

Star Trek: Sutherland Shore Leave

By David Falkayn

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Author's notes: This story takes place on the *USS Sutherland* and involves the character of Elizabeth Shelby. My take on Shelby is in no way influenced by the Elizabeth Shelby as written by Peter David in his New Frontiers series of novels, comics, and short stories.

Deep Space Nine

As the circular open elevator carrying the two officers stopped at the Operations Center, the Trill science officer for the space station, Lt. Commander Jadzia Dax laughed, "You should have seen the look on Captain Hanson's face when, instead of the bridge operations simulator that he'd called up in the holodeck for our class, an Argellian pleasure house appeared! And then two holographic Orion women wearing nothing more than thongs and a smile went up to him and...well...I'll tell you the rest later..." she teased as she noticed Chief O'Brien and a couple of Bajoran techs avidly listening in.

Between fits of laughter, DS9's Bajoran first officer, Kira Nerys exclaimed, "I can't believe it! How did you two pull that off?"

Snickering, Jadzia explained, "We spent the night before breaking through the holodeck security systems and firewalls and slipped Liz's program into the system..."

Shaking her head, Kira smiled, "Well...I'm glad the two of you aren't cadets anymore..."

“On no...” Dax exclaimed, flashing an evil grin, “She’s much worse now...” Turning towards the Bajoran officer manning the communications system, the Trill officer requested, “The *Sutherland* should be coming into our space pretty soon. When they hail us, could you ask Captain Shelby to beam over to Operations?”

“Yes sir,” The tech crisply acknowledged.

Taking a look at a padd given to her by a Starfleet officer, Major Kira sighed, “Looks like we’re going to have a busy couple of days. The *IKS T’Ong* has just received clearance to orbit...*Sutherland* and that Ferengi freighter that it’s towing should be arriving within the next couple of hours...and a Cardassian freighter has just arrived.” Turning to Chief O’Brien, the major asked, “Chief? How are things going on your end?”

Shaking his head in disgust, the burly Irish chief petty officer grimaced, “The airlock at Runabout Pad A needs to be repaired, and we’ve got an issue with the waste reclamation system backing up into one of the cargo bays, plus we’ve been busy running changeling sweep drills with Odo and security and...” Miles sighed, “...Quark is still complaining about the air filtration system in his bar.”

“Well...Quark can wait until his lobes fall off, Chief.” Kira declared with a smirk. All amusement disappearing from her face, she added, “The changeling sweeps have top priority...the other station related problems come second...Quark is at the bottom of the list.”

“Right, Major,” The Chief quickly answered back as he made his way to the elevator.

“Just another day on Deep Space Nine,” Jadzia snickered as she assumed her position at the science station.

USS Sutherland

“Captain’s log—Stardate 49001.3—Captain Elizabeth Shelby recording. After our encounter with the entity, we rendezvoused with the *USS*

Hypatia and beamed over a skeleton crew under the command of my science officer, Lt. Commander Varok. The *Sutherland* then returned to the derelict Ferengi freighter, the *Pursuit of Commerce*, and we are now taking it in tow with us to Deep Space Nine where we will put in for a brief period of rest and recreation. While there, I plan to meet with Captain Sisko as regards both the entity and the contraband that we found on the freighter. Also, I am looking forward to meeting up with an old friend..."

"Sir?" Lieutenant Lavelle, currently manning the helm, called out, trying to get his captain's attention. "We're approaching Deep Space Nine."

"Very good, Mr. Lavelle." Shelby responded, her body language giving no indication as to her growing anticipation at her pending reunion with Jadzia. Addressing Lieutenant Atoa, she ordered, "Open hailing frequencies."

"Hailing frequencies open, sir." Atoa acknowledged. "DS9 is responding."

"Thank you, Mr. Atoa, put them on main viewer," the captain commanded as a Bajoran woman wearing the grey uniform of the planetary militia appeared on the screen. "DS 9 Operations..." Captain Shelby said with a friendly smile, "...this is the *USS Sutherland* requesting docking instructions for us and a security detail for the *Pursuit of Commerce*."

"You're cleared to assume standard orbit, *Sutherland*. Tugs are being dispatched to take charge of the Ferengi freighter," the duty officer replied. Then, after a moment, the Bajoran again spoke, "Captain Shelby?"

"Yes?" Liz replied.

"Lieutenant Commander Dax sends her regards and asks if you can beam over directly to operations?"

"Tell her to expect me in five minutes." Liz replied, her smile growing larger. Vacating the center chair, she turned towards her first officer,

“Commander, you have the bridge.” Seeing the look of anticipation on the faces of her bridge crew, she added in a mildly teasing voice, “Oh...I almost forgot. Shore leave is authorized for all off duty personnel.”

“Yes sir.” Hobson acknowledged, his lips turning up into the slightest of half smiles before turning his attention first to Anara and then to Lavelle. “Mr. Rysyl—coordinate with the tugs from DS 9 as regards the freighter. Mr. Lavelle—once DS 9 has taken charge of the Ferengi ship, proceed with station control instructions.”

“Aye, sir.” Lavelle answered crisply, then, turning towards Ensign Django sitting next to him, he cracked a lopsided grin as he quipped in a whisper, “Someone better tell DS 9 to look out ‘cause the *Sutherland’s* coming to town!”

After she had materialized on the transporter pad of the former Cardassian station, Captain Shelby looked about. Noting the heavy functional design that typified Cardassian structures, Liz couldn’t help but recall a lecture on comparative aesthetics given by her favorite Academy instructor, Ledron Davin. Even now, after all these years, she could still hear the reedy voice of the Zeon scholar...

And what does Cardassian architecture tell us about this people? Well...its emphasis on function over form informs us that pragmatism is a very important aspect of their psyche...

“Lizzy!”

Her face breaking out into a wide grin as she recognized the source of the greeting, Shelby called back as she leaped off the transporter pad, “Jadzia!” Embracing the raven-haired Trill in a tight hug, Liz then stepped back and noticing the extra pip on her friend’s collar, she teasingly congratulated her on her recent promotion. “Way to go, Lieutenant Commander! It’s about time! Of course, if you’d have listened to me when we were cadets and gone command or tactical/security like I did, you’d be a captain by now!”

“No thanks!” Jadzia smiled back. “I see what Ben has to put up with every day and he can have it.” Hearing a throat being cleared, Dax momentarily blushed. “Oops...forgive my manners,” she apologized, gesturing towards the dark-skinned Starfleet captain and the Bajoran officer standing next to him, “Captain Elizabeth Shelby, I believe you know Captain Sisko, commanding officer of Deep Space Nine and this is Major Kira Nerys, first officer.”

“Congratulations on your promotion, Ben.” Shelby said with a smile as she extended her hand, “It’s about time.”

Taking his fellow captain’s hand in his, Ben grinned, “Thank you, Elizabeth. How long has it been?”

“About three—four years,” Liz replied with a smile as Captain Sisko turned towards his Bajoran first officer.

“Captain Shelby and I ran into each other on several occasions while I was on the *Defiant* project.” Ben explained as the foursome walked into his office.

“I see...” Kira remarked, inwardly chuckling at how it seemed that almost all Starfleet officers seemed to know—or know of—each other.

Chuckling, Liz said as she regarded Kira, “Pleasure meeting you, Major. I hope you won’t hold whatever they might have told you against me.”

“I’ll try not to...” The Bajoran woman said with a smile as she remembered her earlier conversation with Jadzia.

Flashing a mischievous grin, Liz addressed the station commander as the group took their seats around the station commander’s desk. “I stopped by your father’s restaurant before heading out here...”

Laughing, Ben quipped, “I hope you didn’t leave him in the same condition you did the last time you were there...” He teased as he recalled his father telling him about when Liz had showed up at the restaurant with an especially attractive and voluptuous Betazoid woman.

Blushing slightly, Liz remembered the surprised look on the old Cajun chef's face when he popped on the couple in the private dining booth that time. Biting back her initial retort as she spied Major Kira out of the corner of her eye, Liz instead settled for a much more innocent response, "Don't worry Ben, I was a good girl. I didn't go a la carte this time, I stuck to the menu."

Feeling somewhat left out of the conversation, Kira prompted, "You should take a tour of the *Defiant* when you get the chance."

"Thanks, I'd like to see how she handles..." Liz replied with genuine sincerity and then her lips turned up into a rueful grin, "I'm afraid we gave it a little too much juice though."

Smiling broadly as well as feeling slightly guilty as he realized that his first officer was being left out of the banter, Sisko responded, making a point to include Kira, "That's all right. We've managed to iron out most of the bugs thanks to Chief O'Brien."

"That's good to hear. I remember working with the Chief while I was on the *Enterprise*. He's a damned good engineer." Liz praised and then teased with a wicked grin, "If it wasn't for the fact that I've already got one hell of an engineer I'd try to steal him away from you."

"Not a chance." Ben riposted with a crooked grin of his own. Then, his face taking on a much more serious demeanor, he queried, "I understand you found something interesting in Subsector 310?"

"A couple of things actually," Liz answered back, her grin also vanishing. "But I think we might want to discuss them with your security chief present."

"Well...Constable Odo and Lieutenant Commander Eddington should be here any moment now." Ben said as a humanoid figure wearing the tan uniform of Bajoran security and a balding human wearing the black jacket with yellow shoulders that marked him as Starfleet operations exited the elevator and quickly entered the Captain's office.

“Constable Odo...Lieutenant Commander Eddington.” Sisko said by way of introduction, “This is Captain Shelby of the *USS Sutherland*. Picking up the baseball that sat on his desk, he turned his attention to the visiting captain as the two newcomers took their seats. “So...what did you find out there, Captain?”

“As regards the entity...” Liz replied, “My science officer, Mr. Varok, is still analyzing what data we have. We do know that it was about to metamorphose, and that it subsisted off of the emotional and mental energy of sentient beings—that was what happened to both the Ferengi ship and the crew of the *Hypatia* and what it tried to do to us. We also know that it was headed here intending to do the same thing to everyone on the station in order to complete its change—but, unfortunately, that’s about it for now.”

“I see...” Ben remarked, stroking his chin. “Well...thanks for keeping the wolf from our door, Captain. As you’ve probably heard, we’ve had enough problems recently.”

Nodding her head gravely, Elizabeth replied, “So I’ve heard. Jadzia told me about your encounter with the Changeling on the *Defiant*.” In a sympathetic tone, she added, “I’m sorry about the loss of life.”

Returning his guest’s kindness, Sisko thanked her, “Fortunately we were able to stop it before it caused a war...” Then, seeing that the subject was making Constable Odo feel increasingly uncomfortable, he quickly changed topics, asking, “What about the *Hypatia*?”

“I assigned her a temporary skeleton crew under Mr. Varok.” Liz responded, “She should be here in a day or so.”

Turning towards his science officer, Benjamin directed, “Old Man, when the *Hypatia* docks, I want you to coordinate with Mr. Varok and see if between the two of you, you can come up with some more information.” Following Dax’s acknowledgement of his order, Sisko returned to Captain Shelby, “Regarding what you found on the Ferengi freighter, I have to admit, I’m more than a little concerned...”

“So am I...” Liz replied, “The political situation here is volatile enough without even more weapons being added to the mix.”

Mr. Eddington interjected politely, “I quite agree, Captains. Not only does it appear that the Klingons are supplying the Maquis, the Federation made weapons you found also imply the possibility of their being obtained through sympathizers in Starfleet...”

As Eddington’s words sunk in, a dark cloud seemed to take shape around Captain Sisko as he remembered his good friend, Cal Hudson, and his recent defection to the Maquis. Keeping as tight a rein as possible on the anger and hurt building inside him, Ben stated in a slow and deliberate tone, “It’s a known fact that the Maquis enjoy some support within certain ranks in Starfleet...”

“True, Captain.” Commander Eddington said diplomatically.

Constable Odo added, “Of course there’s another possibility—that the weapons were purchased on the black market and Daimon Quorak was planning on meeting with representatives of the Cardassian colonists—the Maquis aren’t the only ones involved in gunrunning, you know.”

“That possibility did occur to us.” Captain Shelby responded, further elaborating. “Information that Mr. Atoa—my tactical officer—was able to decrypt from the open logs didn’t give us any information other than the sort of stuff that one would expect—crew disciplining...grumbling about his last quarter’s profits...some idle fantasizing about a certain Trill officer on this station...” She said, giving Jadzia a wink, “Other than that...” she shrugged, “...nothing.”

“That’s not surprising...” Odo remarked, “...given the nature of the enterprise. However...” the shape shifter added, “Just because Daimon Quorak didn’t make an entry in the ship’s log doesn’t mean that there isn’t some sort of record.”

“True...” Liz interjected. “If nothing else, he’d want some sort of documentation for protection in the event of a double cross and/or for blackmail purposes.” She then flashed a brief smile, “Rule Number 72...”

“Never trust your customers.” Jadzia quipped, a smile crossing her face as well. “Glad to see you’ve kept up with your Rules of Acquisition.”

Tilting his head, Odo replied, “Precisely, Captain.” Then, the constable further inquired, “What else did you find in your search of the ship?”

“We didn’t find much else except for this...” Liz said as she presented a Ferengi padd. “Mr. Atoa found it hidden in a secret compartment—with enough booby traps to beat the band.” Taking a breath, she continued, “We haven’t been able to decrypt everything in the padd’s memory as yet...”

“Interesting...” Odo remarked as he perused the sparse information on the padd, nodding his head as he read a name that figured prominently. “Daras Tobar.” The constable growled. “Former Kon Ma—he was discredited when it became revealed that he was part of the Circle...”

“So...” Liz asked after Sisko and Odo had filled her in on first the Kon Ma, and then the Circle and its attempted takeover of both the station and Bajor, “How do you think he figures into this—I can’t see him helping out the Cardassians. Do you think he might have switched his allegiances to the Maquis?”

“We’re not sure yet,” Eddington answered. “We’ve tried to infiltrate someone into his organization for some time, but...”

“Our agents...” Odo said, picking up from where his colleague left off, “...both Starfleet and Bajoran security...always end up either dead or following an empty trail.”

Eddington added his face a picture of frustration, “No matter what we do — he’s always one step ahead of us.”

“Mmm...” Liz muttered, thinking for a few moments before responding. “Maybe what you need is a fresh perspective...”

“What do you mean?” Ben asked, curious as to what his colleague was currently thinking.

“Give me a few days to flesh out the details...” Captain Shelby replied somewhat airily, “Then you and I are going to need to have a private chat.”

“Just let me know when.” Ben responded, “And I’ll make the time.” Then, standing up, he announced, “Well...unless there’s something else, I think we can call this meeting over.”

As the gathering stood up and began to exit, Jadzia turned to Liz, “So...Lizzy...what sort of plans have you got for the rest of the day?”

“Well, Jadz...” Liz drawled, “I was thinking about maybe unwinding for a bit in a holosuite. I’m not really in the mood right now for anything rowdy...maybe a nice leisurely couple of hours in a Roman bath program I have...”

“If that’s what you want...” Jadzia said, “...then I’ve got the perfect program for you. How does the thought of spending some time in the baths on Trill sound?”

“Mmmm...” The starship captain purred, “Sounds tempting.”

Then turning towards Major Kira, Dax offered, “How about you Nerys? It’s the perfect thing for you—calm...relaxing...”

Shaking her head, Kira chuckled, “You know how I feel about holosuites—if it’s worth doing—then it’s worth doing for real...”

Not giving up, Jadzia further coaxed, “You don’t know what you’re missing...a nice hot bath followed by a massage...”

“I couldn’t even if I wanted to...” Kira politely demurred, “I have to get with Odo on the security updates and then another meeting with Captain Sisko, and **finally** a meeting with Vedek Lanai...”

Well...at least meet us for dinner...” Jadzia pleaded.

“Yes, please.” Liz enticed.

“All right...” The major finally agreed. “I’ll meet you at Quark’s at say...1900 hours.”

“Sounds good.” Jadzia replied. “We’ll see you then.”

The senior officers of the *Sutherland*, along with Ensign Django, gazed upon the various shops that made up the station’s Promenade with a mixture of pleasure and astonishment. As they took in the sights and smells—the brilliantly colored shirts, skirts, dresses, pants, robes, and other articles of clothing on display in the window of Garak’s Tailor Shop...the spicy aroma of freshly prepared hasperat wafting its way from a small family Bajoran restaurant a few stalls away from Garak’s...the cry of ‘Dabo’ and the sound of cheering coming from Quark’s...the chiming from the temple calling the faithful Bajorans to prayer...and the general hubbub of beings of what seemed to be almost all the races that made up the Alpha and Beta Quadrants and even a few from Gamma Quadrant—they stood in silence, allowing their various senses the time to take it all in.

“Not bad.” Sam, dressed, like most of the *Sutherland* crew in civilian clothing, exclaimed with a boyish grin as his eyes gravitated towards the Ferengi owned bar.

“Figures...” Django teased, “The moment we arrive and what’s the first thing he sees—the bar...”

“Don’t tell me you don’t want to at least check the place out...” Lavelle rejoined.

“Ok...yeah...I wouldn’t mind a spin or two on the dabo wheel...” Maria admitted.

Taking the dark-skinned ensign’s hand, Sam laughed heartily, “Then let’s do it!”

“What about you?” Jadon asked, turning towards Anara with a twinkle in his eye. “Want to take a couple of spins on the dabo wheel or try out one of the holosuites?”

“No thank you.” The Deltan officer, wearing a multicolored loosely flowing gown in lieu of her Starfleet uniform; her bare scalp decorated by a floral headband, politely replied in her usual lyrical voice. “I think I’d just like to take a walk along the Promenade.” Then, turning towards Commander Hobson, she asked, “Sir...would you like to join me?”

