

"TANGLED WEB PART ONE"

PROLOGUE

Quantum viscosity. Most sentient minds don't realize that it exists. To those people who can grasp the idea of multiple realities, they simply think that the dimensions exist next to each other, never brushing or coming into contact unless someone deliberately tries to cross from one to the other. That simply isn't the case. As alternate time lines and sometimes, alternate forms of reality, flow past each other, there is friction. One dimension temporarily sticks to another, and as they pull apart, all sorts of cosmic phenomena occur. At times, black holes tunnel from one to the other. Other times, great amounts of matter could be discharged into an unsuspecting dimension. When that happens, the inhabitants of the recipient dimension can be in for a great shock. Once, a warrior species was surprised when a race that they had eradicated three centuries ago suddenly popped back into existence from an alternate time line. Needless to say, they were quite happy to pummel their former victims back into oblivion.

Perhaps the most perplexing phenomenon happens when two dimensions not only rub up against each other, they temporarily merge. The laws of physics for both coalesce into a weird intermingling that doesn't resemble either. What was up in one universe and down in the other suddenly becomes sideways in the combined dimension. Usually the two universes manage to pull themselves apart with little difficulty and the inhabitants of each forget it ever happened. All they have left is the dim recollection of strange circumstances. Other times, the dimensions become so mired with each other that no poking, prodding, or coaxing can separate the two.

This is a story of one of those combinations. The two universes in question had existed side-by-side for all eternity. While it was true that one sprung into existence shortly before the other, both were equally dynamic and unique. At times, it seemed as if the two were in some sort of struggle for primacy, but they usually were able to exist side-by-side, neither truly aware of the other.

Unfortunately, events in both dimensions were conspiring against that peaceful co-existence. Due to a coincidental accident in both, the two universes intertwined in a thoroughly unexpected way. Planets that had nothing to do with one another merged to form one. Governments that would never seem compatible consolidated. Histories intermingled. None of the inhabitants were the wiser. Only time would tell if this combination would actually survive...or if it would result in complete annihilation.

CHAPTER ONE

The Founder strode into the lab, her quiet authority spreading throughout the room. Unfortunately, that natural fear she instilled in Dominion subjects was lost on the Cardassian scientists, but they knew enough to acknowledge her presence with strained reverence. Thankfully, the Vorta supervisors more than made up for the Cardassians' lack of deference. One of them, a sniveling toady named Borchan, approached her cautiously, head bowed low and arms outstretched, the perfect picture of obedience. It almost caused her to grin. But that would be an admission that the solids amused her. It would appear as though she and this inferior solid had something in common, and she wasn't about to allow that.

"Founder, you honor us with your presence," Borchan said, his voice dripping with obsequiousness.

"Spare me, Borchan," the Founder snapped. "I have come to check on your progress."

"Certainly," Borchan said, never once looking up at the being he considered a god. "We have made considerable progress in the device itself. Dr. Karidom believes we will be able to test it later today."

"Show me," the Founder ordered.

Borchan, incredibly enough, bowed even lower. The Founder was surprised. She was unaware that the Vorta had been created with that much flexibility. At any rate, the Vorta indicated an elderly Cardassian in the midst of the organized chaos of the lab. The Founder brushed past Borchan and walked over to him.

"Doctor, Borchan tells me that you are ready to test the device. Is that wise?" she demanded.

Karidom glared at her with the arrogance that only a Cardassian would dare reveal to a Founder. She supposed it wasn't his fault. He was a solid, one who hadn't been exposed to the perfection of the Founders for very long. The fact that she was trapped within Cardassian space was particularly annoying. She had a special hatred within her heart for Captain Benjamin Sisko. Not only did that accursed solid drive the Dominion from Deep Space Nine, she suspected that he was responsible for corrupting Odo. If only she had had more time with that wayward child. She could have restored him to his rightful place in the Great Link, and the Dominion would be that much stronger.

"Yes, I believe it is," Karidom said, a hint of a snarl in his voice. It was obvious that he disliked her, but the Founder chose to ignore that. "We have been working with miniature versions of the device for months now. I feel that it is time to see if it works in real life."

"For your sake, I hope it does, Doctor," the Founder said harshly. "I would hate to turn you over to the Jem'Hadar."

That seemed to deflate Karidom's arrogance a little. Unfortunately for him, the Founder was being absolutely serious. She considered this project of the utmost importance. Ever since the accursed Federation retook Deep Space Nine and regained control of the Bajoran wormhole, the Dominion had been effectively severed in two. There was the Gamma Quadrant and the Alpha Quadrant with no bridge between them. While it was true that her compatriots in the Gamma Quadrant were working feverishly to replace the fleet that had mysteriously disappeared in the wormhole, it would do them little good. With the Federation in control of Deep Space Nine again and with the Ninth Fleet stationed there, it was unlikely that they would be able to get any new troops into the Alpha Quadrant any time soon. That meant that the Dominion either had to develop their own resources in Cardassian space or they had to find another way to travel to the Gamma Quadrant. They were already experimenting with new Jem'Hadar (although the first batch had failed their first mission miserably), but just to be safe, they were also trying to develop the technology to open wormholes into the Gamma Quadrant. Karidom's brilliant research had helped the creation of the technology that now dominated the lab. With it, they would be able to open a wormhole any time they wanted, letting any number of reinforcements into the Alpha Quadrant. It was particularly annoying that a Cardassian had come up with the technique that would help the Dominion win the war with the Federation, but if that was what it took.....

"When will you be ready, Doctor?" the Founder asked.

"Five hours, maybe six," Karidom answered, looking over some of the readings. "By then, the transmitters will be aligned properly and we will be fully powered. By focusing a beam of anti-tetryons through that small pocket of subspace I've charted, we'll be able open a small wormhole to the outpost at Elhartan Prime in the Gamma Quadrant and send a probe through."

"Excellent," the Founder breathed. She allowed the faintest trace of a grin to grace her lips. If the test was successful, they estimated that they would be able to send the first fleet from the

Gamma Quadrant through a stable, Dominion controlled wormhole within two weeks. And then, it was only a matter of time before the whole of the Alpha Quadrant was theirs.....

"Captain Pellaeon!" the stormtrooper said, snapping to attention. "We weren't expecting you, sir!"

"Of course not," Captain Pellaeon snorted. "It's a surprise inspection."

"Of course, sir," the stormtrooper said, carefully staring straight forward.

"Carry on," Pellaeon sighed, stepping past the sentry into the lab.

It was truly disgusting. Over the years since the Emperor died at the Battle of Endor, military discipline in the remnants of the Empire was growing more and more lax. At least Grand Admiral Thrawn had restored some of the discipline, but Thrawn had died almost two years ago, assassinated at the hands of the treacherous Noghri. Pellaeon allowed himself to reminisce for a few seconds, remembering what it was like back in the heyday of the Empire. He could remember when a whole system would cringe when they heard that a single Star Destroyer was arriving, when the mere mention of a TIE Fighter squadron would cause planets to cringe in terror. Now the Empire was just a punchline, something to joke about. Well, if the scientists in this lab succeeded, not only would the Empire be strong again, it would completely crush the New Republic.

"Dr. Reja!" Pellaeon shouted over the hushed din of scientists conducting their own tests.

Reja, a tall Corellian, looked up from his sensors. He was an oddity, that was sure. He was old enough to remember the Old Republic. He could tell stories of Bail Organa and the Jedi Knights if you asked him. He also spoke fondly of the Empire, how Palpatine knew what he was doing and how he brought order to the galaxy. There were even rumors that Reja was beginning to speak highly of the New Republic behind closed doors. Reja was nothing more than an opportunist, willing to live under anyone who paid his bills. Currently, that meant that he was working for Pellaeon, and hence, he loved the Empire as fully as any mercenary could.

"What is it, Commander?" the old man asked irritably. "I'm very busy."

"I came to inspect your work and to get an update on your progress," Pellaeon growled, trying to remind the scientist who was in charge.

Reja stared at Pellaeon vehemently for several seconds before turning back to the sensors.

"I am almost finished. In approximately six hours, the generators will be fully charged and ready fire the beam of anti-tachyons into that piece of inter-dimensional flotsam we've discovered."

Pellaeon smiled. If this test was successful, the Empire's lost glory could be restored. By bouncing that anti-tachyon beam off of the "flotsam," as Reja called it, they would be able to open a temporal gateway into the past. According to Reja, they could then pull what he called a "quantum clone" through the portal. The clone would be an exact replica of any historical figure they wanted, leaving the original in the past to leave history intact. Pellaeon didn't even pretend to understand the theories behind it. He even suspected that it wouldn't work. But the possibilities forced him to endure Reja's idiosyncratic theories and even his horrendous personal habits. Imagine it. With Reja's portal, Pellaeon would be able to create a quantum clone of a young Emperor Palpatine, or Darth Vader, or Grand Admiral Thrawn, or Grand Moff Tarkin. Within a week, Pellaeon would be able to bring back all of the leaders who made the Empire great. With them back in power, the Empire would finally retake Coruscant and then, the rest of the Galaxy.

Pellaeon nodded to Reja, saying, "Very well, Dr. Reja. I'll be waiting."

The Founder watched as Karidom made the final checks, making sure that the targeting sensors were aligned properly, that the power cells were fully charged. She could already imagine what it

would be like to cross through one of his wormholes, rejoining her people in the Great Link. Karidom dashed from console to console, overseeing everyone's preparations.

"How long will this wormhole last?" the Founder asked. She already knew the answer, but if she could make Karidom even more frantic, she would.

Karidom stopped in his tracks and glared at her for a few seconds before continuing.

"I've told you before," Karidom growled. "Ten minutes, maybe fifteen. Now, if you'll excuse me, we're only thirty seconds away from my greatest triumph."

"The Dominion's greatest triumph," Borchan corrected angrily from the Founder's side.

Karidom rolled his eyes and nodded, glancing at yet another console. "Of course. The Dominion's victory. How stupid of me to forget."

Borchan and the Founder exchanged a glance. They shared the same thought. Once Karidom's experiment was successful, they would eliminate him.

"Fifteen seconds!" Karidom cried.

"Ten ... nine ... eight ..."

Pellaeon tensed as the computer's voice continued the countdown. Within a matter of mere seconds, Reja's portal would open before him. If all went well, within another five seconds, a quantum clone of Emperor Palpatine himself would step through. It was a magnificent, heady feeling. The Empire's destiny was finally going to be fulfilled.

"...three..."

"...two..."

The Founder felt herself tense.

"...one..."

Pellaeon sucked in an eager breath.

In one dimension, a beam of anti-tetryons lanced out, stabbing deep within a "pocket of subspace," as the inhabitants of that dimension called it. At the exact same time, a ray of anti-tachyons pierced the "inter-dimensional flotsam." Unbeknownst to the inhabitants of either dimension, they were both trying to utilize the same, small dimension lodged between their respective realities. And as luck would have it, the two beams of energy not only passed near each other, their paths crossed. As they crossed, they intertwined. Anti-tetryons mixed with anti-tachyons. The interaction of the two different particles was like nothing anyone could have predicted.

With an explosion that lit up the tiny dimension, the two beams of energy ricocheted off of each other, pushing against the temporal walls that defined that empty reality. The small dimension began to expand exponentially, but rather than push against the walls of the surrounding realities, it began to merge with them.

Small explosions resounded around the lab. Pellaeon looked around desperately as stormtroopers raced in with fire suppression canisters, spraying foam over the flaming consoles. Reja was desperately racing from station to station, trying to fathom what was happening.

"What is going on, Doctor?" Pellaeon demanded.

Reja looked up, confusion flashing in his eyes. "I have no idea! Our anti-tachyon beam is interacting with ..." He looked down at one of the sensor consoles and blinked in surprise. "... anti-tetryons! It's causing the flotsam to grow and absorb our dimension!"

"What?" the Founder demanded.

Karidom had to shout to be heard over the warning alarms and shouts of confusion from the Cardassian lab technicians. "Just what I said! The pocket of subspace is absorbing our dimension and merging with it!"

"Can you shut it down?" Borchan demanded.

Karidom shook his head, slamming a fist down on one of the consoles in frustration. "No! The reaction is sustaining itself! There's nothing that I can do!"

By now, the "tiny dimension" was tiny in name only. It had managed to absorb most of its neighbors and would consume the remaining parts within seconds. Unfortunately, it couldn't contain the two dimensions it had engulfed with any amount of stability, so the two disparate realities were forced to merge. They began to blend together, sending out ripples throughout all other forms of reality.

An entity in a dimensional safe haven looked up as the ripples passed through him. The dizzying sensation of two realities merging into one almost caused him to drop his infant son. He handed the child to his wife, who griped that she had already spent the past few millennia watching the kid and it was his turn now.

The entity took a few tentative steps forward, sniffing at the "wind." Not that it was really wind. It was more like a current of all quantum realities that flowed through that dimensional safe haven. He could "smell" the merger, and it frightened him. His kind was wise in the ways of interdimensional physics. Some of them even joked that they were the guardians against chaos. Whatever they were, soon all of the entities in the safe haven were sniffing the air, perplexed as to what had just happened.

