

FOR THE LOVE OF GUL DUKAT

A DEEP SPACE NINE TRIBUTE SAGA



BY SUSANNE L. LAMBDA

FOR THE LOVE OF GUL DUKAT

(A Deep Space Nine Tribute Saga)

by

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For Seth, Darman and Jennifer.

Like me, they look into a mirror and
see all the possibilities the universe holds.

*Three snakes shall come to a fertile land,
One shall feed, one shall starve,
And one shall devour all.*

*Blood will flow, shadows arise,
A great fire shall burn the land,
Bringing death shall consume the living.*

*From the stars, a savior shall come,
Armed with a sword of justice,
To battle the one called Destroyer.*

*from the dark, a dagger will strike,
Poisoned with vengeance and disdain,
Causing savior and shadow to wage war.*

*The fire will burn, the land will bleed.
Legions shall wither and die,
And evil shall reign in the shadow land.*

*Unless the savior tames the feted snake,
The lean snake willingly returns to its lair,
And the subdued snake bows its heads.
Only then will peace reign in the restored land.*

Trakon - Prophecy

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EARTH

Prologue

Seated near the aisle of the Boeing 737, the consummation of several vodka tonics did little to ease my fear of flying. Every little bump unsettled me, and the flow of cool air directed at my face had a peculiar musty smell. I nervously tapped my foot and glanced over at my friend, Helen Monroe, who appeared calm and composed. Her slender frame blocked the view from her window, but across the aisle, dark, gray clouds were visible in the other small windows. Streaks of lightning flashed as rain pelted the windows, and I felt my stomach lurch as the warning light flickered on. Turbulence shook the plane as it was sucked upwards that made the engine whine. An overhead compartment opened, and I heard several passengers gasp before I gulped the down rest of my drink.

“I need another one,” I said with a shake of the plastic cup.

“Stop worrying, Sawyer. We’ll get there,” Helen said.

“Sorry,” I grumbled. “I can’t help it if soaring at 35,000 feet in a tin can filled with highly combustible petrol has me a little uptight.” I felt hot in my jean jacket, and my socks felt damp in my boots. “We’re flying straight into on helluva storm. Do you see that lightning? One precise strike to the fuselage and we go boom.”

She rolled her green eyes. “This isn’t the Hindenburg. Relax.”

“Blimps filled with hydrogen were another bad idea.”

“Would you rather drive twelve hours to Chicago? There are more car wrecks on an annual basis than plane crashes,” she said. Several more nuts rolled off the tray as the plane gave another hard jolt. “Think of life as an adventure, Sawyer. You cannot hide inside your house forever, writing books. Fate has a way of finding you. Now stop worrying. With any luck, we won’t crash.” She laughed under her breath. “You big baby.”

With gorgeous red hair and green eyes, Helen presented a beautiful, serene image to the entire world. She never let anything worry her. Life was to her a giant trampoline she jumped on, seeing how far she could go, never fearing the consequences of her actions. I admired her courage and wished I could be more like her. However, I had learned from experience to expect the worst. No matter how I planned my day, something bad always happened. Life took unexpected turns and I wanted desperately to be in control. Step outside on a clear day and I would invariably get be caught in a downpour without an umbrella. Perhaps I was a pessimistic. At least I admitted my faults unlike my friend.

Helen's eyes narrowed as she scrutinized the nuts left on my tray. I craned my neck to look for the flight attendant, eager to buy another small bottle of vodka. When I turned back to Helen, she popped a nut it into her mouth with a loud crunch.

"At the time each of us born, our fate is already predestined," she said, as if she held all the answers. "You were born to be a writer, Sawyer. Destiny decides whether you will be rich and famous. Anything is possible."

"I don't believe in fate. Each of us has free will," I argued. "We decide what we want to do and when we want to do it. I could stop writing today, if I wanted to. It's my decision what I do with my life, Helen. There's no superior force controlling my destiny."

"You don't believe in God?"

"Moments ago, you said we were lucky they held the plane for us in Kansas City. God didn't hold the plane. The flight attendant waited for us because I asked."

"Whatever," she said, annoyed. "My flight was delayed one hour due to bad weather. I had to run through the terminal to get there in time. If you think this storm is bad, you should have been on the flight from Texas. I'd say I was lucky I made it at all."

"You don't need luck if you are fated to be on this flight. Just saying, Helen."

