.

Dax cringed, "I think I did that when…"

Jen laughed, "Let me get you some clothes."

Jen had given Dax the black leather pants from the performance, grateful Quark had come through with her request to have the clothes cleaned and returned to the ship. Dax insisted on wearing the luxurious green sweater with it so Jen settled on her black pants with the buttons, performance vest, and Klingon jacket.

"Prophets! We even look like a couple now," Jen commented as they took their seats in the command area.

"It's only until I get back to my quarters," Dax added wryly. "Think you can stand it? Besides," Dax added with a sidelong glance at her co-pilot, "is there some reason you *don't* want to look like a couple?"

"Not a one," Jen answered, caressing Dax's arm in the soft green sweater. "This feels as good on you as it did on me," she added with a smile.

Dax smiled back. "Tell me about it. Are you sure you don't want to do the piloting?"

"Nope. You've got a level three pilot's qualification. I'm only a level two, and I think I cheated to get that. 'Sides, I want to be ready to hide under the console when we hit that wormhole," Jen winked.

"Okay, I'm engaging thrusters now, quarter impulse." Dax studied the controls, and was satisfied with the readouts as she maneuvered the cargo ship into the now gaping maw of the wormhole. "We've passed through the GBF membrane and are entering the negative CTL region. Just a couple seconds to the FTL pipeline." Once inside Jen was amazed by the unusual shades of indigo and the shapes that she saw out the view port. Blue light swirled around the ship as it passed impossible polyhedral shapes on either side. A small pod of light sped toward the small cargo ship setting off an alarm in the command area.

"We're getting a neutrino burst, heading for the ship." Jen said, tension clinging to the edges of her voice as she made minor adjustments, her full attention riveted on the control panel in front of her.

"I'm engaging evasive maneuvers." Dax replied with professional calm as she made her own adjustments. "The aliens in the wormhole are associated with elevated neutrino spikes, we'll just move out of their way."

"Better do something else, Dax. The burst is changing course to match us, we will have impact in three seconds." Dax tried furiously to adjust other controls. When impact became imminent, Trill and Bajoran locked eyes for an instant before their universes became white light.
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"The ship has stopped moving." O'Brien announced, concerned.

"Prophets!" Kira cursed under her breath.

Sisko calmly looked at the various readouts at O'Brien's station. "The ship doesn't seem to be in any trouble. Let's, not panic."

"I'm getting elevated neutrino spikes, Captain." O'Brien pointed to numbers scrolling across the bottom of screen.

"The entities are associated with elevated neutrino readings, could be they're conversing," Sisko assured him.

"I don't think Jen had an orb on her ship…" Kira said softly.

"Perhaps they chose to dispense with the formalities." Then, looking at O'Brien, Sisko asked, "Is the Kai well on her way to Bajor?"

O'Brien nodded his head, "Yes, Captain. I made sure she was halfway there before I contacted *No Regrets*." A chirping sound emanated from O'Brien's console and he quickly scanned the readouts. "Sir, a ship is arriving from Cardassia."

"Instruct them to dock at pylon three. Major Kira, I want you and Odo to join me in greeting our gusts."

"A suggestion, Captain?"

"I'm all ears Odo."

"It might be a good idea to bring Tosh and the others here. Perhaps they can give us some insight as to what is going on," Odo nodded to the view screen, "out there."

Kira looked at the constable. I'm surprised you're suggesting that Odo. It's a good idea, but I'm surprised."

"You shouldn't be, Major. I don't suggest this from a religious standpoint, rather from a practical one. We know the beings in the wormhole do not live a linear existence. The people they've communicated with called them 'Prophets' because they saw glimpses of the future. Kai Tulano already saw these events take place; I would even assume he saw our attempt to peer past his words to glimpse our present. Tosh did mention that Dobin and Keyla play a part in this as well." Odo started to mention Kira, but thought better of it.

Sisko closed his eyes; the logic was making his head hurt. "Odo, file Quark's retraction and have the musicians released from holding; bring them to Ops if you need to. Kira, you're with me." With that, he turned and headed for the lift.

"What do you think's happening out there?" Kira asked Sisko as they strode down the corridor to the airlocks.

"Are you asking me as your Captain, or the Emissary?"

"Both, I suppose," Kira replied honestly, shrugging her shoulders. It had taken time but she was beginning to see Sisko as a man who could wear both the mantles of Starfleet command and religious icon gracefully.

"Nerys," he offered gently, "I know what you're thinking. Even if Jen is the Speaker For The Dead, which is looking a bit more likely, that does not mean she isn't coming back. I've done some reading. Wouldn't you think that if Kai Tulano saw two people entering the temple gates he would have mentioned it?" He managed a light chuckle. "Especially when one of them has spots? The fact that Dax is there might be enough to tell us that this isn't even what the Kai was talking about."

"But they've stopped…" Kira protested weakly.
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"They could just be getting acquainted. There are still a lot of unanswered questions, events that haven't happened yet. What about the Klingon Ju'lat, for example?" Sisko stopped walking and turned to face his second in command. The lines of worry were etched in her face. He searched her eyes before speaking, softly, his voice barely more than a whisper.

"Nerys, as the Emissary I tell you that Jen will be back. I feel it, though I'm not sure how. I just suspect that her work for Bajor isn't finished yet, and it is a different set of circumstances that will send her back to the temple for good."

Kira waited nervously with Captain Sisko outside the air lock for the Cardassian ship. Kira was surprised by the visage of the lone Cardassian woman descending the ramp. In an odd way, her features were beautiful.

"Welcome to *Deep Space Nine.*" Sisko said in greeting as she reached the bottom of the ramp. The Cardassian woman nodded. "I am Captain Sisko and this is my first Officer, Major Kira."

The Cardassian glanced from the Captain to the Major and back. "I don't have much time Captain, Major. It is risky for me to even be here. I would like to go somewhere to talk as soon as possible. I have some questions I would like Brenmar to answer."

"I'm sorry MarTay, but at the moment that is impossible," Sisko intoned in a neutral voice.

"It was my understanding that Jen Brenmar was on this station?" MarTay asked guardedly.

"She was, but she's been off the station for a few hours; an appointment with the Kai she declined to keep. She'll be back shortly." *I hope*, Sisko finished to himself.

"I see."

"Major Kira will escort you to the briefing room. You should be comfortable there. I'm sure you're tired after such a long trip. As soon as Jen arrives I will assemble the appropriate parties and meet with you there." Sisko tried to sound warm as well as professional. MarTay appeared to appreciate the gesture.

"Thank you, Captain," MarTay smiled. The gesture left Kira feeling unsettled. "I haven't eaten since leaving Cardassia." MarTay turned to look at Kira, and slowly examined her from head to foot. "After you, Major."

They had walked a short distance in silence when MarTay spoke. The sound of the Cardassian's smooth voice sent shivers up Kira's spine. "Would you by any chance be Kira Nerys?" she asked.

Kira looked up at the face of the woman who seemed to tower over her. She had delicate features for a Cardassian and long black hair that descended down her back in a complex braid. Her eyes were calm and sharp, taking everything in and giving nothing back. This was someone who expected to hold all the cards, and Kira Nerys didn't like her. "Yes," she replied, not trying to conceal her distaste. "How did you know?"

MarTay smiled a thin knowing smile. "It would seem that I am not the only one who talks in my sleep," she said pleasantly. The two women arrived at the conference room door.

"I see," Kira said tightly, stepping through the doorway.

Once inside, with the door shut, MarTay again addressed the Major. "Regardless of what else you might have heard or think about me, I am here because I am interested in helping Brenmar."

Kira fought to suppress the anger welling up like a wave inside her. The scars across Jen's chest had seared itself as indelibly into her memory as the knife had etched them into Jen's

flesh. “Certainly you’re not here to find the weak link in the Obsidian chain?” she questioned tightly.

Again, MarTay smiled. “My dear Kira, I am Cardassian, after all. Of course, I want to know who is behind this. Does Brenmar know?”

“You’ll have to ask her,” Kira answered brusquely. “The replicator is right over there if you’re hungry.”

“Aren’t you the least bit curious about what Brenmar had to say about you in her sleep?” MarTay asked in a voice calm and self-assured.

Kira maintained a firm grip on her composure. “Coming from you? No, I’m not the least bit curious. If I want to know how Bren feels about me, I’ll go to the source and ask her. If you need anything else there is a comm unit near the replicator.” Kira turned to leave.

“I suggest you ask her, Major. I’m sure you’ll find it an enlightening conversation.” Kira could hear the Cardassian’s chuckle as she left the briefing room.

Returning to Ops, Kira discovered a frenzy of activity. Bashir, Dobin, and Keyla were huddled around Dax’s station examining various prophetic texts on a screen. O’Brien stood at the engineering station monitoring progress, or lack thereof, of the tiny cargo ship inside the wormhole. Odo and Tosh were at Kira’s station, examining a hide-bound book. Periodically they’d call out a prophetic reference, which Dobin and Keyla would then search. Bashir was also checking the prophetic phrasings against the puzzle, working toward its release of the medical mainframe. Sisko walked over to Kira as she stepped off the lift.

He nodded at the screen. “Nothing has changed out there. Jen’s ship hasn’t moved. But, we are making some progress in here. All the words we need for the puzzle are in that book Odo and Tosh have.”

“Vedek Danl must have expected Jen to have it –” Kira began, then stopped short as she caught Kai Winn stepping off the lift with her two attendants.

“How very interesting. Do you usually keep detained prisoners in the Operations Center, *Captain*?” Winn’s added extra emphasis on his title was icy.

“Not usually,” Sisko replied smoothly. “Quark decided against proceeding with the charges. I was going to notify you but it must have slipped my mind. You’re free to take them with you, Kai.”

“That’s better, then.” She smiled in triumph.

“I’d reconsider, if I were you,” Tosh cautioned, looking up triumphantly from the book he and Odo were examining. Kai Winn, instantly recognizing the simple hide-bound book, began to pale slightly. “I have just two words for you, your Eminence… *Brenmarjen Opaka*.”

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Jen was not inside the cargo ship. She blinked, and noting that her surroundings didn’t change, tried blinking again. Still nothing. “Shit,” she muttered under her breath.