The first entity knew. He understood what had happened and what it truly meant. It filled his very being with dread.

"Oh no," Q whispered to himself.

A disturbance in the Force caused Luke Skywalker, Jedi Master, to rise from his sleep. It was like nothing he had ever felt before. It was a heady, almost intoxicating feeling ... and then it was gone.

He frowned, rubbing his temples wearily. He sometimes regretted the path he had taken. When he had been a simple farm boy on Tatooine, things like this would have been unknown to him. He would have lived out his life in blissful ignorance. But then, this was his destiny. Being a Jedi was what he was meant to do.

"Master?" a voice asked. "Are you all right?"

Luke smiled and turned to his student. He stopped short, momentarily unsure of who he was facing. He was a young man, maybe twenty-three, with brown hair and brown eyes and incredibly youthful features. He stared at him for a few seconds before the young man's name finally came to mind.

"Yes, Wesley. I'm just fine," Luke said, patting the young man on the shoulder.

Wesley Crusher smiled back at his master. Luke nodded and ushered him out of the room, shaking his head. How could he have forgotten Wesley? He was the son of Dr. Beverly Crusher, the chief medical officer on the *Enterprise*. Luke smiled fondly, remembering when he worked with the crew of the *Enterprise*. They had faced down the Death Star together shortly after the disastrous battle at Wolfe 359. The New United Republic of Planets had lost a lot of ships there ... a lot of good people. Wesley had been there for that battle. He had personally manned the helm of the *Enterprise* as they faced the Dominion's newest threat and he had performed admirably. Several years after the destruction of the Death Star, a rogue Jedi named the Traveler had sensed Wesley's innate Force ability and brought him to Luke for training.

Luke stepped out of the training facility and into the bitter cold morning. Ceti Alpha VI was an oddity. Centuries ago, the Dark Lord of the Sith, Exar Kahn, had one momentous battle with perhaps one of the greatest Jedi Masters of all time. It had taken every ounce of strength that Jedi Master Kirk had, but the evil of Kahn was destroyed. It seemed appropriate to Luke to have a Jedi Academy on the barren desert planet. It reminded him of his home.

He frowned. For some odd reason, he had a nagging feeling that there was something wrong. He stretched out with the Force, feeling the threads of reality pass by him. No, everything seemed to be the way it always was. He finally shrugged and turned inside. His students were waiting for him.

"Streen, Kes!" he shouted. "Wesley, Mara. Let's begin our training again."

CHAPTER TWO

Jadzia Dax sighed in disgust. She hated sewers. If she would have known that half of this job consisted of slopping through sewers, she would have never agreed to it. She really couldn't complain. She knew that the job of bounty hunter wasn't glamorous when she agreed to become one. Still, it would be nice if her partners agreed to a weekend vacation on Risa or even Nar Shadda, but she knew that would never happen.

She pulled open the tricorder and scanned her surroundings again. Almost there. She continued to slosh through the sewage when she heard it. A low, rumbling growl echoed up and down the corridor. Dax froze immediately. Everyone had heard of dianogas, the almost mythical creatures that inhabited just about every sewer system in the galaxy. Unfortunately, that myth was based on reality. Most people who saw the creatures didn't live to tell about it. Dax unslung her phaser rifle and switched on the mounted light. She shone it up and down the tunnel carefully, trying not to make any noise. For a few seconds, the only sound she could hear was the quiet swirl and swish of the murky water.

That almost peaceful silence erupted into chaos. Thick, leathery tentacles lashed out of the water, wrapping around her arms and legs. Dax fired blindly, a crimson energy bolt burning along one wall. She struggled, trying desperately to free herself from the vice-like grip. It was no use. The dianoga was dragging her deeper and deeper into the water. Part of the creature reared up out of the water, revealing its mouth filled with jagged teeth. Its one eye swiveled around on its stalk and examined this tasty little morsel that was foolish enough to enter its lair. Dax opened her mouth to scream, but a tentacle snaked up and wrapped itself around her throat, cutting off her voice. Dark spots were beginning to swim through her vision....

Suddenly, a flash of silver streaked through the tunnel and the dianoga's eye fell from its stalk, blood spurting from the severed appendage. Dax could feel the tentacles go slack and she was able to pull herself free. The dianoga thrashed in the water, bellowing in pain. There was another rapid

swishing, and the dianoga fell into two pieces. Jadzia pulled herself away from the dying creature. It thrashed violently, trying desperately to latch on to whomever had injured it. Finally, with one last pathetic gurgle, it died. Dax took a few deep breaths to calm herself before looking up at her savior.

"Took you long enough," Dax grumbled.

Worf gave her a sardonic look as he wiped the blood and gore from his batleth. Dax knew that that was as close as he was going to come to a smile. The Klingon Warrior had to crouch, the smell in the sewer probably nauseated him even more than Dax, but she could tell he was loving every second of it. He lived for this sort of adventure. Even though it wasn't his idea to become a bounty hunter, she knew he loved this life.

"I'm sorry," Worf rumbled quietly. "Bossk positioned more troops at the south grate than I had anticipated."

"I'm not complaining," Dax admitted, poking at the dead dianoga with her phaser rifle. "You ready?"

Worf nodded. The two bounty hunters crept through the slime a few more meters before they came across a locked grate in the ceiling. Worf motioned for Jadzia to cover him. Dax immediately pressed up against one of the walls, keeping her phaser rifle locked on the grate. Worf pulled a small lock picking mechanism and attached it to the grate. After a few seconds of whirring and clicking, the mechanism beeped softly and the lattice fell open. Thankfully, no one was standing in the level above to hear them. Without saying a word, Dax carefully crept over to Worf, who boosted her through the opening.

Dax backed away from the hole, scanning the darkened room. As planned, she and Worf were entering the complex through a basement storage room. According to the information they had obtained from traders who supplied Bossk regularly, this was about the only way they would be able to get into the well-secured compound. The Trandoshan would never see them coming.

Still keeping one eye on her surroundings, Dax leaned forward and tapped the opening with the butt of her rifle, signaling Worf to join her. As she pulled back, though, she tensed. The rhythmic sound of footsteps echoed down the corridor, coming towards her hiding place. She whirled in time to see an armored Klingon step through the door. For a split second that felt like an agonizing eternity, the startled Dax and surprised Klingon stared at each other, neither quite sure of what to say or do. Finally, though, the Klingon cursed and started to draw his disruptor. Dax was faster. A crimson phaser bolt smashed into the Klingon's chest, knocking the warrior a few meters backwards. Worf was immediately by her side, his own phaser drawn and ready. For a few minutes, Worf and Dax stared at the dead Klingon, neither one speaking. They didn't have to. According to their intelligence, Bossk didn't have any Klingons working for him. That could mean only one thing.

"Duras," Worf growled.

Dax sucked in a deep breath. She knew how much Worf hated Duras. When Worf was just a young boy, Duras' father had betrayed his people to Senator Palpatine's minions, the Romulans. Duras' father had provided the security codes to the Khitomer Colony, allowing three Star Destroyers through to level the colony. Worf was the only survivor of the massacre. Then, years later, Duras framed Worf's father for the betrayal. Worf was disgraced, forced to leave the Klingon Empire entirely. Supposedly, that was why Worf was a bounty hunter. Dax knew better, though, but that was another matter entirely. Worf had discovered the deception years ago and sworn to kill Duras the first chance he got. He and Dax had known that Duras had illegal dealings with Bossk, but they had never expected to find him here.

"Things could get interesting," Dax observed. "With Duras' men, that means that the defenses are at least doubled."

Worf nodded grimly. He pulled out his batleth and held it out reverently.

"It is a good day to die," he said, sprinting into the corridor.

Dax groaned to herself. It would be useless trying to reason with Worf. This vendetta was more important to him than his life. She also knew it was useless to try and reason with their partner. Both of them were stubborn and determined to finish this mission. Taking a moment to steel herself, she ducked into the corridor.

Worf had apparently started the party without her. Several dead guards were strewn around the corridor, brutally slashed and hacked. Three of them were Grans, clearly Bossk's men, but two of them were Klingons. She suspected that Worf had savored those battles. It was rare for him to face Klingon Warriors. Dax finally caught up with him, in combat with another Klingon. Their batleths were locked and both were growling at each other. Dax knew better than to interrupt Worf. She cautiously scanned the corridor. After all, while the Klingons would respect two warriors engaged in mortal combat, Bossk's men wouldn't. Sure enough, a Gran rounded the corner, arming a thermal detonator. Dax quickly fired, sending the three-eyed mercenary into the wall, a brutal scorch mark in the middle of his chest. Thankfully, Worf dispatched his opponent quickly and turned back to her.

"Bossk's chamber is another thirty meters that way...." Dax said, pointing, but it was no use. Worf was already on his way. Dax sighed and sprinted after her partner, trying to keep up.

Surprisingly, they met very little resistance. Jazdia suspected that Bossk had most of his sentries out patrolling the perimeter, probably engaged in combat of their own with Worf and Dax's partner. The few people Dax and Worf came across were easy enough to kill. Apparently no one had managed to raise the alarm yet. That was good. They might still be able to take the Trandoshan by surprise. Eventually, they came across the massive tritanium doors. Dax knelt down, scanning it with the tricorder.

"I'm picking up one Trandoshan life form ... and a Klingon. No guards," Dax commented, surprised.

Worf grunted with pleasure. "Excellent."

Dax grimaced to herself. Her seven lifetimes had taught her that things were never that easy. Bossk and Duras had to have some sort of back-up plan. They wouldn't be this stupid. Whatever the case, though, they had to get in there. Their partner would be arriving via his own means shortly, and they had to hold up their end of the plan. She quickly attached a sequence charge to the door and motioned for Worf to stand back. The charge detonated, sending fiery debris throughout the corridor. Worf charged forward, diving through the smoking ruins. Dax almost shouted his name to stop him, but she quickly followed suit.

Sure enough, the only people in the room were Bossk, the reptilian bounty hunter, and Duras. Both leapt out of their chairs, staring at the two bounty hunters in surprise.

"What is this?" Bossk demanded.

"Come on, Bossk," Dax said, leveling her phaser rifle on the Trandoshan. "You know what happens when Jabba places a price on your head. Ten bricks of latinum can be good motivation."

"And you know why I'm looking for you," Worf growled to Duras.

Duras snarled back at Worf but remained silent. Dax knew that the other Klingon was occupying Worf's attention, so she focused on Bossk. Thankfully, the lizard-like humanoid wasn't armed. She could see his concussion rifle laying a good two meters away, well out of reach. Now it was a waiting game.

Their partner had to arrive to tape the kill. Dax and Worf glared at their prey for what seemed like an eternity before Duras broke the tense silence.

"What's the matter, Worf? Has your lust for latinum tarnished your sense of honor?" he snarled. "What do you wait for? For your Trill prostitute to give you the okay?"

Worf snarled in reply, taking a step forward. Without thinking, Dax shot a nervous glance at her partner. That was all the distraction that Bossk needed. The bounty hunter dove for his weapon, snatching up the concussion rifle and firing at Dax. Dax bit off a curse as she dove for cover, the energized pocket of air slamming into the wall behind her. She fired back, clipping the Trandoshan in the shoulder and sending him to the floor. Duras immediately snatched up his batleth and charged Worf. The two Klingons collided, batleths coming together in vicious blows. Dax quickly dashed over to Bossk's prone form and kicked his concussion rifle away from him. That done, she turned and watched the fight.

They were too evenly matched to predict a winner. Every blow, every move that Worf tried, Duras was able to counter. It seemed like the only thing they could do was nick each other, drawing blood through tiny scratches that only made the two Klingons fight harder. Dax was no slouch when it came to hand-to-hand combat, especially Klingon fighting styles, but even she couldn't recognize half the moves the two warriors were using. Worf and Duras didn't speak throughout the fight. The only sound was their grunts of exertion and the clanging of batleth against batleth. Eventually, though, it looked as if Worf was tiring. His blows weren't as strong or well-directed. Duras, on the other hand, looked like he could go a few more rounds. He was slowly beating Worf back. A few of his swings even caused bigger gashes. Worf was trying to put up a defense, but it was no use. Soon, Worf tripped over his own feet and fell backwards, the batleth falling from his hands. Duras let out a low chuckle and prepared to finish him. Dax almost intervened, but she knew that Worf would never forgive her. It was a matter of honor.

Before Duras could make the killing blow, one of the duracrete walls suddenly exploded inward, knocking both Duras and Dax off of their feet. It took several minutes for the air to clear of the dust, but when it did, there was someone else standing in the room. Dax could hear him first. There was an audible hum as his jetpack shut itself off, followed by the slow sound of boots stepping through the hole. Next came the figure of bluish-gray Mandalorian armor. The figure already had his blaster focused on Duras.

"I suggest you drop it," Boba Fett said tonelessly.

Duras seemed to consider it for a second, glancing first at the blaster in Fett's hand, then at Worf. Deciding to take the chance, Duras screamed in rage and charged Fett, swinging his batleth in a deadly arc. Fett didn't even hesitate. Red beams sliced through Duras' chest, sending the Klingon to the ground. Dax was immediately at Worf's side, running her tricorder over him. Severe lacerations, a few broken ribs, but nothing....

