

# "The Ties That Bind"

## Chapter 5

Kira first contacted Bashir to advise him of the situation. The doctor stated he would of course make his facility and staff available for the necessary tests, and could meet them there immediately. Kira next called the constable and asked her to invite Jord to the infirmary, politely. She then personally escorted Nilom there.

Constable Emyr and her charge arrived about ten minutes after Kira and Nilom. Ranjen Shayl and Vedek Nane accompanied young Jord. The two clerics appeared calm; the youth was obviously nervous.

"Ranjen Shayl and Vedek Nane were discussing various of the art pieces," Emyr informed her in a low voice. "Jord was listening intently, in my observation. When I asked him to come along, he became alarmed, and they immediately insisted on accompanying us."

Kira nodded, replying equally *sotto voce*. "Probably expected he was in some kind of trouble. Maybe I shouldn't have asked you to be the one who brought him here."

Emyr shrugged. "They're here."

"What is it you wish to discuss with Jord?" the dignified vedek asked before anyone else could ask, belying his apparent tranquility. "Is it the incident in the holosuite?" He spotted Nilom. "Or has there been some difficulty with another of the station guests? I assure you, if any of my students have misbehaved or broken any station rules, it will be addressed promptly."

"Oh, no, no one's done anything wrong." Kira nodded politely back at Nilom. "Nilom has raised some questions...."

"Do they have to be here?" Nilom interrupted querulously, pointing at the clerics. "This is none of their concern."

"I am his vedek and his guardian," Nane replied directly. "If it involves my student, it is my concern."

The Cardassian's mouth tightened, and she glanced at Shayl.

The ranjen focused on Nane. "I will return to the Promenade," he said smoothly, and bowed his departure to the vedek before leaving.

After an uncomfortable moment, Kira continued, mentally growling to herself. "There is apparently some chance Jord and Nilom are.... Nilom is looking for a relative. Her brother was a soldier. He served at Jalanda, where he ... knew a woman. They had a child. It was about the time you were born. He ... lost contact with his son and the boy's mother." She looked directly at the youth. "Nilom asked if you would be willing to undergo a genetic test to confirm or refute the possibility that you are her brother's son. Dr. Bashir, here, can perform the test right now."

Jord stared at the Cardassian woman, stunned.

"It's quite simple and absolutely painless," Bashir interjected soothingly. "We can have the results in less than an hour."

"Why...." Jord swallowed hard. "Why would I want to know if I'm related to her?"

"What?" Nilom bristled. "I am entitled to know if you are my brother's child!"

"But...." Jord turned an alarmed expression on the vedek. "Must I?"

"Colonel Kira!" Nilom's expression was outraged.

"Dr. Bashir," the colonel interjected hastily, all but shoving the heavysset Cardassian woman toward Bashir, "why don't you start with Nilom, while we talk with Jord. This has been very unexpected for him and obviously a shock. He's never had a biological family. Let's give him a few minutes to absorb the situation."

"He—"

Bashir hastily steered Nilom into the diagnostic chamber.

"Jord—"

"Must I do this?" Jord again asked point blank of the vedek, ignoring Kira. He crowded close to Nane as if to hide behind him. His stocky body towered over and framed the smaller, wiry form of the vedek. Nonetheless, it was as though the elderly man's own aura provided a shield over the youth.

"She came here to find her brother's child," Kira said, though none of the others were looking at her. "She's determined, and desperate, I think. I doubt she'll simply walk away if Jord refuses to undergo the genetic testing. She may petition the Bajoran government for help."

"He is of age. The authorities won't force him to undergo any test."

"I know." She couldn't help a welling of sympathy for Nilom in the face of the youth's balking — stubbornness might be another family trait. "She has no other family left. Would it be so terrible for an orphan and a woman alone to discover they're family?"

Nane nodded briefly. "It will do no harm, Jord. I believe it is important to have connections," he told the youth quietly. "If you are related to Nilom, you will have found family and half your heritage. And if you are not, you both will have the peace of mind of knowing."

From her previous experience with Nane, Kira understood the irony in his comment.

"Why would I care to know which of ten thousand Cardassian soldiers abused a nameless Bajoran woman and walked away from her?" he cried.

"There is something else to think about," Kira added. "She's not nameless. If you are Nilom's brother's son, we know who your mother is, and what happened to her. If the test is positive, you will know who you are as a Bajoran as well as a Cardassian. It will give you all of your family."

Near-hunger flared in the youth's dark eyes. But: "You have been my family for four years, and the Order before that, almost as long as I can remember—"

"Do you think we would ever walk away from you?" Nane asked protectively, resting a delicately-veined hand on the youth's broad shoulder.

After a second's searching gaze, Jord dropped his eyes and shook his head.

"So, Taban?" the vedek asked.

"All right. If you think it's a good thing," he said to Nane. Standing up straighter, Jord lifted his chin. "I'll endure this test."

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Unable to concentrate on his work, Kaoron found himself again on the Promenade, mingling with station personnel and visitors, but keeping quietly distant, not joining any conversations. After a time, he found

himself observing Syrlynor, who was explaining the inspirations for certain of his better-known works.

