

A Space for Faith

Posted originally on the [Ad Astra :: Star Trek Fanfiction Archive](http://www.adastrafanfic.com/works/305) at <http://www.adastrafanfic.com/works/305>.

Rating:	General Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	Gen
Fandom:	Star Trek: Deep Space Nine
Character:	Original Vulcan Character(s) , Original Bajoran Character(s)
Additional Tags:	Religion , Bajoran Culture(s) , Women Being Awesome , Post-Series , Vulcan Culture(s)
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2011-10-15 Words: 22,757 Chapters: 5/5

A Space for Faith

by [Beatrice Otter](#)

Summary

Tora Manar grew up in the camps, during the Cardassian Occupation of Bajor. She loves Bajor, but she's ready to see the galaxy. Now Bajoran separatists threaten to end her Starfleet career before it can really get started.

Notes

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Transitional Space

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Breathe in, breathe out. Tora Manar listened to herself breathe, instead of the bustle of the Promenade below. It seemed vaguely sacrilegious to watch for the Prophets in the hustle and bustle of an alien marketplace, full of people paying no heed to the wonder in their midst. The Orbs were kept in monasteries for a reason, so that the faithful might come on retreat and meditate on them in peace, even if they were not fortunate enough to see an Orb directly.

The stars were beautiful, so many more of them than she had imagined, and yet somehow colder, too, stripped of the twinkle of atmosphere. Manar had stood at the window for ... some time. A newly arrived security officer did not have the clearance to see a schedule for ships transiting through the Celestial Temple.

But there, she was getting distracted again. Manar breathed in, and out. In, and out.

There!

Like a storm blowing up out of nowhere, the Celestial Temple opened, and Manar laughed in wonder.

*“As the great river floods in the rains
So your wisdom washes over us
Scouring away impurity
Washing us into new courses.”*

She leaned against the bulkhead, vigil over, weariness fighting with elation as she sang the old chant softly, the chant that she'd learned in the mining labor camp so far from her family's lands. Now, she could find her room and get some sleep after a long day's travel to her new posting. She slung her bag over her shoulder and checked the map on her PADD, humming softly.

The merchants below didn't bother her so much, now. If the Prophets were with them in a Cardassian labor camp, surely a free market-place would not trouble them.

“He's just like a machine. Look at him, Manar.”

Manar looked up from fiddling with her new Starfleet uniform to see what her friend Rez was looking at. This was her first full day on the station, and now that she'd had a decent night's sleep she was a bit nervous. Rez was watching a Vulcan, wearing security gold, eating some kind of soup and studying a PADD. He looked fairly ordinary, for a Vulcan: tall, thin, greenish skin, straight black hair, pointy ears, smooth nose, probably around thirty years old, relatively good-looking. Exotic, to a girl who'd never been off of Bajor before.

“What?” she said, turning back to Rez. “He looks normal to me. I mean, normal for a Vulcan, anyway.” Manar dug her fork into her hasperat. It wasn't as good as her grandfather made, but what could you expect of replicated food? She stole a glance at the Vulcan. He was the first one she'd ever seen; the Human's oldest allies might be a power in the Federation, but they had a reputation of keeping to themselves.

“You wouldn't know,” Rez said, “you just got here. But every day in the two months I've been on the station, he follows *exactly* the same routine. He gets to the Replimat at exactly the same time and orders the same soup and reads the same PADD. It's like clockwork. I wonder why he does it?”

“Clockwork, huh,” Manar said. “And how do you know that? Have you been here every day for the past two months timing his movements?”

Rez shot her a look. “No,” he said. “But it's not like it was hard to notice.”

“So you've been watching him for two months.” Manar sat back and tilted her head. “Have you ever seen him talk to anyone while he does it?”

Rez snorted. “I've never seen him talk with anyone, period. On duty or off.”

“In the two months you've been watching him, have you ever been polite and introduced yourself?” In the section on Vulcans in the training course designed to integrate Bajoran officers into Starfleet, they'd said that Vulcans often didn't mix much with people of other races even when they did move among them. But still—two months without speaking to anyone?

“No.” Rez shook his head. “Why would I want to? And what would I say to a Vulcan?”

“Now, I *know* your mother taught you better manners than *that*, Teno Rez.” She stood up, tossing her napkin on the table. “And ‘hello’ usually works.” Before she could talk herself out of it, she marched over to the Vulcan's table. After all, one of the reasons she'd transferred to Starfleet after Bajor *finally* joined the Federation was to meet aliens other than Cardassians and experience things she wouldn't get to do on Bajor.

She stopped two feet away from the Vulcan, careful not to invade his personal space. He didn't look up from his PADD. “Hello,” she said. “I'm Tora Manar.” She smiled at him, hoping her friendliness would help smooth the waters even if the Vulcan couldn't reciprocate.

The Vulcan looked up from his work. “Ensign Tora,” he acknowledged. “I am Soval.” He seemed to be waiting for something.

Now what? What do you talk with a Vulcan about? “I just got here,” she said, gesturing around the Promenade. “I’ve been assigned to the Beta shift Habitat ring security station.”

Soval raised an eyebrow. “I am also assigned to that station and shift. You are replacing Ensign Latha?”

“I guess,” Manar said. Latha was a common Bajoran name; Starfleet assigned a lot of Bajorans who’d transferred to Starfleet to DS9 for their first few months, before moving them to a more permanent assignment. They called it ‘getting your feet wet,’ and it was the reason Manar and Rez were here. She was just glad their assignments had overlapped enough for them to be there at the same time; Rez was shipping out on the *Lincoln* in a week, and who knew when they’d see each other again? She glanced over at Rez, who was trying to surreptitiously motion her back. “So, this is my first Starfleet assignment,” she said. “What can I expect?”

The Vulcan followed her glance to Rez. “I am not aware of any great procedural differences between Starfleet and Bajoran security arrangements that were not covered in your classes,” he said. “I believe your companion is attempting to attract your attention.” He returned his attention to his PADD.

Manar frowned. *That* hadn’t gone well. She stalked back over to their table and flopped down.

“And *that* would be why I haven’t introduced myself,” Rez said with a grin. “Crash and burn.”

“Are you done yet?” Manar said, irritated. Besides, she hadn’t given up on the Vulcan. Before she was transferred off, she was going to have a real conversation with him if it killed her.

“Yes,” Rez replied. “Want to take a walk along the upper Promenade? Maybe we’ll get lucky, and a ship will go through the Celestial Temple.”

“Ooh, wouldn’t *that* be nice,” Manar said. To live in a place where one could see the Prophets’ own home open to mortals! Twice in as many days! It was such a blessing.

Two minutes before Beta shift began, Manar walked into the secondary security station that covered the Habitat ring. Soval was already there, running a check on his phaser. Maybe she’d get the opportunity to talk with him sometime during the shift. Manar stepped up to the weapons rack next to Soval and selected one for herself, signing it out with her security code and running a check on it. A third security officer, an ensign, human, entered right behind the last patrol from Alpha shift. Manar stepped over to the secure console to give them room at the weapons rack. A fellow Bajoran jogged in, earring clinking.

“You are late, Lieutenant Hazar.” Soval’s voice cut across the murmured pleasantries as the shifts switched off. “This is the fourth incident of tardiness in the last two weeks. If it becomes a habit, I will have to report it.”

“Sorry, sir,” Hazar said stiffly. “It won’t happen again.”

Soval nodded acknowledgement, then turned to the Alpha shift supervisor. “I relieve you, Lieutenant,” he said formally.

“I stand relieved,” the other replied a little less stiffly. “See you tomorrow.”

As Alpha shift filed out, Soval turned to Manar. “Our routine is fairly standard. At least one officer must remain in the station in case of emergency; we follow a regular patrol schedule, with assorted random patrols. Report anything suspicious immediately. You have been given the standard station security orientation briefing?” At Manar’s nod he continued. “Then you and Ensign Wilkins will be assigned to the first patrol sweep. Any questions?”

“No, sir,” Manar said. Her briefing had been thorough, and she could ask Wilkins if she had any questions on patrol.

“So,” Manar asked as they made their way around the station through one ugly gray hall after another, “is there really enough of a security problem in this area to justify two-man patrols?”

“Not really, no,” Wilkins replied with a grin. He was a human, and she had seen enough of them since joining Starfleet that his species was no longer a novelty to her. Like all humans, he was fairly laid-back and talkative. He was short and fit, with a round face and attractive features, if she ignored the lack of ridges. “Not since the war ended, anyway. They just want the new Bajoran officers paired up with a regular Starfleet vet in case of emergency. And after the war, and the station being occupied, people find Starfleet patrols reassuring. So, here we are.” He shrugged. “I don’t mind—it’s nice to have the company.”

“I suppose so,” Manar said. She smiled at him. It was a pity they worked together. She allowed herself a brief fantasy of what his dusky amber skin would look like against her rich bronze, before shaking it off. She didn’t date her partners. “Kind of insulting to us, though, when you think about it.”

“They just want to make sure you have a chance to figure out the ropes before throwing you in the deep end. It’s fairly standard procedure for integrating large numbers of prior service organizations into Starfleet, Ensign.” He paused to check that a maintenance cover was properly sealed. “Not that we do that often.”

“Yes, but you have new planets joining every year,” Manar protested.

He shrugged. “Usually, they make recruits from new Federation members go through the full four years at the Academy even if they were in whatever military or scientific corps their planet had. You Bajorans, all they gave you was a three month BASIC course. And then a couple

months of hand-holding afterwards.”

“Well, I guess when you put it that way, it isn’t bad,” Manar admitted—she’d only had a one-year course to become an officer in Bajoran service; if regular Starfleet officers had four-year training periods, she had a lot to catch up on.

“Hey, on a less serious note, we have a weekly get-together in Quarks,” her partner said. “You’re welcome to come. Wednesday night—that’s two days from today—right after we get off-shift.”

“Thank you, Ensign,” she said with a grin. “Sounds like fun.”

“Call me Brendan,” he said.

“I’m Manar.” She smiled; one thing she’d been worried about, when joining, was that she wouldn’t find the kind of camaraderie among aliens that she’d had in the Bajoran militia. It was good to know that wasn’t the case, especially after her run-in with the Vulcan.

“So, what do you think about the latest round of trouble on Bajor?” Brendan said.

Manar shrugged. “Bajor’s still half-destroyed from the Occupation, and nobody’s quite sure what it will look like when it’s been put back together again, except that it won’t look like it did before. Somebody’s always upset about something.”

“Yeah, the whole situation’s a mess,” Brendan said. “If you ask me, a lot of people down there are just plain counterproductive.”

Manar shot him an annoyed glance. Who was he, an alien who’d grown up in freedom and plenty, to pass judgment on Bajor? But, she reminded herself, *she* sometimes thought that, and besides, she didn’t want to get off on the wrong foot with her new partner.

A week later, Manar was feeling pretty confident in her duties. Walking a beat was pretty much the same, whether you were in Bajoran or Starfleet service. She’d made friends with all her shift mates besides Soval, who didn’t talk much unless he was giving an order, though he didn’t seem to mind his crew chatting as long as they paid attention to their duties. His silence did nothing to dissuade her curiosity. Humans were an open book, easy enough to figure out; Manar liked challenges.

“Has anybody ever invited Lieutenant Soval to Quark’s?” she asked Brendan as they made their way back to the Habitat Ring security station after their last patrol. It was her second Wednesday on Deep Space Nine. Other shift supervisors came with their crews, so she knew there was no protocol reason why Soval couldn’t come.

“Not that I know of,” Brendan said with a shrug. “But people generally don’t invite Vulcans to bars. And Vulcans tend to be big on hierarchy—they don’t often socialize with their juniors. Besides, it’s not like he doesn’t know about it.”

“But nobody’s ever asked him?” she asked. She knew Vulcans were solitary by nature, but surely some form of contact with others outside of his duties would be welcome.

“Not in the six months I’ve been here.”

“Mind if I invite him?” Manar asked, slightly appalled.

“Knock yourself out,” Brendan said skeptically. “I doubt he’ll come, but you can ask him.”

They turned the last corner to the security station, and entered to find that Gamma shift had already started to arrive and gear up, making the tiny room a bit crowded. While she waited her turn to check in her phaser, Manar ran through a dozen different ways to ask Soval to come. It didn’t take her long to figure out that a simple invitation was the best, and if he turned it down, it would hardly be the end of the world.

He was still working on paperwork. The Federation required far more of it than she’d ever dreamed, when she’d volunteered for transfer; she couldn’t imagine what they did with all of it. Though, at least none of it required actual ‘paper,’ which couldn’t be counted on in a Bajoran militia still recovering from the occupation and not always possessing reliable computers. She stepped up and checked her phaser in. (She still thought the design of a Bajoran disruptor much easier to handle). Soval didn’t seem to be close to finishing up, she decided, hovering near his desk. Should she ask him now, or wait until he was done?

“Yes, Ensign?” Soval said, glancing up at her.

“The rest of the team goes to Quark’s, after shift on Wednesdays,” Manar said. “I was wondering if you would like to join us tonight?”

He sat back and raised an eyebrow.

“It’s okay if you don’t want to,” Manar said, feeling stupid, after waiting for him to say something. She could feel the eyes of the rest of the team on her. “I just thought maybe you’d like to get out, a little.”

“Thank you for the offer,” Soval said, studying her. “I have paperwork that must be finished.”

“You can come when you’re done,” Manar countered.