Her eyes narrowed. According to these readings, there were trace amounts of sodium quadricate, a Klingon sedative, running throughout Worf's system. She stepped over to Duras' batleth and scanned it. Sure enough, the tips of the weapon were coated with the most potent sodium quadricate that could be found on the black market. One scratch from this weapon would be enough to stupefy any Klingon. No wonder Duras almost won.

"Where is he?" Worf groaned weakly.

"He's dead," Fett said simply, stalking over to Bossk's prone form.

The Trandoshan tried to pull himself away from the menacing figure in the armor. Fett's helmet swiveled downward. Dax knew that the microrecorder in the bounty hunter's helmet was recording everything that happened around him. That was what they were waiting for the whole time. Jabba

would want proof that they had conducted the hit. Thankfully, Jabba enjoyed the recordings, laughing hysterically as his enemies were killed.

"Took you long enough," Dax grumbled under her breath.

If Fett heard her, he chose to ignore it. Instead, he leveled his blaster on Bossk without saying a word. Bossk held up his hands in supplication, as if he could somehow ward off the unemotional bounty hunter.

"Please, Boba Fett!" Bossk hissed. "I'll pay you anything! Fifteen bricks of latinum! Twenty!"

Fett remained silent, switching the safety off of his blaster.

"Thirty! One hundred bricks!" Bossk pleaded.

Fett's head swiveled to face Dax and Worf. Dax shrugged.

"Your call," she said, knowing full well that Fett would never agree.

Fett's helmet turned back to Bossk. He was silent for several seconds, making Dax wonder if she were wrong. Had Bossk found a way to save his own life?

"Jabba sends his regards," Fett finally whispered.

His blaster barked once, burning a hole between the Trandoshan's small, red eyes. Fett turned back to Dax and Worf.

"Can he walk?" he asked, holstering his blaster.

Dax nodded and helped Worf to his feet.

"Excellent," Fett replied.

Without warning, there was a flash of blue light, and a hologram of Bossk materialized in the center of the room. The appearance was so sudden that it caused Fett to whirl and draw his weapon.

"Fett, if you're seeing this, I'm dead. You mammalian fool," Bossk snarled. "You never thought to check me for a deadman's switch?"

Dax felt her blood run cold. Deadman's switches were a favorite trick of paranoid individuals who wanted to protect themselves. Small nanoprobes were implanted in the person, set to monitor the individual's vital signs. If they suddenly stopped, the switches could trigger any sort of trap to kill the victim's killers.

"I hope you think about your mistakes for the rest of your life. That should be for another ten seconds...." Bossk said, the hologram fading from view.

Dax was immediately diving for the gaping hole in the wall, dragging Worf behind her. Whatever Bossk had planned for them, she didn't want to stick around to experience it. She probably wouldn't make it, but she would be damned if she didn't try. Suddenly, though, she felt a strong arm wrap itself around her waist and her feet lifted off the floor. She looked to one side and saw Fett holding her, his rocket pack propelling them through the gaping hole. Within seconds, they were at least a hundred meters away from the compound, speeding away rapidly. Dax glanced over her shoulder in time to see the compound erupt into flames, the blast throwing duracrete high into the air. Dax let out a sigh of relief. The ten bricks of latinum was theirs.

CHAPTER THREE

Worf groaned and began to stir. Dax glanced over at him and smiled. The bacta had done its job, purging his system of the sedative and healing all of his injuries. He slowly rose from the bunk and looked around the cabin tentatively.

"We're back aboard the *Slave I*?" he asked, surprised.

Dax nodded and knelt down next to him. "Yes. You were asleep for the trip back. Fett and I had to carry you."

Worf glanced at his batleth, which was hanging from the wall in its usual place. The Klingon swung his legs over the side of the bunk and heaved himself into a standing position. He staggered slightly and Dax quickly reached out to steady him.

"What happened to Duras?" Worf asked, confused.

"He sedated you," Dax said, explaining about the sodium quadricate and what happened to Duras.

Worf's eyes narrowed and he stared at the closed door vehemently.

"That Ha'DibaH, Fett!" Worf spat. "He has no honor! He should not have interfered!"

"Duras was cheating," Dax pointed out. "He had no honor to begin with."

Worf grumbled to himself, sitting down. Dax smiled warmly and sat next to him, placing a tender arm around his massive shoulders.

"We got Bossk," she whispered. "And we survived. That's what counts."

Worf barely grinned, but that spoke volumes to Dax. She leaned over and kissed him tenderly. He didn't respond at first, but soon, he too was kissing her, gently at first, but then with more and more urgency. Dax resisted the urge to laugh. It reminded her of their first kiss in so many ways. They had been working together for a while, forced together by circumstances. At first, Dax had just found him annoying, but soon, she started to have feelings for him. Worf, if he knew about them, didn't seem to care. One time, when they were hunting a member of the Black Sun criminal organization, Worf hadn't checked a room entirely before motioning for Jadzia to enter. Because of his carelessness, Dax was almost killed by a booby trap. Once Dax had recovered from the initial shock, she started berating Worf for his carelessness. Worf didn't appreciate the comment, and soon they were arguing viciously. It had almost come to blows, but the next thing Dax knew, Worf had pinned her down and was kissing her with a passion she hadn't experienced in a long time. Unfortunately, Fett had walked in on them, ruining the moment, but after that, they both knew of their mutual attraction. It had grown into so much more since then.

Worf pulled Dax close, pinning her down on the bunk, an animalistic growl rumbling in his throat. Dax was about to respond with a growl of her own when she heard the door to their cabin swish open. She groaned and sat up, quickly straightening her hair.

"You could learn to knock," she said angrily.

Fett stared back at them silently, his face still hidden behind the helmet. It didn't surprise Dax that Boba Fett was still wearing the Mandalorian armor. He never took it off, not even to sleep. Not that she blamed him. The armor from the bygone Clone Eugenics Wars was intimidating, to say the least. Even though she had seen the bounty hunter wearing it for the past five years, the armor still made her uneasy when Fett looked at her.

"We have a new contract," Fett said simply, not apologizing for his rudeness. He stiffly walked over to a chair and sat down. Even seated, he was rigid. He looked more like a statue than a man.

"I thought Jabba was going to give us some time off," Worf complained.

"This contract isn't from Jabba," Fett said, his voice devoid of any emotion.

Dax stared at Fett in shock. Was Fett an idiot? Did he have a death wish? Jabba had retained their services for an indefinite period of time, and the Hutt was very jealous about his employees' services. Taking a contract from a different crime lord would be suicide. What was Fett thinking?

Fett seemed to read her mind, for he explained, "This contract is from the Dominion. Darth Vader himself requested our services."

The mention of the Dark Lord of the Sith's name caused Dax's stomach to churn with anxiety. This was even worse than she had anticipated. Thankfully, Worf covered for her apprehensiveness.

"Who is the target?" he asked, his tone carefully guarded.

"I do not know yet," Fett replied, rising from his chair. "We are to meet with a Dominion contact on Deep Space Nine. The contact will reveal the identity of the target then."

"Do we even know where the mission will take place?" Worf persisted.

"No," Fett replied.

With that, Fett left the room. Dax turned to Worf frantically, but Worf held up a hand, silencing her. Worf quietly crept to the door and listened against it. Finally, after he was sure that Boba Fett was away from the cabin, he turned back to her.

"We can't take a contract from Darth Vader!" Dax said, distraught. "It has to mean we're going to assassinate a United Republic official! We can't do that!"

"I know," Worf replied quietly. "But, Jadzia, we are supposed to be bounty hunters. Fett will become suspicious if we refuse."

Dax knew that he was right. Their identities had been changed so that they would be bounty hunters. Their hooking up with Boba Fett had been a stroke of luck. Normally, the infamous bounty hunter worked alone, but three years ago, Worf and Dax had convinced him to take them on as partners. Since then, no one was able to track them down. Boba Fett was so paranoid, he rarely stayed in one place for any length of time. That meant Worf and Dax were constantly on the move. It was perfect set up for people in their position. Now, though, it looked like their untouchable cover was going to work against them.

Worf read the distress in her eyes. He drew close to her and knelt down, staring deeply into her eyes. The Klingon tenderly wiped a tear away from her cheek.

"Jadzia, par'maHi, we shouldn't worry too much yet. Perhaps it's a joke. Perhaps it's merely an escort job. Besides, you know Fett. He always wants to be the one to perform the kill. He'll probably have us disable the security systems for wherever we go. While he tries to make the kill, we can warn the

United Republic about the contract. It won't be the first time that Boba Fett has failed."

Dax forced herself to smile. She knew Worf was right, of course. It was too early to panic. Still, the thought of working for the Dominion, for Emperor Palpatine's corrupt dictatorship, chilled her to the bone. It was an act that went against her very nature. Would she be able to do it? Would she be able to deny her past and lash out at the only hope the galaxy had? Only time would tell.

The trip to Deep Space Nine was tense. It took them several days at maximum warp, but that hardly mattered. During that time, Boba Fett, as usual, kept mostly to himself. He rarely left the bridge, which was fine as far as Dax and Worf were concerned. They busied themselves with studying schematics of Deep Space Nine and reviewing its personnel. The station commander was Captain Benjamin Sisko, who was also in charge of the Defiant. Since Deep Space Nine was positioned at the Maw Wormhole, the only entrance into the Dominion controlled Gamma Quadrant, Rogue Squadron had been assigned there. Everyone had heard of Rogue Squadron. After the United Republic's fleet had been destroyed at Wolfe 359, Rogue Squadron and the *Enterprise*, even though they were seriously outnumbered and outgunned, took on the Death Star by themselves and were successful in destroying it.

What worried Dax the most was the security measures in place at Deep Space Nine. The head of security was Odo, a Changeling. Everyone knew about the Changelings and feared them. They were the Emperor Palpatine's lieutenants, his own personal group of assassins, spies, and odd-jobs.

Only Darth Vader was higher than they in the Dominion. While it was true that Odo had long ago abandoned his people, the fact that he was a Changeling made Dax nervous. Otherwise than that, Deep Space Nine had the usual United Republic security systems. Whatever their mission was, Dax doubted that they would meet much resistance.

The first hint that they had come close to Deep Space Nine was the appearance of four X-Wings outside the *Slave I*. Through the tiny window in their quarters, Dax could see them taking up formation around the ship. She and Worf immediately made their way to the bridge. They both knew that Boba Fett usually wanted them to stay away from the bridge, but this was an exception.

Fett didn't even acknowledge them as they walked through the door. He merely switched on the exterior sensors, scanning the X-Wings. Standard compliment of proton torpedoes, usual sensor packets. Dax guessed that they were merely on patrol and the *Slave I* had attracted their attention.

The speakers on the *Slave I*'s radio crackled to life. "Attention, unknown vessel. This is Lieutenant Tom Paris of Rogue Squadron. Identify yourself."

Boba Fett reached out and toggled the radio. "This is the *Slave I*. We have business on Deep Space Nine."

Dax gave Fett a sardonic look. "Gee, that's nice and direct."

Fett's helmet swiveled towards her for a split second before facing forward again. A chill danced up and down Dax's spine. She hated it when Fett did that. Probably that was the reason he did.

There was a tense silence on the radio for a few seconds before Paris answered. "Uh, I see.... I'm assuming you're Boba Fett?"

"That is correct," Fett replied.

Another silence. Finally, Paris pointed out, "You know, the United Republic and you are not on the best of terms, especially after that stunt you pulled on Earth five years ago."

Dax and Worf exchanged worried looks. That was something that Fett had never told them about. Of course, Fett was never talkative.

"Do I have clearance to approach Deep Space Nine or not?" Fett insisted.

Once again, the comm channel went silent. Dax felt her back go tense. True, *Slave I* was armed to the teeth, but the four X-Wings out there were more maneuverable and there were eight more within a five minute flight. Add to that the Defiant..... It would take a miracle for them to survive a direct confrontation. If it were up to her, they would turn back and send Darth Vader their regrets. Unfortunately, Boba Fett would not back down. He would make his way to DS9 no matter what it took.

"Very well, *Slave I*," Paris' voice came over the channel. "You may proceed to docking port seven. If you wish, you may slave in to our docking control and it will pilot your ship."

"That is unnecessary, Lieutenant Paris," Fett returned, just a trace of anger in his voice. "I am perfectly able to pilot my ship."

What sounded like a wounded ego was actually an expression of Fett's paranoia. He never allowed anyone to tap into the *Slave I*'s computer for any reason. Fett hated giving up control in any situation. That included docking computers.

Within seconds, the distinctly Cardassian space station loomed in the *Slave I*'s viewport. The station had once belonged to the Dominion when they controlled Bajor, but after the destruction of the Death Star, the New United Republic of Planets had liberated both the station and Bajor, driving the Dominion back through the Maw Wormhole. That was seven years ago. Since then, the Dominion and United Republic had skirmished but never really clashed openly. Both were licking its wounds and both knew that one final confrontation was brewing. Until it came, life

proceeded as normally as possible for anyone with the sword of Damocles hanging over their heads.

