

# "The Ties That Bind"

## Chapter 7

It was the last evening of the gathering, the final formal party. One more day of playing host. Tomorrow, artists would begin departing, returning to their home worlds or moving on to their next destinations. By the day after tomorrow, most of the rest would be gone. In two days, the station would be blessedly back to normal, or at least as normal as it could be, for the moment.

Glass in hand, Kira looked around the ward room. This close to the end, she could admit to feeling relief it was almost over, and pleasure that the festival had gone so well.

The fete was another well-organized event. Alden seemed to have a talent for playing host. The food and beverages were impeccable. Musical instruments were arranged in groupings for this gathering, to emphasize the musical portions of the festival, as the previous receptions had emphasized visual arts and the dance. People were clustering around the instruments, and some were even playing.

Kira felt pretty good. No one had killed anybody. Her crew had done well. She felt less enamored of Minister Lizin, who never did come to the station to take part in the festival he'd foisted on her. Thinking about it, he no doubt knew about the plans for the Cardassian embassy, and was afraid to face her until her reaction was known and she'd had time either to settle down or to hash it out with Shakaar. She made a face. That was also likely the reason Jolorn had called her in the middle of the night, when she might be too fuzzy to coherently argue with him.

Kira sighed. She was still unsure what was going to happen with Nilom and Jord. Neither was happy about the other. Would they even speak to each other, now each knew who the other was? Did it really matter, since they'd both be gone in a day or two? She kept her eyes open in case either one showed up at the reception. She'd given Emyn an explanation and the head's-up to stick close, but wasn't sure that would be enough of a deterrent to trouble. The worst she expected was an argument, some yelling, but anything that made the other guests uncomfortable, was unwelcome.

Hopefully Vedek Nane would keep all his young protégés close to hand. Keep Jord out of trouble. Keep an awestruck Wani from hovering. Or maybe Wani could hover around Kuhlman, who was currently playing something with a lively tempo on the piano.

Kira caught a glimpse of a newcomer to the party, standing at the entry, scanning the crowd. It was Admiral T'Lara. Unexpectedly, to Kira, the Vulcan officer was wearing civilian robes. Something about her roving expression suggested she was looking for someone.

She crossed the wardroom. "Admiral."

"Colonel. It appears your guests are enjoying themselves."

Kira glanced around. "Yes. It's turned out to be quite a pleasant gathering."

"Quite successful in all respects."

Puzzled, Kira turned back to the admiral. There had been an undertone in her voice. "Yes," she repeated, then hesitated. "Admiral, is there something troubling you?"

"No, Colonel, not at all," the admiral replied calmly.

"I have to admit, I had some concerns about our facility being able to host so many visitors," Kira said, keeping her attention on the admiral, trying to read the enigmatic Vulcan features. "With so many refugees still coming through the station, and the increased numbers of personnel, rebuilding the relay station and strengthening our defensive capabilities — it was quite a change of focus."

"You have done admirably." T'Lara said absently.

Following her gaze, Kira realized the admiral was watching Syrlynor, the Vulcan artist, in the midst of a cluster of personnel. He looked ill at ease, and it was not long before he excused himself and headed for the door.

"Excuse me, Colonel." T'Lara followed him out.

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"Syrlynor."

"T'Lara." He did not turn.

"You are failing your commitment," she said bluntly.

Now he faced her, his expression distantly polite. "Unlike some, I am unaware of having failed any commitment in my life," he replied.

A chill swept from her blue eyes, and T'Lara stepped closer. "You are here as an ambassador of good will."

"In what manner have I failed to demonstrate good will?" he said, his tone condescending.

"You have not mingled with the population nor sought out opportunities to demonstrate the value of Federation membership. You have behaved arrogantly with your peers from other worlds as well as the Bajorans. You have not attended receptions beyond the most minimal time possible, to the point of being insulting to this station and its personnel."

"You seem to have incorrectly chosen to style my behavior as the product of emotion. I would expect better of a Vulcan of your years and discipline. But then, perhaps after all it is not to be unexpected, coming from you," he replied with an edge.

"Is it logical to expect one you have insulted to respond favorably to you?"

"The Bajorans rejected Federation membership; they have chosen their path. I have no further obligation to you, nor you to me. Hence it is irrelevant to me whether the Bajorans, or you, respond favorably to me."

"You should not have come here."

"I was invited." An eyebrow lifted. "Or would you have me suggest a Bajoran invitation is not worth accepting?"

"You have not been concerned with rejecting invitations in the past."

"If you refer to our own history, I had no desire to reside on Earth or to raise children on a starship, surrounded by emotional beings, while my mate focused on other worlds and failed to follow the path of Surak."