The news had broadcasted a massive cell across the Midwest. We had no business being in the air. I had waited for Helen outside the gate. I assumed she would miss the flight and checked on times for the next flight to Chicago. Luck had nothing to do with it, I thought. I always had a backup plan. I traveled more than Helen throughout the year. This was my thirteenth comic con to date. I had a new sci-fi novel to sell. I shipped two boxes of

books to the convention hall earlier in the month. My business cards and bookmarks fit inside my carryall; I came prepared.

Helen flew by the seat of her pants. She liked to Cosplay and often competed for cash prizes. Winning first place remained out of reach because she waited until the last second to make three outfits, not one. She fancied herself a tailor. I did not tell her taking time to make one quality outfit might land her first prize. Helen's greatest fault was pride. The moment I offered constructive criticism, she would perceive it to be a personal attack and turn her Irish temper on me.

"I'm sure my brother told you what happened last week," Helen said. "I failed my exam into the police academy. You know, I wanted to be a cop, I could have passed it. The truth is I decided I don't want to follow in my dad and brother's footsteps. It's not my fate to be a cop. Being a dispatcher allows me more time to sew costumes and attend comic cons with you."

From what I had heard from her brother, Helen had slept with her instructor. She thought he would pass her, only his wife found out and blew the whistle. Her family was furious. If Helen wanted to sabotage her career, she had done a great job. I saw no reason to tell her what she already knew and changed the subject.

"Personally, I believe in synchronicity," I said. She lifted an eyebrow, interested. "Carl Jung claimed every random coincidence is actually a meaningful message, if you stop and pay attention to it. An example would be turning on the TV tonight and catching a program on precisely what we are discussing. What you call coincidence, luck, or fate, I call it synchronicity."

"I'm of Irish heritage. Of course I believe in luck," Helen said. She scooped up the remaining nuts on my tray, folded them in a napkin, and placed them inside her purse. I had no idea why other than to annoy me.

"Nothing happens by chance, Helen. Things happen for a reason, a higher reason. Now give back the nuts you stashed in your purse. I'm hungry."

"Too bad. I want them for later."

A second later the oxygen mask above her head dropped. It hit Helen in the

forehead, startling her. I laughed. Earlier, I had changed seats with her, since being next to the window made me claustrophobic. In so doing, I had avoided an airstrike by the mask now dangled like an alien creature above her head. Helen tucked the mask inside its cubicle and closed the lid.

“That’s a coincidence,” Helen said. She flipped her red curls over her shoulder. “Let me give you an example, Miss Smarty Pants. When we boarded the plane, I gave you a Cardassian pin from Deep Space Nine. You said you wanted one, so I picked one up for you the other day. You’re lucky I’m so nice.”

“Yeah, well, I checked the price on EBay for same pin this morning so I’d know how much to spend for one at the con.” I tapped the pin attached to my jean jacket. “Say what you will, Helen. Whenever this type of thing happens, it’s a reminder to take a look around and recognize we’re not alone in the universe.”

“I’m not as stupid as you think I am. A physical and psychological phenomenon that happens simultaneously is just a coincidence,” Helen said. “Now I’m sorry I gave you the pen. This obsession with Cardassians needs to stop. If we ran into Gul Dukat in real life, he would probably make you a pleasure slave. How would you feel about that, Sawyer?”

I swirled the ice cubes in my cup. “Probably enjoy myself. He’s sexy as hell.”

“Spock is sexy,” she said. “I like men who are logical and thrifty, not ambitious and cunning. Your preference for bad guys is why can’t pick out a nice boyfriend.”

“Yeah, well, I didn’t sleep with my instructor.”

Helen’s eyes widened before she hauled off and slugged my shoulder. I let it slide and gazed around the cabin, listening to other conversations, while she tidied our space. Two men discussed the World Series. Some beastly woman chastised her child about spilling the contents of a juice box on the floor. I turned back to Helen.

“Indulge me,” she said. “Who is the best starship captain on Star Trek? Don’t say Picard right off the bat. Think about it. Which captain can you depend on to get you out of the worst possibly imagined situation?”

“Gul Dukat.”

“Don’t be such a pain in the ass, Sawyer Kincaid. Dukat killed millions of Bajorans

during the Occupation. You are in love with a fictional character that ranks right up there with Hitler. Answer the question”

A female flight attendant walked by with a bag of trash. Helen placed her cup in the bag and motioned for me to do the same. I tossed it out with a shrug.