It is a corporeal being. Jen heard the words in a familiar voice. A voice that made her blood burn. Jen turned to see the visage of Kai Winn standing behind her.

“Kai?” Jen asked accusingly.

We know this one. Jen turned again at the calm voice of Dax standing behind her. She was between Kai Winn and Dax, and both were studying her intently. Jen hurried over to stand next to Dax.

“Dax? Is that you?”
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"*We use the images of your thoughts for communication."* The voice was Kira's, and this time, Jen was not surprised to see Kira's visage off to her left.

Jen nodded. "I see. You're the beings of the Celestial Temple. Your time is not linear."

The Dax avatar stepped forward. *"We exist here, in all time. You desire to be one with us? But you are different."*

"I'm sorry, but I don't follow you. I don't want to be a prophet, and I don't want to stay here, but I do desire to be with the one you resemble."

"Why this one? And not this one?" Dax asked, shifting to the visage of Kai Winn.

"Because my feelings for the two are different… it's a long story and I'd rather not take the time to go into it."

Jen turned away, only to be brought up short by a new figure: An ancient woman with long gray hair, sitting in a rocking chair. The woman was Bajoran in appearance and looked at Jen with kindness. There were fifteen small silver rings in her right ear.

"Wha…who… are you?" Jen stammered. "I've never seen you before."

"*Don't be silly, Bren*," the impossibly old woman said. "*You recognize me, don't you?*"

"You can't be me." Jen stated, unsure.

"*You're the expert,*" the old woman cackled. "*Funny thing about non-linear time, you never know* when *you're going to run into someone*." The woman continued to cackle, the sound fading in to the willowy whiteness that surrounded her. Jen closed her eyes. When she opened them again, she was standing behind a rocking chair. A figure was seated in the chair, nursing a baby and humming quietly to herself. Jen looked around her and realized that she was in someone's living room. It was warm and inviting. Jen relaxed; she felt comfortable. There were plants, a few books, instruments, and Klingon weaponry artistically positioned throughout the room. She heard the faint sounds of food preparation taking place in an adjacent room. Jen could smell the tart cinnamon fragrance of Bajoran breakfast cakes. She returned her attention to the woman in the chair, shifting her position so she could get a good look at the baby. Her eyes widened in disbelief when she saw the delicate Trill markings on the side of the baby's chubby face as it nursed contentedly. Jen leaned around the chair to look at the woman holding the baby. Somehow, she wasn't surprised to see herself in profile, about ten years older. As the seated Jen turned to look at kneeling Jen, an older Jadzia walked into the room.

"Is Benjamin asleep?" Dax asked the seated Jen. Before turning to look at the Trill, older Jen made eye contact and winked at her before turning away.

"Finally." Older Jen smiled, pulling the baby from her breast and handing him to the Trill. Jen would have fallen over had she not realized that she was no longer kneeling but standing, and she was no longer in the living room, but outside. Disoriented, she shook her head, gazing at the clear blue sky. Nothing seemed familiar. She wasn't on Bajor.

Jen stood on a grassy hill across a small stream from three other people. They were facing her, looking behind her. Jen turned and saw a young man heading toward her. When he got close enough, she could see that he was a very handsome Trill in his early twenties. As he passed, he gave no indication of seeing Jen at all. She followed him across a small bridge to those waiting on the other side. "It happened!" he exclaimed, his voice full of pride and joy, "I'm Joined. Benjamin Janar, at your service." He was embraced by the three women waiting for him. One woman was a very young adult, Jen guessed her to be about fifteen years old. She was unable to see the faces of the other two, but the dark and light brown hair led her to believe that it was herself and Dax. Jen was about to smile when something about the young woman startled

her. She clearly had a Bajoran nose but Jen detected faint Trill spots running from her forehead down her neck.

"How did that happen?" Jen breathed, not expecting an answer. She was doubly shocked to see the young woman lift her head and address her.

"*You got sick. Ben was five. You and Dax were visiting Bajor when it happened. No one could help. It was your blood. Uncle Julian performed surgery that saved me. He needed blood so Dax gave you some. Your system didn't reject it, but Julian didn't expect you to incorporate her DNA with yours.*" Looking a bit sad, she added, "*I'm not qualified for joining, but I'm glad my brother is*."

Jen reached out and tenderly touched the cheek of the young woman. As the young Bajoran turned her face to the offered hand, Jen was amazed to see five silver rings in her right ear. "What's your name?" Jen asked.

"*Kira*," the girl said, smiling.

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Dax looked around at surroundings that were instantly familiar. She remembered discovering the wormhole with Benjamin, then seeing and feeling the Dax symbiont removed from Curzon and placed in Jadzia. This was the room in the Symbiosis Commission complex where the ceremony took place. She saw two bodies lying side by side on two tables. One body was in darkness so she couldn't see it; the other was herself as a very old woman. Someone sat next to the old woman, holding her hand. The aged Jadzia looked at her younger self and smiled. Then, following her line of vision, the sitting woman turned, looked at Jadzia, and also smiled. Dax was stunned. It was Jen at over one hundred years old. Dax could feel the sensation of being old and about to die, waiting for the symbiont to depart. She was afraid but grateful for the companion at her side, tenderly holding her hand and being brave for her. Dax saw movement beneath her symbiont orifice as the Dax symbiont was removed. Jadzia began to tremble as she saw the tie cut and Dax taken away. She could feel herself falling into a cold dark abyss; then the venerable Jen held the ancient Jadzia in her arms. She no longer felt afraid or cold. As her world grew dark, she felt the warm comfort of her lover's arms. Jadzia felt tears streaming down her face as she watched herself die, a look of peaceful contentment on her face.

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"All time happens now," a voice behind Jen calmly intoned.

"Trust me, I'm convinced." Jen turned to face the new voice, recognizing Kai Opaka, the most beloved Kai in recent history.

"You're really here, aren't you?" Jen asked, sensing the lack of detachment present in the other 'visages'.

"In a matter of speaking," the motherly Kai smiled. "You've grown so, I am very proud of you, Bren."

Jen looked suspiciously at the Kai. "At who I am or who I will become?"

Opaka shrugged. "Both are women to be reckoned with."

Jen laughed quietly as her defenses slipped away. "Yeah I suppose. How can you be here?"

"A part of me is here. The mind can travel amazing distances under the right circumstances. It is good to practice meditation."

"Opaka, why have I seen these things? Why am I the Speaker For The Dead?"

Opaka looked at Jen, amusement playing across her features.

"Are you?" she chided the younger woman.

"I'm not?" She asked hopefully.

"Jen," Opaka began patiently, "you embrace a melody of a long ago Bajor. You sing songs long forgotten. Is that not giving voice to those who are no more? Does seeing a potential future give you hope to create one?"

"Have these things really happened?" Jen gestured around her. "If time here is not linear, and I've seen my future, why is that necessary? What am I doing here? I mean, the *Speaker For The Dead* is supposed to exist in the Celestial Temple for all time. I hope I don't fit that description."

"Consider yourself an experiment." Opaka smiled reassuringly. "You have something to teach entities such as the Emissary. For you, this is your first encounter. For us it is part of existence and has happened already. To go back and live your life, then return; those here will better understand the linear life experience."

"*Does it not exist here?*" The image of Kai Winn sounded troubled.

"So, I'm a prophet?" Jen asked uncomfortably.

"Walk with me, Bren. There are things you should know." Opaka offered her hand, which Jen accepted.

The apparition of her in the rocking chair spoke as they walked past. "*Bren, you haven't been here yet but you've already come and gone and you're here to stay*, *but you're no prophet.*"

Jen sighed, and looked to Opaka for explanation. "Mind running that one past me again?"

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Dax turned from the scene before her in the Joining area. She found herself underground, in a cave-like setting. A team of doctors huddled around a baby. A thin line extended from the baby's neck to a medical unit. Another line extended from the medical unit into the arm of a woman in a chair next to the crib. Dax recognized the woman as a young Kai Opaka. Rather than the gold robes of a Kai, she wore Vedek red. The baby began to stir. Sluggishly at first, then fully awake and screaming, diverting Dax's attention from the Kai. The doctors looked relieved at the sound of the wailing, and removed the thin line from the child's neck before the baby was handed to Opaka. As the Vedek picked up the baby, the blanket shifted, exposing the baby's back. A small dark triangular birthmark just under the left shoulder blade was exposed. "That's Jen," Dax breathed, then blinked and found herself in the familiar surroundings of the small cargo ship.

"Jen?" Dax said softly to the unconscious form in the co-pilot's seat. Jen opened her eyes. Dax almost didn't recognize the timeless awareness reflected there. "Are you okay?"

Jen smiled and Dax felt much relieved. "I'm okay 'Zia, are you?"

Now it was Dax's turn to smile. She nodded, "I am now." On impulse, she leaned close to Jen and kissed her cheek. When she drew back, she looked carefully at the side of Jen's neck. She gently touched the tiny circular scar she found there.

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"The ship is moving, Captain." O'Brien said trying to contain his relief. "They're coming through the wormhole now."

"Hail them, Chief," Sisko barked. The visages of Dax and Jen, side by side at the controls of the cargo ship filled the view screen. "Dax, Jen, are you alright?" Sisko asked.

"We're fine, Benjamin," Dax answered, glancing at Jen and smiling. "We just had a little detour with the landlords is all."

"Good. The moment you're docked, I want to see both of you in my ready room. Sisko out." Sisko looked from the screen to the startled Kai standing next to him. "I think you should also attend this meeting, your Eminence. I'm sure Jen will have a few words about your warrant for arrest." There was steel in the large man's deep voice.

As the others made their way out of Ops and headed to the ready room, Tosh stood, dumbfounded. He looked at the screen where he had just seen Jen and was mystified. "That's impossible," he said to no one in particular. "She *is* the Speaker For The Dead. She isn't supposed to come back."

Kira, who was following him out patted him on the back. "Don't feel so bad, Tosh. Jen's always had a knack for shirking responsibility."