"I had not expected to see you here."

"Ranjen Shayl," Kaoron greeted the orange-clad monk.

"Lieutenant." The Bajoran joined him.

"Do you really find it surprising a person of my heritage would be observing the work of a Vulcan artist?"

Shayl cocked his head, studying Kaoron, his sharp gaze penetrating even the attempt at Vulcan aloofness. "Actually, no. But I had the impression this type of art would be less interesting to you than that of most of our other visitors."

"In that, you are correct," Kaoron admitted. "But in any event, I am here. What are your thoughts on Syrlynor's work?"

The ranjen gave a chuckle, an odd little sound from deep in his throat, then he studied the displayed pieces for a moment, craning his neck to get another angle on the three-dimensional works. "Colorful," he said thoughtfully. "Very precise. Quite attractive and eye-catching. Almost a maze for the mind, requiring active contemplation."

"That seems an apt description," he acknowledged. "I believe Syrlynor would be pleased to hear his work described as useful for meditation."

"I've noticed you seem particularly interested in Syrlynor's presentation, but I haven't seen you actually look at his works," Shayl remarked.

"I am familiar with his works; they are not new to me. It is more interesting to me to see the reactions of others to them."

"My impression is you were watching him, not us."

"It would be most impolite to ignore Syrlynor when he speaks," Kaoron chastised. "And Syrlynor is similarly offended when one shows the discourtesy of observing him when he would rather not be ... observed."

"I have noted he seems ... less social than his peers."

They watched silently as the artist finished his prepared remarks, then moved on as observers closed in with their own questions and observations. The artist now seemed almost ill-at-ease, surrounded by personnel and visitors, responding to comments. He quickly excused himself, leaving his assistants to deal with the crowd.

The ranjen stuck with Kaoron as he moved off through the Promenade crowd.

"You seem troubled. For a Vulcan."

"Indeed? But you forget, I am also part Romulan." Kaoron couldn't help some light teasing. "Am I troubled for a Romulan?"

Shayl peered intently at him for a moment. "No, you're not."

"How can you tell?"

"You aren't destroying anything."

"That sounds more like a celebrating Klingon!"

Shayl laughed out loud. But after a moment, he noted conversationally, "Many Bajorans come to me for spiritual guidance. Some also tell me of events in their lives, and ask for advice."

"I have observed that about you. Your people have a great deal of respect for your words."

"One of the officers here once referred to me as filling a 'father-confessor' role for him, despite not being of his race or his beliefs." The Bajoran stayed in pace with him as they left the crowds behind for a quieter section of the station. "I would hope you also would feel you could speak to me in confidence, if need be."

"Are you offering guidance?"

"You seem troubled, as though you could use guidance." The ranjen smiled briefly. "If you want to discuss anything, I would hope you would not be put off by the fact I am Bajoran and look to the Prophets for my spirituality and understanding of existence."

Several tentative minutes passed as Kaaron weighed the matter.

"I will consider it. Thank you."

Shayl bowed his head once in acceptance. "You know where I can be found."

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Vedek Nane and his young art student left the infirmary as soon as Bashir had taken his readings.

Nilom remained, anxious for the results, pacing the infirmary the same way she'd paced Kira's office.

Kira found herself half-wondering how the woman ever calmed down enough to work on her water sculptures. It almost wore her out just watching. The colonel had remained in the infirmary, politely trying to keep the Cardassian artist company, as she supposed she was expected to. Nilom, however wasn't in the mood to talk, and her occasional comments were more rhetorical than conversational. Several times, Kira considered calling Tarrn and ordering her to the infirmary to resume her guard duty.

It seemed like days to Kira, but it was less than an hour before the doctor reappeared.

"Well?" Nilom demanded before he could even speak, drawing herself up in front of the human.

Bashir glanced around first, to see if Jord was still around, before announcing, "The results are positive. My tests confirm you and Jord Taban are very closely related, genetically." He gestured. "Now, without your brother to test, I can't say with one hundred percent certainty he is Jord's father — but unless another male member of your immediate family was on Bajor at that time, he would be the most likely ... candidate. You have found family."

Fierce elation flooded the Cardassian woman's face. "My brother's son...."

Bashir turned to Kira. "We'll need to apprise Jord of the results."

She nodded. "I'll talk to Vedek Nane, and to Jord. Unless you think you should tell him, in case he has questions...?"

"I suspect you'll be able to answer any questions he might have, much better than I," the doctor deferred.

Kira was sure he was right. All the same, thinking about it, she thought she'd take Ezri along for that conversation.

"Colonel," Nilom caught their attention.

"Yes?"

"This will of course be kept confidential, I trust?"

"Confidential? What do you mean?"

"Well, I certainly don't want this to be public knowledge! My family may be dead, but I still have their reputations to maintain!"

Kira closed her eyes in disgust.

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Kaaron found a message waiting in his quarters.

*"So she is your mother."*

Five simple words on the screen. An unsigned message that erased itself five seconds after he read it.

A conversation overheard? His personnel file accessed? It didn't really matter. He knew whence the message came and what it meant. It was an accusation.

He had never boasted of his mother's identity, but neither had he hidden it.