“I couldn’t help overhearing what you were talking about,” the woman said. “I just love Captain Janeway. A female captain is best in any situation. Women are smarter than men are. It’s a known fact.”

The woman walked off, unsteady on her feet as the plane shook, rattling the overhead compartments. Two compartments opened in front of us. A man unbuckled his seatbelt and closed them, nearly falling into the aisle from the turbulence. I realized then Helen asked the question to keep my mind off the storm.

“Every captain has a foil, and every foil believes he or she is the hero in their own story,” I said. “Dukat is simply misunderstood. If you were a Cardassian, you would not think he was a bad guy. I’d pick Gul Dukat every time. Deal with it or you shall know Cardassian justice, woman.”

“I’d picked Janeway for the same reasons she did.”

“So predictable,” I groaned. “If Dukat was on this plane, right now, I’d walk right up to him and plant a kiss on his mouth.”

“You might introduce yourself first.”

Heavy turbulence brought my stomach into my throat. A crackle of thunder produced a bolt of lightning struck the wing on our side of the plane. I struggled to remain calm as the plane’s engine started to whine and black smoke billowed from the damaged wing. The rapid descent lifted my stomach into my throat.

Passengers started to scream as pandemonium swept through the plane. The oxygen masks deployed. Helen put hers, while I watched the flight attendant fall to the floor. The beverage cart careened toward her. No one tried to stop it before it crashed on top of her.

Another hard jolt made me grab my mask. I put it over my face, pulled the cord, and felt the rush of oxygen hit my lungs. I knew we were going to crash. I blamed Helen. If she had been one minute later, we would have missed the flight. Another hard shudder rocked

my body forward. Despite the tightness of the seatbelt, I struck my head against the chair in front of me. Helen's screams were barely audible as I blacked out.

PART ONE

CARDASSIANS - 101

SAWYER

Chapter One

I awoke to a bright light shining in my eyes. I had always heard a person on the verge of death glimpsed a light guided the way to heaven. After years of not attending church, I wondered if now weighed against me. A large shadow blocked the light as a sizeable form bent over me. An oval face with scales, ridges over the eyes, and gray scales came into view. Yep, I thought, dead, judged, sent straight to Hell. I tried to move and found I was strapped to a table.

"It's all right. Remain calm, my dear," a male voice said.

"Is this a hospital? It has to be a hospital," I said with a groan. His cologne assuaged my nostrils and triggered a headache. "Give me a shot of morphine. If my health insurance doesn't cover it, I'll settle on two Tylenol."

No doubt, I had a concussion and hallucinated. The doctor looked like a Cardassian. His assistant resembled a grimacing goblin and held a device that reminded me of a tricoder. I would have laughed if my head didn't throb like the very devil.

"The other one is awake, sir," the assistant said.

"Leave us alone," Helen shouted. "Do you hear me? You had no right to take off our clothes and strap us to these beds. Nothing is wrong with me! Stop staring at me, you spoonhead, and release me this instant!"

"Helen, stop yelling," I groaned. "There is no reason to be rude. Be thankful the plan didn't crash and we have only minor injuries."

I assumed most of the passengers would sue the airline for damages and medical bills. I intended to do the same thing. My friend lay on a nearby table, covered with a red sheet matched the color of her cheeks. It felt softer than cotton. I wanted to ask Helen's opinion about the material. She was far too furious to discuss such trivial matters. I

imagined Helen carried in on a stretcher, kicking and screaming. She had most likely taken a few swings at the assistant. Maybe she had a concussion too, I thought. She was clearly not a good patient.

“Do it again and I’ll bite your hand off. Who is your commander? I demand to speak to him at once. Do you hear me? You have no right to poke and prod us like lab rats, you dirty lizard!”

“Doc, give my friend something to shut her up before my head explodes. I am seeing things. I must have a concussion because you look like a Cardassian.”

“I am. My name is Dr. Quirin. You seem confused, so I will quickly explain. You are on Terok Nor, in a section of the Alpha Quadrant controlled by the Cardassian Union. What can you remember? I want to help you. You can trust me.”

“Right,” I said. “Helen? What happened? I don’t remember a damn thing!”

“What happened is we were abducted by aliens!” Helen put up a fierce struggle, trying to break the restraints. “Sawyer, we have to get out of here! They’re going to dissect us!”

“Calm down,” I said. “This has to be a dream, that’s all, just a dream.”