He considered that for a moment, head cocked. “Perhaps I shall.” He turned his attention back to his screen.

Manar let out an unobtrusive sigh of relief. That had gone better than she expected.

Brendan tugged at her sleeve, and she followed him out the door.

Manar hovered on the fringes of the group, glancing at the door to the bar when no one was looking at her. After almost three quarters of an hour, she was starting to give up. Brendan and his girlfriend had already left, and some of the others would start drifting away soon. She turned her attention back to the story Fala was telling involving childhood pranks between siblings.

“Oh, that’s *nothing*,” Tom said. The two were both on the Docking Ring crew, and were in the habit of swapping stories. “My sister, Gracie?” He shook his head. “On ranches on Earth, they have these fences with electrical current through them, to keep cattle from straying, right? I grew up on Deneva, I’d never seen one before my family visited my grandfather when I was nine. Anyway, Gracie and I were playing by ourselves out in the north forty one day, and we found this fence. She dared me to pee on it, which I did.”

“Ooh,” Fala said. “That was *nasty*. You win, I have no stories that can top that one.”

“Wonder what Lieutenant Soval’s doing here?”

Manar glanced up to see him standing, somewhat uncertainly, in the doorway. “Over here, Lieutenant,” she called, waving to make sure he spotted them.

“He’s joining us?” Tom said, a little incredulously.

“I asked him,” Manar said.

Tom shrugged. “Fine by me. I’m just surprised he actually came.” He raised his glass towards a passing waiter.

“Actually, so am I,” Manar said.

“Pull up a chair, Lieutenant,” Fala said as he drew near. Her speech was slightly slurred from drinking, but if she was drunk she hid it well. “Join us. We were just sharing embarrassing childhood stories.”

“Painful ones,” Tom said. “Don’t forget the painful part.”

“D’you have any you wanna share?” Fala asked.

Soval raised an eyebrow. “Not particularly.” He hesitated, standing behind the chair next to Manar.

“Fala and Tom were sharing stories,” she said. “The rest of us were listening and laughing. Actually, it was a bit of a competition for who had the worst story, and Tom just won it.”

“I see,” he said, sitting down. “Vulcan green tea,” he told the Ferengi hovering at his elbow.

“And where’s my refill?” Fala asked. “But Tom did win. His sister once talked him into peeing on an electrified fence. Tops anything my brothers ever did to me.”

“I am not surprised,” Soval said gravely, raising an eyebrow at Tom.

“I was nine, and I’d never seen one before.”

“Ah.”

There was a slight silence, and Manar shifted uncomfortably. Now that the Vulcan had joined them, the others seemed to have lost their ease. “I always got along fine with my brothers—better than I generally got along with the other girls in the camp. I was a bit of a tomboy, which my mother was constantly trying to remedy. Though I think her main objection was trying to keep our clothes clean and in one piece. Climbing rocks and things was a bit hard on them.”

“Did it work?” Tom asked.

Manar hesitated. “I never stopped preferring playing with the boys instead of the girls, but she did manage to get me interested in books and schoolwork, which kept me out of trouble more than my brothers.”

“I had understood that education was a low priority on Bajor during the Occupation,” Soval said neutrally.

“It took a back seat to survival, but that doesn’t mean we’re ignorant or backwards,” Fala shot back.

“No, but it does mean we have a lot of work to do to catch up,” Manar replied. “The primary and secondary education in my home province is only just getting going again in some places, almost a decade after the Occupation ended. We have to rebuild the universities, and even then most people can’t afford to take the time off work to go. I couldn’t; that’s why I joined the militia. And then transferred to Starfleet—their continuing education programs are much better than Bajor’s. I don’t want to be a security guard or a soldier all my life.”

“What career do you wish to pursue?” Soval asked. “You are not currently enrolled in any academic studies.”

“How do you know?” Manar frowned. She didn’t think she’d ever mentioned the subject in the station house.

“As your immediate superior, I would be informed of your participation in any such endeavors so that I could adjust the duty roster as necessary to accommodate them.”

“Oh,” Manar said, bemused by the idea that one’s superiors would rearrange the duty roster to take personal studies into account. And that Soval was so matter-of-fact about it. “Well, I wanted to get settled in to my duties before adding anything on the side.”

“Logical,” Soval said with a nod. “Unfortunately, assignments are currently in a state of flux while Starfleet transfers itself from a war footing

to a peacetime footing. It may be some time before you receive a long-term posting if events are left to themselves. It is unfortunate, as Starfleet needs fewer guards and more scientists during peacetime, and greater education—particularly in the sciences—would greatly enhance your career flexibility.”

“Oh,” Manar said. “So you’re saying I should start classes as soon as possible, even if I’m not going to be here long?”

Soval hesitated. “If you can maintain your studies during periods of transition, it might be wiser. Also, there is a greater chance of your being assigned a post with resources to assist you along your chosen path if you have demonstrated both aptitude and interest in that area.”

“Thanks,” Manar said brightly. “I’ll look into it.”

A Space to Learn

"I received your class registrations, Ensign," Soval said three days later as Manar checked out a phaser for her shift. "There should not be any conflict with your current duty schedule; if one develops, please let me know. Also, if you require a tutor in any subject, it should be possible to arrange for one here on the station."

"I thought there wasn't an Academy extension program on DS9?" Manar said with a frown as she adjusted her phaser in its holster. She would never understand the design of Starfleet personal weaponry; it was more awkward to hold than a Bajoran disrupter, more difficult to aim, more prone to coming out of its holster accidentally, and had no greater range or power.

"Your current classes are all general undergraduate courses," Soval replied. "Almost any officer on the station would be qualified to tutor them, myself included."

"Oh, right," Manar said, feeling a slight flush creep over her face. "Thanks," she said, "but so far it doesn't look like I'll be having any difficulty with them." She cocked her head. "Why do they call them 'undergraduate?'"

"The Federation educational system assumes that all its citizens receive at least the equivalent of secondary education in math and science; it is required by law, although new members such as Bajor have a grace period to implement such a program," Soval said. "The majority of Federation citizens go on to receive either a general or vocational tertiary degree. The graduation from that program is the one that precedes either entrance into the workforce or a more specialized degree of some kind. Therefore, tertiary studies are referred to as 'undergraduate' in general parlance, and any specialized studies after that are referred to as 'postgraduate.'"

"Oh." Manar glanced over at Brendan, waiting impatiently by the station house door. "Thanks, Lieutenant. I'll let you know if I need anything."

"I'm so glad to hear you are continuing your studies," her mother said. She smiled. "We haven't had a scholar in the family since before the Occupation!" On the screen, Manar's parents sat in their bedroom in the family home. There were cracks in the plaster that hadn't been fixed, and a discoloration in the wall where a painting—a family heirloom—had hung before the Occupation.

"I'm hardly a scholar, Mom," Manar said with a shrug. It was hard to get enthusiastic when her studies were this hard—much harder than she had expected. "This is all basics, and what I study will depend on what kind of post I want to get." This close to Bajor, Manar could get a real-time call whenever she wanted. After she was transferred away from the Bajoran system it would be much more difficult, so she was taking every chance she got. Her roommate was playing in the holosuites; it sounded tempting, but Manar would rather save her credits.

"Still, it's more opportunity than we have back in the valley," Dad said. He shook his head. "There's only two teachers for the whole school, and almost a hundred children; the Federation offered to send in alien teachers, but we had a vote and decided it was better to have our own people. There are too many stories of problems from other schools. Those Federation teachers just don't seem to respect us."

Mom pursed her lips. "Though I said at the time that if we could just get one or two of them in to teach math and science and Federation government and history, then our own teachers could focus on Bajoran history and literature and music and art and religion, and the children would be much better served over all."

"It's done and the decision's been made," Dad said. "You can argue it again next year."

"Be that as it may, your nephew Nalas has really reached the end of the schooling available in the valley," Mom said. "There's distance-learning, of course, but he's too old to be ordered to do it, and he's too lazy to do it on his own. He needs structure. I say he should be sent to university, but his *mother* says we need him here on the farm."

Manar hid a smile. Mom and Aunt Chayen had a long-running (mostly) good-natured feud, the reasons for which were lost to the mists of time. If Aunt Chayen said it was cold, Mom would insist it was warm for the season; and if Mom said Nalas should go away to school, Aunt Chayen would disagree. Just hearing about it made Manar feel like she was back home.

"To be fair, we really *do* need all the help we can get out here," Dad said. "It breaks my heart every time I see the vine trellises in shambles, but it will be a long time before we can afford to fix them. Thank you again for the replicator credits you transferred to the family account; with that, and what we saved ourselves, we were able to get that new Federation soil-cleanser. It does so much more land at a time; we've done the whole section north of the river, and have started lending it to our neighbors. If we could get a few more of those, why, the whole valley would be decontaminated in just a year!"

"If those hooligans would stop making trouble," Mom said.

"Hooligans?" Manar said, heart sinking. The last year had been so calm, since the end of the Dominion War and the Emissary's return to the Prophets.

Mom made a face. "They think joining the Federation is going too far, too fast. They think we'll somehow stop being Bajoran if we don't limit the number of aliens on the planet, and they think we should declare any Bajorans who leave the system to be apostates like the followers of the Pagh-Wraiths, because they're leaving the Prophets."

"That doesn't even make sense," Manar said. "If the Celestial Temple reaches from one end of the galaxy to the other, and if the Prophets could send the Emissary visions on Earth *without even an orb nearby*, then obviously there is no place in this galaxy they do not touch. Prylar Horran said that the Council of Vedeks had already ruled on it!"

"Obviously it's still a matter of contention, no matter what the Prylar thinks," Dad said. "But I believe that once things are in better repair and

there is work to go around, the hotheads will see reason.”

Mom laughed. “Or at least have less time on their hands to sit around and fight. That’s one thing I’ll agree with them on: the replicators are a mixed blessing. Everyone has enough to eat and clothes to wear, but accumulating enough credits to actually *fix* things so we can grow our own food and make our own clothes is a bit of a challenge. I don’t like sitting around twiddling my thumbs. I’m afraid that children today will grow up used to having replicators supply their every need, and not understand the value of hard work and craftsmanship.”

“Getting back on our feet is still going a lot faster than it would have without them,” Dad said.

Two weeks later, Manar was ready to concede defeat. The ‘soft’-science courses weren’t a problem, but it had been nine years since she’d studied any math at all, and she’d forgotten most of it. Worse, standard notation was different in the Federation than on Bajor, so while some of the things she was studying were reviews of things she already knew, other parts of the course assumed she knew things that had not been covered in any course she’d ever taken. And all assignments had to be 100% correct; if you missed any problem, you had to redo the whole thing.

She hesitated at the door to Lieutenant Soval’s quarters. The computer said he was in them, and given the time she doubted he was sleeping. Still, she’d never shown up unannounced at a superior officer’s quarters, before, and she knew Vulcan privacy taboos were stricter than Bajoran ones. She hit the chime anyway.

A few seconds later, the door opened. Soval stood there in a robe of some kind, the first time she’d ever seen him out of uniform. “Ensign Tora,” he said, raising an eyebrow. “Was there something wrong with your communicator?”

“No,” she said with a grimace. “But I kind of wanted to talk to you in person. And not in the stationhouse.” She shifted uneasily from one foot to the other.

“Very well,” Soval said, standing back to let her enter.

His room was no larger than hers, and there was no portal to see the stars. He didn’t have to share it, though, which was a luxury not to be discounted. With the new Bajoran officers rotating through the station on top of a commercial trade that was exceeding pre-war levels and still climbing, space was at a premium. She shared her quarters with two other officers. It was better than the camps, and slightly better than the family home they were still rebuilding back on Bajor, but there wasn’t really anywhere she could go for a moment alone unless she wanted to spend her energy credits on one of Quark’s holosuites.

“Can I offer you some tea?” he asked.

“No, thanks.”

He gestured to the one chair in the room and sat on his bed, folding his hands in his lap.

“I’m having trouble in my math class,” she admitted, trying not to fidget. “The others are fine, but I’m just not getting the math.”

“You require a tutor,” Soval said. “A simple request at any time during your shift would have been sufficient.”

Manar shrugged. “It’s a basic first-year academy course that half the student body tests out of.”

Soval cocked his head. “You received far fewer academic opportunities as a youth than the average Starfleet cadet, and have not been in a position to rectify the lack as an adult until now. Given the resources to continue your education, you immediately took advantage of them, despite the fact that you are not required to do so and most of your peers do not. There is no shame in this. It is, in fact, admirable.” He studied her for a few moments. “Still, if you would prefer discretion, it can be arranged. Was there anything else?”

“No.” Manar stood and smiled at him. “Thanks, sir.”

Soval inclined his head gracefully.

“Hey, Manar, glad you could make it,” Brendan said with a grin the next day when she arrived for her shift.

“I’m only five minutes late,” she said defensively. “I was in the middle of some class work and wanted to get it finished before work. I would have made it, but I forgot about the Convocation of Ranjens here on the station. Had to wait for a lift.”

“Well, they’ve handed out new assignments.” He jerked his head to the Lieutenant’s desk. “You’d better go pick up yours now.”

“Right.” Manar stepped across the small room to the desk, and picked up the only PADD remaining. She pressed her thumbprint to the reader, and it lit up. Her work schedule looked the same, but a daily tutoring session had been added. No mention of who her tutor was ... but the address was Soval’s.

“I trust the schedule meets with your approval, Ensign Tora?”