Jen and Dax were the last to arrive in the ready room. The others had taken their seats, leaving two seats at the end of the table open. MarTay sat at the opposite end of the table, Kai Winn was seated to the side between Kira and Odo, glancing at the Cardassian uncomfortably. Jen and Dax entered the room side by side, arms not quite touching. The Bajoran's eyes met the Cardassian's and grew cold. Dax noticed Kira's eyes light up knowingly at the sight, Dax presumed, of their similar attire. Even Sisko found concentration difficult at the sight of Dax in Jen's revealing sweater. O'Brien looked down at the table bashfully.

"Why Brenmar," MarTay said coldly breaking the silence, "I don't think I've ever seen you looking so pleasantly exhausted."

"You haven't," Jen answered flatly.

"Well," Sisko began, attempting to thaw the chill that had descended on the room, "Jen, Dax, please have a seat."

Sitting, Jen could feel the reassuring presence of Dax's knee as it pressed against hers. The Bajoran's eyes did not flinch from the Cardassian sitting on the opposite end of the long table. "I must say that you're looking livelier than I expected," she said, keeping her voice neutral.

"Yes, well, that's what we're here to talk about, isn't it?" MarTay saw Jen's eyes move to bore into the Kai sitting between them. MarTay followed her gaze, and Kai Winn found herself under the scrutiny of two very angry women.

"I trust the two of you've met?" Jen asked icily, looking from MarTay to the Kai and back.

"We were just introduced," MarTay replied with a chuckle. "The dear Kai did not seem the least surprised to see me so…healthy."

"Why don't we start with the prophecy?" Sisko again tried to diffuse the building tension in the room. "Doctor, has the program been unlocked."

"Yes, Captain, it has." Bashir glanced at the visibly relieved Kai and touched a point on the control panel in front of him. The prophecy illuminated on a screen behind MarTay. "Completely deciphered it reads:

In the aftermath of the Cardassian Occupation, Kai Winn will stumble
The family of the Opaka continues.
For the Brenmarjen will come from Cardassia Prime,
Thrice marked and broken.

The Klingon Ju'lat will be spoken,
The religion of Bajor will once again move towards its proper future.
From D'Kor, the Lycene pretender
To find the Brenmarjen must be
Blood will identity confirm
Thievery as false as Me'tey's death
Houses of Being in alignment;
The Klingon Warlords will need comfort
Go to them and begin an age anew

"Some of the words and phrases changed when we got everything in place. For instance, the name Me'tey inserted itself when the other placeholders were filled. It's pretty self-explanatory up to the end. The course of Bajoran religion will be put right after the speaking of the Klingon Ju'lat." Bashir frowned. "We don't exactly know what that means, but those are the right words."

"Continue, Doctor," Sisko encouraged.

"From D'Kor, the Lycene pretender –"

Tosh cut him off. "I'm sorry Bren, but that's me. I am a Lycene Vedek." Jen looked at the dark-haired man, shocked and angry. "As the prophecy says, I had to do it in order to find you, and be sure of who you really are."

"Go on," she said, barely audible.

Kira spoke up. "I think that the next line is about our current situation. Jen is no more a thief than MarTay is dead. We've guessed that the last line is a resolution to this present conflict."

"Well, I think it's clear that there has been some mistake," Kai Winn interrupted. "Obviously, the reports we received were not accurate, not that I'd call it 'stumbling'. Clearly Jen isn't needed for testimony, and if she didn't steal anything –"

"Ah, but Kai," MarTay purred, "It isn't quite as simple as that anymore."

"No, it isn't," Jen added in agreement. "You wanted me out of the way, got someone in the Obsidian Order to provide the reason, and I want to know why. I find it hard to believe you would be this paranoid over some obscure prophecy."

"I don't know what you're talking about, child. This is the first I've heard of any prophecy involving you." Kai Winn demurred.

"I think you do," Dax said shortly. All eyes around the table looked at the Trill.

"I saw something in the wormhole," Dax began, absently, almost to herself. "Vedek Opaka gave a blood transfusion to a baby." Dax looked into Jen's face. "It was you."

"Impossible," Jen said in disbelief.

Dax smiled. "The baby had a birthmark blow its left shoulder blade."

"I don't have any birthmarks," Jen protested.

"Yes, you do." MarTay, Kira, and Dax replied in unison. Trill, Bajoran, and Cardassian then looked with embarrassment at each other and around the table. Keyla tried to stifle a giggle and failed. Tosh buried his head in his hands.

"Oh," Jen replied weakly, turning a shade of Vedek red.

"I think I can provide some illumination here," Doctor Bashir added helpfully. "Kai Opaka had a very rare type of blood. That is what started all of this." He nodded to the view screen set into the wall behind MarTay. I knew I'd seen your blood type before, just after I

arrived at the station. It was the same as Kai Opaka's. It's clear you are some sort of relation, as the prophecy says."

"He's telling the truth, Jen." Tosh said gently.

"What are you talking about Sener?" Jen said quietly, eyes boring into the pipe player.

"Brenmarjen Opaka was Brenmarjen Moska's sister. Your grandmother, Taos, died from an infection that swept the refugee camps. Your grandfather had two small daughters. Moska was four while Opaka was an infant. Opaka never would have survived the relocation. She was taken in by the Dakarnian Monastery and became an Acolyte. When it became clear that she would become a Vedek and someday possibly Kai, your grandfather moved and adopted the family name 'Jen'. The Cardassians were all over us by that point. The thought of having a Kai, with an obvious sister and family out there was too dangerous. Had the Cardassians known about your mother's relation to Opaka, she most certainly would have been used in an attempt to control her." Tosh looked around the room and took a deep breath before continuing. "Opaka and Moska kept in touch. Opaka was there when your mother died. The same illness almost killed you too. She provided the transfusion at the Monastery that saved your life. She tried to save Moska as well, but she was too far gone."

"How do you know this?" Jen asked, fighting to control her emotions.

Tosh put a small bound book on the table. "This is Opaka's. She wrote in here that she wanted you to have it." He turned his head to glare at Kai Winn. "Someone else had second thoughts about you knowing the truth."

"How did you get this book?" Jen asked quietly, still looking at Tosh.

"The good Vedek stole it!" Kai Winn exclaimed, turning around and glaring at Tosh with unabashed fury. "You planned this whole confrontation!"

"And what did you plan?" Jen stood up, furiously slamming her hands on the table as she growled at the Kai. "You thought Opaka's bloodline might be a threat, so you arranged a one-way ticket for me to Cardassia. You were ready to have me killed rather than risk me knowing who I really am!" She quickly drew the Klingon dagger from her belt and pointed it at the Kai. "Yet you have the audacity to shriek at him for stealing something that is rightfully mine?!" Dax calmly stood up and gently removed the dagger from Jen's hand. Jen didn't resist.

"Sorry," Jen muttered, sitting back down. Dax set the dagger on the table away from Jen.

"Regardless of what you think of me," the Kai replied smoothly, "my interests have always been and will always be in what is best for Bajor. We are at the brink of Civil War; our spiritual solidarity is all that is holding us together. A fracture in our system of belief could crumble our civilization."

"Jen's not a threat to anyone's system of belief," Kira muttered, angrily.

"I'm sorry you can't see it, child," the Kai replied.

"This is all very enlightening," MarTay smoothly interjected, "but forgive my selfishness; it doesn't help me much."

"What is it you want?" Sisko asked MarTay.

"I want to know who in the central command was working with the Kai?" MarTay asked coldly, looking at Kai Winn.

"I don't know what you're talking about," the Kai replied.

"Oh, I think you do. And unless I get a name, I will see to it that everyone on Bajor knows the lengths their illustrious Kai will go to eliminate a threat, including killing the niece of their beloved Kai Opaka."

"You can't be serious." the Kai hurriedly replied.

"I'm dead seri –"

"No, you're not." Jen replied flatly, cutting her off. She stood, exhaustion clear in her features, and slowly walked behind Dax's chair, gently resting her hands on the Trill's shoulders. "You're angry, but not stupid. Bajor just might be needed to save Cardassia's collective butt from the Klingons. A Bajor consumed by Civil War won't be any help to anyone, except the Dominion." With Jen standing directly behind Jadzia, there was no way the Cardassian could look at Jen without noticing the beautiful Trill. MarTay recognized the subtle manipulation and her eyes grew cold, as much from the obvious ploy as the drummer's words. Dax, who had been sitting with her hands folded on the table top in front of her, casually rested her palm across the Klingon dagger, in case Jen intended to take it. Jen walked around the table towards MarTay, taking her time.

"You want answers? Well, so do I. For starters, how did you manage to live? After all I'm sure Dakmar is dead."

"Yes, he is." MarTay said helpfully. "You were of more help to me than you might have guessed, Brenmar." Jen flinched at the use of her given name. "Thanks to you, I had a very good ally in the Obsidian Order. I was able to arrange my husband's demise and take his place just before the Order collapsed."

"I see," said Jen, conversationally. "So, you discovered Variella was an Order member?"

"What?" MarTay shouted, furious. "You knew Variella was a member of the Obsidian Order and you didn't tell me?" Jen had reached MarTay's seat now. She was standing looking down at the striking Cardassian.

"Oh yes, I knew." Jen smiled.

"I'll give you two seconds to explain that or I'll break your neck," MarTay growled through clenched teeth. Jen leaned over, her face inches away from her former lover's. She spoke quietly, for MarTay's ears alone, in flawless Cardassian.

"*Kvett nosh torrek vas duma. Vilemas Variella soto nus'tal vrok notspa tulle. Krig nosh vleman ros tosk'ma ott ital.*" MarTay appeared to be fighting back tears.

"Too bad the Order collapsed," Jen continued, conversationally. "And then to be invaded by Kronos," Jen shook her head sadly. "You seem to have had a rough go of it."

Jen looked back down the table, "So, your Eminence, I don't suppose you'd like to let us in on who in the Central Command owed you a favor?"

"I'm sure I don't know what you're talking about," the Kai answered darkly.

"So Legat Gromet isn't the connection?" Jen asked, pleased at the sight of blood draining from the Kai's face. "Yes, your Eminence, I know. Would you believe the Prophets told me?" Jen continued her slow walk, now from MarTay's chair to the Kai. "They showed me many things."

Jen spent a long moment searching the faces of those assembled around the table. She closed her eyes in thought, briefly, as if making a decision. When she reopened them, Dax was surprised by the wisdom and maturity etched in the young Bajoran's features.