The Cardassian doctor peered intently at me. He held the same small device to the side of my head. It produced a strange humming sound. A frown appeared on his face. Somebody was begging for a lawsuit, I thought, as he jerked my head to the side. On a quest, he reached behind my neck to probe around with his fingers. He found a tiny object at the top of my spine. Whatever it was, the object was the size of a peanut. When he rubbed on it, I let out a loud groan.

“What the hell, Doc! That hurts! Is it a tumor?”

“Not to worry about, my dear,” Dr. Quirin said as he straightened and set aside the device. “From what I can tell, nothing is physically wrong with either of you. Nor do I believe you have a concussion. As you are my first human patients, I could be wrong. You seem to be in some degree of pain. Allow me to ease your suffering.”

Dr. Quirin removed a hypo from his pocket. He placed it against my neck and pushed a button. I heard a soft hiss and felt immediate relief.

“Better, Saw-Yor?” he asked, butchering my name.

“Yeah, Doc,” I confirmed. “Human doctors always ask how many fingers they are holding up after a patient bumps their head. Go on. Give it a try.”

I waited for Dr. Quirin to do as I asked. A gray hand lifted held in front of my face. Three fingers rose into the air. Three long fingers with tiny ridges on the inner sides.

“Four,” I said to see what he’d do, “and you still look like a Cardassian.”

“Because he is, you nimrod,” Helen shouted without a shred of sympathy.

“Where did you get this pin?” Dr. Quirin asked. He held out the pin removed from my jean jacket. I had no idea where my clothes had gone. “This is the Cardassian emblem. I’ve never seen one like this before.”

“Helen gave it to me.” I felt sleepy and yawned as I turned to study the room. A wall of monitors, computers with blinking lights, and three empty bio-beds fit neat and tidy into a small space. Another room with a glass wall appeared to be his office. “For a dream, this seems awfully real, Doc. Be a pal and unfasten these restraints, huh? I mean, what am I going to do against a space station full of Cardassians? I promise to behave.” I winked at him. “No funny stuff.”

“Gul Dukat will be arriving soon and I am certain he will have many questions for the both of you. You seem harmless enough.”

“What? Wait. Did you say Gul Dukat? Do I look okay? Is my breath bad?”

“Remain calm,” Dr. Quirin said. “Purcell, unfasten her restraints, only hers.”

The assistant was shorter than the doctor and at least twenty years younger. Purcell unfastened my restraints and stepped back. With care, I lifted my hands to my face. My cheeks felt warm to the touch. I reached around the back of my head for the little acorn of pain. The doctor shook his head. I lowered my arms and closed my eyes.

“Sawyer, can you hear me? This isn’t a dream.” Helen sounded groggy from the sedative. “I know you think we’re in a hospital in Chicago. This really is Terok Nor. Gul Dukat is coming here. What are we going to do? They think we’re Federation spies.”

“That will be quite enough talking,” a loud, male voice commanded.

My eyes flickered open. In excitement, I turned my head and started to grin. A tall,

dark form stood in the doorway stared at me with intense blue eyes. Ridges covered the sides of his glorious, long neck. In his black cuirass, a disrupter pistol worn on his right hip, the officer appeared extremely masculine and very much in command.

“I am Gul Dukat of the Second Order of the Cardassian Union, Prefect of Bajor, and commander of this battle station,” he said. “Welcome to Terok Nor.”

The infamous Cardassian swaggered into the room, oozing with arrogance. He possessed far too much sex appeal for his own good. His eyes locked on mine. Tongue-tied, I trembled as he approached my table and leaned down for a closer look. I caught a strong whiff of cinnamon, either cologne or his natural scent, and caught my breath.

“What is their status? Is quarantine necessary?” Dukat asked. I reached for his arm, groaning when he pulled his arm away, staring at me in dismay.

“Both Terrans are healthy,” Dr. Quirin said. He pointed at a large bio-scan monitor across the room that reminded me of a flat-screen TV. I figured this is what it was since it had an outline of the interior workings of my body, outlined in a green light. At the top of my spine a red light blinked; the mysterious acorn. “I’ve determined their age to be early to mid-thirties. Neither has mothered a child or is currently menstruating. Nor do I find signs of illness or disease. I do not believe they need to be quarantined.”

The doctor had been quite thorough, I thought, slightly repulsed at the idea. Helen let out a snarl and fought against her restraints. Dukat glanced toward her, moving so fast it appeared as a blur. I managed to catch hold of Dukat’s hand to keep him beside me. Helen let out a scream of frustration and fought against her restraints.