She looked up to see her superior watching her. “Yes, sir. Thank you.” She smiled.

“I trust your tardiness will not be repeated?”

“No, sir.” Manar shook her head. “I’ll be on time.”

“Good.” He walked past her, taking a seat at his desk.

Manar waited for a few seconds, but he ignored her presence. She gave a tiny shrug and turned to gear up.

“So, what’d you get?” Brendan asked. “I’m on Alpha shift starting tomorrow. The transition’ll be hell, but I can’t wait to get off swing shift. It’s even worse than graveyard.”

“My work schedule isn’t changing,” Manar replied with a shrug.

“Huh.” Brendan frowned as they started out for their patrol. “We get these reorganizations every so often, and most of the new Bajorans get transferred off the station. I’m pretty sure you’re the only one of the Bajorans we’ve got now who’s staying.”

Manar flinched. “So, what, they think I’m backwards and need more time being babysat?”

“You’re the most recent transfer in by a good three weeks,” Brendan pointed out. “You’ll probably just get transferred out before the next major transfer cycle begins. Don’t take it personally. Just enjoy our last patrol together.”

“I’ll try,” Manar said, mollified.

“So, now that you’ve been here a while, what do you think of Starfleet?” Brendan asked, halfway through patrol.

“Starfleet is more accommodating than I was expecting,” Manar said, though she supposed that when you had as many resources as Starfleet and the Federation had, it was easier to make exceptions for people.

They turned a corner and she ran a practiced eye over the corridor in front of them; nothing was out of place. Brendan liked to talk, because it helped him stay awake towards the end of shift. Manar supposed he was had a point, but it also could distract you from your job and it let everyone who cared to listen know right where you are. “I’ll be glad when I’m off the station, though,” she said as she noticed a rattling vent cover. She’d have to remember to tell maintenance about it. “It will be nice to get away from all this Cardassian architecture.”

“Hey, Starfleet architecture isn’t meant for beauty, either,” Brendan pointed out.

A fellow Bajoran would have understood without needing to be told. What would it be like, for the very walls around you to be free from ghosts? “It’s not beauty I’m worried about,” Manar said. “It will be decently lit, and it won’t remind me of the camp I grew up in.”

“Oh, right,” Brendan said, flushing. “Sorry.” He glanced sideways at her, biting his lip, and she sighed. That was the annoying thing about Federation people, regardless of species, she had found. Either they were rude and thoughtless about the Occupation and the scars it left, or they were overly solicitous and tripping over themselves to apologize for things that were not their fault. Sometimes, they did both at once. It was very tiring.

Soval did neither. It was one of the things Manar liked about him.

They walked down the corridor, the silence settling uncomfortably between them. This was not what she wanted when she wished Brendan would talk less. Besides, if he was worried about having offended her, he wasn’t paying attention to his duties. Sometimes, she wondered how the Federation had won the Dominion War. They were very good at science and technology, and yet basic skills like guarding seemed difficult for them.

They turned another corner. A ranjen was waiting for a turbolift, the colorful robes standing out amid the dark gray. When the Cardassians ruled, you never saw that. Even when people could get colorful fabric instead of the rough neutrals the Cardassians gave out, they got dirty and stained quickly. “I liked the old Starfleet uniforms better than these,” she said to break the silence. “Red, gold, blue, with the color on the outside rather than hidden under a jacket.”

“These are more practical in dangerous situations,” Brendan pointed out. “It’s a bit less like wearing a target on your back.”

Manar laughed at the reversal. A Starfleet officer, arguing for practicality! “My family were weavers before the Occupation,” she said. “Our valley was known for the brilliance of its fabrics. We grew the plants for fabric and for dyes, as well as much of our own food. Then we spun and wove it to sell across the planet—each family in the valley had its own special style.”

“Do you miss weaving?” Brendan asked.

“I’ve never done it,” Manar said. “The Cardassians destroyed our looms, poisoned the land, and herded us all into labor camps. It was decreed a non-vital industry. Machines make fabric much more cheaply, you see, and slaves don’t need art. Members of the Lh’valla were deemed non-essential and added to the general labor pool.” She’d tried weaving, after the Occupation, but it would take a *very* charitable observer to call what she’d done fabric. Perhaps one day she would have children who would learn the family trade.

“Oh,” Brendan said again. “I’m so sorry.”

“Why?” Manar asked. “*You* had nothing to do with it.”

Manar took a deep breath before signaling her presence. The door opened at her touch, and she slipped inside. The lights were brighter than they had been the last time she was here, and only one candle was lit.

“You brought your texts and study materials?” Soval was standing beside a desk that hadn’t been there a couple of days earlier.

“Yes, sir,” Manar said, slinging her bag onto the desk. “I wanted to say thanks for doing this. I know how Vulcans are about privacy, so if you’d rather not do this, I can find someone else ...”

“Your concern is appreciated but unnecessary,” Soval replied. “If this were a problem for me, I would have found you a different tutor. However, given that I am qualified to tutor you in this subject and that you require discretion, this was the most logical alternative.”

“I see,” Manar said. “So, where do you want to start?”

He clasped his hands behind his back. “You will not need your study materials today. I have reviewed your transcripts and your assignments to date, but I believe a closer examination of your understanding is required. Given your educational background, a systematic approach to covering the gaps in your knowledge base would be more effective than simply assisting you with your current coursework. I have a test prepared to evaluate your specific needs; please notify me if you have any questions or difficulties. Once it is completed, I will outline a further course of study.”

“But what about my class?”

Soval raised an eyebrow. “The purpose of the class is to ensure that you have a basic background in mathematics, suitable to be built upon in further studies; it presupposes that the students who take it possess a standard Federation secondary education. You do not. In some areas, you are more advanced; in others, you are behind. And given that Bajor did not use standard Federation notation for mathematics until quite recently, after your formal schooling was complete, you are struggling even in those areas in which you are familiar with the principles involved. It would be illogical to suppose that assignments and tests designed for a standard student would serve you well. New course work must be created to fit your current knowledge level. Once you have mastered the information required, you can then test out of the course even if you have not completed every assignment. A broader understanding of the subject will help you not only in this course, but in any further courses you choose to take.”

“Oh,” Manar said, blinking. She’d heard Vulcans could be long-winded, but it was the most words she’d ever heard Soval say at one time. “Okay.” She sat down at the table and pulled the computer terminal closer to her. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw Soval sit down on his bed and begin reading. Turning her attention back to the screen, she got to work.

Manar fought to keep her voice level and slow, as was proper when chanting. Her arms were *killing* her—it was so hard to keep them up in the right position, out straight from her body, forearms vertical, hands cupped towards the altar. She wasn’t going to make it through the whole thing, and worse, her attention was more on her arms than her devotions. Sighing, she gave into the inevitable and stopped, rubbing her biceps. A rustle of cloth alerted her; she’d thought the temple deserted at this hour.

She turned, to find the Vedek in charge of this temple watching her. Manar had never spoken with her, though she had seen her praying. “I should have tried harder to finish it, I know,” Manar said, flushing. She stood up and faced Vedek Pelin. “Your arms were trembling,” the Vedek said. She was tall and large-boned, and the purple and red robes she wore only made her look larger and more imposing. “Effort is useless, without the strength and discipline to support it, and that takes regular practice.” She walked forward and stood in front of Manar, raising a hand.

Obediently, Manar turned her head to give the Vedek better access to her ear.

Vedek Pelin smiled, but didn’t comment on the state of Manar’s Pagh. “Don’t apologize for your weakness, child,” she said, dropping her hand. “We Bajorans have been preoccupied with survival for the whole of your young life. It’s hard to take time to pray when you don’t know where your next meal will come from—or even if you’ll be alive to eat it. You have returned to the temple, that’s the important thing. You can learn the disciplines. All it takes is time, and attention.”

Manar nodded. “Thank you.”

“I would suggest, however, learning the chants before singing them on your own.” The Vedek glanced down at the PADD by Manar’s feet. “They should be written in your soul, not on your computer.”

“Of course.” Manar could feel her face flush, and ducked her head. “I will do as you say, Vedek.”

Her communicator beeped. “All security personnel not on duty, report to cargo bay 4. Repeat, all security personnel not on duty, report to cargo bay 4.” Manar nodded to the Vedek, scooped up her PADD, and hurried out.

It was the first all-security briefing since Manar had arrived, and it was immediately obvious why it was being held in the cargo bay: there was no security station large enough to assemble everyone at once, not even the main office. The bay was only half filled with cargo; Lieutenant Ro and the shift supervisors stood at one end while the rest of the security personnel filed in. Manar could see the supervisors counting heads, making sure their teams were present.

When people had stopped filing in, Lieutenant Ro climbed up on a cargo pod so everyone could see her. She was an intense woman, and even from the middle of the crowd Manar could feel the force of her personality. Although Manar had never met her, she was proud to serve with one of the few surviving Maquis.

“As some of you have no doubt already heard, there was a riot this morning in Ashalla outside the main Starfleet personnel processing facility. Protesters who oppose Bajorans leaving the system on religious grounds clashed with security forces and things escalated. Three people were killed: two rioters and one Bajoran Starfleet recruit. Many more were injured, and there was a lot of property damage.”

Manar bit her lip; Ashalla was on the other side of the planet from home, but a riot with casualties on both sides would have ripple effects everywhere. She’d have to call home as soon as she could. It wasn’t the first riot or other disturbance since she’d left the planet, but it was the first time people had died in one.

“Things are very tense right now, and we want to keep the station calm. We’ll be sending out increased patrols effective immediately; your new schedules have been sent to your PADDs. Also, I hope to arrange seminars with Vedek Pelin at the Temple here on the station to give you

all a better handle on the religious angle. Questions?"

An Andorian Manar didn't know raised her hand. "Why do we need to know the religious details? All we need to do is keep the peace."

Lieutenant Ro's mouth pressed into a flat line; Manar was glad it wasn't aimed at her. "You need to know, Crewman, so that if there is a peaceful protest on this station you don't accidentally insult the protesters, their beliefs, and their intelligence, generally proving their point for them and provoking an attack, as one unfortunate Starfleet officer did this morning in Ashalla. Understood?"

"Yes, sir." The Andorian's antennae drooped, and she had turned a delicate shade of lavender. Manar was fascinated.

"Would you care to repeat that, Ensign Flanders?" Soval's voice rang out, and Manar turned. *She* hadn't heard anything ... but then again, Soval was a Vulcan.

Flanders was a Human man she'd never spoken to, although she recognized him. More, she recognized the Starfleet officers around him—none of them Bajoran. They'd transferred in as a group from one of the ground combat battalions; this post was supposed to be a transition from combat back to "normal" life. They all had that look Manar had seen on too many of her own people, of those who had been so embedded in a struggle for survival that a return to peace was beyond their understanding. She sympathized, really she did, but why did they have to work through their issues *here*? Bajor had enough damaged, potentially violent people on its own, courtesy of the Cardassians. It didn't need to import any more.

"I said, Bajorans seem to be a pretty violent people," Flanders said, facing Soval squarely.

From the look Soval gave Flanders, Manar bet that was a cleaned-up version of what he'd *actually* said. "Unlikely, considering that before the Cardassian Occupation, Bajor's crime and internal strife rates were both significantly lower than the average for many Federation races, including both Humans and Andorians. The high rate of violence during and since the Occupation is consistent with long-term trauma and a response to violent conditions—something with which *you* should be familiar, Mr. Flanders."

"Your schedules are on your PADDs," Lieutenant Ro said. "Those of you who should be patrolling now, get to it. Those of you who aren't, I'd suggest you get some rest. You're going to need it."

"Dammit!" Manar flung the stylus on the desk in annoyance. "*Don't* say it." She held up a hand to forestall the comment she knew was coming. And why the hell did Federation standard only come with one real curse word, anyway? Bajoran had some really expressive profanity, and she'd learned most of it during her time in the camps and the militia. She'd love to use some of it now, but She looked up to see Soval studying her intently, and blushed under his scrutiny. "I'm sorry, sir. It's just ... I don't seem to be *getting* anywhere."

"On the contrary, Ensign," Soval said. "In the past two weeks you have mastered the Federation notational system and refreshed your knowledge of such basics as trigonometry and calculus. You have only just begun studying the more advanced principles; expecting yourself to understand it immediately would be illogical. What, exactly, about the current problem is difficult?"

"If I knew *that*, I wouldn't need help." Manar sighed and rubbed her nose ridges. "I'm sorry, but I need a break. Mind if I get something to drink?" Shifts were now half-again as long as they had been, to increase overlap and make sure every things stayed peaceful. Lieutenant Ro apparently didn't believe in taking chances, and there had been four new riots on Bajor since the one in Ashalla—although thankfully only one other person had died, and one of the riots had been a counter-riot led by supporters of the Federation. Between the increased patrols, the schoolwork, and the time Manar was spending in the Temple praying for peace and protection for her family, she was exhausted.

Soval gestured to the replicator, then folded his hands inside his robe. He watched her order and return to her seat. "How long a break do you require, Ensign Tora?"

"I don't know. Until my head stops spinning and I can think." Manar took a sip and sighed. Too hot, and not as good as her mother made, but still a welcome relief. "And can we drop the formality, please? It's not helping me, any. Call me Manar."

"Very well. Would you prefer to continue this session tomorrow?"

Manar shook her head. "No, I just need a few minutes and then we can tackle it again. Unless you'd rather? If there's something else you want to do, I don't mind putting it off."