Boba Fett masterfully sidled the ship up to the docking port. Dax listened as the clamps locked into place and an airtight seal was formed. Fett rose from his chair and faced his partners.

"Our meeting is set for 1700 hours tonight. We are to meet the contact in Quark's Bar. Until that time, I suggest that we stay on the ship so as not to arouse suspicion," Fett said.

With that, he left the bridge. Dax and Worf watched him go, knowing full well that his "suggestion" might as well have been an order. When they were once again sure that Fett was out of listening range, Dax turned to Worf, nervous.

"Why can't we leave the ship? Do you think he suspects who we really are?" Dax hissed.

Worf shrugged and replied, "If he did, he would have killed us, not confine us here. He is just being cautious."

"Paranoid is more like it," Dax grumbled.

Worf gave her the smallest of grins, patting her on the leg. "We will survive this, par'maHi. We have survived every other mission, we will survive this one too."

Dax looked around her, amazed. Deep Space Nine's Promenade was a sight to behold. Shops of every kind, selling all sorts of merchandise, lined the walkway. There was a Klingon restaurant, a droid salesman, even a few bounty hunter agencies. Dax had heard it rumored that there was a thriving black market on the station as well, dealing in technology, information, and even spice. If she had the time, she would have explored every inch of the Promenade, taking in all of the sights, but Fett wasn't about to allow that.

The crowds parted automatically as Fett moved through it. People were already whispering about how it was the "legendary Boba Fett." If the bounty hunter heard them, he didn't let on. Instead, his helmet swept back and forth, scanning the crowd for potential trouble. Worf and Dax trailed a few meters behind, trying to remain as inconspicuous as possible. That was the arrangement that they had made years ago. Fett went first, to attract all of the attention. Worf and Dax went behind him, hidden in the crowd. That way, people would underestimate the great Boba Fett and think he was alone when, in reality, he wasn't.

Finally, Worf and Dax swung into Quark's Bar. That was also part of the plan. They entered first and cleared the room. When they thought it was safe, Boba Fett entered. Dax looked around the room. A perpetual haze hung in the air. Dabo and sabacc tables littered the back wall, people huddled around them. Latinum was passing hands faster than Dax thought possible. In one corner of the bar, Figrin D'an and the Modal Nodes played a lively jizz tune, drowning out most of the hushed conversations. She frowned for a moment. Something about all of this was familiar in a strange way. She had never been to Quark's in any of her seven lifetimes, but she still felt as if she had frequented this bar before. She knew where every Dabo table was. For some odd reason, she knew that there were holosuites on the upper level. Even the Ferengi bartender, who she assumed was Quark, seemed familiar. It was as if she had seen the entire bar in a dream. Finally, she shook off the feeling. It was too ridiculous.

As Fett entered the bar, all motion ceased. Every head turned and everyone stared at the bounty hunter, some out of curiosity, some out of spite, but most out of fear. Fett scanned the bar carefully, his hand resting close to his blaster. It was a clear message: don't mess with me. Eventually, the Modal

Nodes started playing again and people went back to whatever business brought them to Quark's. Quark himself recovered from the initial shock and came around the bar, his arms open and inviting, an overly-friendly grin on his lips.

"Boba Fett!" Quark cried, crossing to the bounty hunter. "So good to see you! Welcome to my bar! "

Quark stuck out a hand. Fett didn't even look at the Ferengi, opting instead to slowly look at every patron in the bar. Quark's hand hovered in the air for a few seconds before he nervously withdrew it. The Ferengi motioned for a table towards the back of the room.

"Please, sit down! What will you have?" Quark asked. When there was no answer, Quark prompted eagerly. "The first drink is on the house!"

Fett nodded to Quark, who lingered a second, confused, and finally went behind the bar. Dax and Worf took up position several meters away from Fett, watching the crowd for trouble. Dax was especially curious to see who this Dominion contact was. After all, the United Republic had been in control of Deep Space Nine for seven years. It would be incredible for a Dominion agent to remain undetected for that long.

Then again, maybe not. Dax's jaw almost dropped open in shock when the Cardassian strode into the bar, his incredibly blue eyes scanning every corner of the bar carefully. Finally, his eyes fell on a Starfleet official, a doctor, by the looks of it. The Cardassian went over to the doctor and joined him. Dax glanced at Worf, who was watching the Cardassian with interest as well.

"According to our information, that should be Garrick, a tailor," Worf whispered. "He was left behind when the Dominion abandoned the station. As far as anyone knows, he isn't a Dominion spy."

"Or he's a good one," Dax returned. "But he isn't talking to Fett..."

Dax's voice caught in her throat when she felt a blaster carbine press itself up against her ribs. She sensed Worf tense next to him, and she suspected that whoever it was had a gun to his back as well.

"Listen to me very carefully," a voice hissed in her ear. "I know who you are, and I know why you're here. Go up to the holosuites and run the Battle of Hoth program. You'll receive the rest of your instructions then."

Just as suddenly as the gun had appeared, it vanished. Dax whirled around, but the contact was gone as well. Dax glanced at Worf, who nodded. She motioned for Quark to come over.

The Ferengi approached the couple trepidatiously, as if he expected them to attack him. When he realized that he was safe, he opened up slightly.

"Can I help you?" he asked tentatively.

"We want to rent a holosuite," Dax explained.

Quark looked between Worf and Dax for a second, an unsure expression on his face. That eventually melted away to a knowing leer. He chuckled craftily.

"I see," he chortled. "Well, never fear. I have a full range of programs available for young lovers, such as Risian Moonrise or Endor Sunset. Or, if you're really adventurous, I can offer you Jedi Mistress..."

The look on Worf's face made it clear they weren't looking for one of "those kinds" of programs. Quark looked to Dax, confused.

"We want to reenact the Battle of Hoth," Dax explained, smiling.

That didn't help Quark understand at all. He merely motioned for them to go upstairs. He watched them climb the spiral staircase and finally shook his head.

"Klingons," he muttered under his breath. "Only they would find freezing to death, surrounded by Dominion AT-ATs romantic."

Worf watched as Dax ran a tricorder over the walls of the holosuite. She finally paused and looked over the readings. Just as she suspected, there were no obvious listening devices. That meant the only way the United Republic could be listening in would be if Odo was hiding somewhere in the room. If that were the case, Dax knew that they would never find him. She glanced at Worf and nodded.

"Let's go," she said.

Worf nodded and called out, "Computer, run the Battle of Hoth program."

The computer chattered to itself for a few seconds. Then, a young woman appeared before them. "Greetings," the woman said. She then looked at both Worf and Dax and frowned. "I am only programmed to speak if Boba Fett himself is present."

Dax sighed and pulled out her communicator.

"Boba Fett, come up to holosuite three. We need you to receive the final information," she whispered.

"On my way," was the terse reply.

Within minutes, Fett strode into the holosuite. The hologram of the woman smiled.

"Good. This is direct from Darth Vader himself. Tomorrow, there will be a secret conference between United Republic officials and the Romulans," the woman said.

Dax's eyebrows arched in surprise. The Romulans? That was incredible. For the past several years, the Romulans had stayed out of the conflict between the United Republic and the Dominion. They had been allies with the Dominion for decades, but shortly after the destruction of the Death Star, they broke off the treaty. For them to be entering a discussion with the United Republic was amazing. It was close to miraculous. No wonder Vader was resorting to bounty hunters.

The woman continued. "Your mission is to infiltrate the talks. Your target package is two individuals."

She made a small gesture with her hand and a stout Romulan appeared. "This is Senator Pardek. He is the chief instigator of this move for peace. The Emperor believes that if he is eliminated, the desire for an alliance with the United Republic will fall apart within the Romulan Empire. Here is your other target."

With another gesture, a third figure appeared. Dax felt her breath catch in her throat. Her knees buckled slightly, but she forced herself to remain standing. The image of a young woman hovered in front of her, her warm brown eyes shining with warmth and tenderness. Her brown hair was pulled into a style that flattered her face. From the way she appeared, it looked like this hologram was taken at some sort of official function. Dax already knew who it was. She knew better than anyone.

"This is Princess Leia Organa Solo. She will be representing the United Republic in the talks. She is your primary target, but if you can eliminate any of her companions, such as her husband or her husband's Wookiee companion, you will be paid a bonus. Upon completion of your assignment, you will be paid one thousand bricks of gold press latinum. Good hunting."

With that, the three holograms disappeared. Fett turned and looked at Worf and Dax.

"We will leave for Bajor in three hours. Be on the ship by then."

With that, Fett stalked out of the holosuite. Worf turned to Dax, whose face had lost all of its color. It appeared as though she were on the verge of collapse. Worf immediately raced to her side, supporting her carefully.

"Par'maHi!" he whispered urgently. "What's the matter?"

"That's....that's Leia," Dax barely managed to whisper.

"I know," Worf said, confused.

"You don't understand, Worf!" Dax said. "I can't kill her."

"Neither can I!" Worf returned, somewhat hurt. "I have no love for the Dominion either and I don't want to hurt the United Republic. We'll find...."

Dax shook her head. "No! It's more than that! Worf, that's Leia Organa....my daughter."

CHAPTER FOUR

Dax leaned heavily on Worf's shoulder as they carefully strode along the upper level of the Promenade. So many conflicting emotions were churning within her, it was hard to know what to expect next. One minute, she was on an emotional high. She hadn't seen Leia for years. To know that she was not only okay, but apparently living well, was incredible. At the same time, though, Dax could feel her emotions sinking into an all-time low. Fett would expect her to help kill her daughter! Then there was anxiety, nervousness, and all sorts of other emotions, all fighting to be felt in their full intensity.

Dax looked up at Worf, who stood silently by her, a muscular arm around her shoulders. It was times like this that she loved him the most. The Klingon knew that he shouldn't intrude on her thoughts. He would merely stand there, offering her comfort and support silently until she was ready to talk.

"I can't do it, Worf," Dax finally whispered weakly. "I can't kill my only daughter."

Worf tenderly squeezed her shoulders, affirming what she just said. She smiled sadly up at him.

"I suppose you're a little confused. After all, you've always thought that I was just some Trill you were supposed to guard," Dax commented wryly.

Worf shrugged slightly and replied, "I was told that you were one of the only survivors who actually made it off Alderaan before the planet was destroyed. I thought that made you special enough for a personal bodyguard."

"There was more to it than that," Jadzia said. "You know how I told you that my previous host was named Curzon?"

Worf nodded, not comprehending.

"That's not true," Dax said. "Before I joined with Jadzia, my host's name was....Bail."

A look of understanding finally appeared in Worf's eyes. His jaw dropped open in shock. Dax nodded grimly.

"That's right. Before I became Jadzia Dax, I was Bail Organa, Leia's adoptive father," Dax said.

Dax looked away from Worf and out the massive porthole. Out there, not too far from this station, was the Maw Wormhole, and beyond that, the very heart of the Dominion, the corrupt government that wanted her to kill her own daughter, the seemingly indestructible evil that not only killed most of her family, but destroyed her home planet as well.....

CHAPTER FIVE

Bail Organa stormed towards his office, furious. The citizens of Alderaan knew enough to get out of his way. After all, he was Bail Organa, a joined Trill of six lifetimes. He was Senator Organa, the representative in the United Republic of Planet's Council. Most importantly, he was really pissed off.

He looked down, reviewing the communique he just received from Mon Mothma on Coruscant. According to this, "Emperor" Palpatine had just forced several ludicrous resolutions through the Council. For one thing, he had solidified his claim to being Emperor. That wasn't too unusual. He was somehow named Emperor over the United Republic years ago. Worse, now Emperor Palpatine had changed the name of the United Republic of Planets to the Dominion, whatever that meant. And as if that weren't enough, Palpatine had the gall to dissolve the Council itself. He claimed that the regional governors would control their own systems. Organa smiled grimly. That meant that he was officially out of a job.

He swung a hard right into his office, surprising several of his aides. They exchanged glances at each other, unsure of why the senator was in such a foul mood. All of the aides were confused, that is, except for Jadzia, his chief of staff. The young, unjoined Trill had a knowing look on her face. Organa nodded curtly and motioned for her to join him in his office. Jadzia obediently followed him. As soon as the door was shut, Organa faced his aide.

"I take it you've heard?" Organa asked seriously.

Jadzia nodded. "It's just beginning to filter through the news services."

Organa gave Jadzia a knowing look. The only reason he knew about the news was because Mon Mothma contacted him personally. The only way Jadzia could have found out was if she sliced into the computer system again.

"Creative programming, Jadzia?" Organa chided.

Jadzia smiled wickedly. Organa couldn't help but laugh. Jadzia was the most clever unjoined Trill he knew. She was intelligent, highly motivated, and more than willing to bend the rules when she had to. That was why Bail had recommended her to the Trill Symbiosis Commission to be joined. If Bail were a bit older, he might have even recommended her for the Organa symbiont, but she would be ready for joining in a matter of years, not decades. At least, Bail hoped he would be around for a few more decades. He wanted to see his daughter grow up and raise a family of her own. He loved Leia like she was his own. He tried every day to forget who her real father was. It was a horrendous thought.