"Captain, there is nothing more this discussion can yield. MarTay has what she wants, and I can assure you that Cardassia will be wary of the Kai in the future. Your computers are unlocked and I'm sure you've learned more about prophetic interpretation than you ever wanted to know. I now know why the Kai's been out for my blood, and I think our differences are best worked out privately."

"If you're certain?" Sisko asked, and Jen nodded in reply. Turning to the Cardassian, "Is there anything else MarTay?"

"No, Captain, nothing." She spoke absently, her mind clearly elsewhere. "I will return to my ship and depart shortly."

Jen looked down at the Kai, her expression one of sadness. "Kai, there is a temple on the station. Why don't we go talk there? It won't take long. I know you've got a ceremony to prepare for."

Kai Winn nodded, looking at Jen as if she was seeing Jen for the first time. "I… I need time to meditate; I'll meet you there in three hours." As the others stood and prepared to file out of the ready room, Kira walked up to Jen.

"What'd you say to MarTay?" Kira asked, in a whisper.

Jen shrugged. "I explained that I didn't tell her about Variella because Variella genuinely loves her. Had MarTay known of Variella's interest from me, she would have focused on manipulation, not realizing that Variella didn't have to be manipulated. Variella is a good woman; she didn't deserve MarTay's usual treatment."

MarTay hurried past Jen at the door, glaring at her briefly then rushing down the corridor. Just outside the ready room, Tosh was talking to Dobin, Keyla, and Kira. Upon seeing her, he rushed past her and continued down the hall.

"Tosh, wait up?" Jen called after him. "What's wrong with him?" she asked when he ignored her and kept walking.

"You're not behaving like a religious icon and I think it upsets him," Kira offered hopefully.

Dax walked up to Jen and returned her dagger. "You can be quite intimidating with one of these."

"I'm sorry I lost it." Jen couldn't help but smile at the touch of the Trill's hand as she took the dagger. Jen looked shyly at the others, who were watching the exchange with interest.

"Do you mind if I get cleaned up at your place before I meet the Kai?" Jen asked shyly. "I hate the 'freshers in cargo ships."

"Of course. Will I see you afterwards, for dinner?" Dax asked, returning Jen's smile.

"Sure. At *Quark's*?"

Quickly glancing at the faces of her audience, Dax leaned in and kissed Jen softly on the mouth. "My place," she whispered, then after a quick smile to the others, turned on her heel and strode down the hall, hands comfortably clasped behind her back.

Dax smiled to herself at the embarrassing predicament to which she had just left Jen. After rounding a bend in the corridor, she was surprised to see Tosh standing there, apparently waiting for someone.

"Commander, a word?" he said stiffly.

"Of course, Tosh, what is it?" Dax asked, concerned.

"It'd be best if you'd stay away from Jen." Tosh's look was one of anger, frustration, and embarrassment.

"Best for who?" Dax asked, a slight edge to her voice.

"Best for Bajor," he answered. "Look, Commander, I've studied the prophetic body all my life. I've read every line of every prophecy many, many times and frankly, I've never seen you mentioned."

Dax smiled at the Vedek coldly. "An oversight of the Prophets, no doubt. But you've just proven that not all prophetic interpretations can be trusted. Jen may be a religious icon to you, but before that, she is a woman. It is that woman in which I'm interested. I suggest you look a little past prophecy and focus more on the present, and trust Jen to make her own decisions."

Jen saw the end of the exchange and hurried over. “What’s going on here?” she addressed the Trill and Bajoran, who continued staring fiercely at each other.

“Nothing, Bren. It’s okay.” Dax turned to look at Jen, her features instantly softening. “I need to stop by sick-bay; I’ll see you back at my quarters.” Dax shot Tosh one final icy look and strode off down the corridor.

“What did you say to her?” Jen demanded angrily.

“I told her I don’t think she should see you.” Tosh replied flatly. He didn’t want to anger Jen but was well past caring.

“And would you mind explaining just how who I associate with has the slightest bearing on you?” Jen was standing toe-to-toe with the large man. She seemed slight compared to his muscular bulk.

“Look Jen, you’re the Speaker for the Dead and –”

“– not if you keep up with this. You think you’ve read the prophecies, but guess what? I’ve *lived* them. I’ve talked to the blasted prophets, and I’ve got news for you – I saw a lot more of Jadzia in my future than I did you.”

At this moment, Kira started to come around the corridor. Upon overhearing the heated exchange, she stopped short and continued listening unseen.

“Don’t believe me?” Jen continued, acid dripping from her words. “Look this up in your prophetic body: Jadzia and I are going to have two kids, Benjamin and Kira. That’s not all, Tosh. Kira is going to be Bajoran and Trill, and might even become Kai.” Jen began to pace furiously.

“I can’t believe you!” Jen swatted at his silver-adorned right ear for emphasis as she passed him. “You lie to me, gain my trust, and then have the audacity to berate one of the few people in this mess who has been nothing but honest and genuinely has my best interests at heart.”

“That’s enough Brenmarjen!” Tosh yelled back. “I’ve had it with your self-absorption. I am not going to apologize for the fact that I love my planet as a whole more than any individual on it.” Tosh took a deep breath, then continued. “Look Bren, I’m sorry. I need to think. It’s not just you. This whole ‘prophetic thing’ is not unfolding the way it should and I need to see about that. Can we talk later, when we’ve both cooled off a bit?”

As if trying to shake her anger off, Jen stepped back from Tosh and put her hands up. “Fine, we’ll talk later, but remember – it’s individuals like you and me that make up Bajor as a whole.”

She turned from him and stormed down the corridor. Kira resumed course from the opposite direction of Jen’s departure. When she reached Tosh, her heart went out to the tortured soul she saw. He was still staring at the space left by Jen’s departure.

“You look like you could use a drink,” Kira offered.

“Why is she so blasted difficult?” Tosh bemoaned.

Kira couldn’t help but smile, thinking about Captain Sisko. “I think that’s part of what makes them religious icons. If they were like you and me, they wouldn’t need us, would they?”

Tosh looked down and the diminutive Major. “Did you say something about a drink?”

Kira grinned, “Let’s go to *Quark’s* and you can tell me all about it.”

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Dax sat up on the examining table and waited for Doctor Bashir to compare some read-outs before asking how she was. “I never seen anything like this before,” he muttered surprised.
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Dax couldn't help but laugh. "And just how many Trill patients have you had?"

"Just you, Jadzia, but this could be serious." There was no laughter in his eyes. "One of Dax's anterior anchors has completely detached itself. This sort of thing is simply not supposed to happen. When did you notice it?"

Jadzia had been dreading that question, but steeled herself for the worst as she answered. "It happened when Jen and I were on her ship." Bashir continued to look at her with a neutral expression. "Together," she added, arching her eyebrows for emphasis.

"During intercourse?" he asked, surprised. She nodded, beginning to blush. "This is unusual, isn't it?"

"It's never happened to me or any of my other hosts before. Trust me, I'd remember it."

"It detached itself, you say?" Doctor Bashir scanned his readouts one more time. "I don't know what to tell you Jadzia. Dax seems fine; but I can contact the Symbiosis Commission about that if you'd like."

"No Julian, it's okay, I'm sure I'm fine. I just thought you should take a look."

"As long as it reattaches I don't think there's a problem." Bashir said, making a note in his padd. "Let me check again in a few days." Looking up he studied her, an odd expression on his face.

"What is it Julian?"

"I'm surprised I'm not feeling a bit more jealous, that's all," he answered honestly. "I suppose because I can see how happy you are."

Dax hoped off the examination table and kissed the doctor softly on the cheek. "It's because you're a sweet man, Julian. And a dear friend."

The doctor smiled. "I suppose so. Tell me Jadzia, have you given any thought as to how this relationship is actually going to work?"

Dax looked thoughtful a moment. "I'm not sure I follow you, Julian."

Bashir spoke quietly, his words caring and concerned. "Jen is *Speaker For The Dead,* and the only living relative of Kai Opaka, not to mention thorn in the side of Kai Winn. What I mean Jadzia, is that there are going to be forces at work that will desperately want Jen on Bajor. If not in the Vedek Assembly, then elsewhere. Does Jen feel responsible to them? Is she prepared to put the needs of her people aside for her own desire – or yours? Is that a choice you would ask her to make?"

Dax smiled and tried to sound more confident than she felt. "I wouldn't ask her to make a choice Julian. I'm willing to share her with Bajor. Things have happened so quickly that neither of us has really thought this through. I think we need to see where we are before we think too much about where we're going."

Julian grinned and patted Dax affectionately on the hand, "I'd think about it soon if I were you. You know how Bajorans get about their religious icons."

"I'm sure it'll work out Julian, you'll see."

"I sincerely hope so," he said softly to himself as he watched her go.

Leaving sickbay, Dax started walking. She wasn't sure of a destination until she reached the turbo lift leading to Ops. Unsure why, she stepped on the lift and headed to the nerve center of the station.

Ops was a different world. This is where focus and control thrived in an unexpected marriage between Federation technology and Cardassian aesthetics. A mixture of Bajoran and Starfleet personnel carried out the tasks that gave the station life. Currently, Ops was minimally busy as Dax headed over to her station. She felt at peace here, centered. As she was off-duty, the

officer on duty at her station quickly vacated it and began busying himself with checking readouts at a nearby workstation. Dax scanned the readouts of the console absently. Everything was in order, nothing pressing. She noted some interesting requests for research that she'd be starting in the next few shifts but beyond that, there was little to distract her from the conflict growing within.

Captain Sisko returned to Ops and was surprised to see Dax sitting at her station looking intently at her console. He walked over, and that she didn't notice him told him that his friend and mentor was indeed troubled, but not by anything on that screen.

"Boo, Old Man," he said quietly.

Dax was visibly startled. "Benjamin! I didn't hear you walk up."

"I know you didn't. You look troubled. Let's go talk." He walked into his office and offered his friend a seat, then joined her on the black couch.

"I'm fine, Benjamin," Dax offered trying to smile reassuringly. "I've just got a lot on my mind, that's all."

"I'm sure you do." He smiled, "So, what are you going to do about her?"

"Is it that obvious?" she laughed.

"To anyone that knows you, yes."