"I have no other engagements," Soval said.

They sat in silence for a few minutes, before Manar shifted uncomfortably. "So, are you a career Starfleet officer, or did you just sign up for the war?" At his raised eyebrow she hurried on. "I mean, sitting here in silence with you watching me isn't exactly going to help me relax and get back to work, I need something to distract me. You've read my service record, and you have to have heard me talking with the others on the team, so you know all about me."

"I see," Soval replied. "I am not a career officer."

"So, you're just hanging around for the transition, then?" Manar asked. "If you don't mind my asking, what did you do before the war?"

"I was a composer."

"A composer? How did you end up in security?"

Soval cocked his head. "It was the area requiring the most personnel, and I was not qualified for a more specialized position." He stood up and went to the replicator himself. "Toma juice. Chilled." He took a sip of his drink, then returned to his seat. "As the war went on and Starfleet required more and more people to replace those lost in battle and to expand the fleet, each Vulcan family group was expected to send at least

one person. As a composer, my work is not vital to the daily operation of Vulcan society.”

“Ah. Besides, it’s something you can do anywhere.” Manar nodded and took a sip. “When I was fourteen, we lived in the same camp as Kaval Roana.” Manar was so glad the camps were gone, and yet, in the camps, everyone was united by their common enemy. “She exchanged music lessons for paper to write her compositions on—I took horn lessons from her for a few months, didn’t amount to much. She could write anywhere, she said, though she did prefer quiet. Do you know her work?”

Soval shook her head. “I am afraid I am unfamiliar with most elements of Bajoran culture.”

“Well, now that the war is over and things are getting back to normal, perhaps you should take advantage of being here and go see something of our world.” Manar finished her drink and made a face. “I suppose we should get back to work, now.”

Manar swung the bag with her homework onto the table by the door and flopped down on her bed, pinching the bridge of her nose to stave off an incipient tension headache. She’d never felt this drained after a study session before, but Soval had proven himself as implacable a taskmaster as her drill sergeant in bootcamp had been, even if his field was intellectual and not physical. “Computer. Lights one quarter, play something by Kaval Roana.” She loved these Federation computers that did whatever you asked them to. As the music started to play, she frowned. “No, wait. Computer, do you have any recordings of works by Soval of Vulcan?”

“There are two composers by that name,” the computer replied. “Please specify which composer you wish to hear.”

“The one stationed here on DS9.”

“There is at least one recording of each of Soval of the High Clan’s works.”

“High Clan?” Manar frowned. “What’s that?”

“Vulcan clan names are not pronounceable by the majority of Federation species,” the computer explained with its typical air of patience. “Therefore, in Federation standard they are referred to by rank or by a translation of their name. The High Clan is the most powerful and prestigious clan on Vulcan.”

“Huh.” So, did that make Soval an aristocrat? “Play something by Soval of the High Clan,” Manar said.

A soft humming filled her cabin, gradually swelling in volume. There were no instruments, only female voices; words in a language she didn’t know. It was sung in unison, with a complex rhythm. Manar had never heard anything like it before, and didn’t really like it, but the thing that caught her attention was the passion in their voices. “Computer, who’s singing?”

“The Temple Choir of the Shi’lak Abbey.”

Temple? Vulcans had religion? It didn’t seem to fit their logical world-view; she couldn’t imagine such a thing as a Vulcan mystic. No, wait, Soval was a Federation citizen; his music would be performed more places than just his home planet. “Are they Vulcans?”

“Yes.”

Manar raised her eyebrows. Interesting. And for Soval to have written something with that much emotion in it, well, seemed to imply his emotionless façade was just that—a façade. Surely, no one could write such music without feeling it deeply. So was he unusual in that respect, or did all Vulcans have such passion locked up in their hearts?

Manar stood on the upper level of the Promenade, watching people walk by below her. The station’s trade had really started to bounce back and people of many species mingled in the station’s public areas. Manar didn’t think she’d ever get tired of watching them all, and she had nothing better to do in the couple of hours before her shift started. There had already been one opening of the Celestial Temple, and another ship was scheduled to go through soon.

Her back itched, as if someone was watching her; that was one instinct from the camps she’d never lost, though it had seldom been this strong. She glanced around, casually; Soval stood a few feet away, hands clasped behind his back studying her.

“I apologize, Manar,” he said. “I did not mean to disrupt your meditations.”

“I wasn’t meditating,” Manar said with a smile. “Just people watching. I can do it any time.” She glanced down at the Replimat on the level below. “Want to get something to eat?”

Soval considered this. “Very well.”

They walked to the nearest stairs, Manar following Soval down them to the lower level. “I looked you up on the computer, last night,” Manar said. “Listened to a piece chanted by a temple choir. I didn’t know Vulcans had a religion.”

“We do,” Soval said, “though we do not often discuss it in public, nor bring it up in conversations with off-worlders.”

“So you have some kind of privacy taboo?”

“Not as such,” Soval replied. “Individual responses and beliefs are private, but the subject in general is not. It is simply that most off-worlders find it too great a conflict with our reliance on logic to understand. There is no need to confuse the issue.”

“So, do you think logic and religion are in conflict?” Manar said as they placed their orders.

Soval hesitated. "That depends on the religion," he said, slowly. "In the abstract, no."

"Why not?" Manar asked.

"Religious experiences are highly transitory and by their nature not prone to external verification. However, that does not make them invalid or impotent. In the absence of evidence to the contrary, the divine can be presumed to exist," he said, sitting down at an empty table. "There are holes in our knowledge that can best be filled by the existence of a deity. For example, we know the standard primordial conditions in which life on the vast majority of planets was created. Those conditions can be duplicated in labs with very little difficulty. Yet, in hundreds of years of trying by scientists of virtually every species of the Federation, no one has ever managed to create so much as a microbe in a lab. The creation of the universe is another such inexplicable event. We know what conditions were like from the first moment of existence through the current age with a great deal of certainty, and why they developed the way they did. But we have no idea how or why the universe came into being in the first place. Nothing comes from nothing, Manar. There must be something of which we are not aware underlying the cosmos."

"So why does the Federation look down on religion?"

Soval paused. "Some key races, including Humans, have had traumatic confrontations between faith and science during formative periods in their development. As Humans make up the majority of Starfleet, they are disproportionately influential in the ways non-members experience the Federation."

"So, if I want to speak of my faith, don't choose a Human?"

"Not unless you wish to fulfill their sociological curiosity."

Manar took a bite. She didn't particularly want to have her religious observances and her faith examined like a sample in an enhancer. "That's good to know."

Four weeks later, they'd settled into a routine and Manar was making good progress. "Soval!" Manar said as she entered his quarters for her tutoring session. Their sessions had expanded to include almost all of her subjects, as needed. "Guess what! Kaval Roana has a new symphonetta being premiered in two weeks in Amanthalar, and I have a pair of tickets. Do you want to go?"

"I would be honored you accompany me, Manar. However, you may not be stationed here in two weeks." Soval stood from his meditation mat and began extinguishing candles.

"The next transfer cycle is coming up, isn't it," Manar said, heart sinking. She'd joined Starfleet in part to see the galaxy, but found herself reluctant to leave the station now that it came down to it. She could see all kinds of aliens here, and still go back to Bajor to see her home and family when she wanted. Or go to live concerts.

"Indeed it is." Soval cocked his head. "Would you be interested in staying on Deep Space Nine for the next rotation?"

"Sure, I guess. Is that possible?" Manar frowned. "I thought they wanted to cycle as many Bajorans through as possible."

"That is true. However, we have not yet completed your math proficiency course. Transferring at this time would seriously interrupt your studies, as your curriculum is not standard. I have been working with the math department at the Academy to both create your syllabus and adapt it for general use with Bajoran officers. An interruption at this point would disrupt that project. As for the transfer rate, you have been on the station long enough that you do not need to be paired with a regular Starfleet officer; we could put a new Bajoran officer with you, which would not impede the transfer rate."

"Sounds good to me," Manar said. She grinned. "I'm sure my mother would prefer I stayed in the area for a little longer. And that way we could go to the concert."

"Very well," Soval said. "I will see to coordinating the transfers accordingly, and arrange for sufficient leave." He paused. "Is security a concern?"

Manar shrugged. "No more than usual, as long as we don't do anything stupid. That area's usually pretty quiet, and they like it that way. Trouble-makers tend to go elsewhere."

"Indeed?" Soval raised an eyebrow. "That would explain why Amanthalar has never been in a security report."

Manar laughed. "It's a bit of a backwater; even the Cardassians didn't bother with it. As a general rule, people there stay out of politics, go to Temple regularly, and get on with their lives. Though I suppose now that people who want quiet like Kaval are starting to move there, it won't be a backwater for long." She thought for a second. Bringing an alien did mean they were more likely to be hassled, but she didn't think the risk would be much worse than usual. Certainly not in Amanthalar. "As long as we're careful and don't wear our uniforms, we should be fine."

A Space for Home

“Is it done?” Manar demanded as soon as Soval opened the door, her eyes drawn to the PADD in his hand.

He raised an eyebrow. “Yes.” He stood back to let her in to his quarters.

“And?”

He handed her the PADD.

She snatched it and scrolled down until she found the test results for her math final. “Yes! 89% average!” A grin split her face. It was almost an A, and closer than she had expected to come, and just barely enough to test out of the class. “And now I can go to the concert with a clear mind.”

“I would not have permitted you to take the test if you were not ready for it, Manar,” Soval said mildly.

She looked up at him, still clutching the PADD. “I know, but that doesn’t make the waiting any less nerve-wracking.” He was pleased, and possibly amused, she could tell from the slant of his head. She was starting to get a feel for his—not moods, exactly—but whatever approximation of them Vulcans possessed. They were subtle and she wasn’t quite sure she always got them right, but if nothing else she’d learned how to tell what subjects were off-limits and which she could ask about. “I’m going to take the basic physics course and the next math course in the sequence, now that I’ve got this out of the way.”

“A logical progression,” Soval said with a nod. “However, depending on the content of the physics course you may require another tutor.”

“But you could still help with the math, right?” Manar said. She’d come to enjoy their sessions together, and the occasional study breaks for conversation.

“Yes,” Soval said with a nod. “Although it has been some time since my undergraduate studies, my knowledge retention is sufficient for our purposes. Math was my secondary area of study, as so much of music is based on it.”

“Really?” Manar raised an eyebrow.

“Yes. Each note is based on a vibration at a certain rate; A, the note that standard Federation orchestras tune to, is 440 Hz. That is why so many species have similar tonal structures; there are relatively few ways to assign value to the sound vibrations. A detailed study of the mathematics behind many musical works can be quite informative.”

“Huh. And did you ever use that kind of analysis once you were out of school?” Manar asked.

Soval hesitated. “Not beyond the most rudimentary levels.”

Manar grinned. “Well, at least you’re putting it to good use now.”

“Indeed,” Soval said with a slight bow.

A day later, Manar was rethinking her enthusiasm. She’d been glad for the time to come to Bajor and see her parents, and had arranged a day of visiting on both sides of the concert. Out of hospitality (a virtue Vulcans and Bajorans both prized, though in different ways) she had invited Soval to stay with her family. The sprawling home where her father and his family had lived before the Occupation certainly had enough room; it was designed for three or four generations of people to live together in relative comfort. The Cardassians had thinned their ranks from what they should have been, and some (like Manar herself) had chosen not to return to their ancestral lands when at last they’d been able to scrape together the money for that first small decontaminator and begin the long process of rebuilding.

But staying at home Soval had, inevitably, met her parents, Aunt Chayen, her one surviving grandmother, and those cousins who were home. And he had no place to retreat to when they began interrogating him on his suitability as a possible husband for Manar.

“I understand you are a composer,” Grandmother said as they sat in the common room sipping tea. “Will you be leaving Starfleet soon? Do you plan to go back to Vulcan, or could you see yourself living elsewhere?”

Manar kept her gaze firmly on the wall across from her, near enough to where her grandmother sat to give the illusion of being a dutiful grandchild. This was *not* the way she’d thought this would go. Remembering the leave two years ago when she and Grandmother had stripped the walls of this room and re-plastered it, talking and laughing and discussing Manar’s career prospects the whole time, was the only way Manar could keep from screaming in frustration.

“I will resign my commission when the personnel situation stabilizes,” Soval said. “At that time I will return home to resume my career and be closer to my family.”

“So tell me about your family, Soval,” Mom said. “I understand they are highly placed in Vulcan society?”

Manar frowned at her mother. She’d hoped that Mom, at least, would be too sensible to take her at her word that she and Soval were not in any relationship that might lead to marriage. She hoped he didn’t realize that all the questions were designed to vet him as a potential spouse. Though he seemed to be taking it with aplomb, she wasn’t confident enough in her ability to read his moods to be comfortable.

“They are,” Soval said. “The great T’Pau was married to my great-uncle, and the current Vulcan ambassador to the Federation is of my clan. Our clan estates are in Khomi, which is rich in mineral wealth; we are also known for our stonemasons.”

Manar opened her mouth to change the subject, but her father cut her off.

“Ah!” he said brightly. “Then you come from a family of artisans, as well.” He and Mom shared a pleased look. “Are any in your immediate family artisans, besides yourself?”

“No,” Soval said. “My father is a miner, and my mother is a manager of the clan’s business interests. My wife V’Das was an architect in a prominent firm, and our daughter T’Dar has followed her into that field. My son Sepel and my daughter V’Ras are miners.”