“The red head is aggressive, sir,” Quirin said. “She struck Purcell, requiring us to strap her down to the bio-bed and sedate her. The blonde, however, is cooperative. I have had no trouble with her. She believes her memory loss comes from a concussion. Despite my examination, I did not find this to be the case, yet she insists we are hallucinations.”

“Interesting. Let’s start with her then,” Dukat said in a liquid smooth voice. He moved to the end of the bed, lifted the corner of the sheet, and peered beneath. “Surely you remember your name? What is it? Where are you from and why are you here?”

“I am Sawyer Kincaid. My friend is Helen Monroe and we’re from Earth. But don’t

bother questioning Helen. She won't tell you anything. She doesn't like Cardassians and she doesn't like you. I, on the other hand, think you're gorgeous. You're a lot taller in person than I thought you would be."

The Gul frowned at my response. The doctor approached Dukat and whispered in his ear. Both glanced at the bio-scans and spoke in soft voice to avoid us overhearing their discussion. Dukat moved into reach. I brushed my fingertips across the front of his armor. It was heavier and thicker than it appeared on the TV show. I received a stern look from Dukat that made heart flutter. He caught hold of my fluttering hand and pressed his thumb into my palm, until it hurt.

"This one shows no fear," Dukat said. He laughed as my heartrate on the bio-scan monitor started to beep to match its speed. "Not the usual reaction I receive when interrogating prisoners. She's excited, Quirin. Smell her pheromones. Perhaps I should perform the examination."

"Please," I begged, practically panting.

"Stop flirting, Sawyer," Helen scolded. "You're making things worse!"

"Ah, the red head is spirited," Dukat said. He pulled his hand free and walked toward Helen's table. "There will be repercussions if you are spies, my dear. We shoot spies on Terok Nor. Answer my questions and I may be persuaded to spare your lives. I want to know how you infiltrated my station. Which ship did you arrive on? Who is the commander? Did you transport onto this station or were you smuggled inside a crate?"

"They were found unconscious outside sickbay," Quirin added.

Dukat snorted. "What is your purpose for being here, if not to spy?"

"Sawyer? A little help," Helen said with a gulp.

I held the sheet against my breasts as I sat up, letting out a soft whistle. Dukat turned toward me. His eyes narrowed as he marched straight toward me. With force, he grabbed a fistful of my hair and yanked. A soft moan of delight escaped my lips. Hair pulling was a sexual turn on. He looked surprised and lessened his grip.

"Well? I'm waiting for an explanation," Dukat said. "What manner of spies has the Federation sent to us, Quirin? For a spy to be effective, they must first blend in. Being

caught the moment they arrival, unconscious, is needlessly careless and pathetic.”

“Honest, Dukat, we’re not spies,” I gasped. “I don’t know how we came to be here. We were on a plane headed to Chicago when lighting struck the wing. In the turbulence, I struck my head, hence my concussion. I want to cooperate to the fullest.”

Gul Dukat laughed harder as he commenced to twist my long hair around his hand to pull me closer. I slammed against his chest. The sheet fell to my waist and gave him a view of my breasts. He grew silent as I spread my fingers across his chest and gazed upwards with longing. With a shudder, he glanced at the medical staff.

“Dr. Quirin, what did you give this one? She does not seem to realize the gravity of her situation,” Dukat stated. He lowered his head to sniff my hair. I stared at his lips. The upper lip was thin, while the bottom was full. I puckered up. “While I appreciate the invitation, my dear, I want answers. I will get them, one way, or another.”

The doctor approached Dukat. He released my hair and pushed me away. I lay down and pulled the sheet to my chin. Dukat kept his eyes on me as Quirin again whispered into his ear. Helen lifted her head and glared at me.

“Stop being a killjoy, Helen,” I grumbled.

“Don’t you get it? We are on Terok Nor. I don’t know how. I don’t know why. That really is Gul Dukat. If you don’t cut it out, he’s going to have us shot.”

“Relax,” I said. “Any second I’m going to wake up in a Chicago hospital and find you in a chair, knitting a hat. Let me have a little fun, will you?”

I slid my legs out from under the sheet, sat up, the sheet kept in place. Extending one leg, my bare foot brushed across Dukat’s thigh. The Cardassians fell silent.

“Hey, Dukat,” I whispered. “Come a little closer. I don’t want Helen to hear what I have to say.”