His heart skipping a beat, Hobson cleared his throat before answering formally, yet with a slight smile, “Yes...thank you, Lieutenant.”

Appearing nonchalant at Anara’s rebuff, Jadon grinned, “Well...you guys have fun—I think I’m going to join the kids over at Quark’s.” Then, waving as the groups separated, he called out, “I’ll catch up with you later!”

As the others split up into their separate groups, Manuele turned towards Denise, “Well Doctor—looks like it’s just the two of us—you feel like doing something?”

“Actually...” Dr. Murakawa grinned, “I need to see Dr. Bashir about what we discovered out there...but I think I could go with a bit of dinner afterwards...”

“Sound good to me.” The burly New Kauaian replied. “Captain Shelby wanted me to touch base with station security, so that’s probably going to tie me up for a couple of hours anyway. Where should we meet...the Replimat?”

“Nah...” Denise replied with an emphatic shake of her head. “I’m sick of replicated food and I don’t feel like *gahk*.”

Nodding his head in agreement, Atoa remarked, “Me neither. Well...that knocks out the Klingon restaurant. How about that Bajoran restaurant over there...”

“You know...” The doctor said, licking her lips, “I’ve always wanted to try hasperat with maybe some spring wine...”

“Ok, then.” Manuele grinned. “I’ll meet you at the Bajoran restaurant...say 1900 hours?”

“Sounds good to me,” Denise answered back. “See you then.”

As Constable Odo’s ever observant eyes swept the Promenade, a slight guttural sound escaped his throat as he noticed the crew of the *Sutherland* breaking up into groups of varying sizes varying from solitary individuals to small groups of four or more.

“Something bothering you, Odo?” Kira, seeing her long-time friend and associate standing by the railing, asked as she approached. “You’re not expecting any problems from the *Sutherland’s* crew, are you?”

“No more than from any other visitors to the station.” Odo responded, “Starfleet personnel generally behave themselves—usually the only problems are the occasional breaking the peace or other minor violations. But...” His eyes then focused on Anara who was at that time walking along the Promenade escorted by a Starfleet commander.

“She’s Deltan— isn’t she?” Kira asked, curious. “I’ve never seen one before—but I’ve heard about them.”

Odo simply grunted. “I’d better speak to Chief O’Brien about the air filtration system...”

“She’s only one Deltan!” Kira half teased. “Her pheromones can’t be that powerful...”

“You’re forgetting what happened when Mrs. Troi had her...condition...a few years ago.” The constable rejoined with a grunt. “Still...it’s not her I’m really worried about. It’s them.” He said as his gaze now concentrated on a group of Klingons coming into the Promenade from the opposite direction.

“I know we’ve had quite a bit of traffic from Klingons recently...” Kira replied thoughtfully, “But...haven’t they been quieter than normal?”

“Yes.” Odo said with a nod. “And that’s what has me worried.”

“Still—you don’t see any trouble coming from the two crews mixing, do you?” Kira asked her concern mounting. “I mean...the Federation and the Klingons are allied now—aren’t they?”

“There’s a human saying that I’ve heard Chief O’Brien mention more than once...” Odo replied, “I believe it’s from a philosopher he calls, ‘Murphy’, and it goes something like this—If anything can go wrong, it will.” The Constable then took a deep breath as he saw groups from both crews descend on Quark’s. “And I also believe in another saying—this one mine—If there’s trouble to be found on Deep Space Nine, it will almost invariably originate with Quark, at his bar, or at his instigation.”

“Those are some pretty good sayings.” Kira agreed, nodding her head. “So...what are you planning on doing?”

“What I always do.” Odo answered, a sardonic smile crossing his face. “I’m going to keep my eye on Quark and wait for him to slip up.”

Checking her timepiece, Kira flashed a winning smile. “Well, good hunting to you, Odo. I have a meeting with the vedeks and then I’m meeting Jadzia and Captain Shelby at Quark’s for dinner.” She laughed merrily, “At least I’ll have a ring side seat if you do catch him in the act.”

“Ohhhh...” Liz cried out in pleasure as a pair of firm hands belonging to very well built holographic Trill masseur firmly kneaded the muscles of the small of her back, her naked body soaking in the warmth from the nearby hot springs as she lay down on the marble slab. “This is sooooo nice, Jadzia...I owe you one.”

“I’ll take you up on that favor someday.” Dax grinned as she lay on a similar slab next to her friend. “Oh, yeah...” The raven-haired Trill purred as her masseur began on her shoulders. “Right there...now press harder...”

“Ummm...Jadz...” Liz said tentatively, unsure as to whether she should broach the topic or not, “I’m sorry I couldn’t make it for the Rite of Closure... you know that if I could have, I would have...”

“Don’t worry about it, Betts!” Jadzia replied reassuringly, “Believe me, I understand.”

“Still...” Shelby persisted, “It was important to you and I know how hard it was for you to go through with it. I should have been there.”

“It’s ok, honest.” Jadzia repeated, reaching over across the narrow space between the two women to take her friend’s hand. “I know that if you could have made it—you would have.”

“Thanks, Jadz.” Shelby responded, squeezing her friend’s hand. “That means a lot to me.”

“That’s what friends are for.” Dax said with a smile and then inquired, “Speaking of friends...have you heard from Pava recently?”

Smiling fondly as she remembered Pava Lar’ragos, the El-Aurian who was her old supervisor back when she was a junior lieutenant stationed on the *Shran*, Liz replied, “Yeah...a few months ago. Starfleet seconded him off to the Diplomatic Corps. He’s heading up the security detail for the negotiations with the Tsen’kethi.”

“That’s good...” Jadzia said. “He’ll enjoy the change of scenery.” Sighing with pleasure as her muscles relaxed under the tender ministrations of her holographic masseur, she quipped, “You know...this is almost as good as the real thing...”

“Tell me about it...” Liz moaned contentedly as her masseur gently massaged her legs and then exclaimed, “Oh! By the way, I got a message from Admiral Glover. He congratulated me on getting my command.”

“That’s great!” Dax answered back, her smile growing wider at the mention of the senior Glover’s name. “Samson’s a good man.”

“Yeah...” Liz said fondly, “He’s always been there for me. Sometimes I can’t believe he and Terrence are father and son.”

“I know what you mean...” Jadzia agreed, her manner becoming a touch more reserved at the mention of the younger Glover’s name.

Picking up once again on her friend’s change of mood, Liz gently probed, “Everything ok? Is there something about Terrence you want to talk to me about?”

“Everything’s ok, Betts...” Jadzia responded, plastering a smile to her face, “Honest. Like they used to say, ‘Nothing to see here...’”

“Jadzia...” Liz frowned, “You can’t fool me...we’ve known each other way too long. That trick doesn’t work with Ben and it’s sure as hell not going to work with me. What happened? Was Terrence being his usual self again?”

“No...” Dax answered back, emphatically shaking her head. “Nothing like that. It’s just...well...it’s kind of confidential between us.” Taking a deep breath, she sighed, “Let’s just say that he went through some pretty bad crap a couple of years ago and leave it at that, ok?”

“Sure...” Shelby reluctantly conceded, “I understand. Don’t worry about it.”

“Thanks, I appreciate it.” Jadzia replied, her lips turning up into a smile. Then, her smile turning into a leer, she teased as she changed the subject, “So...tell me about this Rome program of yours...”

“Oh...” Liz exclaimed, flashing an evil grin. “It’s the most decadent...imagine you’re the Empress Messalina and you’re surrounded by the most beautiful men and women...” She then gasped as the masseur’s sure hands found a sensitive area, “Let’s see...there’s a palace level with these Greek gymnasts wearing nothing but really

skimpy loincloths and the prettiest slave girls...and there's the Coliseum with big, husky, beefy gladiators...and then there's the baths..."

"Hmmm..." Jadzia mused, obviously tempted, "Sounds good to me. Maybe we'll be able to play some before you have to go—you can have the slave girls while I take the gladiators..."

"Well..." Liz replied with a grin, "You can have all the gladiators but one—there's a certain Thracian that's all mine." Licking her lips, she continued, "Anyway, if we're not able to squeeze it in this time—we can do it the next. *Sutherland's* going to be more or less in this sector for the near future at least, so I see us coming here on a semi-regular basis."

"That'd be fun." Dax answered back with a smile of her own. "Maybe...if it's ok with you, we can get Major Kira to join us..."

"Hmmm...I know it's just a first impression and all..." Liz said, a note of doubt in her voice, "...but I get the feeling that she's a bit...tense...if you know what I mean." Do you really think she'd enjoy this program? I mean—well...it gets pretty raw in places. Do you think she can handle it?"

"You're right, Betts. Kira is a little uptight—and well—I guess I've taken it on myself to loosen her up a bit..." Jadzia confessed in a soft voice, "And no... I don't think she could handle the full monty just yet," she admitted with a snicker. Then, her smile vanishing, she said with utter sincerity, "The thing is, Nerys is a friend of mine too—a good friend—and I really don't want her to feel like I'm excluding her now that you're here..."

"It's ok." Liz replied consolingly, "I don't want you to either—hell—other than maybe being a little tightly wound up, she seems like she's good people..."

"She is." Dax quickly agreed and then encouraged, "Just give her a little time and get to know her better—you'll like her too."

"Ok...then..." Liz smiled, "Next time we go to Rome...bring her along...I promise we'll break her in nice and easy..."

Smiling contentedly as she heard her friend's words, Jadzia raised her eyebrows as she teased, "Why does that phrase 'break her in nice and easy' worry me?"

Laughing, Shelby fired back, "You know me too well..." Groaning as the masseur began rubbing her down with a towel, the blonde captain teased back, "You don't have to worry though...the Major's safe from me. You know I like my ladies cute, curvy, feminine, and soft...and while Kira does have some nice curves and she might be feminine when she's off duty..." She said, licking her lips, "...she's definitely not soft." Seeing what amounted to a look of relief on her friend's face, Liz jibed, "But that doesn't mean I can't get her into some major trouble..."

"Oh well..." Jadzia sighed, a mixture of false melodrama and pure pleasure as her masseur put the finishing touches on a most relaxing rub down, "Someone better notify Admirals Paris and Shanthi. Looks like we're going to have yet another victim of the evil Elizabeth Shelby..."

"Oh look!" Anara, pointing towards a dress on display in Garak's shop, cried out as she took Hobson's hand, practically dragging him into the shop with her. "Isn't it beautiful?" The Deltan woman exclaimed, practically cooing in delight while she held the dress in front of her body.

"It is striking." Chris agreed, his lips turning up into a slight smile at the sight of his companion's enthusiasm.

"Ah...I see that the lady and her gentleman friend have most perceptive eyes!" Turning in the direction of the voice, Anara and Chris saw a Cardassian male of about average height and weight and wearing civilian clothing of good, yet not exquisite cut, approach them. "I'm Garak and welcome to my humble shop." The tailor said, bowing politely. Maintaining his welcoming smile, the Cardassian's observant eyes quickly made out first, the Starfleet communicator pin affixed to a fold in the lovely Deltan woman's gown, and second, the knowing look

the uniformed male Starfleet officer gave him. “That dress is most becoming to you, Madam...” Garak said unctuously as he shepherded the couple deeper into his store. “Why don’t you try it on?” He encouraged as he gestured towards a fitting room in the back.

“I couldn’t...” Anara replied, even though she was deeply tempted.

“Please...” Garak insisted as he reached for another, equally exquisite, dress. “I really must insist.”

Seeing her escort’s gentle nod of the head, Anara smiled, “Ok...” Turning towards Chris, she teased, “I’ll be back in a few minutes—try not to get too bored...”

“I’m sure I can find something to keep the Commander occupied.” Garak said reassuringly as he reached for a jacket. “Perhaps a nice coat made of genuine Tryllym wool? It’s the perfect match to this Rigellian pants-shirt combination over here...” Not giving the stern faced Hobson time to voice any objections, the Cardassian, in a matter of mere moments, had already smoothly separated him from his companion and had relocated him to an area of the store where the two men could talk quietly.

“What do you know about a Ferengi freighter, *The Pursuit of Commerce*?” Hobson asked as he appeared to examine the lining of the jacket that Garak had just thrust into his hands.

“Why...probably less than you do, Commander.” The simple tailor replied with a grin as he helped Chris on with his jacket. “Hmmm...” Garak vocalized as he walked around his customer, carefully appraising the cut and fit of the coat. “I think maybe a little more in the shoulders...”

“I’m curious...” Chris began, with just the slightest hint of irritation in his voice, “...did the Daimon commanding that freighter come in here for a...fitting?”

“Oh my, no!” Garak exclaimed. “I definitely would have remembered him had he of done so. Ferengi daimons are so...hard to forget.”

“Well...” Hobson then flashed an icy grin as he recalled the information his captain had given him regarding the former Kon Ma agent, “...then maybe a business associate of his...a certain Daras Tobar...might have come in for a suit...”

Seeing the tailor’s eyes widen for just a fraction of a second upon hearing that name, Hobson smiled inwardly. “Now that’s a familiar name...” Garak said with a phony smile as he helped Hobson off with the coat, “He’s never been in my store though...” The Cardassian said, with deliberate emphasis on the word store, “...but I do recall hearing mention of him frequenting another establishment—on Persis IV, I believe...”

“Do you know the name of this...shop?” Chris queried, probing further.

“I’m not really sure...” Garak demurred, “The problem is...there are so many shops there, and without knowing exactly what Mr. Daras was interested in purchasing...it would be hard to say...”

“I see...” Hobson drawled, “I believe our mutual friend was interested in...sporting equipment...most notably what you would use in...hunting...”

“Ah...” The tailor exclaimed. “I understand.” Turning his attention back towards the coat, he requested, his voice taking on a meaningful tone, “Let me complete the alterations on this jacket...it should take no more than a day or so...then if you’d please return, I’ll have everything ready for you.”

Just then, Anara came out of the changing room, resplendent in her dress, its low-cut neckline and rustling fabric mingling with her brilliant smile and pheromones to create such a heady mix that it immediately struck the two men standing before her speechless. “So...” She beamed, “What do you think?”

Recovering first, Garak replied, “Madam...you simply must wear that out of the shop...to put it in a box would be an absolute crime.”

Smiling ruefully, Anara shook her head, “I’d really like to...but there’s no way I could afford such a dress—it must cost a good thirty or forty slips of latinum...”

“I insist, Madam.” Garak replied, refusing to take no for an answer. “Seeing you in that dress is payment enough for me.”

“I can’t...” The Deltan woman said, reluctantly declining the tailor’s generous offer, “Even though I really want to...it wouldn’t be right...”

Still smiling, Garak, standing in between the two Starfleet officers, politely escorted them to the door of his shop, “If it eases your conscience any, Madam...think of it this way...you’re wearing that dress will be the best advertisement I could ever ask for. People are going to see you wearing it and come flocking to my shop for outfits just like it.”

Seeing her superior officer’s subtle nod of approval, Anara smiled shyly, “Well...if you insist...how can I refuse.”

“I thank you both for your patronage.” Garak replied as he and his customers reached the threshold to his store. “And...” He then fixed Commander Hobson’s eyes in his gaze for the briefest of moments as he spoke, “...as I said, Commander...come back tomorrow and I’ll have your jacket ready.”

“I can’t believe it!” Lavelle moaned to the woman walking with him down the Promenade as he shook his head dejectedly. “Two hours at the dabo wheel, and what do I have to show for it—I’m down twenty slips of latinum while you’ve practically cleaned them out!”

“That’s what you get for looking down the dabo girl’s cleavage instead of paying attention to the wheel.” Ensign Django teased as she counted her winnings. Then, counting out twenty slips, she pressed them into the hands of the forlorn helmsman. “Here...” She grinned.

“No.” Lavelle shook his head as he pushed the money back. “It’s yours...you won it, fair and square.”

“Damned right, it’s mine.” Maria snapped, “And I can do with it whatever I want to.” Then, she cracked a wry grin, “Besides—who said I was giving it to you—this is a loan, buster—and you’re going to pay back every slip with interest.”

“Interest?” Sam asked, more than a little concerned.

“Yeah...we’ll discuss the terms later.” Smiling and taking her escort by the hand, she dragged him over to a stall manned by a portly middle aged Bajoran man. “To start off with...you can buy me one of those.” She said, pointing to a blue, red, and green colored jumja stick.

“Sure thing,” Sam said with a grin as he paid for two of the treats. Taking a lick from his, his grin widened. “This is good.”

“Isn’t it though?” Maria agreed as she took a lick from her own stick.

“So...” Sam then asked, “What next?”

“Oh...” Maria grinned, “Let’s just walk for awhile, ok?”

“Sounds good to me,” The helmsman grinned as he took his companion’s hand in his own.

As the couple walked down the Promenade’s concourse, they were followed by two pairs of eyes. “He must be the one.” The owner of one of those sets of eyes, a Bardeezan, vocalized with a grunt.

“He is.” The Bardeezan’s companion, a Dopterian, said as he scratched his pointy earflap.

“Good.” The Bardeezan replied. “What do we do now?”

“We watch and wait.” The Dopterian said, “And do what our employer tells us.”

Leaning back in his seat, Jadon sighed contentedly as he rested his back against the bar. “You know Quark...” The Trill engineer said as he sipped his Trillian aurea, “...you really should put back rests on these stools...it’ll make them a helluva lot more comfortable,” he jokingly complained as he took another sip from his glass, reveling in the feeling as the golden liqueur stimulated his taste buds. Shoving a handful of Gramilian sand peas in his mouth, Tol murmured, “Mmmm...these aren’t half bad.” Chuckling as he swiveled his stool to where he faced the Ferengi bartender, he pushed his now empty glass forward. “Another one, Quark.”