“Wait,” Manar said, eyes widening. “You have three grown children?” He looked *her* age! She’d assumed that he couldn’t be that much more than thirty.

“Yes,” Soval said, nonplussed at her surprise. He cocked his head. “As I am sure you learned in your BASIC course, Vulcans are relatively long-lived for hominid species. This makes judging relative ages often difficult for non-Vulcans.” He sipped delicately at his tea.

“Right,” Manar said. But it was one thing to hear it and another to *see* it. She shook her head. Well. She supposed it didn’t really change anything, but it was still a shock. She tried to ignore the way Grandmother was giving Soval a less, well, *grandmotherly* eye now that he was revealed to be older than they had all assumed.

“You brought him home and didn’t even know that he has three grown children?” Aunt Chayen shook her head. “Honestly, Manar!” Aunt Chayen often brought men and women home, though no one expected *her* to marry at this late stage in her life. But she always knew their history and personality before inviting them.

“I brought him home as a *friend*, Aunt Chayen,” Manar said. “He’s a composer! I had tickets to the premier of a new work by one of Bajor’s most prominent composers. There’s nothing more serious about it!”

Soval looked between them, one eyebrow raised. “Would I be correct in assuming that your family believes us to be in the process of courting?”

“Yes.” Manar could feel her face heating up. “I told them we were coworkers, but they didn’t believe me.”

“Being colleagues does not necessarily preclude a deeper relationship,” Soval pointed out. “And, certainly, we spend more time together than I do with any of my other colleagues.” He paused, and tilted his head. “However, there are many types and degrees of closeness, and ours is certainly not one that would lead to a marriage.”

“No kidding,” Manar said. They got along well, and she liked learning about Vulcan culture, but that was a far cry from being willing to spend her whole life with one. As for anything less formal, well, although he was handsome in a typically Vulcan way, he was a bit too pale for her tastes. Not to mention *far* too reserved. As a teacher and friend, he was good. As a romantic partner? She made a face. The mind boggled. Not to mention, he had grown children!

“You need not be offended on my behalf,” Soval said mildly. “It is only natural for a family to be concerned with potential spouses of one of their own. Besides the desire for a mutually supportive and fruitful partnership between mates, a new relationship inevitably affects the system of family interactions. If I were to bring someone a great distance to meet my family, there would be similar interest. It is only natural. In fact, I find this similarity between our cultures to be fascinating.”

“I’m more concerned with the fact that I *told* them we were just friends, and they didn’t believe me,” Manar said. “And also because I was *hoping* to spend my time here enjoying what could be my last time on Bajor before I am transferred out.” Starfleet had been very good about allowing her classwork to dictate her assignment, but Manar had no faith it would last.

“I am so glad to hear that you understand the importance of family,” Grandmother said to Soval. “It is one of the great tragedies of current Bajoran society that so few people really know what family means.” She smiled at him.

Manar rubbed her forehead, uncertain whether Grandmother was interested in Soval now for Manar’s sake or her own. And wondering which would be worse. She sighed.

“It’s still not quite the right shade,” Grandmother said as she worked the fastenings up the back of the dress. “We’re getting closer—I’d almost forgotten about adding *sinda* juice to the fixative step, and it truly does make such a difference—but there’s only so much that can be done with the poor quality of *srinko* that your mother assures me is the best we can manage to grow for now. There.” She stepped back and nodded firmly. “The dyes may have suffered, but the looms were easy enough to rebuild. The weave, at least, does credit to our ancestors.”

“It looks very beautiful, even if it’s not quite perfect yet,” Manar said, swishing the diaphanous tunic around and admiring herself in the mirror. She looked like she belonged in one of the old pictures from before the Occupation, that Grandmother used to tell stories about back in the camps. The deep blue contrasted well with her bronze skin and black hair. It was layered over a subdued yellow shirt and trousers, and it fit her perfectly.

She turned to her grandmother and wrapped her in a hug. “Thank you so much,” she said. “I love it.”

Grandmother laughed. “I’m glad. But you couldn’t imagine we would send you off to Prophets-only-know-where without at least one of our garments? Now that we *can* make them again. And now you may go to your concert properly attired as a Tora.”

Arm in arm, they went out to show the rest of the family. Manar went straight to her father and gave him a hug, knowing he had sewn it. “Thank you, Dad,” she said.

“It was a family effort,” he said. “Your mother grew it, your grandmother wove it, I sewed it, and your aunt embroidered it.” Manar nodded, and turned to thank them all.

Fifteen minutes later, she and Soval were in the family flyer, doing a preflight check. It had a few quirks, being old and worn, but Manar was used to it and didn't mind.

"Your family is greatly skilled in the textile arts," Soval said once they were in the air.

"Thank you," Manar said, keeping her eyes on the readouts and the sky in front of her.

"Your grandmother mentioned that the color is not precisely what it should be," Soval said. "May I ask what the difference is?"

"I wouldn't know," Manar said. "I was born in the camps, years after the Cardassians destroyed our home and poisoned the lands. If there's any of the old Tora weave still around that wasn't destroyed by Cardassians or neglect, we haven't found it, except for a few scraps here and there. So I've only really seen it in pictures, and that's not the same."

"Will you be able to recreate the original color?"

Manar sighed. "I hope so," she said. "Mother says the problem is the bees—the dye comes from a plant called srinko, and the color varies depending on how it's pollinated, what other flowers the bees have been at. Well, that means that the right plants need to grow nearby, but the Cardassians poisoned the land so that most of the plants that *used* to grow there, don't any more. We're hoping that once we get all our land back into production, and our neighbors, we'll be able to cleanse all the wild areas and replant them with the right seeds, and that will fix the problem. But who knows if it will work."

"I see," Soval said. He paused. "Is that light supposed to be flashing?" He pointed to the altitude indicator.

"No," Manar said. "But don't worry. It hasn't worked in years. Just ignore it."

Soval didn't resume their conversation, which relieved her. Although Manar was proud of her heritage and her family's efforts, she really didn't know that much about the family business.

"Do you mind if I ask a personal question?" she asked.

Soval hesitated. "No," he said.

"When you told us about your family, you said your wife *was* an architect. You talked about your children in the present tense."

"V'Das died in an accident at a construction site five years ago," he said.

Manar shot him a brief glance. He seemed unmoved, studying the terrain below them. But she thought she detected a hint of grief in his voice.

"I'm sorry," she said. "Do you miss her?"

"Always," Soval said. "We were ... close."

He said no more. Manar bit her lip, not wanting to pry, and she spent the rest of the trip in silence.

The concert was better than Manar had imagined. She'd never heard a full orchestra play live, before; getting that many players together for long enough to practice a major work was difficult when everyone was working so hard just to get by. So she was unprepared for the volume, for the waves of sound that enveloped her and drew her along on their tide. It was an experience she would not have missed for anything, and she regretted that she wouldn't be here on Bajor to enjoy future concerts.

At one point during the second half, she remembered her companion and glanced over to see how he liked the music. Soval sat with every muscle at attention, perfectly still, with not a movement disturbing the dark grey fabric of his robes. His eyes were closed, and his mouth open as if to drink in the richness of the sound. Manar smiled and turned back to the music. This was the Bajor she wanted him to see, this was the Bajor she wanted all of the Federation to see: the music, the art, the faith, the culture, the learning, everything that the Cardassians had tried to destroy, everything they were working so hard to build anew.

Manar wanted the galaxy to know Bajor's gifts, not its scars. Here, in this auditorium, wearing the traditional garb of her people, the Bajor of her grandmother's stories seemed almost tangible. Yes, there were cracks in the walls of the auditorium that needed to be repaired. Yes, the brasswork could stand some more polishing and the seats reupholstered. But the music! The music was incredible. Manar ran the delicate fabric of her tunic through her fingers, feeling its smoothness against her calluses, and sat back to enjoy the rest of the concert.

The symphonetta being premiered took up the last half of the concert. It was a history of Bajor in the last century, captured in sound. The first part was based on a contented, sedate melody, a fantasia on an old hymn with melody and counterpoint weaving between the woodwinds and the brass.

Then came the Occupation, a great shriek of sound, with percussion and brass discordant and off-beat. It mellowed into a dark, menacing chorale with hints of several Cardassian military songs woven into the bass line. Yet there were fragments of Bajoran hymns and Temple chants woven in, as well. Manar recognized a chant giving thanks for the harvest, which morphed disturbingly into a Cardassian song about the end of a long campaign before changing yet again into a hymn about the unknowable ways of the Prophets.

Last came freedom. Yet, despite the traditional format of a symphonetta it was not a restatement of the first movement's theme. Instead, it built on the second movement, changing from minor to major key and minimizing discord in the melodic thread. The counterpoint from the first movement was reused, though in this context it had such a different feel Manar had trouble believing it was the same melody.

When it was over, Manar felt emotionally drained as she clapped with the rest of the audience. It was a spectacular piece, and she was glad she

had been here to hear it; but she wasn't sure she wanted to listen to it again any time soon. It was too painful. This was not a piece Manar would have expected to be premiered in a peaceful backwater like Amanathalar. She wondered what Soval thought of it; he couldn't possibly have caught and understood the implications of the various melodies Kaval had used. He could only judge it on the artistic merit of the sounds themselves, divorced from all context.

Soval was sitting back in his seat, almost slouching. It was the most relaxed she had ever seen him, and he was staring off into space.

"Did you like it?" she asked. For a few seconds, she wasn't sure if he had heard; he didn't move a muscle. But then he nodded.

Soval took a deep breath, but his gaze remained fixed on something she could not see. "I have not written anything since my wife died. For months, I could not bear to sit at my lyre. When at last I could bring myself to bring out my instrument again, there was no music in me. All I had were other peoples' melodies, and pieces I had written long ago. It was why I volunteered to fill my family's quota in Starfleet: if I could not fulfill my calling on Vulcan, at least I could be genuinely useful elsewhere, and spare my children the hardship of war. During the war I was stationed many places, and saw many things; experience is said to be an artist's truest inspiration, and yet such things as I saw and did did not suggest in me any music I would care to write. But at this moment, I feel more myself than I have since my wife died. I have begun, I think, to see a way it might be possible to unite that which I have experienced to that which I have always been. I thank you, Tora Manar. I am very grateful for the opportunity to have heard this performance live."

Ah, Manar thought. The emotion did, it seemed, affect even a Vulcan who didn't—couldn't—understand the context of what he had heard. "You're welcome," she said. "Do you want to see if we can get backstage and meet Kaval Roana herself?"

"Very much," said Soval.

He followed her through the auditorium and around to the performer's wing. The halls were crowded—they were not the only ones who came to pay their compliments to the composer and the musicians. Manar started to push her way through the crowd (after all, unlike most of them, *she* actually knew Kaval personally). But the ugly looks she and Soval were getting changed her mind, and she stopped, waiting her turn with the rest of the people.

Manar realized that she'd never been on the surface of Bajor with an alien, before, outside of her Starfleet training which was self-selecting for Bajorans who didn't have a problem with aliens. The Bajoran population of the station was likewise skewed to those who could work easily with people from a variety of planets. A backwater where they might never have seen any aliens besides Cardassians might not have been the best place to come with an alien. But even with the riots, lately, on some level it hadn't occurred to her that it would be this different.

Soval had dressed in civilian clothes, of course, but ... they still stood out as alien against the Bajoran formal wear. Manar realized she should have had him replicate Bajoran-style clothing. He would still have been an alien, but at least he wouldn't have stood out so very clearly from a distance. His tunic and trousers were a severely-cut gray, and although it was not a style the Cardassians might have worn, there were enough similarities to make people ... uncomfortable. Particularly after such a concert as they had just heard. She'd seen crowds get ugly, once or twice as a child when the Cardassians executed someone or there wasn't enough food. She'd seen it happen once or twice from the other side, as a member of the Militia tasked with keeping the peace and maintaining (or establishing) order. She'd never been the target, and she hoped that wasn't about to change.

There was no help for it now. If they had been on the fringes of the crowd, Manar would have led him back out and to their flyer, and given him Kaval's communicator code later. But others had come along after them, and getting out would take almost as much trouble as waiting and getting further in. From the way the people around them were jostling them while being careful never to look them in the eye, forcing them either direction would cause trouble.

She turned to Soval, to ask what he thought, and her heart sank. This was Soval the composer, not Soval the Starfleet security guard. And apparently Soval the composer wasn't very observant; he didn't seem to notice anything out of the ordinary. He still seemed to be focused inside himself, as if listening to something only he could hear. Maybe he was; Vulcans had very good memory, and for all Manar knew he was replaying the concert in his head.

"Manar," Soval said, "Many of the melodic fragments utilized in the symphonetta were obviously taken from other sources, and seemed to be used to evoke moods and associations rather than included for their own individual merit. May I ask you to explain their significance, if you were familiar with them?"

"There were several different kinds," Manar said carefully. "Some were Bajoran hymns or folk songs. Some were Cardassian." She didn't say anything more, willing him to pick up on the fact that this was probably not the best time to explain about the Occupation to an alien in public. This was music designed for Bajorans, an expression of their experiences. This was their life, not an academic discussion. And she didn't think there was any way to talk about this with Soval *without* sounding academic.

Soval looked at her oddly. She raised her eyebrows at him and then pointedly glanced around at the crowd. Soval followed her gaze and she could see when he got it; his already-perfect posture straightened just that few centimeters more, and his face lost its abstracted look.