Dukat craned his beautiful long neck. “Yes? You have something to say to me?”

“I love you,” I blurted.

Sliding off the bed, I felt hypnotized by Dukat’s bedroom eyes as I walked toward him; I was fearless. An amused expression appeared on his face. I threw my arms around his neck, not caring the sheet hit the floor. I was just shy of 5’11 and still had to stand on my

tiptoes to meet his gaze. Pressed against him, eager to feel his hands on my body, I licked my lips, aching for a kiss.

"You are persistent. I'll give you that," Dukat said.

An eerie stillness followed. The lights flickered overhead. Both bio-scans seemed to short circuit at once and went dark. For a moment, it was only us in the room.

"Just one little kiss. Please."

Dukat remained perfectly still as I pulled his head down and slammed my lips right onto his mouth. A sudden spark passed between us. I tingled from my head to my toes. His lips turned soft, pliant, curving to fit my own. It certainly felt real.

"Of all the nerve," Dr. Quirin said, outraged.

Ignoring the doctor and Helen's vocalized protests, I focused on making it one helluva kiss. His lips parted. I slid my tongue inward, meeting his own. It was everything I had fantasized. He was an excellent kisser. His hands slid over my hips and cupped my backside as the kiss changed from inquisitive to demanding. I slid my fingers into his thick, silky hair, my temperature rising. In fast succession, he grabbed a fistful of my hair and dipped me over his arm to continue the glorious kiss. The doctor cleared his throat, loudly, and the bio-scanners started to bleep. The lights flickered on. Dukat broke off the kiss and pressed his lips to my ear.

"Not here. Not now."

His fingers dug into my arms as he forced me to step back. He kept me at arm's length, staring at me as if I had committed a cardinal sin. I feared bruises would result from his tight grip and then remembered it was a dream.

"Ease up, babe," I whispered. "I'm on your side."

Dukat dropped his arms. He lifted his head high, glancing at the medical staff from the corner of his eyes. "Do not address me in such an informal manner, Terran!"

"All I wanted was a little kiss."

"And you have had one," Dukat hissed. "I do not have the time to enjoy what you offer so freely, Sawyer. I am turning you over to my glinn. You will soon learn how Cardassians deal with spies. Take her into custody this once!"

Dukat thrust me into the arms of a Cardassian who had snuck up behind me. Strong arms wrapped around my naked body. Dukat retrieved the sheet from the floor and tucked it around my body. He turned and walked to Helen's bed.

"Remove her restraints," Dukat ordered. "Tonight, I intend to have you both entertain my officers."

The assistant released her restraints. Helen sat up, the sheet wrapped around her, not saying a word. The Cardassian who held me squeezed harder when I tried to break free. I tried to get a look at him. He used one hand to push my head to the front.

"You have the good sense to remain where you are," Dukat said as he lifted a strand of her red hair. "That is wise."

"We're not disposable goods," Helen said in a hostile tone.

"You really won't see the good side of my personality if use tone with me."

Dukat jerked the sheet away from her body. The soldiers let out wolf whistles as he slid his hand across her breasts. Helen slapped his hand away, glaring at every Cardassian in the room.

"Don't do that again," she shouted.

At Dukat's nod, Purcell handed the sheet to Helen and scurried out of the way. She pulled the sheet around her body and climbed off the bed. Dukat loomed over her and snapped his fingers. Two guards appeared and took hold of her arms. Dragged to the door, Helen hissed like a hellcat. A push from my captor advanced me across the room. Dukat returned to stand beside Dr. Quirin.

"Glinn Damar, have these females dress in something suitable for this evening's entertainment," Dukat ordered. "Add them to the lineup. Perhaps they will change their minds and confess the truth when they see what lies ahead."

I used every bit of strength to jerk around in the Cardassian's arms. I stared into the sneering face of Damar.

"Oh my God," I groaned. "You're even handsomer in person!"

"Be silent," Damar ordered in a perfectly nasty tone.

Helen was marched through the doorway by the guards. Damar panned my arms to

my sides and tried to spin me around. I loved him as much as Dukat. It was my dream and I saw no reason I could not have both men. I glided my tongue across his jaw, tasting pumpkin pie, the same as his scent; delicious.

“Cease and desist, woman!”

This time, Damar jerked my arms behind my back. His maneuver placed me in closer approximation and his armor scratched my skin. He was extremely attractive for a big brute. His blue eyes, his best feature, radiated with anger. His famous sneer sent goose pimples down my arms and back. His lips were full, sensuous, begging for a kiss. I was spun around before I could kiss him and faced an amused Gul Dukat.