“Sure thing.” The ever acquisitive Quark acknowledged, as he took an elegantly shaped glass carafe out from the bottom of his bar and refilled the previously empty glass. “So...” The bartender, smiling broadly as he saw his profit margin going up thanks to the crew of the *Sutherland*, “...how long do you plan on being at the station?”

“Only a day or two.” Jadon replied, then, leaning closer and dropping his voice to a whisper, the Trill added, “Long enough for you to earn a tidy little profit...”

“Really...” The Ferengi, his lobes tingling, answered back in as noncommittal a voice as possible. “What do you have in mind?”

“Not here.” Tol responded. “Do you have some place quieter where we can talk?”

Sweeping the bar with his eyes just to be sure a certain shape-shifting constable wasn’t watching, Quark motioned towards his office behind the bar. “Over here...” The bartender directed, motioning the Starfleet officer into his inner sanctum. “So...” The Ferengi asked the moment he was sure the two were alone, “What sort of profit are we talking about?”

“I need your help in moving some cargo...” Jadon answered.

A skeptical look on his face, Quark inquired, “What sort of cargo?”

“Nothing dangerous,” Tol replied with a reassuring smile. “I’ve got a very special holosuite program—guaranteed to knock your lobes off. I

want to trade it for ten cases of Romulan ale—I'm planning a surprise birthday party for a friend of mine. Can you set it up?"

"Illegal..." Quark said as he punched in a series of numbers on his padd, "But not really harmful to anyone...but...how do I know your program's any good?"

Laughing, Tol retorted as he held the isolinear rod just within reach of the Ferengi, "You can take it up for a free sample." Then, just as Quark reached for it, the laughing Trill snatched it away from his hands. "Before you get any ideas, old buddy, the rod is read only and locked at the first level. If you want it all, you're going to need the access code, and I'm the only one who's got it." Flashing a sly grin, he warned, "And don't even think about siccing your brother on to it—not even Rom can crack this baby. Besides Quark..." Tol finished, taking a little of the sting out of his words, "...you're coming out of this deal pretty damned good and you know it—so...are you in or out?"

"I'll take a look at the program first just to make sure it's everything you say it is." Quark said with a sly grin. "And...if it checks out...when do you want to conduct the exchange?"

"Tonight." Tol replied. "Here...at 2000 hours."

"Ok..." Quark acknowledged, maintaining his grin. "2000 it is." Then, hearing the shouts of dabo, the Ferengi cringed and charged out of his office as Tol followed behind laughing. "Damned Rom—I told him to fix that wheel! That's what you get for relying on family."

Sitting at the bar with his fellow warriors, Captain K'Temoc of the *T'Ong* laughed as he saw the Starfleeters entering the bar. "Who among us would have thought..." The burly Klingon guffawed as he slammed his mug of blood wine on the table, "That when we returned from our mission we would be **allied** with the Federation?"

His second officer, Ma'tak, grunted as he chugged down his blood wine. "Not I." Shaking his head in disbelief, he reminisced, "When we had

awakened, and the Federation starship *Enterprise* hailed us, I thought at first that we were about to fight the devil Kirk! Instead, the son of Mogh was on the bridge.” He guffawed, “I was very disappointed.”

“As was I, my friend.” K’Temoc replied. “It would have been a glorious battle!” Lowering his voice, he added in a whisper, “Be patient. Our time comes soon. Songs will be sung, and blood will flow. But for now, we must stay silent. Our Federation allies will know soon enough our purpose. And then we will see their true heart.” He growled as he drained his goblet of blood wine, “More blood wine, you worthless pet’aQ!” He bellowed, calling the Ferengi waiter to refill his goblet. “And hurry!”

“Well it seems Garak was right about the dress attracting attention.” Commander Hobson remarked somewhat awkwardly to his companion as he noticed the fairly large number of beings, mostly males, glancing in Anara’s direction as the couple walked together down the Promenade, stopping occasionally to look at the trinkets on display in one or another of the various shops lining the busy concourse.

“Yes...” Anara replied somewhat with an amused smile, “It seems he was.”

His curiosity overcoming him, Chris asked delicately, “Doesn’t it bother you to have men staring at you all the time?”

Chuckling, Anara joked as her eyes temporarily fixed on a young female Bajoran woman, who, blushing as she realized that she had been noticed by the Deltan, turned shyly away. “It’s not always men, you know...” Her gentle laughter turning into a warm smile, Anara briefly touched the back of her escort’s hand, enjoying a moment’s pleasure from the short-lived contact. “But sometimes...” she admitted, “...the reputation we Deltans seem to have acquired can be a...what is it you humans say, a...royal pain in the ass?”

Breaking out into rare open laughter, Chris replied as he nodded his head, “Yes...that’s it exactly.” Then, his curiosity still getting the better

of him, he asked, "So...how do you deal with it when the attention gets a little too much?"

Taking her companion's hand once again, this time not immediately releasing it, Anara asked in reply, "What do you do to get away from the universe?"

Inwardly reveling in the warm contact of her flesh with his, the normally standoffish commander answered back, "I read...listen to music...maybe go into the holodeck and put on a nature scene or something like that and just walk or even lie on my back and look at the sky..."

"I do much the same." Anara interjected with warm laughter, and then, giving her escort a meaningful look, she remarked sagely. "It seems that once we get beyond the pheromones and the reputation my people have, we're not that much different, are we?"

"No..." Chris acknowledged in a soft voice, "We're not."

Gul Tamar's jaw clenched as he entered the bar of the former Cardassian space station, *Terek Nor*, now Deep Space Nine, with the crew of his freighter. Noting the Klingons sitting in one part of the bar, drinking their blood wine, he shook his head as he addressed his first officer, "How we have fallen, Turon! Just a few years ago we were feared in this sector. This station was ours...Bajor was ours...the Federation trembled at our name. Now look at what we have become! Starfleet controlling what is rightfully ours...the Bajoran rabble laughs at us to our faces...and...those Klingon...animals...run free!"

"Our time will come again, sir." Turon replied in a low voice. "We will have what is ours."

"I know, my friend..." The haughty gul replied with a slight grin, "...but until that time does come, let us at least drown our sorrows in some kanar."

“You know, Dr. Murakawa...” Dr. Julian Bashir grinned as he regarded the lovely Japanese-Centauran woman standing near him in the DS 9 infirmary. “...I was thinking that if we should encounter another one of those entities, that forced biofeedback technique of yours could be used to communicate with them.”

“You think so?” Denise asked, her eyebrows furrowed with thought, “That’d be great if it could.” Pouring over the data on the computer screen, she spotted something, exclaiming as she brought up a complex molecular sequence, “Doctor? Look at this. It’s still going to take quite a bit of work, but I think we might be on to something.”

“Yes...” Julian drawled as he analyzed the data. “That just might work...” Cupping his chin with his hand he continued, “...we still have to find some means of fine tuning and adjusting the frequencies so that we can communicate without causing harm. Still...” He said, “...it’s a first step. I’ll turn it over to Dax and your Mr. Varok when he comes in tomorrow—maybe they’ll have some thoughts.”

Giving the Egyptian doctor a smile, the *Sutherland’s* CMO stated in a sincere voice, “Thanks for your help, Dr. Bashir.”

“Don’t mention it...” Bashir responded with a wide grin, “...and the name’s Julian.”

“Okay Julian...” Dr. Murakawa beamed back, “...call me Denise.”

“Great!” Dr. Bashir said, flashing his most brilliant smile as he enticed, “So...Denise...if you’re not doing anything later...how would you like to join me for a bite to eat?”

“Ah...I’d like to...” Denise replied, her voice tinged with regret, “...but I’ve already promised to meet someone else.” Noting the crestfallen expression on her colleague’s face she asked, “But how about a rain check, ok? *Sutherland* will be coming back here fairly regularly.”

His smile returning, Julian nodded his head, "All right, then...a rain check it is."

"Great!" Denise replied as she turned to leave, "I'll see you later then."

Noticing the attractive Starfleet officer wearing the turquoise of the medical services exiting as he entered the infirmary, Chief O'Brien remarked to his friend, "Who's she, Julian?"

"Huh..." Dr. Bashir, his attention focused on the retreating backside of the lovely Dr. Murakawa, looked up on hearing the Chief's voice.

"The lieutenant commander?" The Chief chuckled, enjoying his friend's discomfiture.

"Oh...Ah..." Julian vocalized, "She's Dr. Murakawa...Denise...the Chief Medical Officer of the *Sutherland*."

"The *Sutherland*..." Chief O'Brien mused, "Oh yeah...that's the ship that just came in along with the *T'Ong* and that Cardassian freighter."

"Yeah..." Julian agreed, "That's the one. They ran into the most fascinating alien entity out there..." he exclaimed his voice and movements growing livelier as he began to recount Dr. Murakawa's account.

"Hold on, Julian!" The Chief exclaimed, holding up his arms. "You can tell me all about it on the way to Quark's!" Seeing the blank look on his friend's face, Miles shook his head, "You forgot—didn't you?"

"I'm sorry, Miles..." Julian replied an apologetic look on his face as he remembered that he and the Chief had planned to get together for their usual round of beer and darts. "I just got so involved with Dr. Murakawa and the forced biofeedback technique she'd come up with that it slipped my mind." Slapping his friend on the back, he encouraged, "Let's go."

"Right..." Miles responded with a toothy grin of his own, "I'm ready to kick your butt tonight."

“You haven’t won a game in three weeks, Miles,” Julian teased as the pair left the infirmary, “What makes you think you’re going to win tonight?”

“Cause I’ve got incentive!” The Chief replied with a sly grin. “Keiko’s coming home later on tonight and that’s put me in the Zone...”

“So...” Sam asked, turning towards Ensign Django who at that moment was enjoying the jumja stick in her hand, “Tell me about Maria Django...”

Shrugging her shoulders, Maria countered, “What do you want to know?”

“Hmmm...the usual.” Sam replied with a hopeful grin. “Where’re you from...what do you like...what do you hate...why did you join Starfleet...you know...the stuff you usually talk about on a first date?”

Chuckling, Maria responded, her laughter turning into a foreboding frown. “Aren’t you getting a little ahead of yourself here? What gives you the idea we’re on a date anyway? I just wanted someone to walk with—I could just as easily have gone with Manny or the doctor or even the Iceman if he wasn’t so busy mooning over Anara and if I didn’t think he was a jackass...”

His ego deflated, Sam apologized to his mercurial companion, “I’m sorry...I didn’t mean...I just thought...”

Laughing again, Maria placed her free hand on top of his, “Don’t worry about it...” Then, magnanimously, she announced, “If you want this to be a date, we’ll call it a date.”

Sighing with relief that his companion’s good mood had returned, Sam smiled as the couple stopped at an observation window. Looking out at the stars, he asked, “So...what do we talk about?”

Still chuckling, Maria said, “Ok...you want the Maria Django story? Here’s the abridged version...suitable for sensitive types and small children.” Taking a deep breath, she narrated, “I was born in Sao Paulo,

but grew up near Rio. The parentals were both in the tourist trade— Mom ran a hotel while dad owned a charter boat—you know the ones that do diving trips and all to wrecks and ‘secret coves’ and such?” Seeing her companion nodding his head, she continued. “Well...I loved Rio—especially Carnivale—spent most of my time on the beach at Ipanema as a teenager, but I couldn’t ever settle down—there’s just so much to do and see, you know?”

Seeing the knowing look in Sam’s eyes, Maria grinned and, taking another breath, went on, “So...a friend of mine...she’s a lieutenant aboard the *Cortes* now...told me that I should put in my application for Starfleet Academy—that I’d get all the excitement I’d care to ask for if I joined up.” Pausing for a moment to take another lick from her jumja stick, Maria quipped, “Well...I didn’t think I stood a chance in hell of getting in. While my grades in school were pretty good...” she admitted modestly, “I didn’t have a Picard or Paris to sponsor me. My recommendations came from teachers and local officials and all—no one really important; and...well...you know all about how I tend to blurt out how I feel about things...” A determined look crossed her features, “And I don’t put up with crap from anyone. But somehow...I still don’t know how...I got in on my first try!”

Smiling at both the pride in her voice and her enthusiasm, Sam complemented, “Well...someone in the selection process must have seen something in you. I mean...it took me three tries to get in...and I finished near the top of my class in secondary school and in the pre-Academy prep school.”

Choosing to take his remark as a complement, Maria continued. “Yeah...well...that or I just got damned lucky.” Shrugging her shoulders, “Either way...it doesn’t matter—I got in...finished the Academy in the lower third of my class...” She then flashed a wicked grin, “Too many demerits for insubordination, I guess...” Then, turning the tables on Sam, she said, “Ok...that’s all of the Maria Django Story you get to hear for now—so...what’s the deal with Sam Lavelle?”

Chuckling as he put on the air of a man of mystery, Sam replied, “Why don’t I tell you that story over a drink or three at Quark’s?”

“Sounds good to me,” Maria answered back as she tossed the remnants of her jumja stick into a nearby waste reclamation unit and grabbed her date’s hand. “Let’s go—that jumja stick was good, but it made me thirsty.”

Spying Sam and Maria standing at the observation window, Anara smiled knowingly as she turned towards Chris. “Well...it seems the crew is getting to know each other...”

“So I’ve noticed.” Hobson acknowledged his brow creasing, “I’m not sure that’s such a good idea...”

Hurt and disappointed at his remark, Anara asked, “Why? I think they look good together.”

Seeing his companion’s distress, Chris cleared his throat. “It’s not that I object to a romance between officers...” He said, feeling a twinge as memories of his late wife flooded his mind, “It’s just that...”

Remembering the images she had picked up during their brief period linked together in the entity’s group consciousness, Anara nodded her head, “You’re afraid they might get hurt—as you were...” Afraid that she might have gone too far, the empath quickly apologized, “I’m sorry...I didn’t mean to...”

Turning quickly away from his companion, Chris struggled for what seemed to be an eternity to get his emotions under control. Finally, once again secure in the knowledge that the barriers were back in place, the first officer turned back towards his fellow officer. “No apologies are necessary.” He said in his normal clipped tone. “It was several years ago...”

Her empathy picking up on his inner turmoil, Anara was about to propose that the two of them retire to a quiet area when a familiar voice hailed the couple, “Chris...Anara! Just the pair I’m looking for.”

Turning in the direction of the voice, the two Starfleet officers spotted Jadon striding towards them, his usual affable grin on his face. “So...you guys having a good time?”

Putting aside for the moment the recent awkwardness between her and her companion, Anara replied with a slight smile, “Yes...we went to the tailor’s shop and the owner insisted on giving me this beautiful dress to wear...” She pirouetted, showing off her dress in a pleasing rustle of color and fabric.

“So I see...” Tol remarked, carefully appraising both wearer and dress. “It is most striking...Rena would have loved it.”

“So...” Chris interjected, “What have you been doing, Jadon?”

“Oh...a little bit of this...a little bit of that...” The Trill engineer replied mysteriously.

“Uh Huh...” Hobson vocalized a wry look on his face. “Why do I suddenly have this feeling there’s something going on that I might not be too terribly pleased about?”

“I don’t know...” Jadon replied, maintaining his usual lopsided grin, “Why?”

“I hope there isn’t...” Chris retorted. “I’d hate for there to be a repeat of Gamma Canaris III...”

“There won’t be...” Tol promised as he spread out his arms, “See...no hookers...”

The answering retort forming on the first officer’s lips unfortunately died as his comm badge beeped. “Yes,” Hobson answered, inwardly grateful at the interruption.

“Commander.” The voice, belonging to Lieutenant Nyota Dryer, Atoa’s assistant Tactical Officer, rang out from the intercom. “Your presence is requested on the *Sutherland* at once, sir.”

Taking a deep breath, Chris promptly responded. “Very well...I’ll be there as soon as possible.” Turning towards Anara with a rueful look on his face, Hobson apologized, “I’m sorry...but...”

“I understand.” Anara replied. “We’ll talk more later—if you want.”

“Thank you.” Chris said, the apologetic look still on his face, “But I’m sorry about leaving you here all alone...”

“Don’t worry, Chris.” Tol then volunteered, “I’ll be glad to keep the lieutenant company.” Turning towards Anara, he added, “That is...if she desires...”

Thinking momentarily about her answer, Anara smiled, “Sure...that would be nice.” Hearing the gong being rung by the priest at the Bajoran temple, Anara remarked, “I think I would like to observe their religious service—that is if I’m permitted. What would you like to do afterwards?”

“Well...” Jadon said thoughtfully, “Why don’t we meet at Quarks in say a couple of hours for drinks and maybe a bite to eat?”

“Very well...” Anara agreed.

“Great.” Tol beamed, “I’ll see you there in two standard hours...”

“Hi.” Manuele greeted, rising from his chair as Dr. Murakawa approached. “So...how did your meeting with Dr. Bashir go?”

“Great,” Denise replied as she took her seat. As her eyes took in the Bajoran prayer wheel on one wall, a replica of the famous painting “Sunrise on the Dhaka River” by Kira Renan, hanging on the opposite wall, the single candle burning in the center of their table and the maroon table cloth and silver Bajoran eating implements, she smiled. “He had some pretty good ideas regarding the forced biofeedback technique and how it could be applied in the future if we run into another one of those entities.”

“That would be excellent...” Atoa remarked, “...provided it’s willing and even able to listen to us.”

“We won’t know until we try.” The Doctor countered, “Anyway...isn’t that what we’re supposed to be all about—meeting and communicating with new life?”

“Point taken,” The tactical officer conceded as a Bajoran waiter approached their table bearing a pot of Deka tea and two cups. Grinning broadly, he asked, “Trust me to order for us?”

“Go ahead.” Denise smiled back as she settled down into her chair, her mouth already watering in anticipation as the spicy smell of hasperat wafted its way from the kitchen.