Dax studied her friend warmly. Benjamin Sisko had been a dear friend to Curzon Dax and had accepted the new host Jadzia with an openness that had made Dax truly proud. In seven lifetimes, she'd never met anyone quite like him.

"I'm not sure how I feel about her, Benjamin. I mean the attraction is there, she's wonderful to be around…" she sighed, frustrated. "I'm worried that she'll be taken away before I really know how deep my feelings go."

"Which complicates coming to terms with how you really feel," he offered supportively.

She nodded. "You know how I am, Benjamin; I feel fiercely protective of everyone on this station, but when it comes to someone feeling that way about me…"

"You're scared."

She looked at him ruefully, "I wouldn't go quite that far, Benjamin. There is a difference between fear and caution. You of all people know how complicated it gets for a Joined Trill to be involved with a mono-species."

Sisko laughed. "The difficulty of the situation certainly didn't deter Curzon. But maybe that was because he didn't take most of his relationships as seriously as you do." The Captain looked thoughtful. "You know Dax; there may be more complications to this." She looked at him questioningly. "You're a Starfleet officer, Jen might very well be a significant player when it comes to Bajor's admittance into the Federation."

"You don't think Starfleet would have a problem with this do you?" Dax asked, shocked.

"Quite the contrary, my friend. Starfleet would be grateful for such a personal alliance." Sisko smiled, his white teeth gleaming against his dark skin. "I trust Kira's okay with it?" Dax nodded. "So, the only problem is that you're in love and not ready to admit it?" Dax's look of shock was slowly replaced by acceptance. She got up from the couch and quickly kissed the Captain on the cheek.

"Thank you, Benjamin," she said, leaving his office.

"Any time, Old Man. Any time."

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Dax finished her ponytail and studied the results in her dressing mirror. Returning to her quarters had further quelled her uncertainty, as did Jen's proximity. Sisko's words haunted Dax as she began to realize that they were true. She listened to the faint sounds of Jen in the shower, and smiled. On some level, she had been drawn to the drummer since her arrival on the station. Part of it was the music, and how her passion for sound reverberated throughout her entire being. It was also Jen's charm and the depth of awareness she seemed to be fighting against. It was difficult for Joined Trill, with hundreds of years of experience, to feel the connection she now suspected was developing between her and the Bajoran. Rarely did a person of a single lifespan possess the wisdom or complexity necessary to engage a Joined Trill fully for very long. Jen was a complex person before their journey to the wormhole but since then, Jen seemed to have a sense of certainty about herself that rivaled those of a Joined Trill.

Maybe it's just an infatuation, she wondered to herself.

"But I saw us as old women!" she protested aloud. For now, the unnamed feelings coursing through her was enough.

Bren and I can name them and sort through them later, *together*. Her thoughts were interrupted by the signal at the door.

"Come in."

The door opened, revealing a Cardassian woman Dax did not recognize. She was much shorter than most Cardassians and her features not quite as sharp. The woman looked very embarrassed.

"I'm sorry to intrude," I was just at Jen's ship and they said she'd be here."

"Come in," Dax offered pleasantly. "She's in the shower, I'll tell her you're here."

"That's okay; I wouldn't want to disturb her. Do you mind if I just wait? We're sort of old friends."

"You must be Variella," Dax said warmly. "Can I get you some tea?"

"Do you have Ceryllian?"

"Certainly," Dax smiled, walking to the replication unit. "With Garbo root?"

The Cardassian woman laughed a soft gentle laugh that surprised Dax. "I can indeed tell that Jen has been here." She walked over to Jadzia and extended her hand. "You must be Commander Dax." The two women shook hands warmly. "I must tell you, when MarTay told me how beautiful you are, I thought surely she was exaggerating. But I can see now she wasn't."

"That's very sweet," Dax said, embarrassed, offering Variella her tea. "But I would think I might not rate very high by Cardassian standards."

"There you are mistaken, Commander. Some beauty transcends age, as well as species."

They walked to the low couch and Dax offered her guest a seat. She was surprised and impressed by the woman's kindness and manner. "Please, it's Jadzia. I rather thought MarTay had it in for me in the conference room."

"Oh, she did." Variella agreed, sipping her tea and smiling appreciatively. "She's a very jealous person. She hasn't quite gotten used to the fact that she never owned Jen, even when she thought she did."

"I heard your name mentioned in the meeting, but to be honest I'm not sure of the context?" Variella looked genuinely taken aback at the question.

"Oh. I would have thought Jen would have told you." Variella paused, considering her words carefully. "I love MarTay very much, but I will be the first to admit that she has some rather unpleasant qualities. She is very distrustful, narcissistic, insanely jealous, and justifiably paranoid. Shortly after arriving in Dakmar's household, Jen fell into an emotional game of

cat-and-mouse with MarTay. What Jen did not realize at the time was that the stakes were quite high. She simply thought she was flirting, when in reality she was playing at a life and death gamble. When Jen finally got MarTay to be honest about her attraction, Jen ended up with more than she bargained for. Jen was used to bait and trap others that shared MarTay's attraction." Variella looked at Dax warmly. "I was caught in that trap. But instead of telling MarTay what she knew, Jen protected me. She is a very special woman…"

"I thought I recognized a familiar voice." Jen said, entering the room wrapped in a bath towel, her long, wet hair combed back. Variella stood, and the two women embraced warmly. As they kissed in greeting, Dax carefully kept her own jealous impulses in check. "I didn't know MarTay brought you."

"I had the codes I needed to get past the Cardassian checkpoints, and I managed to avoid any Klingon encounters," Variella feigned smugness at her piloting prowess.

Jen laughed. "Yeah, either MarTay wouldn't let you out of her sight or you didn't want to let MarTay out of yours."

"Well, when we heard the rumors that you were here," Variella grinned warmly at Dax, "we had no way of knowing you'd make friends so quickly. Frankly it was I who wanted to keep an eye on MarTay." When Jen looked genuinely concerned, Variella added with a laugh, "I thought she might kill you."

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Kira and Tosh sat at a table near the bar in *Quark's*. He drank the blue liquid in the glass in front of him absently, mulling over ancient prophecy. "I just don't get it," he said for the umpteenth time.

"What's the problem with Dax? Keep in mind; she is a very close friend of mine." The big man smiled weakly.

"It isn't just that it's Dax. There is nothing wrong with her. It's that Jen has a purpose, a function necessary to the survival of Bajor. She needs to bring focus and vitality into the spiritual awareness of her people. I don't see how she can do that swooning over a two-meter knockout."

Kira was trying to be patient but finding the task increasingly difficult. "It isn't for you or me to see *how* she will do it. If you believe the prophecy and believe in Bren, then just know that she *will* do it."

Kira could see her words sinking into the consciousness of the distraught Vedek. Looking past Tosh, Kira saw Dobin approach from the other side of the bar. Always grinning, Dobin sat down, gave Tosh a look of pity, then addressed Kira.

"How's he doing?"

"I don't know," Kira answered honestly. "Is this condition 'good' for him?"

"I just don't get it," Tosh muttered again.

Dobin looked askance at Tosh. "Not really. Anyway, Dax came in looking for you. She's with Keyla over there." He indicated over his shoulder to the other side of the bar. "You go; "I'll keep an eye on him."

Turning his attention to Tosh, he gently addressed his friend. "Come on buddy, it's no good to get drunk on something blue. Let's get some Vulcan brandy." Dobin signaled Quark as he gently patted Tosh on the back and sat down.

Kira made her way through the crowd to the main counter where Dax and Keyla sat. She was surprised to see Dax and Keyla sipping drinks and conversing like old friends. Considering the two women involved, she decided it wasn't very surprising.
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"MarTay wasn't nearly as frightening as I expected." Keyla said in a conspiratorial tone. "She was rather attractive, but certainly not Jen's type." Dax shrugged noncommittally. "Oh, hi Kira," Keyla offered in greeting.

Kira smiled at the blonde woman. "You wanted to see me, Dax?" When Dax turned to greet the Major, she noticed an oblong object wrapped in shipping packaging on the counter in front of the Trill.

Dax smiled radiantly. "Hi Kira, are you busy?"

Somehow, Dax looked different. She was dressed in her uniform, hair neatly pulled back behind her, held with a silver clasp. It was the face she'd seen daily for over four years and a smile she'd been treated to hundreds of times. Still, something was different.

"Not at all. I was going to find you tonight anyway. How was your meeting with the Prophets?"

"It was interesting, as usual," the Trill replied, searching her recent memory. "The first time I encountered them I saw myself receiving Dax, and leaving Curzon. This time Dax was removed and venturing towards its next life. I was old and dying."

"How awful!" Keyla said, eyes wide with shock.

Dax shook her head. "It's not that bad. Dying isn't that difficult. Sure, it's scary, and I don't think I'll ever get used to it, but it usually isn't painful. This death in particular was very…" she searched for the right words, "warm and comforting."

"Did you see anything else?" Kira asked.

Dax shrugged, "I saw Jen getting the blood transfusion from Vedek Opaka. She was a very loud baby." Dax couldn't help but smile.

Keyla laughed. "Figures."

"Did Bren tell you what she saw?" Kira asked, curious.

Dax shook her head. "No, she'd only smile and say I'd find out soon enough. She's in the temple right now with the Kai." Glancing down at the package in front of her, Dax added shyly, "Actually, that's why I wanted to see you."

"What is it?" Kira prompted.

"I need to know how to prepare this." Dax peeled back the covering from the package. Inside was an oblong vegetable. It was a very deep purple, black almost, with bright red stripes. Part of a stem was left at the top where it had been cut from the vine."

"Is that what I think it is?" Kira asked dismayed.

"It's Talaffa Squash."

"Betrothal Fruit!" Keyla exclaimed, hugging Dax impulsively. "Congratulations!"

"Where'd you get it?" Kira was stunned, as much by the presence of the highly symbolic squash as she was by Dax's ownership of it.

"One of the merchants on the Promenade… it's fresh, picked today - it's almost out of season, so I'm lucky I found it."

"You're not going to cook that are you?" Kira asked, still dismayed.

Dax looked at her friend seriously. "I am if you tell me how."

"But it's poisonous. Highly poisonous."