Manar took a deep breath. Everything was going to be fine. This was Wyntara Mas Province, after all. Nothing ever happened in Wyntara Mas. And music concerts weren't exactly known for being hotbeds of trouble. And really, all that was happening was some dirty looks and some accidentally-on-purpose bumps. Most of the crowd wasn't paying any attention to them, focused on the composer and musicians they had come to meet. It was only the people directly around them who were unhappy. She and Soval would wait for the crowd to dissipate a little, say hello to her old teacher, and then leave to head back home. And next time, Manar would think twice before taking an alien this far away from any Starfleet base. She fingered her communicator in her pocket, and wished she had her phaser. Just in case.

An hour and a half later, they were finally at Kaval's dressing room. It was bright and well lit, with a symbol of the Prophets on the wall across from the door. Kaval Roana sat enthroned on a large chair, surrounded by gifts and flowers. She looked up and smiled as they entered the room. "Ah, Tora Manar, it was a pleasant surprise to hear from you." She frowned, slightly, as she got a good look at Soval. "What did you

think of my newest piece?"

"Kaval, that was amazing," Manar said. "It was such an honor to be able to hear it. It was difficult to listen to, but worth it. Very much worth it."

"Thank you," Kaval said, still staring at Soval.

"This is Soval of the High Clan," Manar said, introducing him. "He's a composer, too."

"Really," Kaval said, coolly. "And what did you think of it, Soval of the High Clan?"

"Your work is masterful," Soval said; Manar knew him well enough to know just how enthusiastic he was, but to someone who didn't know him he probably sounded as cool as she did. "I was particularly impressed with the use of the brass in the second movement; I understand that is not typical of this type of Bajoran music, but you used it to great effect. Also, I found your use of hymnody intriguing. I was wondering if we might converse further?"

Kaval was silent for a moment. "Thank you," she said. "I am very fatigued at the moment; it has been an exhausting evening, you know. Perhaps I may call you in a few days."

"I will be staying on Deep Space Nine for the foreseeable future," Soval said. "I can be reached there."

Kaval nodded.

"Thank you again," Manar said, taking their cue to leave. "I am so glad I was able to hear it."

Soval followed her out into the hall and out towards the doors. "She hasn't changed much since we were in the camps together," Manar said, hoping that being known to have been in the camps with Kaval would forestall any trouble. "She still doesn't talk much. She never even said much during our lessons; you had to listen to what she didn't say almost as much as what she did. Still, she was an effective teacher." Actually, Manar thought as they pushed open the doors and started through the parking lot towards their flyer, Kaval had been very similar to Soval as a teacher. Funny how she hadn't realized that before. Quiet, serious, utterly dedicated to tutoring Manar—yes, the similarities were obvious, now.

There was a soft whine from behind them, and Manar had only enough time to recognize it for a phaser's discharge before unconsciousness claimed her.

A Space for Conflict

Waking up in a hole in the ground was an unpleasant surprise. So was realizing that her hands were cuffed behind her back, and that she was lying half-way in a mud puddle. Worse was realizing that she was lying on her right side, and that if her communicator were still in her pocket she should be laying on top of it, but she couldn't feel it. Ah, well, Bajor had no shortage of people with experience in illicit doings of all kinds; it was no surprise they hadn't made the rookie mistake of leaving her with her communicator. And where was Soval? "Soval?" she called out, but there was no answer.

Manar twisted around until she saw him, still unconscious, and sighed in relief. He, too, was lying in a puddle. Having found him, Manar surveyed their surroundings. The hole they were in didn't look natural; she could see shovel-marks. In some areas, the Resistance had carved out elaborate systems of tunnels to hide in and to get them around Cardassian blockades. This was probably one of them, in which case (given the understandable caution of most former Resistance fighters) it probably wasn't on any map. And she and Soval were probably deep enough that a Starfleet scan wouldn't find them, not without their communicators to lock on to. So even though her family would probably call the authorities when they didn't show up back home, the chances of anyone finding them weren't good. They would probably have to rescue themselves.

If this operation was being run by Resistance members, that didn't seem very likely. Manar wiggled a little bit, trying to figure out how best to sit up and if there was any way to do it without completely ruining her clothes by squirming around in the mud. It broke her heart—she had the sinking feeling that she would never be able to get the stains out.

With a sigh, she began wriggling towards the nearest edge of the puddle, hoping to keep the amount of ruined fabric to a minimum. After some squirming, she reached dryer ground and rolled forward onto her stomach. Once there, she was able to curl up her legs under her and move to a kneeling position and get a better view of their hole.

It offered no better prospect of an escape route than her first survey. There were no locks that might be picked or wall panels that might be pried apart. They were in a hole about five meters deep and three meters in diameter, with just enough in the way of metal and plastic bracing to keep the sides from caving in. Some distance above the top of the hole was a cave ceiling; they were underground and no one would hear them call for help. The braces keeping the sides intact were flat against the dirt and offered no way to grip them. She got to her feet and walked two steps to the wall and turned her back to it, scraping it with a finger. As she had expected, the dirt crumbled. So climbing out wasn't an option, and the hole was too deep for them to stand one on top of another and escape that way. It was a very clever prison; no way out, unless someone lowered a rope or ladder down, and no power sources that an outsider might detect and follow to the caves.

Well. Escape wasn't practical and rescue might not be either. How was her fellow officer doing? "Soval?" She walked over to him and knelt down by his head. His hands were tied with plastic strips, which was probably what they'd used on her, as well. They were probably too tough to break, and they were definitely too tight to get out of any other way, even by dislocating her thumb. She just hoped they weren't tight enough to cut off circulation. "Soval, wake up!" She nudged him with her knee. "Come on, Lieutenant, it's time to get to work." Being kidnapped meant they were back on the clock, Starfleet officers and not tourists. She nudged him again.

He did seem to be responding; his breathing changed a little, and he twitched. "Lieutenant Soval! Soval!" In a few minutes, he was blinking groggily awake.

"We appear to be in a cave," he said.

Manar rolled her eyes. "You appear to be right. I haven't seen or heard anyone else, so I don't know who snatched us. I don't think we can climb out, which means we're stuck here."

"I see," Soval said. He frowned. His hair was in disarray, and there was a green bruise on his left cheekbone. As he shifted to climb to his feet, the stiffness of his movements suggested further injuries she couldn't see. She really hoped he wasn't seriously injured; she doubted their captors would get medical care for him.

"What is your status, Ensign Tora?" Soval asked.

"Pretty good," she said with a shrug. "Slight headache from the stun, and my shoulders won't be too happy with me if they don't release my hands soon, but other than that I'm fine. You?"

"I believe I may have at least one cracked rib," Soval said. "I do not believe there is any other serious damage."

"Why you and not me?" Manar wondered. "I mean, if they took us because we're together and they don't like aliens, you'd think *I'd* be the main target. At least, if they're following the old Resistance playbook. Ordinary Cardassians, they just killed to get out of the way. Collaborators, they took their time with."

"Are you a collaborator, Tora Manar?"

Manar and Soval looked up. Above them, standing by the edge of the hole and looking down at them, was a Bajoran man about Manar's age or a little younger. He had the look of a person from Manar's own home in Ducrain Province: skin only slightly lighter than her own, dark hair, the characteristic chin.

"No," she said. "Collaborators worked with the Cardassians to destroy Bajor. *I'm* working with Starfleet to *rebuild* Bajor. But assuming you're doing this because you're part of an anti-Federation group, you probably can't tell the difference."

"And is sleeping with an alien your idea of rebuilding Bajor?"

"Wait, you think we're *lovers*?" Manar knew it was stupid, but somehow that seemed to make this whole situation just a bit more offensive.

“Bad enough that my mother thinks we’re together, perfect strangers assume that bringing a friend to a concert means we’re having sex. Has no one heard of the concept of *friendship*?”

“You brought him all the way from Deep Space Nine to meet your family, and then across the continent for a concert,” their captor pointed out.

“You appear to have done some research,” Soval said.

“He’s a composer,” Manar said. “Soval of the High Clan, look him up on any computer tied into the Federation network. I had an extra ticket to the concert, and thought he might be interested, and I figured I owed him because he’s been tutoring me in math. And I wasn’t going to come all the way to Bajor without seeing my family!”

“Of course,” their captor said. “He’s your *tutor*.”

“Ensign Tora is taking several classes to maximize her career potential,” Soval said. “I am indeed tutoring her in math.”

“Besides, he’s older than he looks,” Manar said. “He’s actually got kids my age.” She frowned and turned to Soval. “Is that why you volunteered to tutor me? Do I remind you of your daughters?”

“Not particularly,” Soval said. “Besides the obvious physical and cultural differences, neither T’Dar nor V’Ras are particularly religious, and both are quite content to live in the family lands and work in the family enterprises. However, were the situations reversed and my children in need of such assistance, I would hope that it would be given them.” He turned his attention to their captor. “May I ask your name and why you have brought us here?”

“Manar knows me,” he said.

“I do?” Manar squinted up at him. He did look vaguely familiar, but the headache wasn’t helping.

“Yes,” he said, offended. “We were in the same camp for five years!”

Manar thought back. She’d only been in one camp that long, and there hadn’t been that many Crainors in it. He would have been around her age, probably. A vague memory surfaced: a younger boy tagging along with her group of friends, being told by her mother to let him and keep an eye on him “Are you Lusanis’ cousin?” She thought furiously, trying to remember his name. “Bekar?”

“Yes,” Bekar said, as though she should have instantly remembered an annoying tag-along she’d last seen when she was sixteen.

“That still does not answer why you brought us here,” Soval said.

“I didn’t,” Bekar said. “The—some friends of mine saw you at the concert. You had no business being there, alien. That was *ours*. That was about *Bajor*. You could not possibly understand what we went through, under the Cardassians.” He snorted. “You probably thought it was just an amusing diversion—or, no, you’re a Vulcan, aren’t you. I’ve heard about Vulcans. You probably just thought it was something to study and analyze, like a bug under a microscope. See the last fragments of Bajoran culture, our heart and soul, on display for one night only! As a composer yourself, you must have taken notes. Tell me, Vulcan, are you going to use what you heard in your own pieces? Will you polish up our experience and pass it off as your own, profit by our pain?”

Soval inhaled. “I do not wish to profit from anyone’s pain,” he said slowly. “I have a great deal of admiration for Kaval Roanna’s work, and it was a great honor to hear her music.”

“If you are such a fan yourself, why weren’t *you* there?” Manar asked.

“How do you know I wasn’t?”

Manar snorted. “You said you weren’t the one to capture us, ‘they’ did, whoever ‘they’ are. This is an old Resistance tunnel, and you weren’t old enough to be in the Resistance yourself; I’m betting there’s a larger group with a core of old Resistance members and some others. How did you get involved?”

“After they brought you both here, they looked you up and realized that I knew Manar. They hoped I could get through to you, Manar, show you how wrong you are. We don’t want to hurt any Bajorans, we just want the aliens gone.” He began walking around the rim of the hole. “We want Bajor to be rebuilt by *Bajorans*, with our own faith and art and our own sweat. If anyone is to use our blood and tears, it should be *us*, not some clueless alien offering an endless bag of tricks.”

“A very pretty speech,” Manar said. “But your great respect for Bajoran art would be much more convincing if you hadn’t ruined one of the first Tora-cloth garments made since the Cardassians came.”

“What?” he said.

“My clothes,” Manar said. “They’re Tora-cloth. From Ducrein. You know, the cloth the Cardassians tried to wipe out forever? And now, thanks to the manhandling and the mud puddle you threw me into, they may well be ruined.”

“So replicate another set, since you’re so fond of the Federation toys!”

Manar pinched her lips together. “If that were all I wanted, I would have replicated them in the *first* place. Instead of waiting for my family to grow the plants, spin the thread, dye it, weave it, sew it, and embroider it. All hand-done. All done the old way, the way the Cardassians tried to wipe out. And your friends were so anxious to attack, they didn’t even think twice about continuing the Cardassian’s work.”

“And rebuilding your family’s work is so important to you that you’re running away and leaving others to do it,” Bekar said. “First the Militia,

then Starfleet. You have no *idea* how lucky you are. You *have* a family. And your family had a home to return to, and people who still knew how to run things the old way. And you're throwing it all away like trash!"

Manar's jaw clenched. He was right about one thing; she was indeed very lucky, much luckier than many Bajorans. But she *wasn't* throwing it away, or running away, she *wasn't*. "I have neither the skill nor the patience to be a good weaver," she said. "I'm better at killing plants than growing them. My seams are always crooked and my embroidery is worse. I could stay home and be useless and miserable. Or I could go away, do something that actually suits me, a job where I can be happy and further my education." Mentioning that she also wanted the excitement of travelling the galaxy would probably be a mistake. "Also, did you know that Starfleet officers are given a greater ration of energy credits? With what I saved, my family was able to replicate a larger, more efficient soil cleanser, closer to the great government reclaimers that are too busy in other provinces to bother with us. That cleanser is purifying our soil and water, and that of our neighbors, and after that will be used to cleanse the wilderness, too. It will mean we can grow more, and depend less on those replicators you don't like."

"And because your family profits, you are free to abandon your Bajoran heritage." He shook his head. "It doesn't matter if the *fields* are rebuilt, if we've lost *ourselves*."