"You expected a mate to remain planet-bound so you could define your personal desires as though they were the path of Surak. You refused to accept the path of logic could be followed anywhere but on Vulcan."

"There were options on Vulcan. You chose to reject them."

"To leave was the logical and appropriate choice for me."

"It was not logical to choose a Romulan." The coldly polite words carried an undercurrent of venom.

"Your arrogance towards other species now is retaliation for my marital choice of fifty years ago? That is not

logical."

"Arrogance is an emotion to which I do not subscribe. And to trust a Romulan is never logical."

"You delude yourself. Your historical prejudice and personal bitterness belie your claim to logic."

"You are in no position to determine anyone else's path of logic."

"That may be correct. It may well be no Vulcan is in position to pass judgment on another in that respect."

His expression closed down even more than before. There was a long silence, during which T'Lara could tell Syrlynor was mentally repeating the Dictums of the Syrranites. There were shadows of their childhood bonding still lingering in the depths of her mind. Finally, without another word, he nodded an abrupt farewell and walked away.

T'Lara closed her eyes for a moment to school her face to true Vulcan impassivity. Very few non-Vulcans would have noted the difference. When she opened her eyes, she discovered Kaoron standing behind her, looking strangely guilty. She felt a flash of something akin to irritation at that display.

"My apologies, Admiral, it was not my intention to eavesdrop."

"Perhaps it is I who must apologize, Lieutenant," she responded in an even voice. "My personal history with Syrlynor should have not have become a matter for public discussion. We will speak no more of it."

"It appeared to be an argument," he observed.

"Arguments serve no purpose. Our discussion is over. Let us return to the reception."

"Of course, Admiral."

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After the party, Kaoron was returning to his quarters in the habitat ring when he heard a sharp, angry voice, and recognized it. He increased his stride as the voice fell silent. A second later, just around the intersection of the main habitat corridor and the crossover bridge, he found them.

Vedek Nane and Jord Taban stood together, the elderly cleric protectively between his student and the Cardassian artist, Yurusi Nilom. Deputy Tarrn, the Cardassian's assigned security, hovered near her, looking a little frantic with not knowing whether to intervene or not.

"Greetings," Kaoron said into the thick silence.

Nilom and Nane remained locked in each other's glares. Tarrn jumped. Jord looked relieved, but didn't say anything.

"I would not have expected such a gathering," he noted after a moment, appraising the situation as he looked from face to face.

"We just ran into each other," the vedek said smoothly. His expression was less calm, with a gathering storm in his pale eyes. "And it is late, we should be retiring. Come, Taban."

"I am not going to Cardassia or anywhere else with her," the young man insisted strongly, leaning past the vedek and apparently continuing whatever the discussion had been.

"What?" Nilom stared at him in absolute disbelief. Her lower lip curled in disgust. "Going to Cardassia with me? How could anyone think I wanted to bring you to Cardassia?"

The remark earned shocked stares.

"But you said...", Jord said, sounding sick.

"I said *nothing* about taking you to Cardassia! I want to ensure you *never* come to Cardassia!" Nilom took a step closer.

"Then you suggest ... bribery? To save you from having to acknowledge him?" Nane interjected himself between them again. Cold, unnatural fire glowed from his eyes and showed in his twisted mouth.

"Well, what do you expect?"

His face flushed with anger and humiliation; looking like he was about to throw up, Jord strode away. With a sideways glance at the lieutenant, Nane went after his student, calling his name but receiving no response. Kaoron, Nilom, and Tarrn were left standing.

Kaoron stared at the Cardassian for a long moment, his expression closed down. Then, with dangerous politeness, he stated, "I am puzzled, Nilom, as to why you sought out the young man?"

She looked offended. "What is it to you?"

"He is a friend to me. And you have deliberately hurt him."

"What? How dare—"

"You came to this station determined to locate the son of your brother. Upon doing so, you made no secret of your contempt for his very existence, that he is nothing but an embarrassment to you and you would much rather have found him to be dead, if at all—"

She moved to slap him; he caught her arm effortlessly. Tarrn uttered a single syllable of half-hearted protest; Kaoron silenced her with a cold look from beneath dark brows.

"You made no effort to learn who he was, or what kind of life he led. You offered no relationship, no understanding, no acceptance, no overtures. You dismiss his mother's world and culture as insignificant, and imply he should want no part of it, but you make it clear you consider him unworthy to participate in yours."

Nilom sputtered incoherently with rage, trying to pull her arm free.

"You sought him out to satisfy your needs. You have no care for his."

"What do you know of my homeworld and needs?" she finally spat out, still struggling to escape. "I made a promise to my brother—"

"Which you have twisted into something hurtful. One's home should be a place to belong, a place every being is entitled to possess or create for himself, a place for family. Yet you seem determined to leave him with no place to consider home, and no family to welcome him."