Someone as kind and as caring as Leia to be the daughter of Darth Vader was simply dreadful.

"Sorry, Senator," Jadzia said sheepishly. "Some of our...friends told me there was some important news coming from Coruscant. I wanted to find out what was happening, so I had little choice but to slice into your mail."

Organa's eyes went wide, shooting a nervous glance toward the main lobby. It was true that he and Jadzia were involved with the Rebellion, but they kept that tightly under wraps. The only other person on Alderaan who knew that was Leia, who helped as best as she could. Jadzia caught the look and understood immediately. She pulled out a small device and set it on the desk. For a split second, Organa could hear a high-pitched tone scale upwards.

"What is that?" Organa demanded.

"White noise generator," Jadzia explained. "Just in case anyone's listening. So now what do we do? Do we contact Leia?"

Organa shook his head. "No. It's more important for Leia to get to Earth with the plans for that...that monstrosity that Grand Moff Dukat is building near Bajor. Our friends need that information."

Jadzia nodded. Princess Leia was on her way to the Vulcan-Tatooine system on the *Stargazer* with secret plans for some sort of massive battle station that Grand Moff Dukat, a Cardassian toady to the Emperor, had been building near Bajor. Nobody was sure what it was exactly, but Mon Mothma managed to steal the plans through a Maquis mercenary named Kyle Katarn. Organa then

arranged transport for Leia on the *Stargazer*. He knew Captain Jean-Luc Picard quite well. Both he and Picard had served with such legendary warriors as Kor and General Obi-Wan Kenobi in the Clone Eugenics Wars. Once in the Vulcan-Tatooine system, they would pick up Ben Kenobi and then come to Alderaan with the plans. Organa hoped that he would be able to decipher the plans and determine what the battle station was supposed to do. After that, it would be on to Earth to organize some sort of resistance.

"No," Organa said with finality. "What she is doing is too important and she can't be worried with it now. Plenty of time for her to play catch up once she's here."

Jadzia nodded. Organa sat down, pulling out some of the briefs for the day.

"So what legal business do we have for today?" Organa asked cheerfully.

Over the next ten minutes, Jadzia and Organa went over his meeting schedule for the day. Most of it consisted of routine meetings with boring delegates, all of whom had petty gripes with the way the United Republic of Planets (or the Dominion, as it was now called, Organa reflected mirthlessly) ran its business. It all seemed so futile. Just last night, Organa could have done something about these problems. Now they lived in a totalitarian dictatorship, not a democracy. He might as well go and scream at the Maw Wormhole for all the good it would do.

Jadzia was explaining the nature of yet another complaint when there was a tentative knock at his office door. He looked up, surprised. His aides knew better than to interrupt these meetings.

"Come!" he barked.

The door opened to reveal an elderly man, his eyes red from crying. Organa frowned. He knew that the news about the dissolution of the Council would have made it on the news services by now, but that was hardly a cause for mourning. Especially not in a tough old veteran like Curzon Dax.

"What is it, Curzon?" Organa demanded.

"We....we've just received news about the *Stargazer*," Curzon choked.

Organa felt his blood run cold. He rose to his feet weakly, clutching the sides of his desk for support. Jadzia was on her feet as well.

"What happened?" Jadzia demanded, acting strong for the senator.

Curzon swallowed hard and said, "We've received a distress call from the *Stargazer*. There was....some sort of disaster in the Vulcan-Tatooine system. The *Stargazer*....was destroyed."

Organa's mouth dropped open in horrified shock. He wanted to question Curzon, but he couldn't even find the words. Jadzia took several steps forward, glaring angrily at Curzon as if it were his fault.

"Survivors?" she prompted fiercely.

Curzon shook his head sadly and stepped out of the office. Organa's knees weakened and he sat down hard in his chair, staring at the door in mute shock. Jadzia immediately turned around and rushed to his side, placing a comforting arm around his shoulders.

"Bail, we don't know anything for certain," she whispered. "Leia could have escaped. These are just preliminary reports. It will be okay."

"Leia...." Organa moaned softly, burying his head in his hands.

Jadzia bowed her head, quietly leaving the office. She knew the senator well enough to know that he needed to be alone. The last thing she heard as she left the office was Organa's hushed sobs.

The next few days were rough on both Jadzia and Organa. Not only had the news of Emperor Palpatine's ascension to power broken all throughout the galaxy, so had the news of Princess Leia's apparent death. Organa's office was flooded with sympathy messages from both friends and rivals. Perhaps the most galling message was from Grand Moff Dukat himself. Organa could almost taste

the sarcasm as Dukat expressed his "heartfelt sorrow over your tragic loss." Even though he couldn't prove it, Organa suspected that Dukat and the Dominion had something to do with the *Stargazer's* destruction. He didn't have time for speculation, though. He had to wade through all the messages, answering those he could, while he tried to be the best former senator he could be.

Jadzia was busy as well, but it was with unofficial business. She knew that, while Bail Organa secretly approved of the Rebellion against Palpatine's regime, he would hardly approve of her newfound dedication. Jadzia had met Leia a few months ago and it angered her that the young woman might be dead. Even though she had no real proof, she knew in her heart of hearts that the Dominion was responsible for the *Stargazer's* destruction. While she might not be able to topple the Dominion on her own, she vowed to make herself as much of a thorn in the Emperor's side as she could.

That was why she was in one of many underground command stations that the Rebellion operated on Alderaan. Here the Rebellion monitored everything they could, from Dominion military traffic to encoded Rebellion messages. They even had massive sensor systems scanning the heavens around Alderaan, documenting every ship, every possible threat to Alderaan. Not surprisingly, that was why they detected a massive object moving at low warp speeds towards Alderaan.

"What the hell is that?" Jadzia breathed, looking at the sensor console.

The technician squinted and called up various other readings, saying, "I have no idea. It looks like a small moon."

"Traveling at warp?" Jadzia asked cynically. "Only manmade objects can do that."

Her mind raced, trying desperately to figure out what it could possibly be. An idea struck her, one that caused her very being to quake with fear.

"Plot the object's course," she instructed. "Can you determine where it came from?"

The technician nodded and punched in several commands. The details of the mysterious object vanished, replaced with a star chart. The object appeared perhaps ten parsecs away from Alderaan, a vivid blue line tracing the probable route. Sure enough, the object had come from the Bajor system. Whatever Dukat had been up to, he was sending it to Alderaan.

"Did Bajor lose one of its moons?" a senior officer joked, peeking over Jadzia's shoulder.

"That's no moon," Jadzia whispered. "That's a space station."

Organa looked up as Jadzia dashed into his office. He sighed, disgusted, throwing down the PADD he was reading on the desk.

"Taking etiquette lessons from Curzon?" he asked bitterly.

Jadzia grabbed him by the arm and dragged him out of his chair, surprising him. True, Jadzia tended to be pushy, but she had never manhandled him before. He yanked his arm away, staring at Jadzia in shock.

"What is wrong with you?" he demanded.

"Bail, we have a serious problem. Something the size of a small moon is on its way towards Alderaan at warp three. It came from Bajor," Jadzia explained.

The color drained from Organa's face. "Dukat's project?"

Jadzia nodded grimly. "There's more. We're not entirely sure, but we're reading a trilitium energy system on the whatever-it-is. We can't be sure, but we think it might be a weapon."

Now Organa was on the verge of panic. Trilitium was unstable enough as a compound. If there truly was a trilitium based energy weapon on that....that whatever, it would be powerful enough to at least destroy a planet. He finally understood why Jadzia was so frantic. There was

only one reason that a space station that heavily armed to come to Alderaan: Palpatine was flexing his muscles. He was going to show the entire galaxy who was in charge.

Organa started to gather up his records, anything that he could carry. Jadzia took her cue and started gathering up what she could as well.

"How long do we have?" Organa asked.

"Maybe a day, probably less," Jadzia replied, opening the door to the office.

"Good. And the spaceports? Are they still open?" Organa asked, jogging out of the door.

"As far as we can tell," Jadzia said. "I booked passage for you on a Ferengi Marauder in two days. You should be able to make it off-planet before that...thing gets here."

"What about the rest of you?" Organa asked.

Jadzia gave him a crooked grin. "As far as we can tell, the Dominion isn't announcing the arrival of Dukat's toy. There's no special evacuation order, so there's only normal traffic on and off planet. I haven't found much of anything. It looks like you're the only one of the few who will escape."

That caused Organa to stop in his tracks. He turned and stared at Jadzia, feelings of sorrow and grief welling up inside him. Not only had he lost Leia this week, he was about to lose the rest of his family. No, he couldn't abandon them.

"Jadzia, you take that berth," Organa said quietly. "You have your whole life in front of you. I've had six. I can't leave my family."

Jadzia laughed and replied, "Are you kidding? I've had my fun. No, the Rebellion needs you, Bail. You have to leave."

Organa was about to reply, but the words caught in his throat as someone came around the corner. It was so sudden, he nearly leapt out of his skin. Curzon Dax was apparently just as surprised, as the old man jumped backward, clutching his chest. When Organa managed to breathe normally again, he glared at Curzon.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded.

"I could ask you the same thing, Senator," Curzon pointed out, crossing his arms defiantly.

For a split second, Jadzia felt her stomach begin to churn. Was Curzon a Dominion agent, placed in Organa's office to spy on them? Did he already know what they were planning? Apparently Curzon could read the look on her face, because he laughed, a quick snort of amusement.

"Relax, Jadzia. We have mutual friends. I heard about the space station as well and was coming to check on the Senator's well being," Curzon explained quickly. "Come, we must get you to safety."

Curzon and Jadzia quickly formed an escort for Organa and rushed him the rest of the way through the office building. Jadzia was finally beginning to feel reassured. Bail Organa would survive whatever happened to Alderaan. He would live on, using his fiery words and beliefs to motivate an entire galaxy to stand up and fight against the Emperor's evil Dominion. Even if she wouldn't survive, the ideals she believed in would, and that was all that mattered.

Those hopes died as the three Trill left the office building. A squad of stormtroopers was approaching the building at a brisk jog, their white armor clattering. Jadzia had a special loathing for stormtroopers. They gave her the creeps. The Emperor, or rather, his secretive lieutenants, the Changelings, had developed them over fifteen years ago, genetically engineered soldiers that were addicted to some sort of enzyme. Due to their unique genetic code, they were much stronger, faster, and more agile than an average being. It was rumored that only Klingons or Wookies could best them in hand-to-hand combat. What was worse, their addiction to the enzyme made them

completely loyal to the Emperor and his will. If there were stormtroopers coming here, it could only mean bad news.

She was right. The minute the troops saw Bail, they fanned out and surrounded the three Trill, their blasters drawn and ready. Organa stared at them in shock for a second before composing himself, putting on the airs of the Senator from Alderaan, a member of the now defunct United Republic of Planets' Council.

"What is the meaning of this?" he demanded, letting a trace of annoyance show in his voice. "Stand aside!"

"We can't do that," the stormtroopers' leader said through the tiny speaker in his helmet. "We have orders to escort you to your home and place you under house arrest."

Jadzia gritted her teeth. She should have suspected something like this was going to happen. After all, Bail Organa was a known opponent of the Emperor. For years, the two locked horns over important issues, never compromising or agreeing. Bail had no love for Palpatine and the reverse was true. Now that Palpatine was in supreme control of the Dominion, it wasn't surprising he would arrest a powerful political rival. Still, she might as well try to get them to stand down.

"Do you know who this is?" she asked in a mildly threatening tone. "This is Senator Bail Organa! He has important business elsewhere!"

"I am aware of who this is," the stormtrooper replied tersely. "And I have my orders. Now move!"

As if to emphasize his words, the trooper released the safety on his blaster, as if daring the Trills to defy him. Jadzia could sense the anxiety in both Bail and Curzon, but they soon backed down, obediently following the troopers. Jadzia stood in shock for several minutes before she felt a blaster carbine prod her in the back.

"You too," a stormtrooper prompted.

Jadzia grudgingly followed orders, falling into step with the others. As they marched towards Bail's home, any sense of hope Jadzia had slowly dwindled and died. They were prisoners of the Dominion, and there was no escape for any of them. It was over.

Bail paced his living room, staring vehemently at the door leading to the hallway. Bail knew that beyond that door stood at least ten stormtroopers, more than he, Jadzia, and Curzon could overpower. He bit his lip in frustration. This was maddening! He was a prisoner in his own home, waiting for that monstrosity to come to Alderaan. When that happened, he knew it was all over for him and his people. They would become slaves of the Dominion.....or worse.

He glanced at Jadzia and Curzon. He could tell they were both thinking the same thing. It was hopeless. Being trapped together for a three hours had started to get on their nerves. By now, Dukat's little bauble had undoubtedly entered the system and was cruising toward the planet. It was only a matter of time.

Jadzia slammed a frustrated fist on her armrest. "What are we going to do?" she hissed desperately. "By my calculations, we only have about seven hours before that station gets here. Senator, we have to get you off-planet!"

"I agree," Curzon added.