“Makapa bread, ratamba stew, hasperat soufflé for two—mild please...” Manuele quickly added, and then, glancing once more at the menu, finished his order. “Icoberry tortes for dessert, and to drink—your house spring wine.”

“Excellent choices,” The waiter acknowledged with a smile. “I’ll be back soon with your Makapa bread and ratamba stew.” He then suggested, “You should dip the bread into the stew in order to bring out the best flavor in both.”

“Sounds good to me,” The hungry Manuele answered back as his stomach audibly growled. “I can’t wait to dig in.”

I don’t know which is worse...Kira thought, sighing in frustration as she entered Quark’s...dealing with a roomful of irritated vedeks or fighting through that mountain of reports Starfleet expects to have submitted yesterday. Then, spotting Dax sitting alone at a table not too far from the bar, the Bajoran first officer smiled. Approaching her friend, she called out, “Jadzia! Where’s Captain Shelby?”

“Liz’ll be here soon.” Dax replied as she motioned for Kira to sit down. “She just had to change clothes...” Seeing the confused look on her friend’s face, Jadzia explained, “Lizzy hates wearing uniforms when she’s off duty—she says the uniform gets in the way of her fun.”

“Interesting outlook,” Kira commented as she took a sip from the drink that Jadzia had already ordered for her.

Chuckling, Jadzia quipped, “I think you’re going to find that Liz is an interesting person in a lot of ways.” Seeing her friend’s raised eyebrows, Dax grinned, “She’s isn’t exactly your run of the mill Starfleet officer.”

“I got that impression from the stories you were telling me this morning.” Kira answered back with a laugh.

Her laugh turning into a wicked grin, Dax rejoined, “Those were just the tame ones. Now, if you want to hear another story...” she began, lowering her voice to barely a whisper, “...there was this one time when Liz was having one of her parties and Admiral Paris’ son, Tom, came up to her and she...Well...speak of the devil...” Jadzia, interrupted, jerking her head towards the blonde woman entering the bar, wearing a pair of tight pants made of what appeared to be leather belted by a silver chain and a matching black lace bustier.

“At least she’s not completely out of uniform.” Jadzia joked as her eyes picked up on the Starfleet communicator pin on her friend’s left breast. Shaking her head and snickering as she saw the look of astonishment on Nerys’ face she quipped, “See what I mean?”

“You sure she isn’t from the ‘Mirror Universe’?” Major Kira asked nonplussed at how the Starfleet officer appeared.

“Yep.” Jadzia grinned back. “That’s our Liz...” Taking stock of her friend’s appearance as she waved back at her and Kira, her amused grin turned into a wicked chuckle, “And I’d say she’s definitely on the prowl tonight...” Then, waving, she called out, “Hey, Lizzy...over here!”

“Jadz! Major!” Liz greeted as she sat down in the empty chair reserved for her, smiling appreciatively as she saw the drink waiting for her. “Thanks, Jadz.” Liz complimented as she took a sip of her rum and coke, “You remembered...”

“How could I forget?” Dax laughed, “After all, we went through how many of those things back at the Academy?”

“Not enough,” Liz riposted, laughing gently. Not wanting to exclude Dax’s Bajoran friend, Shelby asked, “So, Major...how did your day go?”

Sighing, Kira replied, “I feel like I’ve been up twenty-six hours straight...”

“I know what you mean.” Liz commiserated. “Things get hectic enough on a starship; it must be ten times worse for you because of all the traffic that goes through here.” She smiled, “But you know something—I wouldn’t trade it for anything in the universe.”

Empathizing completely with her fellow officer, Kira nodded her head emphatically, “You’re absolutely right, Captain...”

“Liz...” Shelby interjected, “We’re off duty now and I don’t like mixing business with pleasure.”

“Jadzia said something about that.” Nerys commented with a slight grin. “I’ll be honest...that’s kind of a different attitude from what I’ve seen from almost all of the Starfleet officers I’ve encountered.”

“You want to hear something funny...” Jadzia interrupted with a gentle smile, “Not so long ago, some of us thought the same thing about you.”

“Oh...you did?” Kira exclaimed in mock outrage.

“Oh, yeah,” Dax replied, continuing the friendly banter as she pulled Liz into it, “You should have seen her a couple of years ago, Lizzy—she was positively grim!”

“I was not!” Kira interrupted in a huff.

“Yes you were.” Jadzia countered with a grin. “I remember Ben telling me about the first time he saw you...” Then, turning back towards Liz, she quipped, “But she got better...just like we did.”

Flashing a grin of her own, Kira turned her head towards Shelby, “Jadzia was telling me some stories about when you were at the Academy...How long have you known each other?”

“We’ve known each other since we were plebes.” Liz replied as she took a sip of her drink. Giving her old friend a playful wink, she continued, “Hell, when we first met, she was still Jadzia Idaris.”

“Wait a minute!” Kira said with a gasp, “You knew her before she got the Dax symbiote.” Eaten up with curiosity, she couldn’t help but ask, “What was she like?”

“She was much the same as she is now, but I didn’t know it at first!” Liz reminisced. “The first time we met, we got off to a rocky start.”

“Yeah.” Jadzia nodded her head in agreement, “We each took something we said the wrong way and Liz stormed off.”

“I didn’t storm off!” Liz jokingly protested, “I beat a hasty retreat!”

“I stand corrected.” Jadzia laughed.

“After a bit and a nice talk with Boothby...” Shelby recalled, “I calmed down and went back and we made up. Since then...we’ve been friends.” Sighing, she further recollected, “She worked her ass off that year. If she didn’t have her nose in a padd, then she was locked up in a lab with some experiment or other.”

“I had my eye on only one thing...” Jadzia explained, “...getting accepted as a host by the Symbiosis Commission.” Flashing an evil grin of her own, the Trill turned the tables on her old friend, “What about you, Liz? Whenever you weren’t off with Sandy and the rest of your little group, you were just as bad as me!”

“Yeah, you’re right, Jadz...” Liz admitted, explaining to Kira, “Here I was the granddaughter of a Starfleet admiral...”

“Admiral Robert Wesley...” Dax supplied.

“And the daughter of a starship captain...” Liz continued, “And of course, my father took great pleasure...” She said, a faint note of bitterness in her voice that the Bajoran major couldn’t help but pick up, “...in ramming it through my skull that I had the Shelby and Wesley reputations to keep up...”

“Not to mention you were bound and determined on becoming a captain by your fortieth birthday...” Jadzia interrupted once again, in an effort to head off the angst that almost always overcame her friend whenever the subject of her father came up.

“So...” Kira asked, “What happened? What turned you two into such...”

“Brazen hussies?” Liz prompted with a wicked grin.

“You said it...I didn’t!” Jadzia interjected with a laugh.

“Come on...” Nerys pleaded, curiosity devouring her.

Shrugging her shoulders, Liz answered, “We’ll, on Boothby’s advice, I went down into the Old City and met Sandy and she introduced me to her friends and they became my friends and well...it went on from there.”

“Ok...” Kira replied, “But I still don’t understand how you two went from being such serious students to rigging holosuites with naked Orion dancers...”

“Oh...we were always serious about our work.” Liz defended, Jadzia nodding her head in agreement. “We never...ever...took our classes or studies lightly. You won’t make it through the first month in the Academy if you do.” The fire and determination suddenly appearing in the blonde captain’s eyes caused Kira to immediately take notice as Shelby continued, “The one thing you will find out about me once you

get to know me is that there's nothing I love more than to be thrown into the deep end. I love a challenge and I don't like backing away from fights." Her voice taking on a more somber tone, she continued, "Anyway...when I went back home, father was there..." Lowering her head momentarily, the starship captain sighed, "Let's just say that the two of us don't get along too well with each other and leave it at that. We got into a fight...a big one...and after I stormed out of my parent's house, I said to myself, 'Screw him...screw the Shelby and Wesley names...and screw everyone else. I'm going to do things my way and if people don't like it...they can go to hell. And I've been living that way ever since."

"And as for me..." Jadzia said with a smile, "...let's just say I met someone on Trill who taught me that life really was too short to spend it locked away in isolation..."

"And so..." Liz concluded with a laugh, "That's how the Starfleet version of the Dirty Pair was born!"

"The what?" Kira asked, once again confused.

"Don't ask...you really don't want to know." Jadzia interrupted with a smile as Quark approached the table bearing the first course. Dax, smiling as the Ferengi drew near, remarked, "I hope you don't mind my ordering for you, Liz...but I thought you might like to try some of the local cooking." As Quark removed the covers to the dishes with a practiced flourish, Dax commented. "Alterian chowder..."

"A specialty of the house..." Quark interjected with a wide grin.

"Uttaberry crepes..." Dax then identified as the bartender removed the cover to the second dish.

"And to wash it down..." Quark said, "Andolian brandy."

"Sounds good," Liz said. Turning her attention towards Kira, she gave the Bajoran major a warm smile, "I'm sorry if I might have come on a little too strong just now...it's a bad habit of mine."

“Oh no...” Nerys protested, “It was my fault...I was being pushy...”

“No you weren’t...” Shelby replied, her smile vanishing as her face once again took on a serious demeanor. “The thing is...I was, and I guess you could say still am, ambitious.” Once again, Kira saw the determination and drive in the captain’s eyes. “When I want something...I get it...and I don’t like it when anything...or anyone...gets in my way.” She then let out a mournful sigh, “And sometimes, that gets me and/or the people I care for into trouble or I end up hurting someone.”

“Tell me about it...” Jadzia sighed melodramatically, explaining to the major, “Just before the Borg Incursion of 2367, Will Riker was offered the command of the *Melbourne*, and Liz was supposed to take over as first officer of the *Enterprise*, but Will...”

“Chickened out,” Liz interjected with just the faintest amount of irritation. Addressing her remarks as much to Kira as to her old friend, Shelby spat out, “Riker’s gotten fat and lazy on the *Enterprise*. He ought to be captaining his own ship.”

“Now, let’s be fair, Betts...” Jadzia remarked with her usual equanimity. “It’s just as well, he didn’t...seeing that the *Melbourne* was destroyed at Wolf 359 and Captain Picard was taken by the Borg and assimilated.” Smiling, she reminded her old friend gently yet firmly, “You and Will worked pretty well together with him as acting captain and you as acting first officer—now didn’t you? Admit it.”

“Yeah...ok...” Liz begrudgingly conceded. “When push came to shove we worked well together and he did do an excellent job in command of the *Enterprise* then—which makes my point even more valid—he belongs in the center chair of a starship—not cooling his heels sitting in the shadow of a great man.”

“Don’t you mean ‘standing’?” Kira remarked, still somewhat unaccustomed to human phrases.

“No...” Liz replied, “I mean sitting—standing means that he’d actually have to get off that lazy ass of his and do something.”

“Ouch.” Jadzia exclaimed. “You really don’t like the man, do you?”

“That’s not it at all.” Liz protested. “Okay...at first...he was in my way,” she admitted. “But later...as I and others like Terrence...” she said, referring to Terrence Glover, the captain of the *Cuffe* and son of Admiral Samson Glover, an officer also known for his drive and ambition, “...advanced while he stood still...I came to see him as being too comfortable in his job—and I guess, in a way, that scares me because I don’t ever want to get that way.”

“So...” Kira gently probed, “You’re looking to become an admiral one day?”

“Honestly...” Liz said, carefully considering her answer, “If you’d have asked me that question a few years ago, before I took command of the *Reed*, I’d have said yes...but now...” Shaking her head, Liz took another sip of her brandy, reveling as its warmth coated her esophagus on its way down, “I’m not so sure...and that worries me because I keep asking myself, am I becoming fat and lazy like Will Riker?”

Shaking her head, Jadzia replied knowingly, “No, you’re not. Torias once had a conversation with a certain starship captain by the name of Kirk who told him that one of the biggest mistakes he ever made was accepting promotion to admiral. He said that the only time he ever felt truly free, happy, and alive was when he was sitting in the center chair...”

“So...in other words you’re saying that I’m being too hard on myself?” Liz asked, already knowing her friend’s answer.

“And maybe on Will Riker too,” Dax said candidly with a shrug of her shoulders. “Maybe he’s just found a level where he’s happy at...for right now.” Her eyes boring into those of her friend’s, Jadzia continued to drive her point home, “Maybe you and he have far more in common than you might want to admit.”

“Maybe...” Liz reluctantly conceded, and then, lowering her head momentarily, added, “Thanks, Jadz. I think I needed to hear that.”

“Anytime,” Jadzia replied with a lopsided grin. “After all—that’s what friends are for...”

“Hey Treasure...Candy...” Junior Lieutenant Smithurst called out, waving at the two attractive women approaching him and the three other *Sutherland* crewmen accompanying him, “Over here!”

“Hiya Smitty!” Ensign Angela Barrows, given the nickname ‘Treasure’ by a fellow *Sutherlander* because of her rather well-endowed chest, shouted back as she and her companion, Ensign Candace ‘Candy’ Johnson, walked over and joined their crewmates. “Ya’ll havin’ a good time?” She asked with her trademark brilliant smile and Texas-style twang that marked her as someone from the colony world of Northstar.

“It just got better.” Derek replied, flashing a brief leer as he gazed appreciatively at the two women: Barrows wearing a short skirt and midriff top that barely contained her attributes with Candy wearing a pink fringe mini-dress—the only items marking them as Starfleet the communicator pins that both women wore on their left breast. “Not a whole lot going on here though. We spent the day mostly shopping and looking around...” He remarked, holding up a bag containing various knick-knacks.

“Ehhh...this place is a dump.” One of Smithurst’s companions, a Bolian assigned to operations, replied with a dismissive shrug.

“Don’t listen to Bas.” Smithurst said with a wicked grin as his blue skinned friend scowled at his words. “He’s pissed ‘cause he got shot down by a Bajoran woman he tried to pickup at the Klingon restaurant.”

“Yeeuwww...” Ensign Johnson exclaimed, referring to Klingon cuisine as she held her nose. “You boys are sick! How could you stand even looking at that stuff...much less putting it in your mouth?”

“Oh...it’s not all bad.” Ensign Cuvier replied his accent immediately betraying his New Quebecois origins, “The Pipius claw was okay and the

Rokegh blood pie was actually pretty good...but I draw the line at eating gagh."

"I know what you mean." Derek said with a laugh, "I don't like the idea of my food trying to eat me while I'm eating it." Turning his attention back to the women, he asked flirtatiously, "So...what have you two been up to?"

"Same as you guys." Ensign Barrows responded with a wink.

"Yeah..." Candy added coyly. "To be honest, we were starting to feel kinda bored. I mean..." She said with a teasing grin, "...a girl can only suck down so many jumja sticks, you know..."

"Candy's right." Treasure concurred with a wicked smile of her own, "We were just looking to see where we could find us a party." Just then, the little group heard the cry of "Dabo" coming from the Ferengi owned bar a short distance away.

Reacting to the sound, Derek proposed, "You know...I bet you we could start up a party at that bar."

"Sounds like a plan!" Candy and Treasure readily agreed as the two of them each slipped in between the three men with Derek comprising the center. "Let's go!"

Finishing the last of her hasperat, Denise took a sip of her spring-wine. Gently daubing her lips with a napkin, the lovely doctor asked, flashing a mischievous smile, "So, Manuele.... who taught you how to do that fire dance?"

Chuckling good naturedly, the New Kauaian tactical officer answered back, "It's a family tradition. My father taught me, and his father taught him. I'm not sure how far back it goes."

"Is it a Hawaiian tradition?" The doctor asked as her finger gently traced the rim of her wine glass.

“No...Samoan.” Manuele explained. “I’m Samoan on my father’s side while my mother’s family came from Hawaii to New Kauai in the first colonization wave early in the 23rd century.” A note of pride in his voice, the New Kauaian native continued, “I guess you could say Dad was a bit old fashioned—he didn’t want to see the old ways disappear.” Flashing a smile, he quickly added, “Don’t get the wrong idea about him though—he wasn’t some sort of Luddite who wanted to go back to the 20th century or anything like that. He didn’t have any problems with transporters or replicators or any of the other conveniences of modern life. It’s just that he wanted his children to know something of who their ancestors were, how they lived, and what they were like.”

“There’s nothing wrong with that.” Denise remarked with a rueful expression. “I think it’s a pretty good thing actually.” Shaking her head, she explained, “You know, my father’s Japanese and my mother’s Alpha Centauran, but I don’t speak a single word of Japanese, although my Centauran’s pretty good. Still, we all spoke, read, and wrote in Federation Standard.” Taking another sip of the especially sweet and fruity tasting springwine, as her lips turning up into an ironic grin, she quipped, “I guess you could say I’m a citizen of the Universe.”

His own lips turning up into a grin, Manuele rejoined, “I’ve got a feeling you’re more a traditionalist than you think.”

Chuckling softly, Denise conceded, “Maybe...in some ways.” Her right hand moving involuntarily to where her crucifix hung underneath her shirt, the doctor spying her companion’s interested expression, remarked, “I’m Catholic.” Smiling, she confessed as the waiter brought in desert, “So, I guess in a way you could say that I still keep a little bit of the past with me.”

“Hey...there’re some seats over here!” Junior Lieutenant Smithurst exclaimed, pointing to some unoccupied tables between a group of Cardassians on one side and Klingons on the other. His lips turning up into a wide grin as he spotted some of this fellow *Sutherland* crewmates

sitting at a few tables in that area, he added, “And there’s a few of our people already here.”

“Well all right!” Ensign Bowers answered back as the group made its way to the tables. Turning to her friend, the Northstar native asked, “Ya’ll brought your tunes, didn’t you, Candy?”

“You know I did!” Ensign Johnson responded with a grin as she pulled out a music player from her purse and turned it on.