"You heard him, he's not interested in me or my world—"

"And why should he be, when you make it so clear he will never be welcome there?" Contempt and anger were breaking through the remaining shreds of his Vulcan reserve. He finally released his grip on her arm, pushing her away with the same movement. "I think your brother would *not* consider you to have satisfied the intent of the promise he asked of you."

She held her arm close, nearly breathless. "You ... Federation..."

"I believe you indicated you were returning to your quarters." As if dismissing the Cardassian, Kaoron turned

to Tarrn. "See her safely there."

Nilom's gaze jerked sharply from the science officer to the deputy. "Come," she snapped. "I leave in the morning, it's time to pack!"

The Bajoran blinked, her usual easy nature riled by the exchange she'd witnessed. "I'm your security escort, not your servant!" she replied with umbrage.

The Cardassian stared at Tarrn, then whirled on Kaoron again. "You...."

A tense silence hung over the corridor.

After several seconds of glaring at Kaoron, Nilom turned and all but ran, gesturing at Tarrn to go away. The deputy didn't even hesitate, but followed silently, her mouth set and her expression determined.

It took several minutes for the rage to drain out of him. Taking deep, slow breaths, he finally felt he could contact other beings without feeling the desire to smash them.

Only then did Kaoron realize Vedek Nane had returned, and was watching him intently. He hadn't even heard the man's steps.

"Is Jord all right?" he asked.

Nane breathed a sigh. "He will be."

"Good. Where has he gone?"

"I sent him to pack our things. We will be leaving tomorrow, and I do not think he will be sleeping well tonight."

A moment of silence.

"I am sorry for my loss of control," Kaoron said. "It was inappropriate."

Slowly, the aged vedek smiled. "Very few people have stood up for Taban before, for no reason of their own. This may be one of the finest things anyone has done for him."

Nane reached for his ear, still smiling as he gripped the Vulcan's earlobe, then let his fingertips trace up to the pointed tip. After a moment of he said, "Your *pagh* is one of courage and honor. It has not always been an easy path for you, nor will your future road be so. But whatever path you take, you will make it the right one."

With a nod, the old man released him and went on his way.

Kaoron could only stare after him.

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"You look tired, Ezri." Kira fell into step with the younger woman.

"So do you," the other woman returned wearily.

Kira looked around. "Not waiting for Julian tonight?" she asked lightly.

Dax shook her head, ignoring the teasing. "No, he had something to do back in the infirmary. And since it was with Dr. Monrow, I didn't think I'd be welcome sticking around."

"I don't understand how come you two don't get along," she noted.

"How come you and Endar don't get along?" the Trill countered without thinking.

"Monrow didn't try to blow up my station or kidnap my bartender and almost start an interplanetary war," was Kira's dry response.

"Okay, okay. I don't know why we don't get along either," she admitted. "Hopefully we'll work it out. But not tonight."

They strolled companionably through the habitat ring.

"What did you think of the reception?" the colonel asked after a few moments.

"It was ... good," Dax replied. "Endar did a great job planning it."

"Yes, it looks like he did." Kira seemed to admit it with reluctance. Then she shifted topics. "I noticed Vedek Nane and his student, Jord, stayed very close."

Dax looked down at the deck, concentrating on her footsteps. "I saw that too."

"I suppose you weren't able to talk to him."

"Jord? No."

Kira sighed. "I thought he could use a little counseling, after what he's learned the last few days."

"Sorry, Nerys, but he really didn't seem interested in talking with me." She pasted a smile on her face; she still looked tired. "But I think he was more receptive to Kaoron, and maybe now he'll talk to his vedek."

"Kaoron? Oh. Well, I'm sure Vedek Nane will talk to him, anyway."

Dax decided not to follow that line any further. After a few seconds, she asked instead, "Have you heard anything more from Bajor about the embassy?"

"No, not yet. I tried to contact Shakaar, but he hasn't been available, and neither has Minister Jolorn."

"Think they're dodging you?"

Kira smiled wanly. "Maybe. But I'm sure they're just as busy as I am, and we probably aren't a priority right now."

"Don't they realize that when Kira Nerys calls, there is no greater priority?" Dax teased with mock indignation.

Now Kira groaned. "I don't even want to think about that tonight. Right now my bed is calling and I just want to get some sleep. Here's your door. Good night, Ezri."

"Good night, Nerys."

Feeling a little dispirited, Dax watched Kira walk away before entering her quarters. She half expected and hoped the Bajoran would change her mind and retrace her steps for a late night talk.

Getting ready for bed, alone, she found herself wondering why it bothered her so much that one young Bajoran wouldn't talk to her, and then accepted it was more than just Jord. It was as though some critical inner voice was holding up every challenging patient or potential patient as evidence she couldn't do her job. Padding barefoot across the floor, she wished Julian were there tonight. She could have used somebody to talk to herself.