"No, duh." Keyla said, rolling her eyes. "That's why it's betrothal fruit."

"Look, Kira are you going to help me or not?" Dax asked flatly, a frown creasing her elegant features.

"Ah, sure, of course Dax, I'm sorry." Kira decided that trying to talk sense to the Trill in the confines of *Quark's* would be nothing but distracting. Keyla seemed to read her mind.

"I need to check on Tosh," Keyla offered. "He's an ass and all— but he is my friend. I'll catch up with you later."

Dax picked up the package and put her other arm affectionately around Kira's shoulders. "Come on. We don't have much time."

"Dax, this is impulsive, even for you." Kira said as they walked down the corridor leading to Jadzia's quarters.

The tall Trill laughed. "I suppose it is." They reached the door and Dax looked at Kira seriously. "The fact is, Nerys, I've had this feeling nagging at me since Jen and I got back to the station. It's almost as if the time we spent on her ship was stolen. That life, or fate, or whatever is going to pull us in two different directions. I need to let her know right now that I'm willing to fight for her. If I don't do something now, I'm afraid I won't get another chance. So, this isn't exactly an "I want you to marry me" meal as much as it's an "I'd like to see where this goes meal."

"It's the prophecy isn't it?" Kira queried, following Dax into her quarters.

Dax put the Talaffa Squash on the table and headed to the replicator. She nodded at the Major. "Houses of Being in alignment; the Klingon Warlords will need comfort. Go to them and begin an age anew…" Dax said quietly. "Jen might not know it yet, but she is going to Kronos. I really want to do this for her before she goes." Kira was stunned as Dax looked at her with eyes full of sadness and longing.

Kira was not intending to tell her friend what she'd overheard Jen saying to Tosh, so she was surprised to hear herself blurt, "Dax, you and Jen will have a long life together. I heard her say as much to Tosh. I think the Prophets told her."

Dax smiled, some of her usual mischief returning to her features. "Perhaps it's because of what I'm doing?" A slow smile eased across Kira's face in understanding. "Will you help me?" In that instant, Kira couldn't think of anything she wouldn't have done for her friend.

She sighed, resigned to her fate, but smiling none the less. "I'll help on one condition: You get a hypospray of the antidote and have it on hand, just in case."

"Deal." Dax picked up the oblong squash. "So, what do I do first?"

As they worked, Kira told Dax the story behind the betrothal fruit. It was a favorite Bajoran folk tale, one Kira remembered being told by Jen's grandfather, Foppie.

> *The daughter of a Kava root farmer, Tru Nafril was breathtakingly beautiful. She was also smart, brave, and witty. She lived with her father, and her younger brother and sister on their small farm. Her mother, Vuta, had died giving birth to her sister, and since that time, Nafril had taken care of the family.*
>
> *One day on his way to town, Ranson Tek, his parents only child, headed down the dirt path past the Tru farm. He saw Nafril working at the water pump and was intrigued. For the rest of the month he would pass by her farm each morning and evening, stopping to talk to the beautiful young girl when he saw her in the fields. He would bring her gifts from town; being the son of a wealthy merchant, he had access to things about which Tru and her family could only dream.*
>
> *It wasn't long before the two were in love and wanted to be wed. Tru's father was not looking forward to losing his eldest daughter. He appreciated her hard work, and would miss her laughter around the farm, but as with all his children, their happiness was paramount; Ranson Tek was welcome on their farm at any time.*

Tek's parents however would hear nothing of it. "What has she to give you?" his father would ask. "They are poor as dirt," his mother added in a shrill voice. "No, she is not good enough for you. Until she gives us something we find suitable, she may not have you."

Ranson returned to the Kava root farm with the bad news. Tru's father tried to comfort the boy, told him he'd find a gift suitable for his parents and set to work. First, he offered them his entire Kava root crop – it would be a cold winter for the Tru family but to them it was worth it.

'What is Kava root to us?" asked the mother.

"We can buy it from our friends," said the father.

Nafril retreated to the forest to think.

Next, the Tru patriarch spent night after night carving a forax stone he found in his field. It was beautifully detailed and depicted the Cliffs of Serenity on the coast. Again, the Ranson family was unimpressed.

"It's exquisite!" said Tek.

"We can buy carvings better than that," said Tek's mother.

"We can buy larger stones than that," said Tek's father.

Still in the forest, Nafril contemplated. Walking home, she spotted a Talaffa Squash. It was a special treat her mother prepared for the family when she was alive. It was highly poisonous and very deadly, but Vuta had taught Nafril the secret of its preparation. Suddenly a thought came to Nafril. She picked the squash and hurried home.

Her father was trying to comfort Tek, telling him he'd still be welcome and a member of the family, nonetheless, but Tek wouldn't be comforted- he wanted his parent's blessing. Even Tru's young brother and sister tried to comfort the dejected merchant, to no avail.

'"Tek," said Nafril, "go invite your parents to dinner. I have a gift they may find appropriate."

Happily, the boy headed home.

Nafril went to work. She carefully skinned the squash, making an oblong platter of the thick skin. Next, she cut the squash in half; the squash was filled with juicy round seeds held together by fibrous pulp. It was the Talaffa Squash fiber that contained the deadly poison. With her hands, she carefully freed the seeds without breaking them, removing every strand of fibrous material. She placed the seeds on the squash-skin platter. Next, she cut a thin layer of meat from the outside of the squash halves. The poisons existed in the center; the outside layer was wonderfully flavorful if prepared properly. She worked very carefully, thinking of the happy life she hoped to live with Tek. Finally, she mashed the outside meat into a fine pulp, covered the seeds, and wrapped the skin around them to cook. She carefully washed her hands and work surfaces to remove all traces of the deadly poison, as it would only take a few stray fibers to kill someone. She then prepared has'berat, robotan legumes, and vek'leva with finn kernal bread.

When her guests arrived, they sat at a wonderfully decorated table. Her brother and sister worked hard on the settings and her father's rejected carving made a beautiful centerpiece. There was no denying the meal was delicious, as

fine as the finest chef could prepare… but not finer. Tek's father and mother were about to complain when Nafril presented the final course. A small dish was set in front of each person, round blue-black seeds with red flecks in a deep red sauce. Father and mother tried it experimentally their eyes shining with delight.

"This is magnificent!" exclaimed the mother.

"Wonderful," agreed the father, "but it is still not worthy of our son."

"I think it is," replied Nafril, as she showed them the Talaffa skin. "I have prepared a deadly dish for you. It would have been all too easy to make a mistake and kill either you or your son, yet we've all eaten, and we are all here. Are seven lives not worth me spending my life with your son?"

Tears welled up in the eyes of the Ranson family. They realized that they could have lost their son or each other. More than that, they realized how much Nafril loved their son to undertake something so dangerous. Any member of her family could have been killed just as easily. Tears streaming down their faces they welcomed her family into theirs with open arms.

"How much meat should I take off?" Dax asked, working deftly with the dangerous squash.

"That looks about right, not that I've ever done this before," Kira replied uncertainly.

Dax prepared the squash in the same manner as the folktale. When it came time to prepare the seeds, she held the squash carefully over two dishes – one for the seeds, one for the deadly pulp. Kira studied her as she worked. She was focused on the task at hand, concentration evident on her face. Still, the infamous Trill confidence shone through. Her blue eyes showed no hint of apprehension or worry, only the customary calm.

They'd been quiet while she worked, as Kira didn't want to distract her while she handled the poison.

"What else are you going to serve?" Kira finally asked as Dax finished with the seeds, careful not to break the delicate spheres.

Dax put the squash remnants in a disposal unit and keyed a sequence into the replicator. The dangerous pulp vanished with a soft whir. "I thought I'd serve Klingon val-gakh, my mother's jun'moffa, and Kanar."

"And for dessert?" Kira asked with a wry smile.

"Terran chocolate, a soufflé perhaps?"

Kira laughed. "Dax! Don't you think this is overkill? I've heard you mention val-gakh before, not to mention jun'moffa. Is there any culture's prized aphrodisiac you're not including?"

"You're right! I forgot Ferengi mox chips," Dax said seriously. "Thanks, Kira."

Kira hugged her friend affectionately. Dax was surprised but pleased by the fiery Bajoran's rare outburst. "Jadzia, you're incorrigible. And in all sincerity, I think you and Jen deserve each other."

"Thank you, Nerys," Dax replied softly, her voice brimming with emotion.

"I'll let you finish your preparations. And I want details of how it goes."

Chapter 12

Jen walked the teeming Promenade slowly, savoring the lively bustle of activity that went on around her. She was greeted with familiar smiles; certainly many inhabitants of the station recognized her at this point. A few passers-by stopped her to talk about music, one subject Jen

was sure of which she'd never tire. Finally, the station temple in sight, Jen paused near the entrance to collect her thoughts. Taking a deep breath and nodding to the Vedek outside, she made her way into the temple. This was one place Jen hoped she had nothing to fear.

As was customary, the lighting was low, illuminating a maze of small alcoves of different sizes branching off the main walkway, variously occupied by individuals either in silent meditation or in quiet discourse with a Vedek. She walked purposefully down the walkway towards a beaded curtain at the rear of the temple.

She stepped through the partition into a room decorated with meditative sculptures mounted on the walls. A small reflecting pool was the central focal point of the room, with several low benches positioned around it. Kai Winn was seated nearest the doorway, her back to Jen.

"I did not expect you so soon, child," the Kai said smoothly.

Jen looked calmly at the back of the Kai's head, walking to the other side of the pool as she spoke. "You thought I'd be distracted; caught up in the secular life I desire so much. You expected to find me losing myself in the arms of a Trill and reveling in life aboard this space station."

Kai Winn appeared visibly unsettled by Jen's words, but they were devoid of antagonism; she was merely listing what she knew the Kai saw as facts. Jen wondered if it was her experience in the wormhole, or could everyone read the stern woman so easily?

"Do you think you are meant for a life other than secular?" the Kai guardedly deflected Jen's words with a question.

Jen smiled and sat down across from Kai Winn. "Your Eminence," she began, "we both know I am. But I can assure you it isn't for a long, long time to come. I will go back to the Celestial Temple, possibly forever, but not until my life here has completely unfolded."