"If I had abandoned my heritage, I *would* have replicated these clothes," Manar said evenly. "No, that's not true. If I had abandoned my heritage, I wouldn't even have bothered to do *that*. I certainly wouldn't have come all this way to hear Kaval's latest piece. I could have just gotten a recording and watched it on the holosuite."

"But you have abandoned the *Prophets*, Manar," he said. "You're in *Starfleet*. You'll be leaving, going places the *Prophets* never meant us to go, and you may never come back."

"The *Prophets* will be with me wherever I go," Manar said. "The *Vedek Assembly* said it."

"The *Vedek Assembly*!" He snorted. "A bunch of politicians more concerned with their position than the will of the *Prophets*, or the well-being of their people."

"You think the *Opposition Council* is any better?" Manar shot back. "After the *Occupation*, there's a hell of a political reward for xenophobia. People want their prejudices confirmed, whether or not there's any basis for it. And yes, sometimes the *Vedek Assembly* is more political than faithful. I know enough about the history of our faith to know that's nothing new. But that doesn't mean *all* the *vedeks* are, and it doesn't mean everything the *Assembly* does is."

Manar paused, swallowing. Her throat was very dry; how long had she been unconscious? "Do you remember *Prylar Horran*? He was with us in the camp, he led services and taught us to read the holy texts when the *Cardassians* weren't watching."

"He had an orange handkerchief in his pocket," Bekar said. "He used to do magic tricks when a *Cardassian* came in."

"He wasn't allowed to teach because he refused to interpret the texts to say that the *Occupation* was the will of the *Prophets*," Manar said.

"Oh, is *that* why he played those games with us," Bekar said. "I thought it was just to get our attention." He laughed. "You know, I still remember the funny voices he used to teach us the story of *Tolujnartala*. And then he disappeared, and they said the *Cardassians* had him. I haven't thought of him in *years*."

"He was released after the *Occupation*, and when people first started returning to *Ducrain*, he came too. *Horran* was a *Prylar* there before the *Cardassians* came, you know, and all of his brother *prylars* from that monastery are dead. He opened their monastery again, and a few others came to help him rebuild, and they're accepting novices again." Manar shook her head. "Of all people who might compromise the will of the *Prophets* for the sake of expediency, *Prylar Horran* is the least likely. I went to him, you know, before transferring to *Starfleet*. I hadn't been to *Temple* in a long time. There were so many reasons why *Starfleet* would be a good career move: more chance of advancement, a chance to see the wider galaxy, education, credits to send home. But I couldn't just leave everything without *knowing* it was the right decision. And it's one thing to forget about *Temple* services when you can go any time, even if you never do. It's quite different when there probably won't *be* any to go to even if you want."

"*Prylar Horran* and I sat down with the texts, and we read them, and we talked about them, and we prayed. It wasn't a quick or an easy decision, and *Prylar Horran* covered every text that might possibly apply—you know how thorough he is. But there's nothing in the texts that say *Bajorans* must stay on *Bajor*. And if they hated aliens, why choose one as their *Emissary*? A *Starfleet* officer, no less!"

"That's why the *Prophets* took *Sisko* to themselves," Bekar said. "To make him more truly *Bajoran*."

"It would still have been easier to pick a *Bajoran* in the first place," Manar said. "And if the *Prophets*' reach only included the *Bajor* system and the other end of the *Celestial Temple*, then how did they send a vision to the *Emissary* on *Earth*? I don't think the *Prophets*' are as small as you think, *Bekar*. I think the *Vedeks* are right, and I think *Prylar Horran* is right. There's a whole universe out there to explore, and I believe the *Prophets* go with us when we do."

Bekar shook his head. "If the *Prophets* were interested in the rest of the galaxy, why did they only send their *Orbs* here to *Bajor*? Why not send them out the other side of the *Celestial Temple*, or off through space in this quadrant to other star systems? And yet they did not. They sent them only here, to *Bajor*. That *means* something, *Manar*. It's not just an accident. Just because they *can* travel wherever they wish doesn't mean they *will*. We know they are here, on *Bajor*. Why would you, why would anyone want to take that risk?"

He paced some more. "And even if you're right, and the *Prophets* can be found throughout the galaxy in all the places where *Starfleet* goes, it changes nothing. I can't believe the *Prophets* want any of us to leave, not when there is still so much to be done here on *Bajor*. Sending credits home is a poor substitute for your own efforts and work. For your presence, whether or not you stay on your ancestral lands and work with your family or do something completely different. You didn't have to transfer to *Starfleet*. Even if you didn't want to stay in the *Militia* as it becomes obsolete, there were other jobs you could have done, jobs that would have benefitted your own people."

“And how does it benefit our own people to fight like this?” Manar said. “You and I both want to help rebuild Bajor, but we disagree on how it is to be done and what that means for us. So far, there is no problem. But when you don’t agree to the way things are going, you attack! How does that help? How?” Her voice rose, and she fought to keep it even. “Please, tell me! I’d love to hear your explanation.”

“It will let people know that we are serious!” Bekar said. “Too many people on Bajor are just blindly going along with what the Vedek Assembly and the Chamber of Ministers decree. They think that if they just keep their heads down and focus on their own little concerns, that things will be fine. Or they think that just because the Federation is kinder and gentler, that they will be better masters than the Cardassians and so it doesn’t matter that they don’t respect us and want to ‘fix’ us by turning us into a clone of every other Federation colony world. We want people to sit up and *pay attention*. We want people to *think*, to see what’s going on!”

“You want people to *agree with your interpretation* of what’s going on,” Manar said. “And I’ve got to tell you, kidnapping me lost you whatever credibility you had in my mind. You can make people afraid of you by things like this. But you can’t force them to agree with you at the point of a gun. All you can do is polarize things and widen the gaps between the different factions so that no peaceful situation is possible. You can’t *make* us join your cause.”

“Strictly speaking, that is not true.”

Manar turned in surprise; Soval had been so quiet she’d almost forgotten he was there.

“As you are no doubt aware, with sufficient time to work, there are a variety of effective brainwashing techniques, such as Stockholm conditioning, torture, mind-altering devices and chemicals, and telepathic manipulation.” Soval paused, ignoring the way Bekar glowered at him. “However, for that very reason Starfleet requires intensive counseling for those who are imprisoned, to ensure that any such brainwashing is caught and treated. And being known to have employed such techniques would hardly support your cause.”

The Cardassians had used such techniques, Manar knew, though she was grateful Soval hadn’t pointed it out. It wouldn’t have been helpful, coming from him. She looked back up at Bekar, ignoring the crick in her neck. “You know, I have a lot of respect for the Resistance. When we were occupied by the Cardassians, they did what needed to be done, and I hope that if I had been old enough at the time I would have joined. Violence is an effective tool to fight a foreign invader. But it’s worse than useless to settle internal disputes. In the last decade since the Cardassians left, there have been coups, terrorist attacks, kidnappings, just about every kind of violence imaginable. Bajoran against Bajoran. What has any of it accomplished? Nothing! All it does is make rebuilding harder.”

Bekar shook his head. “It’s not like we started the riots, those happened on their own. All we’ve done is take you, to try and show you the error of your ways. We haven’t hurt you, we didn’t even seriously hurt the *alien*.”

“Kidnapping is a risky business.” Manar was incredulous at his naiveté. “There has to be some sort of payoff—they can’t think we’ll just walk out of here as if nothing happened, even if by some miracle you managed to convince me. And if we don’t join your group, they can’t afford to let us go if we can identify anyone who might lead back to them. So either we stay here indefinitely while Starfleet tears apart the planet looking for us, or they kill us to preserve the secret of their identity. Do you seriously believe that it will stop here, that this will be the end of it? Where have you been for the last ten years? Things escalate! Things get out of hand! People retaliate, and then retaliate again, and it doesn’t stop until serious damage has been done.”

Bekar didn’t quite meet her eyes. He must have known she was right. “But we need to send a message!”

“Then make a speech!” Manar raised her voice. “I am not your enemy! The Chamber of Ministers isn’t your enemy! The Vedek Assembly isn’t your enemy! *You don’t kidnap your own people*. The Cardassians knew that the best way to keep us enslaved was to divide us, so we spent more energy fighting one another than fighting them. That’s why they bothered with a puppet government and interfered so much with the Temple. That’s why they spent so much time building networks of collaborators and playing factions off against one another. They wanted us weak and divided.”

“That’s what the Federation wants, too!” Bekar said. “They’re suborning our leaders to get what they want.”

“If we were suborning your leaders, the integration of Bajor into the Federation—and the Militia into Starfleet—would be significantly easier,” Soval said dryly. “Merely because someone does not agree with you does not mean they have been suborned by those you believe to be your enemies.”

“I said that’s what they *want*,” Bekar said. “I didn’t say they were very *good* at it.”

“The reason they’re not good at it is because they’re not trying to *do* it.” Manar rolled her eyes in exasperation. “Joining the Federation isn’t a perfect solution to Bajor’s needs, but I believe that in the long run it’s the best decision. I don’t want Bajor to become a pawn in the galaxy’s political maneuverings, and I don’t think you do, either. We’re not a backwater, any more. We can’t just bury our head in the sand and hope that there aren’t any more empires like the Cardassian Union or the Dominion to come and enslave us. But whether or not you agree, pulling stunts like this is counterproductive.”

“The Cardassians wanted us broken and fighting one another,” Manar said. “They’re gone, but if we keep fighting ourselves like this, they will still have won. They will have destroyed all that was good about Bajor, and left nothing but a ruined planet full of squabbling factions, a planet where no one can live in peace. You don’t want that any more than I do, Bekar. Nobody wants that. So please, for the Prophets’ sake and for Bajor’s, *think* before you get in any deeper.”

Bekar looked away, his jaw working. Finally, finally, she’d struck a chord. “You claim you weren’t the one who took us, and I believe you,” Manar said. “So far, you haven’t done anything wrong. If you let us out or let Starfleet know where you are, we would have no reason to hold you.” She looked at Soval for confirmation, and he nodded. “But if you continue on this path, if you leave us here, you become an accessory after the fact. You’ll have crossed a line you can’t come back from. I won’t change my position, Bekar, you know that, right? They won’t be able to convince me that the Federation and Starfleet are evil and that leaving the solar system means breaking all ties with the Prophets. What do you think they’ll do to me? What do you think they’ll do to Soval? This isn’t just a riot, a protest gotten out of hand. This is a lot more

serious. You will have actively worked to make Bajor a more dangerous place.”

Manar swallowed. She was so thirsty. All the talking she'd been doing had dried her throat out, but she couldn't stop now. “You can let us go, or tell Starfleet where we are,” she said. “You don't have to agree with us, you can still go on talking and protesting the Federation and all, just tell your friends you draw the line at planned violence. You can stop this before it gets any worse. Before it tears Bajor any further apart than it already is.”

She stopped, watching him think it over. Manar held her breath; there wasn't anything more she could think of to say.

At last Bekar sighed. “I'll have to think about this further.” He turned and disappeared from view.

Manar looked over at Soval. “Think he'll go for it?”

Soval tilted his head. “I do not know enough about Bekar, his affiliations, the group structure, or his emotional makeup to attempt to calculate probabilities with any meaningful certainty.”

“Right,” Manar said heavily. She swallowed again, trying to wet her throat. She wished she could sit down without worrying about her clothes. The ground was hard and damp, but it looked inviting right now.

A while later—Manar wasn't sure how long without a chronometer, though it was probably over an hour and possibly closer to two—Bekar reappeared overhead

“I won't betray the ones who brought you here.”

Manar shot a look at Soval. He took the hint. “While I would prefer that the criminals were prosecuted appropriately for their offense, I believe a deal could be reached.”

Bekar shook his head. “Not good enough, Vulcan. I want your word that I won't be prosecuted for anything even if I don't turn my friends in.”

“As long as you were not a party to the actual kidnapping, there should not be any problems,” Soval said. “It would be easiest if you had an alibi.”

“I was at a tavern all evening,” Bekar said. “There were a rash of burglaries last year so the owner put in a surveillance camera at each entrance. It will prove I was there.”

“Then, contingent on your alibi being substantiated and no deeper involvement into our abduction coming to light, you have my word that you will not be charged with a crime relating to this incident.”

“Thank you. Also, you would have to be blindfolded when we leave so you couldn't lead anyone back here.”

“That is acceptable,” Soval said.

Bekar took out a knife, and tossed it down to them.

It sank into the dirt between Manar and Soval. Remembering Soval's injuries, Manar squatted down to pick it up. It was difficult, with her hands behind her back so she couldn't see what she was doing, but she managed.

Trying to cut Soval's bonds when neither of them could see what they were doing was even more awkward, and Manar cut him several times before she managed it. Thankfully, none of the cuts were deep. And once his hands were free it was a simple matter for him to cut hers free. Manar sighed in relief, rotating her shoulders and rubbing her wrists.

While she and Soval had been freeing their wrists, Bekar had disappeared. He came back and tossed a rope ladder over the side of the hole, for them to climb out. Once they were up, he blindfolded them efficiently and grabbed each one of them by the hand. Manar wondered how Soval was dealing it; Vulcans were touch-telepaths, after all.

Bekar led them on through the caves for what felt like a long time. Manar didn't hear anyone else; they seemed to be the only ones there. Hopefully, that meant the group was a small one. Bekar loaded them into a flyer and they took off; she didn't think they'd walked out of the cave, which meant a large enough opening that one could fly in and out of it.