“That’s more like it!” Derek exclaimed as the music from the player began to fill the room. Turning towards his Bolian shipmate, the young lieutenant requested, “Hey Bas...you want to flag down a waiter and have ‘em bring us some drinks?”

“Sure.” The Bolian operations technician responded as he raised his hand, quickly attracting the attention of a Ferengi waiter who arrived very quickly with a tray full of drinks.

“Tell him to keep ‘em comin’!” Treasure interjected as her friend Candy got up and began to dance, her frenzied motions attracting the surprised attention of both the Klingons and Cardassians as well as the other patrons of the bar. “Way to go, Candy!” The buxom engineering officer called out as she brought her fingers to her lips and whistled. “Let’s get this party going!”

Entering the Ferengi owned bar with his companion, Sam laughed as he spotted his shipmates dancing in a rapidly cleared out area converted into an ad hoc dance floor. “Leave it to Candy and Treasure to get things swinging!” He exclaimed as he spotted an open table—the only one left—near a group of Cardassians. Gritting his teeth at the thought of sitting next to the same race that had so casually murdered his old friend, his earlier good cheer quickly disappeared as he muttered under his breath, “Cardies...great.”

“Got a problem with the Spoon-heads?” Ensign Django asked in a whisper as she picked up on the anger in Lavelle’s voice.

“Yeah,” Sam replied tersely and then, forcing a smile to his face, quickly added, “But I’m not going to let it interfere with our night.”

“Great.” Maria responded as the pair placed an order with the Ferengi waiter. “Cause I’m not in the mood for a barroom brawl tonight.” Changing the subject, the Brazilian woman probed, “So...you promised you’d tell me the Sam Lavelle story...”

Shrugging his shoulders, Sam recounted his life story, “Well...not a whole lot to say, really. My folks separated a while back—amicably...” He promptly added as he saw a sympathetic look on Django’s face. “They still keep tabs with each other; it’s just that their careers took them in different directions—you know how it is. Mom’s Starfleet—she’s a lieutenant commander on the *Potemkin*, and Dad’s an anthropologist—he’s currently a professor at the University of Nairobi and does consulting work for the Federation Ministry of Colonization.”

“So...” Maria ventured, “I guess your mother got you into Starfleet.”

“Not exactly.” In fact, she was opposed to my applying to the Academy. It was my uncle, Richard, who encouraged me to go for it—he was captain of the *De Ruyter*. He endorsed my application to the Academy prep school and then the Academy.”

“And it still took you three tries to get in?” Django asked, not believing that her companion didn’t make it in on the first go.

“Yeah,” Sam affirmed, his face turning crimson in embarrassment. “The first time...I was too cocky and got my wings clipped but good in the first round of testing. So...the second time, I buckled down and made it to the final cut, only to wash out with the psych test...”

“Ouch.” Maria interrupted, feeling for the man seated across from her. “I can relate—that test was a bear—I still have nightmares just thinking about it.”

Unable to make himself heard by his companion because of the boisterous laughter coming from the Klingons nearby as well as the music from Ensign Johnson’s player, Sam raised his voice, “I know what

you mean...I think whoever invents those tests is some sort of sadistic bastard..." Realizing, at the last minute, that the laughter had died down and that he was almost shouting, Sam sheepishly lowered his voice. "Anyway..." He continued a note of sadness in his voice as he mentioned his lost friend's name, "Third time was the charm. I made it into the Academy, and that was where I met Sito Jaxa."

"So...Liz..." Cracking an evil grin, Jadzia asked as her eyes took in the sexy bustier and leather pants, "Dressed to kill, are we?"

"Dressed to get laid," Shelby answered back forthrightly, her answer all but flooring the Bajoran major sitting at the table.

"How long has it been?" Dax, asked, maintaining her teasing voice as she took a sip of tulaberry wine.

"Too long." Liz sighed before taking a drink from her glass. "The last time was just before leaving Earth."

Flashing a wicked grin of her own, Kira tentatively joined in, "What about the holodecks?"

"Oh...of course I use them—I've got a couple of really hot programs..." Liz said, licking her lips lasciviously, "...but, it's not the same—you know." Seeing the major nodding her head in agreement, Liz quickly qualified her answer, "I'm not knocking holoprograms—they're better than nothing. But still, there are times when you just gotta have the real thing..."

"That's what I keep telling Jadzia." Kira exclaimed with a triumphant grin. "If something's worth doing—it's worth going out and doing for real."

"Yeah..." Liz agreed, "But holodecks have their uses too." Flashing a wicked grin, she tempted, "Join me and Dax in my Roman program sometime and you'll see what I mean."

“I don’t know...” Nerys demurred as she took a bite from her Idarian spice pudding, “Like I said...if it’s worth doing...”

“Kira...” Jadzia interrupted, flashing an evil grin of her own, “Lizzy’s programs aren’t exactly what you would call...the usual...you really ought to join us...”

“Yeah...” Liz added, “At least think about it...”

“Ok...” Kira sighed, “I’ll think about it—but I’m not promising anything.”

“Great.” Liz exclaimed with a smile and then added, “You’ve got an open invitation to join us whenever you want.” Then, attracted by the loud cries of ‘Dabo!’ from someone who had made a big score at the wheel, Liz’s eyes fixed themselves on the girl at the wheel, an attractive auburn haired Bajoran woman wearing a low-cut green dress slit all the way up her thigh exposing both her ample cleavage as well as her well turned legs.

“Oh...yeah...” The captain sighed in a low voice.

“Uh Huh...” Jadzia teased, “Looks like Lizzy’s found someone.”

“What?” Kira interjected, her face turning a bright crimson as she recognized who Jadzia was referring to. “Oh...I see...” She said in a soft voice, answering her own question.

“Who is she?” Liz queried as she traced the edge of her glass with her finger.

“I think she’s new here...” Kira replied, trying to place a name with the face.

“Must be one of the new girls that Quark hired recently,” Jadzia conjectured, flashing a wicked grin. “I think I saw her giving Julian the eye a couple of times...” *Going to have to give him a hard time about that...* she chuckled inwardly, leaving herself a mental note.

“Julian?” Shelby asked.

“Yeah.” Dax replied. “Dr. Bashir—the chief medical officer. He’s a pretty...” However, before she could complete her sentence, a loud commotion arose as the sound of hearty laughter rang out.

“Told you I was in The Zone!” Miles O’Brien gloated as he slapped his opponent on the back of the shoulders.

“All right...you won this round, Chief.” The darker, more slender of the two men conceded as he shook his head in disbelief. “A bull’s-eye, a triple twenty, and a triple 18 on the same throw...”

“Like I said!” The chief gloated, “There was no way I was going to lose tonight.” Then, addressing Quark, he called out, “Two mugs of your best bitters, barkeep!”

As the two men leaned back on the bar and drank from their mugs, Jadzia smirked as she pointed with her eyes at the slender darker complexioned man, “That’s Julian.”

“Mmmm...” Liz exclaimed, licking her lips. “He’s not bad either...” Then, flashing a brief leer, she asked, “Is he taken?”

“What?” Kira, not believing her ears, then exclaimed, “Weren’t you just asking about the dabo girl?”

“Yeah.” Liz replied, nodding her head.

“And now you’re interested in Dr. Bashir...”

“Yeah.” Liz repeated with a grin.

“Ummm...” Kira then turned to Jadzia, her expression a pleading one, “I’m confused...”

“It’s ok...” Dax replied in a teasing voice. “You’ll get used to it once you get to know Liz better...”

“Know me better?” Shelby mock pouted. “You’ve got room to talk—don’t forget, I saw you at the last party of mine you were at with that Andorian...you know...” She then flashed another wicked grin, “...after all the brass left and just before things really got going...”

“Uh...ok...” Dax stammered, blushing, before quickly shifting the topic back to her old friend. “So...what’s it going to be tonight—girl or boy?”

“Why not both?” Liz answered back with a leer as Kira once again tried to hide behind her wine glass.

“I don’t think Julian’s that open minded...” Jadzia replied, “I’ll introduce you though...” She said conspiratorially, “And you can take it from there.”

Entering the bar with his Deltan companion, Jadon suggested, “Why don’t we join Django and Lavelle?”

“Where?” The Deltan asked her senses gradually adjusting to the crowded and noisy bar.

“Right over there,” Jadon replied, pointing towards where the couple sat, “See them...they’re sitting at that table over there between those Klingons...” The Trill then took on a grim expression, “...and the Cardassians over there.”

Picking up on the negative emotions coming from the normally genial Tol, Anara gently asked, “Jadon? Is there a problem? If there is we can go somewhere else...”

“No...” Tol answered back with a slight shake of the head, “I’ll be ok...” He then flashed a slight smile, “Don’t worry about me, Anara...just some old bad memories.” Quickly shaking the gloom away from him, he smirked, “Let’s go on over and join ‘em.”

Still feeling residual tension flowing from her escort, Anara reluctantly allowed Jadon to guide her to Lavelle and Django's table. "Very well...If you're sure..."

"Hey..." Dr. Bashir uttered, nudging Chief O'Brien with his elbow. "Over there..." He said, jerking his head in the direction where the three women were sitting, laughing and eating their desert, "Who's that woman with Jadzia and the Major?"

"I don't believe it." Miles exclaimed, his jaw almost literally dropping in astonishment as he took in the blonde's appearance. Downing his synth-ale in a single gulp he took another look, "I think I know her..." His eyes narrowing as he squinted, he shook his head, "That **is** her!"

"All right then..." An increasingly frustrated Julian demanded, "Who is she?"

"That's Captain Shelby." The chief said, still stunned at the blonde captain's appearance. "She was on the *Enterprise* during the Borg Incursion—before she made captain. I helped out some in Engineering installing some of her modifications we used against the Borg." Cracking a grin, he added, "Did you know that she's the one responsible for most of the weapons and tactics we use against them."

As he took in the leather clad Shelby, Dr. Bashir asked disbelievingly, "You mean...she's a starship captain?"

"Yeah..." Miles replied with a snort, "I guess this is a side of her we didn't get to see on the *Enterprise*." Shaking his head, he muttered softly, "I wonder what Commander Riker would think if he saw her now?"

"So...what's the story with Sito Jaxa?" Django asked. "That name sounds awfully familiar."

“Ummm...” Sam vocalized a look of great sadness on his face, “Sito Jaxa. That’s kind of a sensitive subject.”

“I see...” Maria said softly as she sipped her Antarean Sunrise. “You don’t have to tell me if you don’t want to.”

“No...” Sam replied, gulping down his whiskey. The forlorn helmsman allowing its liquid warmth to momentarily console him as he gathered his thoughts, “I think I’d like to tell you about her. You probably would have liked her if you’d have known her—she was a lot like you.” His lips turning up into a sad smile, he began, “She was in the class ahead of mine, but got involved in a nasty scandal...”

“Oh!” Maria exclaimed, “I remember the name now—something about a cover-up...”

“That’s right.” Lavelle replied, “Her, Wesley Crusher, and Nick Locarno along with Jean Hajar. Anyway, their squadron was practicing the Kolvoord Starburst and one of their team, Josh Albert, was killed...”

“Ok...I remember now!” Maria interrupted. “She was in Nova Squadron?” Seeing Lavelle nodding his head, Django continued, “If I remember correctly, Locarno was booted out and Sito, Crusher, and Hajar were put back a year.”

“That’s right.” Sam confirmed. “That put Jaxa in my graduating class. As you probably know, she was shunned by almost everyone else at the Academy. Still, she stuck it out and busted her butt...” he proclaimed, his voice now filled with pride for his friend, “...and graduated near the top of the class.” A sad smile crossing his face, he continued, “We both drew *Enterprise* as our first assignment out of the Academy—and believe me, no one was more surprised than Jaxa—I think she figured that she’d be lucky to get a freighter on the Corazian run.”

“Yeah...I’d have thought the same too.” Maria responded sympathetically.

“Anyway...her, me, Alyssa Ogawa, and Taurik—well, we sort of formed our own little club on the Big E. Then, the ops night duty officer position

opened up and she and I were both up for the slot. That was when she volunteered for an assignment on the Cardassian border—she didn't make it back." He finished with a sigh.

"I'm sorry, Sam." Maria said sincerely as she placed her hand on top of his. "She must have been a very good friend of yours."

"She was." Sam agreed, a sad smile once again crossing his features. "I ended up getting the position and promotion that she deserved..." He said, "And then I transferred over to the *Suthy*—and you know the rest."

The couple sat in silence, each lost in their own thoughts, sipping their freshly refilled drinks until they were startled by Jadon's voice. "Excuse us..." Tol hesitatingly interrupted as he saw the contemplative looks on the other two officer's faces, "...you mind if we join you?"

"No...not at all..." Sam replied with a wan smile as he motioned towards the two empty seats, "Sit down..."

Chuckling as he saw one of his engineers amongst the growing number of dancers, Jadon remarked, "Doesn't take long for Treasure to start up a party, does it?"

"Her and Candy are definitely two of a kind." Sam agreed with a laugh as he unconsciously wiped away the sweat beading on his forehead.

"They do seem to be having fun." Anara remarked; a smile coming to her lips as her senses drank in the music as well as the alternately sensuous and frantic movements of the dancers.

"That's my roommate for you..." Maria said, the morose note in her voice not going unnoticed by the Deltan operations officer. "I'm surprised she's still got her top on."

"What do you mean?" Anara asked.

"Get her drunk enough or high enough..." Maria explained in a tired voice, "...and she starts taking her clothes off." Shaking her head, the dusky skinned ensign sighed as she spotted her roommate chugging

down a beer as the rest of the partiers cheered, “And it looks like she’s on the way to getting pretty hammered.”

“I’ll never understand...” Anara remarked as she shook her head, “...why you humans have such a strong aversion to the naked body. It is one of the most beautiful of forms...”

“Yeah...yeah...” Django answered back with a snort, “...we’re a sexually primitive species...I know...” Then, seeing the hurt look on the Deltan woman’s face, the fiery young ensign mollified her tone, “I’m sorry, Lieutenant...it’s just that you don’t have to have her boobs in your face whenever you get back to your quarters like I do.”

Laughing, Jadon teased, “You might want to rephrase that last remark Ensign...”

“Yeah, Maria...” Sam remarked, joining in the laughter, “Think for a moment about what you just said.”

Maria cursed and then, shaking her head, joined in the laughter. “All right...all right...I had that coming.” Her eyes drifting to the group of Klingons she shook her head as a pair of the swarthy warriors butted heads, with the one standing being cheered by his fellows as he chugged down a mug of blood wine while his opponent lay on the floor receiving nothing but jeers as he slowly picked himself up. Changing the subject, she asked as she continued to fan herself, “Does anyone know why they do that?”

Taking a sip from his whiskey, Sam’s gaze shifted from Maria to Anara. Feeling the increased beating of his heart as he drank in the Deltan woman’s loveliness, the roguish Canadian quickly shook his head in an effort to clear his thoughts. As he caught the suspicious glare being directed at him by Django from the corner of his eye, Sam quickly conjectured. “Guess they’re trying to figure out who has the harder head.” Sam conjectured with a grin.

“I think it might have been part of a mating ritual...” Anara proposed, apparently unaware of her growing effect on the young male lieutenant she was seated across from as she winced in response yet another

raucous cheer coming from the Klingons as the current champion bested yet another opponent.

“You’re both right.” Jadon announced with a knowing grin. “It did start out as part of the contest ritual rival males engaged in when competing for a female and it still is...but it has since evolved into a game where the object is to be the last one standing at the end.”

“And now we know...” Maria said in a mildly sarcastic voice and then, admiring Anara’s new dress, the youthful ensign inquired, “Where did you get that outfit?”

“From that tailor’s shop...” Anara responded with a smile, “You know—the one owned by the Cardassian.”

“Maybe I ought to get a dress like it.” Maria joked as she playfully jabbed Lavelle’s side with her elbow, “What do you think, Sam?” Not getting an answer, Ensign Django repeated, “Sam?”

“Huh?” Lavelle murmured as he reluctantly turned his attention away from the Deltan woman, once again wiping the sweat from his forehead. “Sorry, Maria...” He apologized, “Did you say something?”

Her irritation growing, Django crossed her arms as she replied in a sharp voice, “Yeah...I just said that you’ve got a Viridian sand spider crawling up your ass you mother...”

Quickly interrupting, Anara answered the temperamental ensign’s question. “I think you’d look great in it.” Then, sighing with relief as a waiter approached, she ordered another drink as she attempted to steer the conversation to safer waters. “So...” Anara asked, “How are you enjoying your shore leave?”

“Just great...” Sam replied with a wide smile as he once again turned his attention squarely on the Deltan, the close quarters of the bar combined with her exotic looks seemingly magnifying the effects of her pheromones.

“Peachy...just peachy.” Django remarked in an angry, inaudible whisper as the dance music increased in volume as she once again poked Lavelle in the ribs, this time with considerably greater force.

“Ouch! What was that for?” Sam protested as he massaged his side.

“Oops...” Maria responded with a slight grin, “My arm must have fallen asleep or something.”

Leaning in to her Trill escort, Anara whispered in his ear, “Jadon...I think I ought to leave.”

“Pheromones?” Tol inquired as he felt his own heart start to race. Taking her slight nod of her head as agreement, Jadon whispered, “Before we go, do you mind if I take care of something first.” Seeing the quizzical look on his companion’s face, the Trill explained, “I have to meet up with Quark about a small matter. It shouldn’t take too long.” Standing up, he asked, “Are you going to be ok here?”

“I’ll be fine...” Anara replied with a dubious smile as she observed the men and women dancing near her. “Go on...I’ll be here when you get back.”

“Julian...Chief...” Jadzia, spotting the pair standing at the bar, called out, “Come over here. I’d like to introduce you to an old friend of mine...Captain Elizabeth Shelby...”