"The Prophets have written about changes that will come in the wake of the Speaker For The Dead. Changes to the religious life of all Bajor. Is this a mantle you wish to wear?"

Jen shook her head sadly. "I'm not after power, your Eminence. I don't have designs on how others should live. I will not abstain from the life I want either. If I play forgotten songs and people start singing them, I won't stop playing them. So what is the issue? I'm not after the Kaiship, and I've no interest in joining the Vedek assembly. What threat could I possibly pose to you?"

Winn pursed her lips, sizing Jen up. "Do you think me so shallow, child? I fear not for myself, but for our people. The prophets have chosen me to guide Bajor in the spiritual rebuilding of our people; I seek to rebuild our faith with a sturdy foundation."

Jen looked into the reflecting pool, comforted by the stillness of the water. "The inhabitants of the Celestial Temple care little for who is Kai on Bajor. They've chosen nothing. You eliminated Bareil from the choosing and now wear the white mantle." Jen could see the Kai was shocked and angered by her words.

"I'm not trying to be disrespectful. I'm willing to be candid with you and I expect the same courtesy. The function you perform is important but if you think that you can do no wrong, that your every move is somehow ordained and predetermined, you're wrong."

"I will be candid, Brenmarjen," the Kai said coldly. "The interaction between the prophets of Bajor and the Prophets of the Celestial Temple is not coincidental. What we see when we gaze into a tear of the prophet is not random. I would not expect that your experience in the Temple was random. They show us things for a purpose."

"Their time is not linear, they can't help it." Thinking a moment, Jen realized there was merit to the Kai's argument. "You may have a point. Still, the lives of non-linear beings are hardly a reason to turn away from our true religious foundation."

"The teachings of the Prophets enhance our understanding of the houses, they don't supersede it."

"For you maybe, Kai, but not for most. People take the path of least resistance. Looking outward to someone else's teaching is easier than looking inward and facing what we find." Jen sighed; she had no intention of getting into a religious debate with Bajor's religious leader.

Jen cut to the chase. "I want to know what you want from me. What is it going to take to avoid my untimely demise?"

The Kai paused. Jen was more dangerous now than ever. She knew who she was, knew her lineage, and knew that the Kai had prior knowledge of it. It was unfortunate she was still a player, but eliminating her at this point would have serious repercussions.

"You do not belong on Bajor," the elderly woman stated without emotion. "I know the Prophets have chosen me, whether you feel the same or not. You may be of Opaka's blood but you are not Opaka. Nor do you fill Bajor's spiritual needs. It is my supreme hope that you will not stand in the way of the spiritual guidance I offer our people."

As if the request were any less than she expected. Jen smiled the patient smile of someone addressing a child. "I will not stand for you or against you Kai, unless the Bajoran people suffer from your guidance. Bajor is my home, so you're asking a lot for me to leave it. But I will do as you wish. I will visit Bajor, surely, but I won't live there, though it will never be far from my thoughts. If Bajor blooms under your guidance I will be grateful, if it suffers I will respond."

"Is that a threat?" the Kai asked.

"No Kai, it is an offer. I will stay as far away from the running of Bajor as I can, provided it is run well. But the truth is, I'm not the woman I was a week ago, or even two days ago for that matter. I might not be Opaka, but I'm of her blood. This is enough to make things very difficult for you. It wouldn't take much to cultivate a Maquis following with Klingon support; we both know this. I don't want civil war any more than you do, but I will not be a party to a rebuilding of Bajor that puts station and ceremony above all else."

"You sound like a Lycene," the Kai remarked, having heard the complaint before.

"The Lycene deserve your ear, your Eminence."

"And what, my child, do you intend to do about your newfound heritage?" the Kai looked deep into the reflecting pool as she asked, her face revealing nothing.

It all comes down to this, Jen thought. "I will not hide who I am, Kai. I am the daughter of Opaka's sister. I do not seek to guide the people of Bajor in religious matters. But if their spiritual needs are not attended to, I will remain passive. Certainly, people will discover who I am, a fact I believe provides me with a certain amount of personal security. I don't seek to threaten you, your Eminence, but will remind you of this: You tried to send me back to Cardassia, and I won't forget that."

"You have a difficult path ahead of you, Brenmarjen" Winn remarked after a moment's thought. "While being the niece of Opaka may give you a certain amount of credibility, and 'personal safety', as you put it, you may find the expectations difficult to live up to."

"Expectations to live up to, comparisons to live down… I can't expect it any other way. I'm willing to be a living disappointment, as opposed to a deceased source of family pride." Jen

stood before continuing, “Besides, your Eminence, I’m the last of my family. After me, there are no others.” A slow smile played across her features. “That is, until my daughter arrives.”

“Your daughter?” the Kai asked, frowning.

“I saw her in the Temple.” Jen grinned openly now. “Her name is Kira, and I suspect she’ll be very much like her namesake.” With that, Jen headed for the door, asking as she walked past the Kai, “If there is nothing else, your Eminence?”

The Kai shook her head absently. This news of Jen’s progeny and its implications was new and added to her worries. She scarcely noticed Jen’s departure.

“We’ll talk again soon,” Jen added gently. “Be guided by the Prophets.”

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Dax had almost finished her dinner preparations when a chime at her door signaled a visitor. She wasn’t expecting Jen just yet, but finished her last-minute adjustments with the table just in case. “Come in,” she called, standing between the door and dining room table. She let out a sigh of relief when Benjamin Sisko stepped through the doorway.

“Something smells wonderful,” he commented, smiling as he strode across the room. “Is that you or the food?”

Dax laughed in spite of herself. “Both of us, if you must know.”

“I stopped by sickbay and Dr. Bashir asked me to give this to you.” He was holding a folded piece of parchment in one hand and a hypo spray in the other. He handed Jadzia the latter. “He said it was rather important. The difference between life and death, I think.”

She took the cylinder and put it on the counter. “Kira didn’t waste any time. It’s an antidote for my cooking.”

Sisko shrugged, “Well, you never had my flare for cooking. I don’t know why Curzon never took me up on my offer to teach him.”

“Because Curzon simply found it more convenient to have you cook for him.”

Benjamin gracefully stepped around the Trill and examined the table critically. “Don’t touch anything,” Dax warned.

In response, he held up both of his hands before clasping them firmly behind his back. He examined the various dishes and inhaled the fragrant aroma from the food. Dax could feel her pulse rise with nervousness. “Well?” she asked tentatively.” What do you think?

“I think,” he began sternly, “that I wouldn’t serve this meal to anyone I didn’t want around for a long time to come.” He ended his assessment with a broad smile, his white teeth gleaming against his dark skin. She sighed in relief. “I think you’ve outdone yourself, Old Man, Jen’s a lucky woman.”

“Thank you, Benjamin,” she replied, smiling. “I think we both are.”

“That’s what I wanted to talk to you about, Dax,” he continued, seriousness creeping into his voice. He extended his arm to her couch and she joined him there. “It’s this.” He handed her the folded sheets of parchment. She unfolded them and scanned the contents.

“What is this?”

“It’s a letter written to me by Kai Opaka. It was given to me by Vedek Bareil after she was lost. Apparently, she had written it before my arrival. As far as I know, there are no other copies and the letter was sealed when I received it.”

“So, this isn’t part of the prophetic body?”

“That’s right.”
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She looked back down at the words. “Read it out loud?” Sisko asked. “I’d like to hear it coming from you.”

She nodded and began to read.

“*I have seen interesting times ahead for you, Emissary. For you and those who are close to you. Your arrival has ushered in a new dawn for Bajor. I am very proud of you. Sadly, I fear that while I will see an end to the Occupation, I will not see lasting peace brought to Bajor. I am comforted, however, with the knowledge that after my passing, peace will be found. I also regret that I will not see my niece as the woman she will become. You will meet her though, and through someone who is very dear to you, she will become a part of your life. I would like to tell you who she is but at this time, I cannot. When the time comes, you will know. You may be suspicious of her. Your feelings are valid, but you will come to know the truth through your mentor, the one of uncommon duality and penetrating beauty. I see a lasting bond between your friend and my niece. I also see impossible progeny. It will be a day of wonderful irony when my niece, believing she has turned her back on the religion of Bajor, watches her daughter pick up the mantle of Kai. This is a possibility, however, and not a certainty. Oh, I hope it happens though. While it will be difficult for Bajor to accept a Kai with alien markings, it will show that my people have indeed grown. When the time comes, Emissary, give my best to your dear friend and my niece. May they one day walk with the Prophets, and join me there.*”

Dax folded the paper, and handed it back. “I’m glad she wrote it in Federation standard, my Bajoran is a little rusty.”

Sisko smiled. “You’ll have plenty of time to practice before the baby arrives.”

She looked at him, confused. “I don’t know how we’re going to work out that one,” she admitted.

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Jen decided to stop by *Quark’s* before heading to Dax’s quarters. She was relieved to see her bandmates sitting at the bar, and as she walked over to join them, she glanced up at the battered drum head majestically hanging over the bar. She noted Tosh’s barely conscious state and Dobin’s inebriated attempt to comfort him.

“Who died?” She asked

Tosh’s eyes focused unsteadily on her briefly before turning moodily back to his drink.

“What’ll ya have?” Quark asked, stepping over.

“A Torrid Affair.” Jen replied absently, still studying Tosh.

The Ferengi snickered. “I thought you and Dax already…”

“It’s a *drink,* Quark.” Jen growled.

“I know, I know, I’m just teasing.” He grinned at Keyla, who was still stifling a giggle, then picked up a glass and proceeded to pour several colorful liquids of varying amounts. The end result was a drink clear as water.

“Still, you could satisfy a lot of curiosity, as well as win a great deal of latinum, if you’d just tell us what it was like?”

Jen took the drink and put a slip of latinum on the bar. “Ask Dax if you’re so curious.”
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He shook his head, frustrated. “I was afraid you’d say that.” He headed to the far side of the bar where Jen heard distinct groans of disappointment. It appeared that a lucrative bet had suddenly been called off.

“Tao,” Jen said, toasting her friends and taking an experimental sip.

“So, how did it go with the Kai?” Keyla inquired.

Jen shrugged. “Well, I don’t think she’s going to try to kill me. Not today, anyway.”