“It would seem, Damar, this evening is going to be interesting.”

“We’re not spies,” I said.

“You are what I say you are. Tonight, you are pleasure slaves,” Dukat stated.

“This is a dream is just getting better and better.”

“Are you not afraid?” Damar asked as he scooted me toward the door.

“Of what? Dukat seduces women and women love him for it.”

The Cardassian Gul arched back and laughed. His laughter spread like a virus, until every Cardassian, including the doctor and his assistant echoed the sound. Dukat turned away from me. Damar wrapped his arms around my waist and lifted me off the floor in order to remove me from sickbay. He carried me down the hallway. Angry shouts from Helen caught my attention. One of her guards had yanked away her sheet. The second guard pulled her arms behind her back so his companion could caress her breasts.

“Sawyer! Help!”

Adrenaline rushed through my body. The realization Helen and I might be raped was now something tangible. This dream was out of control. I didn’t think, I reacted on instinct, and kicked Damar in the kneecap. With a grunt, he released me. I shoved him against the wall and threw the sheet over his head. As Damar fumbled to remove the sheet, I ran toward Helen. One push sent a guard slamming against the far wall. A hard punch in the jaw sent the second guard to his knees. In my dreams, I often possessed super strength and took advantage of it. Two more guards rushed out of sickbay, unsure which of us to

subdue. I stood in front of Helen, my fists raised.

“Just don’t stand there,” Damar snarled. “Grab the blonde!”

“Helen! Run!”

As my friend turned to flee, Damar blocked her path. Left on my own, I slugged the first guard to reach me in the face. His nose flattened, blood gushed between his fingers. I sidestepped a blow from another Cardassian and threw a punch. My fist connected with his chin, lifted him off the floor, and sent him flying backwards. He landed on his backside and slammed his head against the wall. I was prepared to continue fighting, until Dukat appeared with his pistol in hand, aimed right at me.

“I would hate to harm you,” Dukat snarled. He glanced in disgust at Damar. “If you cannot restrain these women, I may reconsider your position here as second-in-command. Well? Take them into custody or must I do that too?”

Damar handed Helen over to two bruised guards. She wrapped the sheet around her body, her head lowered, visibly trembling in fear. I glared at Damar as he marched over with my sheet in hand. He tossed it at me with contempt. As I tied it like a toga, I turned back to Dukat as he lowered his weapon.

“This is madness,” Dukat said, furious. “They fight when they should surrender. They speak when they should be silent. They show the same defiance as the Bajorans. Is what we have here, Damar? Are they with the Bajoran Resistance?”

“I will get the truth out of them, sir,” Glinn Damar said.

“Your guards were manhandling, Helen,” I interrupted, still angry, still on a high from battle. “Where’s that Cardassian charm you’re known for throughout the galaxy, Gul Dukat?”

“So fearless,” Dukat said. “Are you willing to die for your friend?”

“That can be arranged,” Damar said with a chuckle.

“Don’t say anything else, Sawyer,” Helen cried. “Please. We’re...we’re sorry. We’ll cooperate, Gul Dukat. Tell your guards to keep their hands to themselves. Sawyer is stronger than any Cardassia. I don’t know why, only that she is. ”

“Very well,” Dukat replied as he approached Helen. “For now, I’ll play the part of a

charming host. I do not want either of prisoner harmed, Glinn Damar. Is that understood? This one is more fragile than I thought, and must be handled with restraint. Take them to the holding cell without further delay."

"We told you who we are," Helen said. "We've been nothing but honest. Neither of us are Federation spies. Please. You have to believe us."

"What you call honesty, I call subversion. There is no escape from Terok Nor. You are here to stay, unless I say otherwise." Dukat glared at Damar. "Why are you still here? Do as ordered. Have these females prepared for my guests."

"They will not cause further problems, sir," Damar grumbled.

"See they don't and clear this hallway. Your performance is deplorable."

Helen pulled her sheet around her body, sniffing back tears. The four guards waited until Damar led us down the hallway and followed. Damar glanced back at us. He drew his pistol and motioned at us to walk ahead of him. Helen grabbed hold of my arm, her bottom lip quivering.

"I don't want to pleasure Dukat's guests," she sobbed.

"Hey, Damar," I said glancing at him over my shoulder. He glared at me. "Can't we work out another arrangement?"