Organa looked at both of them, a disbelieving expression on his face. "What do you suggest? We have stormtroopers crawling all over my home. There's no way any of us would make it."

The room fell silent. Eventually, though, Curzon startled chuckling. The chuckle eventually grew into laughter. Jadzia and Organa glanced at each other, not comprehending. They finally fixed quizzical looks on the old man. Curzon flashed a crafty smile at them.

"If we can't get the whole Senator off of Alderaan, maybe we can get part of him away," he explained.

Jadzia and Bail stared at Curzon for a second, not understanding. Finally, though, Bail caught on. Of course! Why hadn't he thought of that? It was so obvious. Jadzia, apparently, wasn't quite up to speed yet. She looked between the two men as they snickered and pointed at her, bewildered. "What?"

"Guard!" Curzon bellowed. "Guard! Get in here!"

The door burst open and three stormtroopers dashed into the living room, weapons drawn and ready. What met their eyes stopped them short. Bail Organa was lying on the floor, curled up in agony. He was clutching his stomach, groaning. Jadzia was kneeling over him, apparently unsure of what to do. Curzon turned on the stormtroopers, desperation flaring in his eyes.

"The Senator is hurt!" Curzon cried. "We need to get a doctor in here and fast!"

The troopers glanced at each other, hesitating. Finally, one of them turned to leave the room.

"I will go get our medic," he explained.

"No!" Curzon shouted, a little too quickly.

The trooper turned back and although Curzon couldn't see the soldier's eyes, he knew that he was being scrutinized carefully.

"And why not?" the trooper asked, the suspicion in his voice clear.

"Uh...." Curzon stammered, turning to Jadzia desperately.

Jadzia shot a nervous glance down at Bail, who groaned in pain a little more loudly, adding to the confusion. Jadzia finally looked up, a triumphant look in her eye that she tried to mask with concern.

"Your medic won't be able to help him!" Jadzia explained carefully. "The problem isn't with the host, it's with the symbiont!"

The trooper's helmet cocked to one side. "What?"

"The...the symbiont is experiencing post-grandial upper-abdominal distension. If we don't get a doctor here within an hour, the Senator will die!" Jadzia insisted vehemently.

The troopers looked at one another, unsure. Curzon nodded, turning back to them.

"Y...yeah. And the Emperor won't be happy when he gets here and Senator Organa is dead!" Curzon added.

Jadzia shot him a desperate look and mouthed, "What are you doing?" What he said caused the stormtroopers to jump, alarmed.

"What do you mean?" their leader demanded.

"Well, why do you think the Emperor wants him under house arrest? He's obviously on his way to witness his execution. If Bail Organa is dead before he gets here, who do you suppose he's going to blame?" Curzon prompted, a hint of a devilish grin on his lips.

The ploy worked just the way Curzon expected. The stormtroopers were programmed to obey the Emperor and safe-guard him at all costs. If the Emperor were to be displeased by their actions, it would mean their death and a failure of their primary objective. Within a half hour, a Trill doctor from the Symbiosis Commission was standing in the living room, medical kit in hand. Curzon smiled at Jadzia, who made a small gesture towards the stormtroopers, who stood against one wall.

"Uh...you have to leave," Curzon said to them.

The stormtroopers looked at each other, then back to Curzon.

"Why?" one of them asked suspiciously.

Curzon stammered for a few seconds, trying desperately to think of a reason. Jadzia finally stepped forward, ushering them out of the room.

"It's against our religion to have outsiders view our medical procedures," she quickly explained, shoving them through the door.

"No it's...." the doctor started.

Curzon slapped a hand over the doctor's mouth as the last of the troopers was shoved unceremoniously through the door. Once the room was locked, Bail rose from the floor and straightened his clothing. The doctor stared at the ex-Senator in shock.

"Wait a minute!" he said, confused. "I was summoned here by those barbarians because he said that Bail Organa was sick. What is going on?"

"Doctor, we need you to transplant a symbiont," Curzon explained.

The doctor whirled on the elderly man, surprised.

"What?" he asked. "Here? In these conditions?"

"Can you do it?" Bail insisted.

"Well, I suppose I could...." the doctor stammered.

"Good," Bail said, removing his shirt. His abdomen was already beginning to bulge and throb, the Organa symbiont preparing itself to move to a new host.

The doctor stared at Bail in shock.

"Who is supposed to receive the symbiont?" he asked in a quiet voice.

Jadzia bared her stomach and lay down on the floor. "I am."

The Organa symbiont slowly regained consciousness, feeling the connection with a new host for the first time. For a few split seconds, the conflicting thought patterns caused both a temporary feeling of discomfort, but soon, their minds began to merge as one. Memories were passed from one to the other. Two separate entities slowly became one. The host opened her eyes, and Jadzia Organa sat up, rubbing her eyes.

She looked around the room, feeling slightly disoriented. True, Bail's living room looked the same as it always had, and yet it was....different. Odd. Jadzia looked at a painting of the Crystal Falls, something that Jadzia the host had always found ugly. Now, however, Jadzia understood that Leia had given that painting to the person she saw as her father. The horrendous sculpture on the mantle was a traditional Corellian art piece given to Bail by Mon Mothma at a party celebrating the treaty between the United Republic and the Klingon Empire.

The doctor flipped his tricorder shut and sighed. "The symbiont has merged with the host fully. Congratulations, Jadzia Organa. Welcome to Trill society."

Jadzia turned and looked at the prone form of Bail....well, she supposed he was just Bail again. He was breathing raggedly. Jadzia frowned. It felt like a part of her was looking in a mirror. She remembered the way his knee ached when it rained due to a war injury. She could recall each time he found a wrinkle or a gray hair. And yet, that wasn't her anymore.

"How long will he live?" she asked, her voice resonating with a surprisingly confident timbre.

The doctor glanced at the ex-Senator. "Two or three days. He should recover from his shock within ten minutes. So long as nobody questions him too closely, they won't notice the change."

"Thank you, Doctor," Curzon whispered from his post at the door.

The doctor grimaced to himself, picking up his instruments. "No, thank you."

Curzon escorted the medic to the door. "Now remember, you can't breathe a word of this to anyone."

"Who would believe me even if I did?" the doctor observed wryly. "Good luck."

The doctor nodded once to Jadzia Organa and left. Curzon turned back to her with an expectant look on his face.

"Now what?" he asked.

Jadzia glanced at the chronometer on the wall and grimaced. "We only have two hours to get Bail....I mean, me to the Ferengi."

"That's cutting it close," Curzon observed, a worried expression on his face.

"We have little choice," Jadzia replied, glancing at the door. An idea was forming in her mind, one so crazy, so....impossible, it had to work.

Jadzia steeled herself. Without even thinking about it, she drew off of the calm confidence the symbiont instilled in her. She could remember times in the past....in past lifetimes when she (or was it the symbiont? The distinctions were so blurred now they hardly mattered) had been nervous. Drawing on those memories, she was able to calm her jittery nerves and walk to the door. Curzon followed at a short distance, exuding a serenity she knew he didn't feel.

The stormtroopers whirled around as they opened the door. Each one leveled his blaster at the two Trill, their expressionless helmets staring at them.

"Where are you going?" one of them demanded.

Jadzia calmly brushed one of the blasters aside as she walked through them, Curzon following close behind. A stormtrooper stepped forward, brazenly blocking her way.

"Where are you going?" the stormtrooper repeated with an unseen snarl.

"I believe we're free to go," Jadzia explained. "We just remembered. You arrested Bail Organa, not us. That means we're not prisoners here."

"Right," Curzon agreed, carefully pushing a blaster to one side.

Jadzia and Curzon stepped through the stormtroopers and left the house, walking confidently and without looking back.

"Do you think they bought it?" Curzon whispered to Jadzia.

His answer was a volley of laser bolts that burned into the ground behind them. Jadzia turned and saw ten stormtroopers pour out of the house after them. She grabbed the elderly Trill by the arm and started running, dragging Curzon along unceremoniously.

"I'd say not!" she shouted back.

The two Trill tore down the street, desperately trying to find some sort of hiding place or shelter from their pursuers. Nothing presented itself. People on the streets looked at them, puzzled and curious, but those onlookers quickly withdrew into their homes or places of business when they saw who was chasing Jadzia and Curzon. There was no escape. Finally, in desperation, Jadzia ducked into an alley, pulling Curzon with her. The old man, however, wasn't ready to run in the new direction. He stumbled, twisting his ankle. Curzon fell to the ground, clutching at his foot, his face contorted with pain.

Jadzia dropped next to him, saying, "What happened?"

Curzon pushed her away, urging her to run. "Go! Ignore me! The symbiont is what is important! You have to make it to the Rebellion!"

Jadzia wanted to protest, but Curzon shoved her again, pointing toward an open storm drain. With one sorrowful look over her shoulder, Jadzia dove down the hole.

Curzon turned and faced his adversaries. Reaching into a pocket, he pulled out a small holdout phaser. A wicked grin spread on his face as he aimed for the lead stormtrooper.

"I'll see you all in hell!" he roared, thumbing the trigger.

A crimson beam of energy danced from the phaser, burning an ugly black scorch mark across the stormtrooper's white armor. The man fell, only to have two more leap over his body, blasters firing. Curzon managed to drag himself behind a dumpster, peeking around to fire occasionally and keep his attackers at bay. In between his desperate shots, Curzon glanced at the storm drain and smiled. Jadzia Organa was safe. She would make it.

That pleasant thought was on his mind still as the stormtroopers surged forward, overrunning his position. A triumphant smile spread on his lips as the troopers realized that Jadzia was gone and was nowhere to be found. His feeling of victory grew even as the lead stormtrooper shoved his blaster into his abdomen, taking special care to aim for his symbiont, and fired.

Curzon laughed as his own blood splattered across the stormtrooper's immaculate white armor. As the blackness began to swim across his vision, his six lifetimes flashed before his eyes. It was an incredible experience, the memories blending together in a vivid blur.

As his body grew numb, Curzon frowned. It was odd. For a split second, he could have sworn he was lying in an operating room, surgeons working to remove the Dax symbiont from his body. His head turned to one side to see....Jadzia lying across from him! It was like some strange memory from a forgotten dream, a dream that Curzon was still puzzling over when the darkness won him and he plunged into nothingness.....

DaiMon Bok, captain of the Ferengi Marauder, cursed the Trill that convinced him to wait for a "special passenger." That passenger was already half an hour late, and Bok was seriously considering leaving him behind. His helmsman was already picking up a massive object approaching Alderaan. Bok didn't like it. Whatever it was, it shouldn't exist or be approaching this planet he was on. Bok wanted to flee and wanted to flee now! If it weren't for the three hundred bars of latinum the Trill had promised him....

Bok looked up at the early morning sky. Alderaan truly was a pleasant planet, but they were all a bunch of symbiotic philosophers! None of them were truly enlightened. They claimed that money had no value to them, that it was merely a means to an end. Bah! The Ferengi knew better, as did their distant cousins, the Hutt. Bok couldn't wait to get off-planet again. He had a hold full of spice for Jabba the Hutt, and that gangster didn't appreciate tardiness. Just ask that smuggler who dumped his cargo at the sight of three Star Destroyers. What was his name? Hun? Han? Not that it matter. Jabba had put such a hefty bounty on both the smuggler and his crew that Bok even considered hunting for him.

Bok was wondering where he might purchase some weapons for such a hunt when a storm drain cover heaved up. Bok screamed in fright, reaching for his blaster, when he realized it was the Trill woman he had spoken to earlier. Jadzia picked herself up, tugging at the front of her tunic (much the way Bail used to, she observed to herself. A habit he picked up from a human named Picard). Bok looked around, confused. From what this Trill woman had told her, the passenger was an older male.

"Where's the passenger?" he demanded, worried that he had waited all this time and wouldn't be paid.

"Right here," Jadzia returned grimly, striding for the ship.

"What about your friend?" Bok asked, confused.

Jadzia's hand came to rest on her stomach, where she could feel the symbiont press up against it reassuringly. She closed her eyes for a second, picturing Bail in his home. Swallowing the tears down bitterly, she turned to the Ferengi.

"He won't be making it."

Jadzia's eyes grew wide when she saw it. There, hanging in space in orbit around Alderaan, was Dukat's special project. It was indeed the size of a small moon, with a small crater of some kind indented in the upper hemisphere. Just the sight of the monstrosity chilled her to the bone.

Bok had wasted no time in leaving the planet. Without really waiting for launch clearance, he had taken off and darted for the stars, plotting a hasty course for the Vulcan-Tatooine system. They weren't the only people who were fleeing. By now, every transport in the system knew about the space station near Alderaan and were trying to flee as quickly as possible.

"By the Nagus, that's huge!" the helmsman breathed in wonder. "How much do you suppose it cost?"

Jadzia ignored the comment. Bok did as well.

"Any sign of Dominion activity?" the DaiMon asked tersely.

The helmsman shook his head, but his report was cut off by the communications officer.

"DaiMon, we're being hailed!"

"Us specifically?" Bok cringed.

"No, it's a general hail. Audio only."

Bok waved for the message to be played.