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After the reception, instead of retiring, they had gone to the infirmary to review the test results; now the two doctors hovered over the computer, waiting.

"What do you think?" Monrow asked.

"I have a pretty good idea," Bashir replied intently, absolutely focused on the data. "Computer, run a full genetic marker comparison with that of the last Cardassian prefect of this station, Gul Dukat."

"Dukat!" Monrow looked excited.

It took less than a minute before the computer replied crisply, *"Affirmative. The paternal DNA corresponds with that of the Cardassian, Skrain Dukat."*

"Dukat... Do we you think we can identify the mother?" Monrow peered more intently at the console, as if it would reveal a name.

*"Insufficient data at this time."*

Bashir leaned back. "We may not know who the Bajoran mother of the person was, or is, but the Cardassian father ... was Dukat. Our records on Dukat are exceptionally detailed. He was prefect here for so long, and we have more information from when he was a prisoner, along with medical data on his daughter, Ziyal, to compare with. I can check with the Bajoran medical databases, but it's entirely possible the mother of this person is long dead, or may have lived in some refugee camp or colony world, and there may be nothing in the databanks for us to find." He glanced at Monrow, his expression thoughtful. "But I'll check. It could tell us more about that ship and its occupants."

Monrow nodded. "I know Kaoron would appreciate that."

She glanced back at Bashir as she walked out. He was still frowning at the screen. She shook her head. It might be difficult, it might even be impossible, but that obviously didn't mean Bashir wasn't going to try to search for more answers.

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Kaoron wandered aimlessly through the station. He was still focused on calming the thrill of rage in his blood. As a Vulcan, he decided, it had been a primitive urge to protect that had resulted in his response to the Cardassian's treatment of Nane's student. As a Romulan, there had been a certain aggressive and even eager elation in intervening. With the logic of cooling distance, he contemplated the vedek's assurances that whatever path he chose would be the right one for him.

"Lieutenant."

"Ranjen," he acknowledged.

"I am surprised to encounter you here, at this hour."

Kaoron realized he stood in front of the Bajoran shrine on the empty Promenade. The ranjen was probably on his way to prepare for the early morning services.

"I did not realize the time."

Shayl's gaze was sharp. "You have much on your mind."

"I have," he admitted.

"Come into the shrine," the ranjen invited. "It will be quiet there, and a good time and place to talk."

Kaoron followed the Bajoran into the shrine. It was quiet, peaceful, empty. A single duranja lamp glowed before the mandala of the Prophets; someone was in mourning.

Shayl began lighting candles and opening a number of incense braziers between the candles..

"Vedek Nane informed me of the ... incident during the evening," he said. "Your support was much appreciated. There is still so much bitterness between Bajor and Cardassia. The child who should be evidence our peoples can be reconciled is instead treated as a mark of shame."

The remark was too close to his own situation. Kaoron simply nodded.

"I also observed the words between Admiral T'Lara and Syrylnor, and then between you and the admiral," Shayl continued. "The bitterness between them will not heal either, I think. If I may ask, what is its source?"

Kaoron found he wasn't really surprised. "It appears far too many people were observing that moment," he noted. "At one time, the admiral and Syrylnor were ... to be married. It did not happen. I doubt either of them would be pleased to know their very private matter is become a matter of public discussion. "

"I am sure not," the ranjen agreed gravely, then hesitated before adding, "Is your relationship to the admiral a similarly private matter?"

"I was aware that had become known," he admitted, sighing. "It was not logical to expect my relationship to remain unknown, though it was not intended to be a secret."

"It is of little concern to most," Shayl assured him. He removed a small, richly-embellished tin from a concealed cabinet in a side niche, and began refilling the braziers, scooping small mounds of dark brown y'tana incense into them. "How did your parents come to be married, then? Since your father was ... not Vulcan? Was he the reason your mother and Syrylnor did not marry?"

"No. That relationship had already ended. My mother was a Starfleet officer, overseeing security for the engineering conference during which my father requested asylum. They spent time together during the political battle between governments as to whether the Federation would support his defection. Naturally, the Empire wished him returned."

"Naturally."

"But ultimately, he was permitted to stay. At some point, my parents decided to marry. In time, I was born. And as I have noted, four years after my birth, he succumbed to illness."

"Your mother has not remarried."

"No."

Kaoron saw an odd smile cross the Bajoran's face. "It is not unknown for a parent to focus their attention on their offspring, when they feel something wanting in their own lives."

"So I have heard," he acknowledged.

"The relationship with one's parent is precious. It is worth preserving. But not at any or all costs."

"So I have also heard."

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## [Chapter 8](#)