“I know Chief O’Brien.” Liz interjected with a smile as she offered her hand to Miles. “We worked together on the *Enterprise*. It’s good to see you again, Chief.” Turning her attention to Julian, she said, “And you must be Dr. Bashir? Jadzia has said so much about you. Why don’t you two join us? Doctor...” She then motioned towards a pair of vacant chairs as she extended her invitation, “You can sit over here...” She grinned as she patted her hand on the bottom of the chair closest to her.

The doctor, taking Captain Shelby up on her invitation, smiled back, “Thank you, Sir.”

Chuckling, Liz gently chided, “We’re off duty now, doctor—my name’s Liz.”

“Ok...” Dr. Bashir responded, “I’m Julian.”

“Jadzia told me you’re married now, Chief...” Liz probed with a friendly smile.

“Yes sir...” The Chief replied. “To Keiko...she was a botanist on the *Enterprise*.” Proudly, he added, “We have a little girl—Molly.”

“You should see her, Liz...” Jadzia interjected, “She’s an absolute doll.”

“I’m sure she is...” Liz responded with a grin and then, feeling the pull from the music turned towards the doctor saying impulsively, “Come on, Julian...let’s dance...”

“But...” Julian stammered as the vivacious blonde captain took his hand in hers, “I’ve never danced to this...music...”

“There’s nothing to it...” Liz replied as she practically dragged the stunned doctor to the makeshift dance floor, “Just move to the music...” She said as she began to lose herself to the beat. “That’s it, Julian...” she purred as her movements grew subtly more seductive, “You’ve got it. Just like that.”

“So, Quark...” Tol remarked, leaning against the bar, a sly grin on his face as he watched his captain dancing with the young doctor. “What do you think of the program?”

Beaming as he imagined the gold pressed latinum flowing into his establishment, the Ferengi bartender replied in as nonchalant a voice as he could muster, “Not bad...I think we can do business.”

“Good,” Jadon acknowledged as he took the bartender’s hand. “We’ve got a contract.”

“I’m curious though...” Quark inquired, “How are you going to get all that Romulan ale on to your ship.”

“Don’t worry about that...” Tol grinned as the Klingons in the bar cheered. “I’ve got it covered. Flashing a smile, he quickly downed his drink as he spotted an increasingly uncomfortable Anara still sitting with Lavelle and Django. “Catch you later, Quark...right now there’s a certain Deltan that needs my attention.”

“Looks like Captain Shelby likes to dance...” Miles remarked, raising an eyebrow at the blonde captain’s seductive movements.

“You should see her really cut loose sometime...” Jadzia cracked as she took a sip of her wine.

“You mean she’s holding back!” The Chief exclaimed, a look of astonishment on his face.

“Oh yeah...” Jadzia grinned, “Just wait ‘til she gets him alone...”

“Why do I think...” Kira quipped with a wicked grin, “That Julian’s probably going to be late for his duty shift tomorrow...”

As the *Sutherland* crew, now joined by other patrons in the bar, danced, most of the Cardassians sat glumly watching, not quite sure what to make of this particular ritual. Sipping from his kanar, Glin Turon remarked to his commanding officer, “I don’t think I will ever understand these humans. How were they ever able to hold us off during the war?”

Shaking his head, Gul Tamar pointed at the Bolian currently dancing with the large breasted human woman and then at a Bajoran man gyrating opposite the human woman wearing the fringed dress. “It’s not just the humans. Pay attention...” the embittered Gul directed, raising

his voice loud enough that the other Cardassians could hear him as he pointed once again at the growing number of non-humans in the crowd, "...you have a rare opportunity at seeing how the Federation works. Look at how the humans insidiously corrupt and seduce others into their embrace." His lips turned up into a sneer, the puritanical Gul asked, "Is that what you wish to happen to us?"

Gulping down yet another glass of kanar, Tamar then pointed at Anara, still sitting with Maria and Sam, "Look at that one, Turon..." he said, lowering his voice.

"I am..." the glin replied, his heart rate increasing as he gazed upon the lovely Deltan.

"Don't let her beauty...or the pheromones she's secreting...overtake you, my friend." The older gul warned and then asked pointedly, "What do you know of Deltan culture?"

"Not much..." the more inexperienced Turon answered back and then flashing a leer joked, "...just what I've heard in the officer's mess..."

"Understand this..." Tamar cautioned, his eyes narrowing into slits as he glared at the Deltan woman, "The truth is far worse than any of the lecherous stories you might have heard. His glare growing more intense, the puritanical gul pronounced, "What she...and those like her...believe in and represent...pose a far greater threat to Cardassia and our way of life than even the humans." Lowering his voice to just above a whisper, the gul added ominously, "There is only one True Way and all who would threaten that must be made an example of."

Dutifully nodding his head in apparent agreement at his superior's words, Turon shuddered inwardly as he looked into the zealous gul's eyes as the younger officer saw, much to his fear, the eyes of a fanatic staring back at him.

Finishing the last of his kanar, Gul Tamar stood up. Raising his voice in order to make himself heard over the din of the music and conversation, the gul announced to his crew, "It is time we left." Ignoring the grumbles coming from several of the crewmembers who had been

enjoying watching the Starfleet officers and others dance, Tamar emphasized, "Now!"

"So Julian..." Liz, after several dances, propositioned, whispering in the doctor's ear as she rubbed up sinuously against him, "Don't you think it's time you took me to your quarters?"

Readily agreeing, the young doctor slipped his arm around the waist of the petite captain as he escorted her out of the bar. Seeing their captain exiting the bar arm in arm with the dark-complexioned Starfleet officer wearing the turquoise trim of the medical sciences, Django quipped in a low voice, "Well...looks like the Captain's going to get her physical."

"Yep..." Jadon cracked as he rejoined the group, "Looks like our Captain's all set for the night."

Shaking his head as he took in his captain's dress, Sam remarked, "You know...I don't think I've ever seen a captain wear leather like that before..."

"Oh..." Django chimed in with a sly grin, "Like leather...do you, Sam..."

"You offering?" Sam riposted.

"You wish." Maria responded and then added in a joking manner, "You know...I'd pay good money to see Picard wearing something like that..."

"Ouch..." Tol jibed with a fake grimace. "Don't even joke about something like that!"

Cringing, Sam replied, "You had to put that picture in my mind, didn't you, Django?" Then, looking thoughtful, he remarked, "You know, I think I can count the number of times I've seen Captain Picard wearing civilian clothes on one hand."

"Really." Maria smiled, "I'm not surprised. I'll bet he sleeps in his dress uniform."

“I wouldn’t go that far.” Sam answered back, once again defending his former captain. “I know for sure that he enjoys a certain holodeck program set in 1940s Earth. It just seems to me that Captain Picard is more concerned with how others see him as ‘Captain’ than Captain Shelby appears to be.”

Nodding his head, the more world-wise Tol remarked, “I think you’ve got a good point there, Sam.”

“What do you mean?” Anara asked, joining the conversation.

“Well...” Lavelle explained, his heart racing as his olfactory senses took in the heady mix of perfume and pheromones. “I’ve only known Captain Shelby for a few weeks, while I served several months on the *Enterprise*, but I get the impression that Captain Picard is a lot more concerned about his ‘image’ than Captain Shelby. I mean...could you see Captain Picard going into a bar dressed like that and picking up someone just for casual sex?”

“No...” Ensign Django admitted, “But that doesn’t mean that Captain Shelby doesn’t take her job seriously.” She pointed out, feeling, much to her surprise, a strong sense of loyalty towards her new commanding officer, “It just means that she’s not so concerned with how people see her.” She shrugged, “I kind of like that to hell with the universe attitude—it means that if she can make it, there’s still some hope for someone like me in Starfleet.”

As he watched his friend walking out of the bar arm in arm with the roguishly beautiful starship captain, Miles shook his head. “I don’t believe it...” The chief said in a hushed tone.

“Don’t believe what?” Dax asked with a mischievous grin on her face.

“Captain Shelby...” Chief O’Brien replied, taking a healthy swallow of the beer in his mug. “She was nothing like this on the *Enterprise*.” Seeing the look of curiosity on his fellow officer’s face, he explained, “I mean...from the moment she came on board, she was nothing but business. I don’t think I’d ever seen anyone as driven as her...”

With a shrug of her shoulders, Jadzia answered back, "I'm not surprised." Her lips turning up into a warm smile, the raven-haired Trill further elaborated, "You have to remember, Chief, she was only on the *Enterprise* for how long? A few days? A week or two at the most?" Taking the burly Irishman's single nod of the head as an answer, Jadzia continued, "That's not really a whole lot of time to get to know someone...especially someone as complex as Liz. Also..." Dax pointed out, "...the *Enterprise* was in a life or death situation."

"Tell me about it..." Miles responded with an involuntary shudder as memories of the *Enterprise's* desperate conflict with the Borg and its crew's efforts to rescue their captain flooded his mind. "To be honest with you, I wasn't sure we were going to make it..." He said somberly as he finished his beer, conceding, "I guess I see your point. We never did get a chance to see her let her hair down."

"Liz never likes doing anything half way." Dax said with a smile. "When she works, she works hard, and when she plays, she plays hard." Her smile vanishing as her facial expression took on a more somber demeanor, Jadzia confessed, her voice barely louder than a whisper, "She can be a person of extremes—and sometimes I worry about what might happen if she should ever go too far one way or the other." Her lips turning back up into a smile again, Dax shook her head, dispelling her growing gloom as she waxed philosophical, "I'm probably worrying over nothing though—if anything, maybe she's found the perfect way to maintain sanity in an often insane universe."

"Maybe..." Kira, silently listening in to the conversation, acknowledged with a yawn as she stood up and stretched. "I think I am going to go back to my quarters...0600 comes awfully early in the morning." Turning towards Miles, the Bajoran major asked, "What about you, Chief? You turning in?"

"Nah..." Miles replied, "Keiko's shuttle should be here in a couple of hours..." The chief's lips turning up into an amused grin as his eyes drifted momentarily in the direction of the active dance floor, he added, "Besides...it's been a long time since this place has been this much..."

“Fun?” Jadzia supplied, flashing a wicked grin.

“Yeah...” the chief agreed with a laugh. “One thing I’ll say about Captain Shelby and her crew...they know how to have a good time.”

“So...” Jadzia tempted with a twinkle in her eyes, “You want to join them?”

“Sure...” Miles replied with a big smile as the pair, getting out of their seats, began to walk towards where the *Sutherland* crew was gathered, “...why not?”

“Mmmm...that was nice, Julian.” Liz purred as she wriggled sinuously under the sheets of the double bed she shared with Dr. Bashir. Kissing him first on his shoulders and then working her way up to his lips, she leered, “Ready to do it again?”

“Woman!” The good doctor sighed, “You’re insatiable. Don’t you ever get enough?”

“Never!” Liz answered back, violently tearing off the covers as she climbed on top of the doctor, hungrily kissing and nipping at him all the while.

“Oh boy...” Julian gasped as any strand of coherent thought he might have had immediately fled from his mind.

His last foe defeated and being helped up by his fellow warriors, K’Temoc let out a guttural cry of victory as he downed his blood wine in a single gulp. Sniffing the air, the Klingon captain’s keen senses, picking up on the heady pheromones, immediately guided him to where the Deltan woman was sitting. His lips turning up into a feral grin, he addressed his first officer, “Look upon her Ma’tak!” He exclaimed to his executive officer as he began to make his way towards the table where Anara sat, “There sits my prize!”

Noticing the Trill Starfleet officer who had been with Anara and the other couple at the table, Ma'tak remarked, cautiously warning his commanding officer, "It appears, Captain, that she already has a mate."

Dismissing the Trill male with a snort, K'Temoc declared, "If she is his mate and he is warrior enough, then he can fight for her." His eyes narrowing into dangerous slits as he fingered the hilt of his dagger, the Klingon warned as he began to move towards where the Deltan woman and the others sat, "I will have her."

"Thirsty?" Liz, snuggling up closer to Julian's warm body, asked as she drew lazy circles with her finger on his chest. "Want something to drink while we recharge our batteries for the next round?"

"Some iced mint tea sounds good right about now." The doctor smiled back. "What would you like?" He asked as he began to get out of bed.

"I'll get it." Liz replied, gently pushing her lover back on to the bed. "You just lie there and look pretty."

Smiling as he took in Shelby's naked form, he complimented, "Anyone ever tell you that you're one hell of a woman?"

"A few people here and there," Liz smiled back as she returned with the drinks. Then, seeing the look on her temporary lover's face, she warned as she handed one of the drinks to him while slipping back into bed, "You do understand that this is just casual sex—don't you? Tomorrow, when we're back in uniform, it's 'Captain Shelby' and 'Doctor Bashir'; and that this might or might not ever happen again..."

"Yeah," The doctor answered back, a serious look replacing his earlier smile, "Jadzia warned...I mean she told me...what to expect..."

"Warned is the right word..." Liz interjected with a toothy grin. "I had a similar talk about you with her before our last dance while you were talking with the Chief." A thoughtful look on her face, she said in a quiet

tone, “I guess that’s one of the things I love most about Jadz—the way she takes care of her friends.”

“Yeah...she does...” Julian agreed, a lump forming in his throat.

Seeing her lover’s reaction, Liz flashed a sad smile. “Something tells me that you wish you were more than just her friend...”

“What gives you that idea?” Dr. Bashir asked, his face turning red with embarrassment.

“Don’t worry about it.” Liz whispered as she placed a finger on the doctor’s lips. “You’re not hurting my feelings. I’ve seen it plenty of times before,” she said sympathetically. “Jadzia’s not really a life-taker...” Liz noted with a smile, “But she is a heart breaker.”

“You mean...you and her...” Julian prompted tentatively.

“No.” Lizzy replied with a shake of her head. “We’ve always been just friends. Jadz is not my type, and anyway...Jadzia’s always preferred males—while I—well—let’s just say that my tastes are a bit broader where gender is concerned...”

“In other words...” Julian said, his grin returning.

“If you can’t frinx the one you love...” Liz said, a lecherous grin forming on her face as she set her tea down, drawing closer to Julian. “...then frinx the one you’re with.” Chuckling, she once again began kissing and nibbling the young doctor, whispering in his ear, “As much and as often as you can”

“Helluva party!” Chief O’Brien almost shouted to the Trill woman standing next to him, the burly Irishman having to raise his voice just to make himself heard over the music.

“Tell me about it!” Jadzia replied, a large grin on her face.

“Glad ya’ll are havin’ a good time!” A voice with a distinctive southern-western American accent interjected, causing both officers to turn in the direction of the voice. “Hi...” The owner of the voice, a buxom blonde woman wearing a short skirt and midriff top, called out. “My name’s Angela, but you can call me Treasure...” she said as she took the chief by the hand, guiding him out to the dance floor. “How’s ‘bout a dance, Sugar?”

“Ummm...” the chief hesitated, much to the amusement of the Trill woman standing near him, “I don’t think I should...” he stammered, “I’m married...”

“Hell, Sugar that’s all right...” Treasure replied with a wide grin, “I don’t wanna go to bed with ya...I just wanna dance.”

“Go ahead, Chief...” Jadzia encouraged with a laugh as the buxom blonde tugged the Irishman out on to the floor, “I’m sure Keiko won’t mind.”

Returning to the table where Anara and the others sat, Jadon bent over and whispering in the Deltan woman’s ear, asked, “Thanks for being patient, Anara...we can go now if you want?” However, before the lieutenant could get completely out of her seat, Tol heard a voice calling his name.

“Jadon!” Hearing his name called out, Tol turned around, immediately spotting his fellow Trill standing near the dance floor, looking at him.

“Jadzia!” He called out in return, waving for her to come over. Turning towards his Deltan companion, he gave her a questioning glance receiving in return a resigned shrug as she settled back into her seat. “Sit down over here, Jadzia...” The Trill engineer offered, pointing to an empty chair on the other side of him.

“Long time, Jadon.” Jadzia smiled as she sat down.

“Yeah...” Tol replied as he introduced the others at the table. Sitting down between Anara and Dax, Jadon asked, “So, when was the last time?”

“I think it was one host ago for each of us...” Jadzia answered back with a grin.

“That’s right!” Jadon laughed, including the others at the table in the conversation, “If I remember correctly, Curzon tried to hit on Rena at some conference or other...”

“It was at the annual convention of the Federation Xenological Association...” Jadzia supplied with a chuckle as she filled in the details of the story, “...on Axanar...” She then flashed a wicked grin, “Rena turned him down flat at the closing cocktail party.” As the rest of the table laughed, Dax concluded her tale, “Curzon spent an entire month on Risa trying to recover his dignity.” Then, her alert eyes instantly spotted K’Temoc and several other Klingon’s draw near their table. Glancing in the direction of Anara, the DS9 science officer immediately deduced the reason for the warrior’s approach. Leaning over, Dax whispered in her fellow Trill’s ear, subtly pointing towards the oncoming Klingons, “Jadon...I think we might have a problem...”

“I see what you mean...” Jadon replied as the Klingons approached the table. Standing up, he addressed the leader, an insincere smile plastered on his face. “You boys want something?”

Sniffing the air, the K’Temoc growled as his eyes fixed on Anara and her companions. “Be gone, Trill... I would speak with the woman...” The Klingon replied with a belly laugh as he looked down on the engineer, “Not with a Pet’aQ such as you.”

“Why don’t you get outta here, frinxface?” Django, spoiling for a fight, asked, her lips turned up into a sneer as both she and Lavelle got out of their seats.

Responding with a sneer of his own, the Klingon bit back, “You and the boy should go and play with the other children—this is a place for real men and...” He then leered at Anara, “...women.”

“Uh Oh!” Treasure exclaimed as she pulled at Chief O’Brien’s sleeve, “Looks like we got us some trouble, Sugar...”