"Ships in the Alderaan system," a harsh voice barked. "This is Grand Moff Dukat of the Dominion. By now, I'm sure you're all aware of Alderaan's new neighbor. I want you all to witness something."

On the main viewscreen, a green bolt of energy lanced out from the sphere and pierced Alderaan. For a few seconds, it looked like the planet would survive the barrage. Then, hideous cracks appeared on the surface, snaking across every square kilometer. Almost as an afterthought, the planet shattered in a furious explosion, debris flying in all directions. Jadzia had to brace herself on a chair, sorrow overwhelming her. All those people....

"Take this message to the Rebels: the Death Star is fully operational," Dukat continued. "Any resistance to us from now on will be met with violence such as you have seen here. That is all."

The channel went dead. Jadzia couldn't tear her eyes from the screen. The cloud of debris continued to expand, causing the Ferengi ship to duck and weave. Her planet, gone.....her race, extinguished.....her friends....Bail, Curzon...it was all destroyed. Jadzia slowly sank to her knees, so overcome with grief that she could barely breathe. Bok carefully swiveled towards her, his eyes gleaming with genuine sympathetic tears of his own.

"I'm sorry," he whispered.

"DaiMon!" the helmsman prompted, self-consciously too loud. "A new ship is entering the system.....it looks like a Corellian freighter, YT class...."

"Ignore it and get us out of here!" Bok snapped, then turned back to Jadzia. "Ma'am, can I please get your name? We'll need it for the log."

Jadzia's head snapped up, uncertain of what to say. She couldn't admit who she was now. These Ferengi might know enough about Trills to know what her name, Jadzia Organa, meant. True, they may pity her now, but that would change if the Dominion offered them enough money. Her mind drifted back to her last hours on Alderaan for a second. Curzon hadn't been like that. She suspected that he had sacrificed his own life to help save hers.....he was so noble....

"Dax," she finally whispered. "My name is Jadzia Dax."

"Dax" looked out over Paris, awestruck. The events of the past week seemed a blur to her. She hardly knew where to begin when thinking about it.

She had made it to Vulcan-Tatooine safely and booked passage the rest of the way to Earth. The Rebels were surprised to find an actual Trill, one who managed to escape from Alderaan, alive and well. Apparently the only living Trills now were ones that had been away when the Death Star obliterated the planet. Still, they were more than willing to show her every courtesy.

What was truly amazing were the events surrounding the Death Star. Much to Dax's surprise, it turned out that her (or Bail's, in all honesty) daughter was still alive! Apparently Darth Vader, on orders from Dukat, had attacked the *Stargazer*, capturing both Leia and Captain Picard, looking for the stolen plans for the Death Star. Leia, however, had managed to hide the plans in an astromech droid named R2D2. That droid, plus two others (named C3P0 and Data) had escaped from the *Stargazer* to the planet Tatooine. There they had been found by, of all people, Luke Skywalker. Dax couldn't help but smile to herself. She was one of the only people in the galaxy who could understand the irony of that situation, but she (or Bail) had given her word years ago that she wouldn't speak about it to anyone.

At any rate, Luke brought the droids to Obi-Wan Kenobi, who had secretly been keeping watch over the young lad. Discovering a message in R2 that instructed them to bring the droids to Bail on Alderaan, Luke and Ben had hired the crew of the *Millennium Falcon* to bring them there. That crew turned out to be an eclectic bunch, consisting of a smuggler named Han Solo, a Wookiee named

Chewbacca, a Rebel sympathizer named Riker, and a Betazoid named Troi.

Unfortunately, the *Millennium Falcon* arrived shortly after Alderaan was destroyed. Being captured by the Death Star, Luke, Ben, Han, and his crew had mounted an impromptu rescue mission. They were successful, for the most part. They managed to free both Leia and Picard, but Obi-Wan Kenobi sacrificed his life in a fight with Darth Vader. Dax could already feel his loss. He had been a good friend.

To make matters worse, the Death Star was on the move again, this time heading for Earth. The Rebellion staged a last ditch effort to destroy the immense space station, forming a massive blockade at Wolfe 359. The Death Star proved too much for them, though. Most of the fleet was destroyed and the Death Star continued, seemingly unstoppable.

Thankfully, that was when Captain Picard and his newfound comrades took charge. Picard, Riker, Troi, and Data commandeered a newly commissioned starship called the *Enterprise* while Luke convinced Rogue Squadron, a newly formed group of X-Wing pilots, to join the fight. Surprisingly, a handful of snub fighters and one starship was able to accomplish what a whole fleet couldn't. The Death Star was destroyed before it could reach Earth. Dukat was killed in the blast, but according to the reports Dax had seen, Darth Vader escaped. Now the remnants of the Dominion in the Alpha Quadrant were on the run.

Dax was jolted out of her thoughts as the doors swished open. Mon Mothma, the regal senator from Chandrila, glided into the room. The older woman smiled.

"Hello, Bail....I mean, Jadzia," Mon Mothma corrected herself. "This will take some getting used to."

Jadzia nodded and smiled, the first smile that had graced her lips in days. Mon Mothma studied her expression carefully.

"Are you certain you want to do this?" she asked.

Again, Jadzia nodded.

"It's for the best, Mon Mothma. The Emperor wanted me to die with the rest of Alderaan. If he learned that even a part of me survived, he would do his best to correct the situation. You remember how obsessive Palpatine could be."

Mon Mothma smiled knowingly. Both of them had faced off against the wily Emperor for years on the floor of the Council. At least, Mon Mothma had. Jazsia merely carried the memories of the other person who had.

"Going underground is the only solution," Dax finished.

"Are you sure you don't at least want to see Leia one last time?" Mon Mothma asked gently.

Dax closed her eyes, pain welling up inside of her. She had heard that Leia was present and watching when Dukat gave the order to destroy Alderaan. Dukat had blamed her, saying that it was her fault that an entire planet had to be destroyed. Dax shook her head.

"No. She thinks her father is dead, and for all practical purposes, he is. I will always love her like a daughter, but I can't confuse her. Especially not now. Not with what she has ahead of her," Dax whispered.

"Very well," Mon Mothma said, tapping her communicator.

The doors to the conference room opened and a massive Klingon warrior stepped through. Dax's eyebrows shot up, quizzically. Mon Mothma turned back to Dax and smiled pleasantly.

"Jazsia, this is Lieutenant Worf. He's been assigned to be your bodyguard while you hide," the regal woman explained.

Dax looked the young warrior up and down. True, he was no Koloth or Kor (friends of Bail's from long ago, part of her wistfully remembered), but he looked like he would be handy in a fight. She smiled.

"I'll leave you to get to know one another," Mon Mothma said.

After Mon Mothma left, Dax and Worf stared at each other, neither sure of what to say. Finally, Worf uncomfortably stepped forward.

"So..." he said. "Have you given any thought to what our cover should be?"

Dax smiled impishly. "A little. How do you feel about bounty hunters?"

CHAPTER SIX

"And you know the rest of the story...." Dax said quietly, still staring out of the viewport on DS9's Promenade. "The Rebellion managed to drive the Dominion back through the Maw and then reestablished the United Republic of Planets....you and I partnered up with Boba Fett since he never got involved in politics....until now."

Worf stared at Dax in shock. He had never suspected any of this. Dax had always been a Trill to him. A remarkable, fascinating, and wholly captivating one to be sure, but just a Trill. An oddity to a Klingon Warrior. It would have never occurred to him that she had, at one time, been one of the most influential leaders the Old United Republic of Planets had known. For a split second, Worf felt in awe, almost as if he was standing in the presence of a god. That feeling passed quickly when Dax gave him an amused look. She knew what he was thinking. She knew him all too well.

"Don't even think about putting me on a pedestal," she whispered craftily, a smile gracing her lips. "I was Bail Organa at one time. Now I'm Jazsia....well, Organa, I guess you could say. We're two different people."

"But with the same feelings for Leia," Worf pointed out.

Jadzia's face fell. Finally revealing her past to Worf was cathartic. It took her mind off of their impending mission. Now it all came crashing back upon her. The contract. Leia. The Romulans. Her strength left her and she almost collapsed to the deck. Worf caught her and helped her stand.

"What are we going to do?" she moaned.

Worf helped her walk down the Promenade towards the turbolift. "We'll think of something."

Dax and Worf sat silent on the bridge as the Slave I dropped towards the surface of Bajor. The lush, green planet loomed in the viewport. As it did, Dax couldn't help but feel apprehensive. Somewhere, down on that planet, was Leia. Her daughter, so to speak. That, in and of itself, didn't worry Dax. What frightened her was that the next time she would see Leia, it might be through a phaser's sights.

Dax glanced at Worf. He gave a small, reassuring nod. On the way back to the Slave I the previous day, they had outlined their options. If Fett behaved in his usual manner, he would insist on making the kills. In all likelihood, he would order Dax and Worf to disrupt the security network, provide a distraction, something that kept them out of the way. No matter what it was, Dax and Worf wouldn't do it. They would inform the United Republic officials of what was going to happen. It might mean blowing their cover, but they felt it was worth it. This treaty with the Romulans had to go through.

Boba Fett checked the autopilot one last time and then swiveled in his chair, not really looking at either Worf or Dax.

"Here is the plan. We are going to land ten kilometers from the site of the talks. We will then use a site-to-site transport to place ourselves within the compound," Fett said.

That took Dax by surprise. That was completely unlike Fett. Usually, Fett preferred trekking overland to a target rather than beaming in. It gave him time to refine his plan, to triple check every aspect of the contract. To beam in was completely out of the ordinary. Dax resisted the urge to shoot a surprised look at Worf and she bit her tongue. This could get interesting.

Fett flipped a switch, causing a hologram of the compound to appear in front of them. The view zoomed in to show a small podium. Fett pointed at it.

"At 1200, Leia and Pardek will be making speeches in the main square. We will be positioned at the top of this building...." Fett said, pointing.

"All of us?" Worf interrupted, surprised.

Fett's helmet swiveled towards Worf. "Is that a problem?"

Worf glanced at Dax but shook his head.

"Good," Fett snarled. "Worf, you will operate the sensor jammer. Dax and I will handle the targets."

Dax sat bolt upright, startled. This was definitely out of the ordinary. Fett had never let them "handle" a target before. Something was wrong. Something was seriously wrong.

Fett looked to Dax, and it felt as if the black slit that covered his eyes were burning through to her very soul. It felt like there was nothing she could hide from him. Finally, Fett spoke in his low, raspy voice and this time, it seemed to grate against Dax's soul.

"I will handle Pardek. You will eliminate the Princess."

A surge of panic ran through Dax. Her breathing stepped up its pace and it felt as if her heart was about to explode from her chest. Worse than all, the Organa symbiont, which normally nestled peacefully against her spine was beginning to writhe. It shared her pain. Dax knew she had to calm herself, that Fett would perceive her trauma and suspect something. Taking a few measured

yet deep breaths, she forced her heart to slow and her breathing to become normal. As a result, the symbiont calmed as well. She nodded, keeping her face grim.

"We will land in twenty minutes. We will beam out at 1130. Be prepared," Fett instructed.

The warm tingling sensation released Jadzia and she had to squint against the harsh Bajoran sun. Looking around her, she saw that they were indeed on the roof of a building, overlooking a lavish public square. When they had stepped onto the transporter platform in the Slave I, Dax had partially hoped that there would be a malfunction. Having her molecules scattered through the atmosphere of Bajor would have been better than this. She supposed that was not to be.

Pulling out a pair of macrobinoculars, she scanned the square below her. There was a collection of United Republic officials in one corner, a small group of Romulans in another. They weren't mingling, but they weren't hostile to one another either. Some brave souls were even looking at each other. Dax couldn't help but smile. She had been in that position before in other lives. Politics made strange bedfellows, and the Romulans and New Republic were merely flirting with each other right now. After the speeches, things might be different.

It was the Wookiee that warned her Leia was coming. The massive tower of muscle and fur stepped through a recessed doorway, scanning the courtyard with a wary eye and a wicked bowcaster. It was Chewbacca, Han Solo's companion. A handsome rogue stepped out next, tugging at the collar of his dress uniform uncomfortably. A General's uniform, of all things. That had to be Han Solo, Leia's husband of three years. Dax approved. A dashing rogue to be sure, but Dax could read the concern on his face.

Then Leia stepped through the door. Dax was so overcome with emotion, she almost dropped the binoculars. With trembling hands, she lifted them to her eyes and stared at her daughter from a lifetime ago. Leia had matured from a pretty young girl to a beautiful woman. She smiled warmly at each Romulan delegate, shaking hands with all of them. With total disregard for her personal safety, she stayed ahead of her bodyguards, ignoring the protection they offered in exchange for openness and friendship. It made the part of Dax that was still Bail Organa proud.

"It is almost time," she heard Worf whisper.

She rolled over and looked at the Klingon. Worf's face mirrored her worry and pain. The sensor jamming equipment had already been set up. Dax glanced at Fett for a second, who seemed to be engrossed with his own observations of the compound.

"Are you ready?" she hissed to Worf.