“How can she do that with you on the other side of the galaxy?” Tosh growled, still staring at his drink.

“Did I miss a meeting?” Jen asked, looking from Keyla to Dobin to Tosh.

“Aren’t you and the Trill going back to Trill?” Dobin asked, trying to speak clearly.

“Not as far as I know. Why?”

“Don’t you have to meet her parents or something?” Tosh spat.

“What’s gotten into you?” Jen asked, “So what if I do? So what if I’m gone for a few weeks? Is Bajor going to implode?”

Keyla patted Tosh’s arm, attempting to sooth the belligerent man. “Tosh is convinced you’re not going to live on Bajor anymore. It’s in the prophecy.”

Jen shrugged. “Well, that part’s true. The Kai doesn’t want me on Bajor. I figured I’d live on one of the outer planets, maybe one of the moons, or even the station for that matter.” She grinned shyly. “The station would be preferable.”

The big man’s eyes brightened, “Really?”

“So the band isn’t breaking up?” Dobin asked hopefully.

“I never said it was. Where are you guys getting these weird ideas?” Keyla was about to speak and Jen help up her hand to stop her. “If it’s the blasted prophecy, I don’t want to know.”

“Well, you are going somewhere to comfort someone.” Keyla protested.

Jen sighed, taking a long drink from her glass. “It doesn’t say when. It could be years from now. Listen, would you all stop obsessing about this? If something happens, it happens. It isn’t like worrying about it will change anything.”

In his drunken stupor, Tosh smiled. “At least you’re admitting who you are.”

Jen smiled in spite of herself. “Yes, my friend, I know who I am. The question is, will you let me be who I am, and not who you think I should be?”

“I’ll try,” he mumbled, conceding.

“We’ll all try.” Dobin confirmed.

Jen finished her drink and got up to leave. “I’ll see you tomorrow. Be ready to rehearse at oh-nine hundred?”

A wicked smile crossed Keyla’s soft features, “I’d make it twelve hundred if I were you. Something tells me you’re in for a late evening.”

Jen hugged her bandmates goodnight, simultaneously wondering and thanking the Prophets for whatever she had done to deserve such a group of friends.

On her way to the Commander’s quarters, Jen passed several familiar faces. Captain Sisko smiled and nodded as she passed him on the walkway. Chief O’Brien and Doctor Bashir, returning from a game of springball, waved in greeting as she went by. There was something about the look she received that puzzled Jen. Sure, everyone had been polite before, but it had grown somehow. It was as if Jen had been adopted into their close-knit family, as Dax had been adopted into hers.

She reached the turbo lift to take her to the habitat level and was about to enter it when she noticed Kira drinking a cup of rok'tajino at the Replimat. Quietly, she walked over and sat down at the Major's table.

"On your way to dinner?" Kira asked, smiling.

"As a matter of fact, I am. And I've noticed an unusually high number of command staff members hanging out on my path from *Quark's* to Dax's. If I didn't know better, I'd think it wasn't a coincidence."

Kira chuckled. "Perhaps it isn't. Dax is very special to us."

Jen grinned. "To both of us, but don't you think after 300 years, she'd know how to take care of herself?"

Kira shook her head and smiled wryly. "I can honestly say that I don't think years alone could prepare anyone to handle you."

Jen stood up, smiling widely now. "I'll take that as a compliment, if you don't mind. I love you, Nerys."

"I know you do, Bren, and I love you too. I'm glad you're happy. *Pel dar joi* to you both."

"Thanks, Nerys. That means a lot to me. I'll see you later."

Kira smiled as she watched her friend enter the lift. Jen grinned and winked at her as the doors slid silently closed. For the first time since Jen's arrival, Kira felt a weight lifted from her. As she left the *Replimat* and headed to Ops, she doubted she'd ever again have nightmares about that night ten years ago when Jen left, and she doubted she'd ever see her alive again.

Pausing outside Dax's door, Jen keyed the chime signal nervously. "Come in," she heard called from inside as the door slid open. She entered the Trill's quarters, instantly overcome by the exquisite aromas within. Dax stood between her and the table, wearing a short black dress that reached mid-thigh on her very long legs. Jen paused at the sight of the elegant, reedy figure standing before her.

"Y- you look incredible," she stammered, when she finally found her voice.

Dax suddenly looked shy; something that did not happen often. "Thank you," she said quietly. "It's been over a hundred years since the last time I was a woman. Sometimes I forget…"

"Well then, Jadzia," Jen smiled as she crossed the floor to embrace the Trill, "I shall endeavor to remind you."

After a tender, lingering kiss, the aroma of the food became more then Jen could stand. "This stuff smells incredible. What is it?" Jen turned in Dax's embrace and stood gazing at the table, the Trill's arms wrapped around her.

The table was set for two, a deep violet tablecloth draped over the dining area table. The plates were black, as were the eating utensils and the napkins. Long fluted glasses half-filled with Kanar sat by each plate. A Vulcan orchid served as a center piece, its pink, spiny flower and broad black leaves complementing off the color scheme. Several uncovered serving dishes, including an elegant covered bowl sat in the middle of the table.

Standing behind Jen, Dax pointed to the various dishes, announcing their name softly in the Bajoran's ear. "Val-gakh, jun'moffa – my mother's recipe – and mox chips."

"They sound decadent," Jen smiled, stroking the long arms embracing her. She couldn't recall an occasion when everything seemed this perfect.

"What's in the bowl?" she finally asked, reaching for the lid. As the lid cleared the bowl, Dax heard Jen's surprised gasp. Slowly Jen turned in Dax's arms, taking a step back to gaze into

the Trill's blue eyes. She knew then that she could be very content looking into those eyes every day for the next century. She turned back around and, gently taking the Trills hand in hers, broke a piece of the jun'moffa from its loaf. The airy cream-colored bread steamed in her hand as she scooped some of the Talaffa seeds from the bowl. She brought the morsel to her lips and took a bite, unable to keep the grin off her face as she chewed.

"Now that is a delicacy I never expected to enjoy," she said, beaming. "By the prophets, you can cook." She offered Jadzia the remaining bite. The Trill accepted, her front teeth gently scraping against the Bajoran's fingers as she accepted the bread.

Dax was pleased with the lightness of the warm jun'moffa; it complimented the savory Talaffa seeds. Much to her surprise, the seeds didn't really burst as much as melted in her mouth, releasing a delicious flavor akin to a curry.

"I will admit, I had some help, and the antidote is on hand if you're feeling queasy."

Jen chuckled and moved to the table to hold the seat while Jadzia settled herself. "My dear 'Zia, if you'd screwed up with the squash, I'd already be unconscious."

Jadzia smiled and portioned a selection of each of the dishes onto her plate before passing it to Jen. The Bajoran smiled and exchanged the plate with food for her empty plate. There was an aura of domesticity to the exchange, and for a brief moment Jen had a feeling as if they'd sat down to meals like this thousands of times.

"Is everything okay?" Dax asked, reaching across the table to touch the drummer's hand to make eye contact.

Jen allowed herself a moment to be distracted by the delicate spots that framed her lover's face before answering. "I think it's something left over from the Celestial Temple. I get these… I don't know, non-linear feelings perhaps. Does that ever happen to you?"

"No, not really," Jadzia replied. "I remember what I see, but that's about it. Then again," she added gently, "I think the beings in the wormhole are a bit more interested in you than they are in me."

Impressed with the Trill's cooking, Jen ate with enthusiasm, unsure how she wanted to broach the next topic. "I have to know," she asked seriously, "how much stock you take in all that's happened."

"You mean why I'm serving you betrothal fruit on our first date?" Jadzia asked teasingly.

Blushing slightly, the drummer looked down embarrassed. "I was going to kinda work up to that topic. I mean, it'll be a great story for our kids someday, but I wasn't going to go straight there." She was rewarded with a warm laugh. Jen Brenmar decided she could listen to that particular sound for years and not tire of it.

"I'm the one moving fast because I'm serving betrothal squash, and you've already got us having kids. How many? Two?" Jadzia chuckled, enjoying someone willing to take her good-natured teasing.

"Yes," Jen replied matter-of-factly. "A son and a daughter."

Jadzia Dax stopped laughing and gazed for a moment into the bright green eyes of the woman sitting across from her. "Our son will be named Benjamin?" Jen nodded in the affirmative.

"And our daughter?" Jen asked, an arched eyebrow punctuating her question.

It was Jadzia's turn to nod. "Kira, of course."

"I don't necessarily think that the things we see in the Celestial Temple are certain," Jen remarked, helping herself to another piece of the jun'moffa loaf. "Bajoran custom aside, I also

don’t take this as a ‘hey let’s get married right now’ kind of dinner. I am curious though as to what is going on in that gorgeous spotted head of yours.”

“If there is one thing I’ve learned from my time serving with Benjamin on this space station, it’s that what you think of the beings that live in the wormhole doesn’t always matter. You may not see yourself as a religious icon; certainly, Benjamin never saw himself as The Emissary. But these roles have a way of picking who inhabits them, not the other way around. While in a very short time you may find yourself pulled in different directions, be it Bajor or Kronos, I want you to know I am committed to seeing where the journey of ‘Us’ takes us.” She picked up the delicate glass and had a sip of Kanar, watching Jen consider what she’d just said. “Besides,” she added, setting down the glass, “if you are going to be starting a new life off of Bajor, it doesn’t hurt to have a friendly port to land in.”

Jen grinned. “You know, when I was on Cardassia, I would fantasize. Prophets, I’d create these lives and realities for myself to have a place to escape. I came up with some amazing stories about these places I would go and people I would meet. In all of that time, I never managed to come up with a place as perfect as this or a person as amazing as you.” She watched Jadzia smile at her words, beautifully framed by the window behind her and the expanse of space beyond. It was possible that the Prophets were right and that this was the woman she would spend the rest of her life with; it was possible that it wasn’t. She couldn’t wait to undertake this adventure and was grateful beyond measure that the woman sitting across from her wanted to join her. She raised her glass, delicately clinking it against Jadzia’s.

“You know, if you tell me there is Terran chocolate for dessert, I might be the one to insist on immediate nuptials.”

Jadzia laughed. “I hope you like soufflé.” The real dessert could wait until after their meal was finished.

The End