“I’ll try to break it up before it gets started.” The chief volunteered as he pushed his way through the Klingons towards the center of the growing storm.

“Yeah...well...ya’ll watch yourself. You don’t want to get the Missus mad at ya.” The young ensign warned as she began circulating amongst her fellow crewmen pointing towards the Klingons.

Getting up from her seat, Jadzia put on her boldest front as she confronted the Klingon captain, “naDevvo’ peghoS!” She shouted, addressing her command to go away to the entire group of warriors. Then, speaking to the captain in a lower, yet far more menacing whisper of a voice, she said, “yldoghQo’! You’re under the spell of the Deltan’s pheromones. Go away now, while your honor’s intact.”

“Out of my way, Trill!” The Klingon bellowed, shoving Dax aside. “Now...before I break your neck.” Then, reaching for the Deltan woman’s arm and pulling her out of her chair, K’Temoc declared, “Come, female. Let me show you how a real warrior treats a woman!”

“Take your hand off her!” Tol growled as he placed a threatening hand on K’Temoc’s shoulder, “Or I’ll rip it off.”

“I don’t think so.” Anara cried out as she broke free from the Klingon, staggering backwards as she temporarily lost her footing.

“Screw this!” Django cursed as she kicked one of the Klingon warriors, striking him in the groin.

Jadon’s blood now boiling as he saw Anara almost fall down, stared at K’Temoc, uttering an especially vile curse as his fist lashed out, striking the Klingon square on the jaw, “Hab SoSII’ Quch!”

Arriving on the scene, Miles, upon hearing the Klingon insult, muttered a soft “Oh hell...”

“Damn!” Jadon groaned as K’Temoc shrugged off his punch before connecting with one of his own, a solid uppercut under the Trill’s chin, throwing him several feet back to land on his rear.

“That’s done it...” Lavelle muttered as he saw the remaining Klingons get out of their seats. “Django...” He said as he threw a punch at the first Klingon to come close enough to him, striking him in the face, “Remind me sometime why I put up with you.”

“Hey...don’t blame me for this...” Maria riposted as she kicked out at a Klingon, “They’re the ones who started it.”

“Yee Haw!” Treasure yelled out as she leaped from a table on to the back of the nearest Klingon, pounding him with her fists until he tossed her over to land in a heap on top of Jadon. “Sorry about that, Boss...” The red faced ensign said as she looked down on her supervisor, his face trapped by her well endowed chest.

“Not complaining...” A muffled voice came from beneath as the Trill looked up, his smile covered up by the ensign’s bosom.

“Django! Two o’ clock!” Sam, ducking a roundhouse punch delivered at him by one of the Klingons called out as he saw another Klingon preparing to blindside his friend.

“Got him!” Maria called back as she kicked out, hitting her opponent on the shins. “Watch out yourself, you’re gonna get...” Cringing as Lavelle was brought down by a blow to his back, Django then shouted out apologetically, “Sorry!”

“I’ll live.” Sam murmured from his position kneeling on the floor. “Where’s Anara?”

“Don’t know.” Django, blocking another punch from her opponent, responded. “Last I saw, she was tangling with that other Klingon.”

Ducking a blow from one of the Klingons, Miles lashed out, connecting with his fist to his opponent’s jaw. Smiling with satisfaction as he felled

his opponent, he heard Jadzia's warning just in time, dodging as a chair barely missed him to impact on another Klingon.

"Thanks Dax!"

"Don't mention it, Chief." Jadzia called back as she blindsided a Klingon with an empty liquor bottle. "Here you go, Quark." She said with a grin as she handed the still intact bottle back to the cringing Ferengi bartender.

The music still blaring, Ensign Johnson, still standing on her table, kicked out, striking one of the Klingons in the back, propelling him towards one of his shipmates. The Klingon, with a roar, head butted his surprised fellow warrior, driving him back in the direction of Sam who, lashing out with a right cross, connected with the jaw of his opponent, felling him.

"Not bad, Mr. Lavelle," Chief O'Brien praised as he punched yet another Klingon. Then, as he was pulling his fist back for another strike, he and most of the other fighters were distracted by a sharp whistle.

"Hey boys!" The buxom ensign called out as she leaped up on a table. Pulling up her top, she shouted, "Get a look at these!"

The Chief, his mouth agape as he gazed upon the ensign's attributes, never saw the Klingon's fist as it connected with his jaw sending him to unconsciousness, a smile on his lips.

"Get away from me!" Anara cried out as K'Temoc approached her, backing up her words with a kick to his solar plexus. Seeing the Klingon warrior doubled over in pain, the Deltan looked on smugly, "That ought to cool you down a little."

"I'm stuffed!" Denise exclaimed as she and her escort for the evening, Lieutenant Atoa, made their way out of the Bajoran restaurant. "So...what do you want to do now?"

“Well...” The New Kuaian security officer mused, “...how’s about checking out that Ferengi bar everyone’s been talking about?”

“Quark’s?” Denise replied as she mulled the suggestion over, “Sure...why not?”

As the pair approached the bar, the first thing they saw and heard was a crashing sound as Smithurst was propelled head first out of the door by two burly Klingon warriors. Bending over to check on their fallen comrade, Denise quickly ran a medical tricorder over him. “He’ll be ok...” The doctor assured, “Just some minor bumps, bruises, and contusions.”

“And one hell of a shiner...” Atoa remarked, noticing the rather large black eye the young operations officer was sporting. As his eyes took in the chaos going on in the bar, the security officer added, “Better stay here, Denise, to take care of anyone else who either staggers out of there or gets thrown out.”

“You’re not going in there, are you?” Dr. Murakawa asked; her face etched with concern.

“No...” Manuele responded as he activated his comm badge. “I’m going to contact Station security first and then I’m going to contact Commander Hobson and have him send over Nyota and some security people to help out.”

Almost immediately Constable Odo showed up with both Commander Hobson and Lieutenant Dryer from the *Sutherland* and a hefty squadron of Bajoran and Starfleet security as Jadzia staggered out of the bar. “Better hurry it up.” She urged as she wiped a trickle of blood from her lips, “They’re tearing Quark’s apart.”

“Where’s the Chief?” Odo asked as the security troopers waded into the bar.

“Last I saw...” Dax reported, “He was right in the middle of it.”

“This is not good.” Denise remarked as she ran her tricorder over the Trill officer while Manuele and Odo joined the others in breaking up the brawlers.

“Tell me about it!” Jadzia sighed with a mischievous grin as Denise finished her administrations and then made ready for her next customer.

As the pair laid slumped up against the bar next to where Morn still sat, nursing his drink, Django, wiping away a trickle of blood flowing from her lips with the back of her hand, quipped as both Starfleet and Bajoran security guards stormed into the now wrecked bar, “Some first date, huh Sam...wonder how you’re gonna top it for our second?”

Shaking his head in disbelief as a Bajoran guard helped him and Maria to their feet before taking them into custody, “Second date?” He asked, a smile beginning to form on his face as the pair were led away.

“Thank you for your help Lieutenants Atoa and Dryer...” Constable Odo stated simply as the last of the brawlers were placed in the station’s security holding cells.

“We’re just sorry about putting you through all this trouble, Constable.” Manuele replied, his face red with embarrassment as he noted the presence of three of the *Sutherland’s* department heads—both the engineering and operations officers along with the chief helmsman. “Believe me...Captain Shelby and Commander Hobson will deal with them.” He promised as Lt. Dryer, the assistant tactical officer, stood by, barely holding in the laughter struggling to release itself from inside her.

“I’m sure...” Odo responded with a grimace as he surveyed his holding cells, shaking his head as the Klingons from the *T’Ong* began to sing, soon joined by the more coherent members of the *Sutherland* crew. Scowling at the cacophony of noise coming from the cells, the longsuffering shapeshifter added, “I hope either Captain Shelby or

Commander Hobson come soon. I don't know how much more Klingon opera I can take."

"Oh bloody hell..." Groaning, Miles O'Brien looked about the holding cell he shared with the brawlers from the *Sutherland*.

"Hey Chief!" A now fully clothed Ensign Angela Barrows, sitting on one side of the chief petty officer, grinned, her smile vanishing as she noticed the large bruise on the Irishman's jaw, "I'm sorry about that..." She said her apology earnest. Her smile returning, she consoled, "I spotted Dr. Murakawa over there checking in on people...she ought to get to you pretty soon."

"Thanks, Treasure." The Chief answered back, a forlorn look on his face as an attractive woman with Asian features ran a dermal regenerator over him.

Sitting down on the other side of the chief, Ensign Candy Johnson apologized as well, placing a comforting arm around the station's chief of operations "Yeah, Chief...I hope you don't get into too much trouble with your captain."

"It's not Captain Sisko I'm worried about..." A depressed Miles replied, "It's my wife..."

"Ouch..." Both women commiserated as they both drew closer to the chief, their mildly flirtatious gestures and jokes slowly cheering him up.

The trip back to the station from Bajor had been a long one for Keiko O'Brien. Molly had been especially restive all the way over and that, along with her worries over the growing tensions with the Dominion and how that might impact on her family had made her especially irritable. As the airlock door wheeled open, she wanted nothing more than to collapse into the arms of her waiting husband.

“Where is Daddy!” Molly demanded pouting as soon as she and her mother exited the airlock.

“I’m sure he’s back in our quarters, dear; or he got called in to work.” Keiko soothed as the other passengers on the Bajoran shuttle jostled past the kneeling mother and her daughter. Smiling broadly at the little girl, Keiko whispered conspiratorially, “Why don’t we go and surprise him.”

“Okay!” The little girl responded with a big grin as her mother scooped her up into her arms.

“Helluva fight...” Maria Django quipped to the man sitting next to her on the floor of the holding cell, their backs against the wall.

“Sure was...” Sam snickered, his laughter vanishing as Commander Hobson strode into the security area. Pointing at the poker faced first officer, Sam squeezed his companion’s hand, “But I’ve got a feeling we’re going to pay for it now.”

“Tell me about it...” Maria groaned, “What’s that old saying? Fun time’s over?”

Entering DS9’s security holding area, Chris Hobson’s icy expression barely contained the volcanic explosion of anger that stirred beneath the surface. Pausing for a moment to glare at the *Sutherland* crew members in the holding cells, the commander addressed Odo.

“Constable...” He greeted in his usual patrician tone, “I’d like to express my apologies for the conduct of the *Sutherland* crew and assure you that they will be punished.”

“Thank you, Commander...” The shapeshifter replied with a slight tilt of the head in the direction of Manuele Atoa, “...but your security chief has already apologized...”

"I see..." Hobson drawled before turning his attention to the *Sutherland's* tactical officer, "Mr. Atoa...has the Captain been informed as yet?"

"No, Sir..." Manuele admitted, the burly officer cringing inwardly at the frosty glare he received in response from the *Sutherland's* first officer while at the same time maintaining a confident outward appearance. "Commander Dax..." He explained, glancing in the direction of the holding cells where the Trill science officer was approaching the cell containing Anara and Jadon, "...informed us that she was...indisposed..." the New Kuaian said, blushing a bright crimson, "...if you know what I mean..."

"I see..." The Iceman replied tersely as he turned his attention in the direction of the two Trills. Turning his gaze back towards Atoa and Dryer, Hobson directed, "Mr. Atoa...you and Dr. Murakawa may return to the ship after she has finished her work. I'll expect both your reports on this incident no later than 0800 hours." Addressing Lt. Dryer, the first officer ordered, "You're to remain here, Lieutenant, until further notice."

"Aye, Sir..." Both security officers acknowledged glumly as they watched the commander stride purposely towards the holding cells.

"I have a feeling this is one party I'm going to be glad I missed..." Nyota whispered to her supervisor, her lips turned up into a wry grin.

"You can say that again..." Manuele agreed. "If you think the Iceman's pissed...just wait until the captain finds out about all this—she's going to hit the ceiling."

"It's not your fault, Anara..." Jadon consoled as he placed a friendly arm around the shoulders of his Deltan shipmate. "Chief O'Brien..." He explained, gesturing with his head towards the DS9 operations chief, "Told me that they had been having problems with the air filtration system in the bar, but that because of the recent shapeshifter scare they had repairing it was a low priority." Cracking a slight grin as he saw the faintest of smiles appearing on the Deltan's face he continued, "And because Klingons have a much more sensitive sense of smell..."

“I understand...” Anara replied in a soft voice, “But I don’t blame them...or even that Klingon captain for what happened...if anything...” She said with a slightly bitter tone, “I blame myself...” Seeing Jadon’s quizzical expression, she quickly elaborated, “I saw the warning signs...Sam’s behavior...the Klingons butting heads...”

“You’re being too hard on yourself, Anara...” Tol interjected, gently squeezing his fellow officer’s shoulders, “Lavelle’s young...he just didn’t have the maturity to completely deal with the effects of those pheromones...” Chuckling, he added, “Besides...Maria looked like she was ready to kill him if he stepped one centimeter out of line...”

Laughing as well, Anara jibed back, “It wasn’t just poor Sam she was ready to kill...she looked like she was ready to kill me too...”

“Yeah...” Jadon responded, his laughter growing, “There’s nothing like young love...” His smile vanishing, he continued in a more serious vein, “Also, you shouldn’t be blaming yourself for not understanding what was going on with the Klingons...” His facial expression now apologetic, he explained, “It was all my fault...I was the one who knew the origins of their little game...you were ready to leave, but I had to take care of that business with Quark instead of listening to you and going when you wanted to...”

“Don’t blame yourself...” Anara interrupted, “I should have just left instead of staying...”

Before Tol could respond to Anara’s recriminations, he heard a familiar voice coming from the front of the cell, “Well, Jadon...looks like you stepped in it again.”

Politely disengaging himself from Anara, Jadon called back with a laugh as he moved towards the front of the cell, “Hey Jadzia! Come to bust me out?”

Laughing, Jadzia retorted, “You wish.” A more serious look on her face, she cautioned, “Commander Hobson’s here and he’s not in a good mood.”

“Damn...” Anara spit out, deliberately using the human curse as her facial expression once again took on a worried look. “I don’t want Chris to see me here...”

“Don’t worry Lieutenant...” Dax consoled, “I don’t think Commander Hobson’s going to take it out on you...”

“No...” Jadon interjected with a wry grin, Jadzia nodding her head in agreement, “It’s my spots he’s going to have mounted on his wall...” Then, spotting Hobson’s form at the entrance to the security holding area, the Trill engineer remarked in a somber tone as he pointed in the direction of the *Sutherland’s* XO, “What’s that old human saying...Speak of the devil and he comes...”

Lowering her voice, Jadzia whispered, “He sure didn’t waste any time. I better go now...” She said as she turned away, whispering an encouraging, “Good luck...” over her shoulder as she made her way out of the holding area.

“Mr. Tol...” Commander Hobson stated in a flat emotionless tone.

“Commander...” Anara quickly interjected.

“Not now, Lieutenant Rysyl.” The first officer interrupted in a patrician voice, “I’m speaking with Mr. Tol at the moment.”

“Aye, Sir.” The Deltan officer, lowering her head, acknowledged in a sad, disappointed tone.

“I take full responsibility for what happened in the bar, Sir.” Jadon declared, head erect, gazing directly into the eyes of his old friend.

“I’m sure you do, Mr. Tol.” Hobson replied formally as he tried his best to avoid the forlorn gaze of the young Deltan woman standing before him.

“Has the Captain been informed?” Jadon asked as he spared a brief supportive glance towards Anara.

“Not as yet.” Commander Hobson replied, clearing his throat, “But she will be shortly.” Before turning his back on the two officers standing before the first officer instructed, “Upon release from your confinement here you will immediately submit to me your written reports regarding this...incident. It’ll be up to the Captain as to what happens from there.”

Immediately upon hearing his two subordinates’ acknowledgement of his orders, Hobson crisply turned about, striding out of the holding area. Returning to Odo’s office, the first officer addressed both Odo and Jadzia, “Constable, could I ask you to contact Captain Shelby through the station’s comm system?”

“Don’t bother, Odo...” Dax volunteered, struggling to keep her lips from turning up into a grin, “I’ll get her. I think I know where she is.”

Laughing the entire way down to Dr. Bashir’s quarters, Jadzia almost missed the imposing form of Captain Sisko coming from the other direction. Upon seeing the stern countenance on her old friend’s face, Dax immediately adopted a similar expression. “I take it you heard the news, Benjamin.”

“Yes,” the station commander replied testily, although the slight twinkle to his eye indicated to the worldly Dax that the humor of the situation hadn’t completely gone unnoticed by the captain. “I tried contacting Captain Shelby, but it seems that her communicator isn’t...”

“Working?” Jadzia interrupted, maintaining her stony-faced exterior. “I know...”

“So imagine my surprise...” Ben continued, now struggling to maintain his stern demeanor, “...when I found out that she was located in Dr. Bashir’s quarters and that the Doctor had turned off his communicator as well.” He then gave Dax a probing look, “Know anything about this, Old Man?”

“Well...” The raven-haired Trill replied, turning her head slightly to one side, “I introduced them to each other at Quarks and ummm...I guess they hit it off...”

“Apparently so...” Ben affirmed as a slight grin tried to force itself on his face. “Let’s see if the door works...” the captain stated as the pair approached the door to Dr. Bashir’s quarters and pressed the door comm.

Barely repressing a snicker as the pair heard the sound of an object crashing on the floor mingled with assorted moans and groans, Jadzia jibed, “I don’t think they heard you, Ben.”

Letting out a breath of exasperation as he shook his head, Sisko commanded, “Computer. Execute security override...”

“I don’t think you want to do that.” Jadzia warned as she tried to maintain her stony expression.