Ten years ago, T'Lara had presided over the court martial of Lt. Ro for the events on Garon II. The relationship between T'Lara and Kaaron had not been mentioned.

He doubted Ro or the Maquis knew, however, that T'Lara had recused herself from the deliberation and subsequent sentencing, in the decision to send Ro to the stockade. It had been the proper thing to do.

"Yes, she is my mother. And she was there," he announced aloud, for the benefit of anyone who might be listening, or for his own. "But neither the verdict nor the sentence was her decision."

He hadn't expected an answer, and he didn't get one.

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Jord was dazed. "It's true? That Cardassian ... is my ... family? My aunt?"

"Yes," Kira assured him. "According to Dr. Bashir, the genetic testing confirms the two of you are family."

"My ... father's sister?"

"Yes...."

Nane stood silently aside, watching the youth's response. For her part, Kira had dragged Dax along, thinking Jord might need a little help dealing with what he was learning. Or maybe, she admitted to herself, she might need the back-up herself. In any event, she had collected the group of them in the vedek's guest quarters.

The young man looked bewildered. "I barely remember my mother. I never knew my father."

"Your father's name was Crell Komed. He was a simple Cardassian soldier, stationed at Jalanda."

Jord listened, wide-eyed. As if unable to help himself, he leaned closer.

"He was named after a relative who'd been in the military before him. He grew up in Lakarian City on Cardassia. He had a brother and three sisters. They're all dead now, except Nilom." Kira was glad of the

additional information she had drawn out of Tarrn from her lengthy conversations with the water sculptor.

"Komed was intelligent and liked to read enigma tales. He came from an artistic family, as you might gather from Nilom, although he didn't think he had much talent himself. He was strong, athletic — he won an inter-unit wrestling competition three years in a row. He also enjoyed racing sand-trackers on Cardassia, and in the Bajoran Outback." She took a deep breath, looking at his face.

"And he loved your mother so much he broke off an engagement to a Cardassian woman and risked his life and career to have you and your mother taken to safety when he knew you were in danger from his commanding officers." A beat. "He died in a transporter accident."

That should be more than enough to whet the youth's appetite to know more. And if it wasn't, well, at least it was something positive to know about his father.

The others waited, watching his response.

After a pause, Jord burst out, "What about my mother?"

Kira nodded. "Your mother's name was Jasso Rahl. She was born and grew up in or near Jalanda. She had no known siblings, and the people we believe to be her parents died at the Elemspur detention camp."

She watched Jord absorb this, blinking.

"With your father's help, your mother was able to train as a medic. When she had to run to escape Cardassian authorities, she went to Kran-Tobal, and worked in a fishery, but used her medical training to help the resistance." A beat. "I found some people who remember her. They say she loved the outdoors and especially loved the sea. She could swim like a zurafish, and could rappel almost sheer rock cliffs." Another beat. "Her favorite color was yellow."

"I remember her wearing yellow. Gleaming like the sun," he murmured slowly, expression far away.

"For what it's worth, her family's *d'jarra* was the arts."

The young man's lip quivered, and he turned blindly toward Vedek Nane. The vedek reached out a hand to steady him.

"She apparently found a way to leave you with the monks at Karnoth while she tried to set up a new life. And then ... she died at sea," Kira finished, skimming over the rest of the story.

"I hate him! I hate them both!" Jord burst out.

"Jord," Kira said seriously, "your father sent you and your mother away to save your lives. Your mother hid you for the same reason."

"To save me from my own father's people," he replied bitterly.

"Yes!" Kira could see she wasn't making much headway. She glanced at Dax, her eyes entreating the Trill counselor to step in and get past the youth's anger and pain.

"They knew your life was in danger," Dax said urgently. "They both wanted you to live. They each sacrificed everything to accomplish that, even their relationship, maybe their lives."

"Why are you defending a Cardassian?" Jord burst out, still focused on Kira. "You're Kira Nerys! How can you justify—"

"Believe me," Kira said strongly, "I'm not defending or justifying anything the Cardassians did. But I don't want you to hate your own father for things he had no control over, but tried to make the best of!" The words were

out before she even realized what she meant to say. "And whatever you think of what they did, Nilom wasn't part of it. She may be your only living relative—"

"I don't care! I have no desire to know her or go to Cardassia — why would I want to see that place? Or those people? I won't go with her! I don't want to know her! I don't want anything to do with her!"

He brushed off Nane's arm and rushed blindly out into the corridor.

Nane went after him.

Kira found herself considering Jord's last comments. She found she had no idea what, if anything, Nilom might do with confirmation Jord was her nephew. Maybe Nilom hadn't even thought that far. One thing she was uncomfortably sure of — the woman had no intention of taking the youth back to Cardassia with her.

"I think we'd better go too, Nerys," Dax said, sounding a little subdued. "I suspect he's going to need a little counseling from his vedek before he's interested in talking to anybody else."

"Won't you try and talk to him?"

"Remember when you were his age, Nerys," Dax reminded her. "Before you knew any Starfleet personnel or had any reason to trust us. Would you have listened to one of us about how to relate to a Cardassian, of all people?"

The colonel shook her head and followed her out.

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