Worf nodded. According to Fett's plan, the jamming equipment would be activated at 1205, shortly into Leia's speech. According to Dax and Worf's plan, the equipment would then fail thirty seconds later, revealing their presence to the sensors. That would be risky, especially since Dax would have a phaser rifle in her hands at the time, but it was the best they could do.

"Time," Fett whispered, drawing his blaster and snapping the scope in place. The bounty hunter dropped down low, bringing it up to his faceplate.

Dax primed her phaser rifle and brought it up to her eyes. Through it, she could see Leia and Pardek taking their places on the platform. Leia smiled at the nervous Romulan Senator and whispered something to him. Whatever it was, it made the Romulan smile. Bail Organa had used that tactic with a Klingon Ambassador once. A quick compliment (or an insult, in the case of the Klingon) to lighten the moment always helped. Dax closed her eyes, trying to keep her breathing steady.

She was barely aware of the tap Worf gave her shoulder. The jamming equipment was up and running. Thirty seconds to go. She could sense Fett tense next to her, could hear his finger

tightening around the trigger. A moment of panic washed over her. She wanted to turn the phaser on Fett, vaporize him and his damn Mandalorian armor. But she couldn't. Her hands were tied.....

Suddenly, ahead of schedule, Fett fired. Dax watched in the scope as the blaster bolt seared the wall above the Romulan Senator's head. The reaction in the courtyard was immediate. Bodyguards dashed forward, knocking both Leia and Pardek to the ground while they looked around, trying to determine where the assassins were. Dax whirled on her partner, in shock. Fett never missed. Never.

Fett's helmet stared back at her. Without saying a word, Fett turned and shot the sensor jamming equipment, obliterating it. In one fluid motion, the bounty hunter lashed out and kicked Worf square in the chest, throwing the Klingon over the edge of the building. Fett rose to his feet and activated his jetpack.

"Palpatine sends his regards, Senator," Fett growled.

With a burst of flame, Fett rocketed from the top of the building and away from the compound. Dax was so shocked, she stood up and watched him go without thinking. That was a mistake.

The Romulan security guards on the ground looked up in time to see Fett escape and then saw what they took to be his partner stand up as well. They immediately drew their disruptors and fired.

The first shot sliced through Dax's shoulder, spinning her around. She stared at the compound in disbelief, not entirely sure what was happening. The second shot caught her square in the chest, the third in the abdomen, and soon, the painful jabs were coming so rapidly she could no longer tell where she was being hit. Slowly, her entire body in agony, she sank to the rooftop, staring up at the incredibly blue Bajoran sky. She tried to speak, tried to cry out, tried to do something, but it was no use.....

Worf slowly shook his head, trying to clear his mind. Remarkably, he was still alive. Carefully, he picked himself up off of the ground and looked around. He had landed in the courtyard, apparently having bounced off of some awnings. Everyone in the courtyard was looking and pointing at his former perch. Some of the Romulans were even firing in that direction. That's when it hit him. Jazia!

"No...." he groaned, taking a few steps forward.

Before he could say anything else, something grabbed him from behind. Strong, hairy arms encircled his chest and he could hear a war cry that seemed to come from the heart of hell itself. Worf could feel himself being lifted off the ground, Chewbacca bellowing with rage. Without any effort, the Wookiee tossed Worf across the compound. Worf collided with a solid rock wall, his head ricocheting painfully. He sank to the ground, stunned.

A surge of rage shot through him. The pain helped him focus. Within moments, Worf was back on his feet, a snarl of rage on his lips. Chewbacca advanced dangerously, drawing his bowcaster. Worf responded by drawing a dagger of his own. If he were going to die, he was going to die in combat.

Everything around him started to fade. The noise, the confusion, all of it disappeared. All Worf could see was the towering Wookiee, his opponent. With a warcry of his own, Worf charged, taking Chewbacca by surprise. Worf stabbed quickly with his dagger, drawing blood. The Wookiee bellowed in pain, swinging wildly at this annoyance. One such swing connected solidly with Worf, nearly ripping his head off. Stars exploded in Worf's vision and he collapsed to his knees. What sounded like a gruff laugh echoed in the Wookiee's throat as he swung his bowcaster around to finish off the Klingon.

"Chewie!" a voice cried.

Chewbacca turned. Han was shielding Leia with his body, his blaster drawn and ready. The smuggler waved at his companion desperately.

"Forget that Klingon! He's whipped! There are assassins on the roof!"

That statement cut through all of Worf's rage. Jadzia! He had forgotten.

"Wait!" Worf finally croaked.

Chewbacca looked down at Worf in surprise. With a massive paw, the Wookiee grabbed Worf by the throat and hauled him to his feet. Han jogged over to his friend and stared at him, enraged.

"What?" Han demanded.

"There are no assassins...." Worf gasped, fighting for air.

Han and Chewie exchanged skeptical glances. Han leaned forward, giving Worf a sarcastic look. He motioned for security personnel to enter the building. They quickly kicked the door in and poured in, weapons drawn and ready.

"Then I suppose that shot was for target practice?"

"I don't know what happened," Worf snarled. "But that `assassin' is the Princess' father."

"That's not funny," Han returned hotly. "Bail Organa died on Alderaan."

"No, he did not," Worf said, quickly recounting all that he could.

At first, Han stared at Worf skeptically, but as the story unfolded, that disbelief slowly vanished. A truly horrified expression slowly grew. Han turned sharply as the security guards exited, dragging Jadzia's still body behind them. Han turned back to Chewbacca, desperate.

"Chewie, drop him!" Han cried, then turned and ran towards the guards. "Somebody get a medic! We need to save her!"

Leia paced the waiting room in the hospital. It was happening too quickly for her to follow. One moment, she was diving for cover on the podium, apparently under attack. The next, she was being told that, not only had her father's symbiont survived, it was living inside a dying woman, one who had apparently been involved with the attack. Even listening to Worf's explanation didn't help. It all seemed so unreal. She wished that Luke were here. Her brother would be able to help make sense of all this.

She turned back to Han. Her husband stood in the doorway, watching her carefully. He was always a bastion of strength in times like this. His nonchalant attitude helped mask his concern, but she knew that deep inside, he was just as torn up as she.

"Do you believe it, Han?" she asked quietly. "Can that woman really be Bail, my father?"

Han shrugged and said, "You know, I never believed much of anything when we first met. Just in my own skills, my blaster, and my ship. Then I meet Jedis, Changelings, and find out that I married Darth Vader's daughter. I'd be willing to believe anything right now."

Leia crossed over to him and hugged him tightly. Han wrapped his arms around her carefully, holding her close. It felt like they stayed that way for an eternity before he heard someone clear his throat.

He looked up to see Dr. Julian Bashir enter the room. He was Deep Space Nine's chief medical officer. True, it was quite a trip from the station to the planet, but he was the only one in the sector that knew Trill physiology. He had been in surgery for hours. Han could already tell he had bad news. Bashir wore a grim mask, not looking directly at them.

Leia turned and looked at the doctor expectantly. Bashir finally shook his head.

"I can't save her," Bashir whispered. "Her internal organs are well beyond repair. No matter how much bacta I use, it just won't heal."

"What about the symbiont?" Leia asked, desperate. "I have a few unjoined Trill on my staff. If we could transplant it...."

Bashir shook his head sadly and replied, "No. The symbiont took three hits itself. It is dying as well."

Leia looked over Bashir's shoulder, tears beginning to run down her cheeks. She had felt this grief once before. At the time, she was standing before Grand Moff Dukat, held tightly by Darth Vader, on board the Death Star. She could feel the grief welling up inside her again, the same feeling she had experienced the first time she thought she had lost her father. She hadn't been able to say good-bye to him then. Maybe she could now.

"May I see her?" she asked in a quavering voice.

Bashir nodded, motioning for Leia to pass. As soon as the Princess had left, Han pulled the doctor to one side.

"Straight up," Han whispered, "How long?"

Bashir shrugged and replied, "A half hour. Probably less."

Leia slowly entered the room. The lights had been dimmed to a comfortable level. Medical instruments littered the room, but most had been turned off. Jadzia lay on a biobed in the middle of the room, propped up by several cushions. Worf sat by her side, holding her hand tenderly and whispering to her quietly. Leia felt her throat constrict tightly, more tears welling up in her eyes. She wasn't the only one hurting now.

Worf turned and looked at Leia. He turned back to Dax, who patted his cheek gently.

"par'maHi," Worf whispered, pain echoing in his voice.

"I know, Worf," she mumbled. "I know. At least I died in combat. Just promise me one thing."

Worf nodded, squeezing her hand tightly. "Anything."

"Let Fett go," Dax whispered. Worf started to protest, but she hushed him with a finger to his lips. "I know. You want to swear a blood oath, to track Fett down to the very edges of the galaxy and eat his heart. Let him go. I was luckier than most Trill. I've had seven full, interesting lives. I've had more than my fair share. Now I want you to live yours. Don't throw it away. Promise me."

Worf's eyes closed tightly and he nodded. "I promise."

"On your father's honor," Dax insisted.

Worf looked down at Dax condescendingly. Dax managed a weak smile.

"Just trying to keep you on your toes. Now go. I want to be alone with Leia."

Worf bent over and kissed Dax gently. He rose from his vigil and left, giving Leia a sympathetic look. Leia felt her heart weaken slightly. So she wasn't the only one who was suffering now. She promised herself to do something for this Klingon.

"Come, Leia," Dax whispered. "Please, sit down."

Leia slowly sank into a nearby chair, staring at the young woman lying before her. Dax smiled back.

"I know I'm not the same person you left, Leia, but I am your father, more or less," Dax whispered.

Leia began sobbing. Dax reached out and stroked the side of her head tenderly.

"No. No tears," Dax insisted. "This is a dream come true for me. I never thought I would be able to see you again, but here you are. I get to see my little girl one last time."

"Father....." Leia whispered. "There's so much I have to tell you."

"There is no need," Dax returned. "You married a handsome man who loves you. You are fighting for freedom. What else can you tell me?"

"I tried to follow in your footsteps," Leia admitted with a weak smile.

"And you've done well," Dax replied. "Now I want you to promise me something as well."

"Anything," Leia said, leaning in close.

Dax's voice, incredibly enough, became even more quiet as she continued, "Promise me you won't give up. Palpatine finally caught up with me, but don't let him catch you. Fight like you've never fought before. Don't ever stop....."

Dax's voice trailed off, her breathing becoming still. Leia stared at the now peaceful expression on Jazsia's face. She shook Dax's shoulder gently, then more insistently. Nothing she tried could rouse the Trill. And then Leia began to weep. She collapsed over the body of the woman who had held the memories of her father just a moment before and she mourned. She mourned her loss and the loss the galaxy just experienced.

With a harsh cackle, Emperor Palpatine rose from his throne. The hologram of Boba Fett hung in the air before him. Even the great bounty hunter was reserved and in awe at seeing the most powerful man in the galaxy.

"Thank you, bounty hunter," the Emperor hissed. "You have served me well. Bail Organa slipped through my fingers once. I am pleased he did not again."

The gleeful grin disappeared from his lips as suddenly as it had appeared. He scowled at the hologram and waved a dismissive hand towards it.

"You will receive your payment shortly," he snarled.

The hologram vanished. As the Emperor turned towards the massive windows that dominated his throne room, his two most trusted advisors glided out of the shadows. One was the walking embodiment of evil, the Dark Lord of the Sith, Darth Vader. His rhythmic, mechanical breathing filled the room. The other was a female Changeling. She regarded everything around her with a detached, yet condescending glare. Both were powerful in their own ways, yet each showed the proper reverence to the Emperor, for the Emperor was truly their superior. Vader was evil incarnate, yet even Vader's command of the secrets of the Sith could not match the Emperor's dark soul. The Changeling could be smug about some things, but even she had to realize that the Emperor was the superior. They both bowed low as Palpatine turned to them.

"Your plan worked well, Lord Vader," the Emperor observed.

"Thank you, my Master," Vader breathed.

"And I must thank you as well," the Emperor said to the Changeling. "Your informants rooted out Bail Organa's identity quite well."

The Changeling nodded her appreciation, but insisted, "And what now, my Lord?"

Vader's head turned sharply. The impudence! Demanding that the Emperor reveal his plan like some lackey. Vader felt his hatred begin to smolder, then to burn. He would like nothing better than to draw his lightsaber and teach this.....this freak of nature the proper respect the Emperor deserved.

The Emperor sensed Vader's intentions and raised a hand to stop him. Vader stepped back, his hand resting at his side.

"All in good time, my dear," Palpatine crowed. "What I have planned will crush the United Republic. It is a tangled web that we weave here. Destroying Bail Organa once and for all was merely a thread. Even now, I am wrapping the United Republic in a web of destruction, holding them fast. I myself am the spider, and I will soon feast on them. All in good time."

The Emperor began to laugh, a hideous, nerve wrenching laugh that would cause any living creature to shudder in fear. His laughter echoed throughout the massive chamber, even making it out into the surrounding halls. It was an eery sound, one that conveyed no mirth, no glee. Only doom.

TO BE CONTINUED

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The idea was mine, so there.

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E-mail me at j*****u and let me know what you think of the story

God bless!