“Computer.” Benjamin repeated; a slight edge to his voice. “Execute security override Sisko One.” The door sliding open, the captain, spotting a pair of silhouetted figures on the other side of the partition of the barely lit room, called out, “Dr. Bashir? Is Captain Shelby there?”

“Yes?” Shelby’s voice, mixed in with giggles, came out from behind the screen.

“We have a problem, Captain.” Ben stated in as even a tone as possible as both he and Dax tried to maintain their stoic exteriors.

“What sort of a problem?” Liz responded, her voice now revealing the faintest bit of irritation at the unwelcome intrusion.

“Sorry, Liz...” Dax apologized with a wicked grin, “You’re needed in security holding,” the Trill explained as her friend poked her head out from the other side of the partition. “Some of your crew got a little bit carried away and got into a...”

“Some of your people got into a brawl with some Klingons.” Ben interjected, shaking his head at the incongruity of the situation.

“What?” Liz exclaimed as she strode out into the main room, wearing nothing but a bath robe hastily thrown on. Her face now all business as she saw Jadzia nodding her head, Liz made her way towards the replicator, ordering a uniform as she did so. “Fill me in on the details while I change,” she requested as the uniform materialized.

“And that’s the situation....” Dax explained as Liz finished dressing. “Commander Hobson’s there waiting for you and Quark’s there too—he’s making a stink about taking this to the magistrate...”

“In other words,” Shelby sighed, “He wants a big fat bribe.”

Nodding her head, Jadzia confirmed, “You got that right.” Then, cracking a slight grin as she regarded her old friend, now all business, she asked, “So...you ready to go?”

“Uhhh...” Everyone turning their heads at the sound of the doctor’s voice, they heard a plaintive cry, “...Liz...before you go...could you please?”

“Oh! I forgot.” Shelby blushed crimson as she and the other two officers heard Bashir’s plea. “I’m sorry, Julian,” she called back, “I’ll be right there. Flashing an embarrassed grin, she apologized, “Excuse me for a moment, Ben...Jadzia...I kind of left Julian all tied up.”

As Keiko and Molly returned to their quarters, the Eurasian woman frowned when she saw that they were dark and that her husband was nowhere to be seen. Figuring that the chief of operations had been called out on some emergency or other, Keiko queried the computer, “Where is Chief O’Brien?”

“Chief O’Brien is currently in custody in security holding.” The computer replied in its usual feminine monotone.

“In custody?” Keiko exclaimed a look of shock on her face. Soon recovering, she requested, “Connect me with Constable Odo in Security.” As an annoyed Odo appeared on the computer screen, Keiko sighed, “Constable? What’s Miles doing in holding?”

Shaking his head, the shapeshifter explained in as kindly a voice as he could muster, “Your husband was involved in a...disturbance...at Quark’s, Mrs. O’Brien.”

“You’re telling me he was involved in a barroom brawl?” A flabbergasted Keiko exclaimed, her voice growing louder and shriller as her face reddened with anger.

Odo’s slight nod of the head answering her question, Keiko declared, “I’ll be down there after I put Molly to bed...O’Brien out.”

Turning towards the Chief, still sitting quietly in his cell in between Ensigns Barrows and Johnson, Odo declared, a look of wry amusement on his face, “Chief...that was your wife...she’s on her way here.”

“Frak me...” A now despondent Miles replied as he covered his face with his hands.

As Keiko tucked her little girl in bed, Molly looked up to her mother and asked in that sweet voice that only little girls possess, “Mommy? Is Daddy in trouble?”

Looking down at her daughter, Keiko replied with as sweet a smile as she could muster, “Go to sleep, baby...I’ll take care of your daddy.”

Looking back at her mother, the little girl concluded, “Daddy’s in big trouble.”

“Miles Edward O’Brien!”

“Sounds like your wife’s here, Chief.” Odo deadpanned as he made himself comfortable in his seat, content for now to merely watch the show about to unfold.

Turning towards Ensign Barrows, the hapless Chief pleaded in a whisper as he quickly jerked his head up, “Whatever you do Ensign...Please...for the love of God...keep those phaser banks of yours covered up!”

Entering the security holding area, Keiko marched up to the cell containing her husband. Hands on hips, she demanded, “Well Miles? What do you have to say for yourself?”

“I’m sorry...” The chief offered weakly as Maria, sitting in the back next to Lavelle, tried her best to stifle her laughter.

“You’re sorry?” The offended wife mocked, “If you think you’re sorry now...” She declared as the two captains and Jadzia Dax entered the room, “...then just you wait until we get back to our quarters.” Turning towards Captain Sisko, Keiko asked, “Captain? Can my husband be released now?”

“That depends on Constable Odo.” Ben declared, jerking his head towards the shapeshifter.

“I suppose it’s all right,” the chief of security replied as he deactivated the forcefield, allowing the Chief to exit the cell.

“Thank you, sir,” Miles uttered meekly as he addressed his commanding officer.

“Don’t thank me yet.” Sisko responded with a predatory smile. “After your wife finishes with you...it’s my turn.”

“Miles...” Keiko then ordered, her finger pointing towards the exit, “Get your butt back to our quarters—Now! We’ve got a lot to talk about!”

“Yes, dear...” The burly Irishman sheepishly replied as he and his wife exited Odo’s domain.

Shaking her head in astonishment at the scene before her eyes, Captain Shelby addressed the Constable. "What about my people involved in the brawl? What sort of charges are they facing?"

"Minor misdemeanors." Odo replied. "Breaking the peace...creating a disturbance...indecent exposure..." He said, looking pointedly at Ensign Barrows, "...along with property damage to Quark's bar...they're probably looking at paying fines."

"Starfleet is looking at a big lawsuit!" The Ferengi bartender interrupted as he turned his attention on Liz, "Do you know how much damage your people caused, Captain?" He then began tabulating the figures on his padd, "Property damage...injury to employees..."

"What injuries to your employees?" Jadzia interjected with an amused laugh.

"Bork broke his nose." Quark responded indignantly and then continued, "And of course lost profit due to having to close the bar...and..." he added, glaring at the confined brawlers, "I insist on having a damage deposit on account before I allow anyone else from the *Sutherland* in my bar."

"All right, Quark..." Liz sighed, "How much?"

"Here..." The bartender said, handing the padd to Shelby.

"What?" Liz all but shouted. "That's outrageous and you know it! Besides..." She added, pointing towards the Klingons sitting in the other cells, "...my people weren't the only ones brawling." Punching in a new number on the padd, the blonde captain declared, "I'll pay you this for the *Sutherland's* share of damages to the bar..." Flashing an evil grin, she added sweetly, taking sadistic delight in the fearful look on the barkeeper's face, "If you want, you can try to collect the rest from the Klingons." Taking a deep breath, she further offered, punching in another figure into the padd, "And I'll pay...this...as a deposit against future damages by my crew." Giving Quark a stern glare, she pointedly inquired, "Agreed?"

Picking up on the nonverbal cues given to him by both the security chief and Captain Sisko, the Ferengi merchant grudgingly conceded as he placed his thumbprint on the padd and then handed it over to Liz to do the same, “All right...agreed.”

“Thank you.” Shelby replied and then, turning towards Constable Odo, asked, “Would it be all right to have my people released into my custody?”

Nodding his head, the security chief indicated, “That would be acceptable.”

“Thank you, Constable.” Liz answered back with a smile. Then, turning towards her misbehaving crew, she spat out, “You are to immediately return to the ship with Commander Hobson where you will be confined to quarters until tomorrow morning at 0600. At that time you will report to Quark’s to assist in cleaning up the damages from your little party. After that, you will return to your quarters where you will stay when you are not on duty until further notice.” Seeing the depressed looks on her crew’s faces she glared, “That’s right, boys and girls—Mommy just grounded your asses!”

Turning towards her first officer as Odo lowered the confinement field, Shelby grimaced, “Commander Hobson—they’re all yours.”

The next morning

Standing next to Jadon before entrance to the ruined bar, Chris shook his head, “I can’t believe you did all this.”

“It wasn’t just us, Chris...” Tol replied with a cockeyed grin, “...we had some help from the Klingons.”

“Speaking of which...” Hobson noted as the captain of the *T’Ong* approached with his warriors. “I hope they’re not coming for another round.”

Approaching Commander Hobson, Captain K'Temoc announced, "Once we heard about your punishment, honor dictated that we share it. Therefore..." he stated as he pointed gruffly towards the bar, "...we shall help you."

"Thank you, Captain." Hobson replied formally, acknowledging the Klingon's gesture.

Grunting, the Klingon growled out a command in his native language. As the Klingons entered the bar, Hobson turned towards Tol. "Jadon...I'm putting you in charge of the *Sutherland* work detail while I take care of other matters. If you are done before I come back, return with the detail to the ship and follow the Captain's earlier instructions." He then looked pointedly at his friend, "Understood."

Knowing that this was no time for levity, Jadon immediately responded in a respectful, level tone, "Understood, sir."

"Very good, Mr. Tol," Hobson replied in his usual patrician voice as he turned to leave the group. Entering the tailor's shop across the Promenade, the *Sutherland's* first officer immediately recognized Garak standing in the back.

"Ah...Commander Hobson..." The Cardassian proprietor greeted, motioning with his hand, "Come here...your jacket is ready, and I was able to provide you with everything you asked for."

Shaking her head as she made her way towards station operations, Captain Shelby took a deep breath. As she exhaled, her concentration was broken by her first officer's hail.

"Captain Shelby."

"Yes, Commander Hobson." Liz replied in a strained voice.

"I've just returned from the tailor's shop and have the information you need." The first officer reported in a matter of fact tone.

"Excellent!" Shelby exclaimed, pleased at a piece of good news for a change. "Return to the ship. I want you to personally man the transporter along with Mr. Atoa. When I give you the word, you are to beam me and the captain directly to Conference Room One and then join us there."

"Aye, sir." Hobson acknowledged flatly and then, activating his communicator, directed the *Sutherland* to beam him back aboard.

"Hello, Ben..." Liz began. "Allow me to apologize again about last night..."

"That's all right..." Sisko said, barely resisting the impulse to shake his head. Then, his face taking on a serious demeanor, he remarked, "But I have a feeling that's not why you're here...It's about the idea you came up with yesterday...isn't it?"

"Yeah." Liz responded. "But I don't want to talk about it here." Giving her fellow captain an apologetic look, she explained, "It's not that I don't trust you or your senior staff...but...as the Constable said yesterday...all your people have ended up either following dead leads or dead. So...I don't want to take any chances."

"What do you recommend?" Ben queried with a raised eyebrow.

"I think we should talk more about this on my ship." Touching her communicator, Liz commanded, "Now, Commander Hobson." After the transporter had quickly beamed both her and the station commander to the *Sutherland*, Shelby apologized, "I'm sorry Ben...but like I said, I couldn't take the chance of someone monitoring us." Smiling, she gestured at a nearby chair, "Have a seat...my XO and Tactical Chief should be here shortly."

Nodding his head, Captain Sisko took a seat at the conference table as both Hobson and Lieutenant Atoa entered. "Glad you could join us, gentlemen." Captain Shelby greeted as she took her seat at the head of

the table, "Now...as regards the gunrunning and our ex-Kon Ma terrorist..." Motioning in the direction of Commander Hobson, Shelby explained to Ben, "My first officer has just come across some interesting information. I'll let Mr. Hobson brief you and then I'll detail my plan." Turning towards her first officer, Liz gestured, "Commander Hobson...the floor is yours."

"Thank you, Chris..." The *Sutherland's* captain stated as her first officer completed his briefing, laying out for all the complete details of his conversations with the tailor, Garak, without mentioning the Cardassian's name. Addressing her fellow captain Liz asked, "You have any questions, Ben?"

"Just one," Sisko said as he turned his gaze to Commander Hobson, "Are you sure of the accuracy of your intelligence?"

"As sure as I can be," Chris answered forthrightly, "It comes from the Cardassian tailor on the station."

"Mr. Garak..." Sisko interjected with a grimace.

"Correct, sir." Hobson acknowledged in a nasal tone, "A source you have used on numerous occasions, if I am not mistaken."

"True..." Ben admitted, "But he almost always has his own agenda in helping us." A slight smile crossing his features, Sisko added, "And I think I see his agenda here..."

"Correct, sir." Hobson affirmed, "His cooperation with us, while it might very well terminate a source of arms for the Cardassians would also in all probability close down an important pipeline for the Maquis resulting in at least leveling the playing field."

"Ok..." Liz exclaimed as she rose from her seat. "Here's my plan." Turning to her tactical officer she stated, "For this plan to work, Mr. Atoa, you'll be out on your own. No assistance from us at all. I won't lie to you..." She said, gazing straight into the New Kauaian's eyes, "...this

will be an extremely dangerous mission. So dangerous, that I'm making it a volunteer one. If you don't want to do this, I'll understand completely and won't hold it against you. But I need to know now if you're in or out—and I need to know now. Do you understand?"

Nodding his head, Manuele replied, "Go ahead, sir. I'm in."

"Very good..." Liz smiled as she outlined her plan.

Twenty-four hours later as the Sutherland prepares to leave DS 9.

"Mr. Varok..." Liz smiled as the Vulcan science officer entered her ready room. "I take it you've consulted with Lieutenant Commander Dax?"

"Yes, sir," Varok affirmed. "She proved quite helpful in our analysis of the entity.

"So..." Shelby asked, "Were you able to come to any conclusions?"

"Nothing definitive, sir," The Vulcan replied, "But we do have a few working hypotheses."

"Well..." The captain invited, "Have a seat and tell me about them."

"First, Captain..." Varok began as he sat down in front of the captain's desk, noting with interest a plate at the edge of the desk engraved with the motto, 'Who Dares Wins', "...we think that its origins might have been extra-universal...possibly extra-dimensional."

"Interesting..." Liz mused, "How did you arrive at that conclusion?"

"An analysis of the *Hypatia's* hull, combined with one of the tentacles that we managed to preserve following our battle with the entity revealed some rather...interesting properties." Settling down into lecture mode, the Science Officer continued, "We found the presence of a large concentration of tetryonic particles..."

“Tetryonic particles?” Shelby asked, shaking her head.

“Yes sir,” Varok stated and then explained, “These particles occur very rarely in normal space. When they are seen, it is almost always in the presence of anomalous phenomenon.”

“And the best source for that locally would be...” Liz prompted, already knowing the answer.

“The Perdita Expanse, Sir.” The Vulcan responded. “It would be logical to hypothesize that the most likely entry point for this particular phenomenon would lie somewhere there.”

“The Twilight Zone...” Shelby exhaled, “That’s just great.” Taking a moment to clear her head, the Captain continued, “Dr. Murakawa, with the help of Dr. Bashir from the station, thinks that she might have discovered a means of communication. When you get the opportunity, I would appreciate it if you’d touch base with her and let me know what you think.”

“Understood, Captain,” Varok acknowledged as he stood up. “I will attend to the matter immediately.”

As the Vulcan departed her ready room, Captain Shelby’s intercom beeped. “Captain?” Her first officer’s voice came through, “We’re ready to get underway.”

“Very good, Commander...” Liz acknowledged, “Take us away...”

Addressing the dark viewscreen the Dopterian reported, “We have located two of the three individuals you have asked for. I am transmitting the data now on a secure channel.”

“Excellent...” The figure on the other end of the transmission smiled as the images of Lieutenants Lavelle and Ogawa appeared on its screen. “You may now proceed to phase two. Do not fail me and you will be rewarded.”

As the senior staff of Deep Space Nine watched the *Sutherland* depart, Jadzia cracked an amused grin. “Well...I don’t know about you guys, but I’m going to miss Liz. I had a good time. I can’t wait for them to come back.”

“Yes...well it certainly was eventful...” Benjamin replied, maintaining a stony expression even as he tried to fight the smile that wanted to appear on his face. “But I think we can all do for a few boring weeks for a while.”

“Amen...” The Chief agreed readily as he glanced down at his console.

EPILOGUE

Captain’s Log...Stardate 49011.4...Captain Elizabeth Shelby recording. As part of the task force led by the Venture to relieve Deep Space 9, we once again find ourselves at the space station—only now there’s no time for shore leave or fun and games. I’m beaming over with emergency medical, engineering, and damage control personnel to help the station in any way we can to recover from its battle with the Klingons. Thankfully, Gowron and his task force have departed, leaving local space uncontested for now, so we’re not having to come in hot.

Materializing in the station’s operations room, Captain Shelby took in at a glance the damage caused by the recent battle. Consoles still smoked from systems overloads as Dr. Bashir and a medic rushed to and fro ministering to the various casualties. Addressing Captain Sisko, Liz cleared her throat. “Captain? I and my ship are at your disposal—anything you need—just give the word.”

“Thank you, Captain Shelby.” Ben replied with a smile of gratitude. “I believe Dr. Bashir and his people could use help with triage and first aid for the injured.”

Motioning to Dr. Murakawa, Liz directed the physician and her people to Dr. Bashir, who at that moment was kneeling over a wounded Bajoran security trooper bleeding from an open gash created by a bath'leth.

Addressing her colleague, Denise offered, "Dr. Bashir? Is there anything we can do to help?"

"Thank you," Julian replied with a nod, "We've set up a second hospital at Quark's—you can set up shop there."

"Sure thing," Dr. Murakawa acknowledged as she directed her people to the bar.

Turning towards Chief O'Brien, Captain Shelby directed, "Lieutenant Rysyl...Commander Tol...give the Chief whatever help he needs."

"Aye, sir," Both officers quickly answered back as they rushed to the harried Chief.

Turning towards the station commander, Liz remarked in a low voice, "Your people did a good job, Ben. I'm just sorry we couldn't get here sooner."

"I understand, Captain." Ben replied, "We're just glad you're here now." Shaking his head, the Emissary flatly stated, "We're living in a different galaxy now."