A Space to Grow

A short flight later, they were at the closest Starfleet base, just a small complex in an office building, distinguished from its neighbors only by a Starfleet banner outside its door. The people inside were in a furor over their disappearance. The three of them were noticed as soon as they walked in the door.

“Lieutenant! Ensign!” A harried Human lieutenant commander in Security gold rushed over to them. “Are you all right? What happened?” He frowned at Bekar. “Who are you?”

A Bajoran lieutenant brought a tricorder over, running it over all three of them. “It’s definitely them. They’ll need medical treatment, but nothing serious.”

“We were kidnapped after the concert by unknown persons,” Soval said. “They left us in a cave that was a former Resistance base. They believed that this man, Bekar, might be able to sway Ensign Tora to their cause, as the two grew up in the same labor camp. Ensign Tora was able to convince Bekar of the foolishness of the group’s actions; she is to be commended for her clear-headed debate skills in a difficult and dangerous situation. Bekar agreed to release us on the condition that he will not reveal the identities of anyone else involved in the kidnapping, provided that his alibi during the attack itself can be substantiated. We flew here, as you see.” It was a remarkably concise explanation for a long and tiring day.

The lieutenant commander stared briefly at Soval, blinking. “Thank you, Lieutenant, that was a clear and concise briefing.” He turned to Manar. “Well done, Ensign. I’m sure that Lieutenant Soval will be writing up a commendation for your actions, and I will be happy to endorse it.”

“Thank you, sir,” she said, too tired to be proud.

“Lieutenant Kubus, please escort Bekar to the holding era and check out his alibi,” the commander said. He smiled at Manar. “I’ll escort the two of you to our infirmary, and they can check you over while I call off the search.”

He headed off into the small office and Manar relaxed, glad someone else was taking care of it. Being stunned wasn’t a substitute for a good night’s sleep, and now that the adrenaline was wearing off, she was so tired. She found herself drifting off as she sat on the biobed, the noise of the tricorder and other medical equipment forming a soothing background hum.

“Ensign. Ensign Tora,” the Doctor said.

She roused herself to full wakefulness. “Sorry,” she said.

“You appear to be fine,” he said. He was a Bajoran, which was a comfort; she wasn’t quite used to doctors examining her who weren’t even the same species. No matter how good their xenobiology credentials, Manar preferred a doctor who *really* understood the way Bajoran bodies worked. “Bumps and bruises, mainly. No signs of brainwashing, and they didn’t have you long enough to do anything fancy. I’m prescribing two days of medical leave, just to give you some time to process what happened. Starfleet is really big on medical leave. I’m sure you’d prefer to take that here on Bajor.”

“Oh, definitely,” Manar said, pleased at the generosity. “I’m actually on leave now; can I add the medical leave to my remaining shore leave?”

He shrugged. “I don’t know, I’m not used to Starfleet policies yet. Don’t forget to turn in a preliminary report before you leave.”

“Thanks,” Manar said. Giving a preliminary deposition took surprisingly little time: she gave a verbal report, which the computer transcribed. There would be more questions later, but that was enough for now. She saved her report left to find someone who might know how much leave time she had.

“Yes,” Soval said. “In fact, the time spent during our abduction and debriefing gets subtracted from the original leave, as well. Therefore, you receive additional hours of leave to compensate for the hours between the end of the concert and when you were released from medical care. You therefore have three days total leave remaining.”

“That’s great,” Manar said. Starfleet was generous; but then, she supposed it was large enough it could afford to be. “Were you planning on going back to the station or going home with me?”

“I will be returning directly to the station,” Soval said. “I wish to begin composing again, and all my instruments are there.”

It was gracefully done, but Manar wondered how much of it was a desire to spend as little time on Bajor as possible. “Good luck with that,” she said. “I’ll send you Kaval’s number.”

“Thank you,” Soval said.

“Well, see you back on DS9 in a few days,” Manar said.

Soval nodded. “Good-bye, Ensign.”

Manar turned and left, heading for the transporter room. She could not wait to be home.

A day later Manar sat in the garden behind her family home, preparing vegetables for supper and admiring the beauty of the hills. It was a mindless task, for which Manar was grateful. She was busy, and useful, and could mainly work on autopilot. The familiar motions were

soothing. In the camps as a child, the Cardassian rations were never very good or quite enough, and so everyone tried to supplement them with what fruits and vegetables they could gather or grow. Food had still been scarce the first few years after the Occupation; the Cardassians were no longer there to take the best produce for themselves, but they were no longer there to give out ration bars, either.

The camps had been a horrible place to grow up. But at least the problems then were simpler. Manar wondered what Bekar would think if he could see her now.

Her mother came up from the fields, dusty and sweaty from a day's work and sat beside her to help with the work, stealing the occasional bite. She was quiet, which made Manar uneasy; her mother was usually a vocal woman.

"Grandmother doesn't think they'll be able to get the stains out," Manar said at last. "I'm so sorry."

Her mother shrugged. "It wasn't your fault, Manar, it was that boy's. I thought about calling his family and giving them a piece of my mind, but then I checked and found they were all gone now but a few cousins."

Manar sighed. She hadn't heard from Lusanis after she and her family were moved to a different camp. Manar was sorry to hear her family was gone—she should look her up, see if Lusanis herself was alive. "Starfleet's pretty sure Bekar was telling the truth about not being involved in the kidnapping. They think it was a spur-of-the-moment thing, based on a target of opportunity. They're looking further, to find the culprits, but unless they find something drastically different they're going to honor Soval's promise. Bekar's already been released."

"Good," her mother said. "He's a very young man who did a stupid thing, but with the Prophet's grace managed to recognize it and fix it. Hopefully, he'll learn sense."

"We can only hope."

They fell back into silence, then, shelling and sorting. "I was very worried, when you didn't come home," Mom said.

"I'm sorry." Manar smiled at her. "If it was up to me, I would have been back on time."

Her mother smiled back. "I know. It's just ... you know I support you in your career, and I am so proud of you for going back to school. But when you were in the Militia, if anything were to happen to you I would know soon and be able to come when you needed me. Now that you're in Starfleet, what happens if you're hurt while exploring deep space? How soon would they tell us? And even if we were notified right away, what good would it do? We'll be here, and you'll be ... the Prophets only know where you'll be."

"Mother—"

Mom shook her head. "No, I know, it's a good career move and you'll have lots of interesting and exciting adventures, and it's what you want. I'm glad you have the opportunity. Just ... promise me you'll be careful, out there."

Manar reached over and took her hand. "I will, Mom," she said, throat tightening. "I will."

Brendan was there waiting for her at the airlock as she disembarked from the runabout. "Look who's back! What a mess, huh? Guess you need a vacation to recover from the vacation."

Manar laughed and nudged his arm. "They already gave me that, medical leave to 'recover from my ordeal.'"

He took one of her bags, and they started walking down the corridor towards her quarters.

"Actually, aside from being kidnapped, it was actually a pretty good vacation," Manar said. "I had a wonderful time with my family, and the concert was even better than I'd hoped."

"Yeah, *aside* from the little detail of being kidnapped," Brendan said, snickering.

"Well, it's not like anyone was actually hurt. It was uncomfortable, and frightening, but no harm was done in the long run." Manar shook her head. "Although, I have to say it was a little embarrassing that *both* my family *and* the Separationist kidnapper thought Soval and I are having a love affair."

"Really?" Brendan shook his head. "Huh. Go figure. I mean, yeah, you're friendly, but Vulcans can get really obsessive about their mates, so I think we'd be able to tell something was up with Soval. Not to mention he's *really* by-the-book and one of you would have transferred to another shift. Also, I'd like to think you'd tell your partner if you had a lover."

"All true," Manar said.

"Oh, hey, I almost forgot," Brendan said. "The *Dlaspu* made an unexpected stop here at the station—she's a science vessel that was mothballed for the duration of the Dominion War, and she's just getting back into service now. Anyway, they had a few away teams attacked by animals on a planetary survey, and so they've got some holes in their security department to fill." He handed her a PADD.

Manar took it and scanned the information. "I'm being transferred?"

"Short notice, but I hear it's a good ship. And science vessels often have really interesting away team missions, so that should be fun. Plus, I bet you're eager to get away from all the nutcases *here*, after what happened—"

"Brendan, *shut up*," Manar said, angrily. "This is my *home*. These are my *people*. You do not get to talk about them that way."

"But they *kidnapped* you," Brendan said in surprise. "And they have all these conspiracy theories about how the Evil Federation is going to

come in and take over just like the Cardassians did.”

“You have no right to talk,” Manar said. “When you’ve been through what we have, *then* you have a right to an opinion. Yeah, Bekar was wrong. And stupid. And it could have turned out really badly. But he grew up—we *both* grew up in conditions you can’t even imagine. And before I joined Starfleet, the only aliens I’d seen in person were invaders, Cardassians and Jem’Hadar. When the recruiters for transferring came through, all I knew about the Federation was that it was big, and powerful, and arrogant. And for a *really* long time, anything on Bajor that seemed too good to be true generally was. Things are changing, now, and by and large they’re changing for the better. But when you’re used to everything going wrong, it’s hard to believe things can ever go *right*. You don’t get to judge us because we’re not as shiny and pretty as you.”

She could see Brendan’s face go from angry to the uncomfortable look he got when she talked about her childhood. He opened his mouth, but she cut him off. “And you don’t get to pity us, either.”

He grimaced. “Sorry.”

“Apology accepted,” she said, though she wasn’t sure he understood. “Now, can you tell me a bit about the *Dlaspu*? What’s it like on a science ship?”

“Well, science ships get a lot of variety,” Brendan said, hesitantly. He regained his confidence as he went on. “At least, that’s what I’ve heard. I only joined up during the war, myself, you know.”

“I know,” Manar said. “You’ve still been in Starfleet longer than I have.”

Brendan nodded. “I think science vessels are the best assignment for security. Patrol ships just go from here to there in peacetime, and on diplomatic vessels you end up standing guard at boring conferences. Science vessels, now, you get lots of variety, lots of different planets to explore, and they always need security on the landing parties in case something goes wrong. So it’s interesting, but dedicated science vessels are the second wave of exploration, behind the heavy cruisers that go out on five-year missions. So a science vessel gets shorter missions, and the heavy cruisers have already faced the worst of the hazards, so it’s safer all around.”

“My mother will be happy,” Manar said.

Brendan laughed. “Let’s hope you are, too.”

Three months later, Manar had settled in to her new posting and found that she was indeed very happy with it. The work was much more interesting than walking around Deep Space Nine on endless patrols. She had only two regrets, she thought, as she wandered home from dinner at the crew lounge after her shift. Although she was making friends, it was a bit lonely being in a place where no one else spoke her language, and she missed her family. But at least for now, the excitement of travelling to new places more than made up for it.

This week had been fairly routine, but *last week*—the sunset on Argulia III had been magnificent, even viewed through the shuttlecraft’s screen. No Class M planet could produce clouds of such color and texture. She’d sent pictures home, and grandmother had accused her of altering them to make it more dramatic. But she’d also hung a large copy of one of them in her workroom for inspiration.

As Manar entered her room, she noticed her comm console had a blinking light in one corner. “Computer, play message,” she said, unfastening her uniform tunic and pulling it off.

Soval appeared on the viewscreen. “Greetings, Manar,” he said. He was not in uniform, but rather in a severely tailored brown tunic with Vulcan sigils down one side of the breast. It was only the second message he had sent since she was reassigned. “Thank you for the images of Argulia III. It is an atypical example of a Class L planet, and the cloud formations are aesthetically pleasing. I have recently completed the first piece I have composed since my wife’s death. I believe it to be a relatively minor work; but I could not have composed it without your invitation to Kaval Roana’s concert. Accordingly, with your permission I wish to dedicate it to you and to her. A recording is attached. Please notify me if this is acceptable.”

Manar smiled. How flattering. She continued changing into something more comfortable to spend the remainder of her evening in.

On the viewscreen, Soval continued. “Although the kidnapping was unpleasant for all, the concert itself was more than worth such a consequence to me. I thank you once more for the invitation. As you no doubt know more about the political situation on Bajor than I do, I will only note that tensions between the Separationists and the Federation continue to affect security arrangements here on the station.” He paused, tilting his head. “It is gratifying to hear that your studies continue in your new posting. It is also gratifying that your time of study with me was helpful and that you have not needed to find a new tutor. Starfleet Academy has taken our work together and adapted it to be used with Bajoran transfer officers more generally, as we had hoped.

“My minimum commitment to Starfleet will come due in 2.8 months. At that time, I will resign my commission and return to Vulcan. If you wish to maintain our correspondence, I have attached my civilian contact information.

“Live long and prosper, Manar. Soval out.”

“Computer, play attached recording.” Manar closed her eyes and listened as the sound of strings filled her cabin. A tenor voice—Soval’s, she realized—sang over the top of them. Like the other piece of his she’d listened to, Manar didn’t really care for it; it was too alien. Still, she was glad Soval was composing again.

When it was done, Manar smiled. She’d reply in the morning, she thought. Now, it was time for her evening devotions. She crossed the room to the small shrine she’d set up against one wall and lit the candles. It was nice to have a cabin to herself, and not have to worry about being disturbed. Manar knelt before the shrine and closed her eyes for a few moments to clear her mind. She raised her arms, elbows out to the side parallel to the floor, forearms raised above them, palms facing the mandala. She opened her eyes, and began to pray.



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