"Be silent," Damar said in a gruff tone. "Your fate is sealed."

HELEN

Chapter Two

Hustled through a maze of oval-shaped corridors, I gazed at the design of the station, finding it different from the TV show. Heavy bulkheads supported the corridor, lit by three strips of blue light. Each corridor was numbered, the same as the doors. Damar herded us onto a turbolift like cattle. We descended to Level 6, where I assumed the slave quarters were located. Behind every door, I wondered how many Bajoran women were kept. Damar came to a halt outside Door 13. Bad luck, I thought.

“Open,” Damar muttered.

The door slid open. I was shoved inside a room sparsely furnished with two couches, no wall hangings, and a desk. Sawyer ran into the room and turned as the door whooshed closed. She stared at Damar like a kid in a candy store. He placed his pistol on his belt and pointed at the entrance to another room.

“You will find clothes in there. If you fail to cooperate, I will summon the slave mistress to deal with you,” Damar said. “You have one hour. See that you’re ready.”

Entering a room lit with red lights, I stared at racks of costumes suitable for Las Vegas showgirls. A dressing table stocked with makeup, wigs, hairbrushes, and a box of fake jewelry extended across the back wall. The smell of perfume was strong. I approached a rack of clothes. I noticed a metal box filled with handcuffs and coiled whips on the floor.

“What? No dog collar? Or does Dukat brand his slaves?”

“Do you require either?” Damar asked from the doorway.

“No,” I muttered.

“Then do what you’re told. Be quick about it!”

Damar stood with his arms crossed over his chest. He watched Sawyer approach the

table. She examined the items. The glinn walked over and pointed out a bottle of perfume. I assumed it was a scent he liked. I ignored Damar and examined the inventory, sliding my hand across a pair of gold shorts with no crotch. I definitely wasn't going to put on anything accessible. A pair of iron pants that required a key to unlock, of course, were not available. I selected a bright green gown with a gold vest. A pair of soft gold slippers fit my large feet. I'd always been embarrassed about the size of my feet. The slippers made them look smaller. I sat at the table and used a brush to untangle my hair. The curls responded and spiraled down my back. I paused to stare at my reflection. The lights hid my freckles. I applied blush and tried to rationalize how we'd come to be on Terok Nor. It was possible I was in a coma and imagined everything.

"It's not a dream," I muttered. "This is a nightmare."

Hearing a clamor behind me, I glanced in the mirror. A naked Sawyer darted out from behind a rack of clothes and vanished into the next row. Clothes fell off hangers as the Cardassian swept past and searched for the idiot as she played a game of hide-and-seek. At Sawyer's laughter, I turned and spotted her jump out at Damar. She caught the glinn from behind and threw her arms around his shoulders. With a grumble, Damar turned and received a kiss on the lips. In his effort to extract Sawyer's arms, he lost his footing and both tumbled backwards into the garments.

"Release me this once, woman. I will not be assaulted."

"Stop resisting and kiss me," Sawyer demanded.

My friend might want to waste time with Damar, but I planned to get off the station. Gul Dukat was the one man who could help us. All I had to do was convince him we'd been hijacked and ask him to return us to Earth. Captain Janeway would have made it a priority to figure out what happened. Dukat wasn't anything like Janeway. The chances he'd help us were slim. I had to try. I stood, smoothed out my gown, and entered the front room.

"Where are you going?" Damar emerged from the room, his thick black hair in disarray. He wiped his hand across his mouth. Not a fan of kissing, I thought. "This type of behavior will not be tolerated. Sit here and wait while I deal with your friend."

"I have a better idea. Why don't you take care of Sawyer, while I pay a call on Gul Dukat? I can explain everything that happened. Surely, he'll be more inclined to help if I talk to him and not Sawyer. She doesn't believe any of this is real. I do."

"I have my orders," he said. "It seems I must send for the slave mistress Gurgala, after all. Your friend does not take Dukat's threat seriously. Nor do you."

"Use a little more persuasion. I'm sure she'll see things your way if you take the time to explain the rules. For some reason I can't explain, Sawyer likes you. I don't like you or Dukat. But I don't want to be shot as a spy either. Let me talk to him."

His upper lip curled into a sneer. He clenched his hands. Wanting no trouble, I stepped away from him and placed a table between us.

"Helen, I found a bottle of kanar," Sawyer shouted from the other room. "It tastes a bit like molasses. I drank half of the bottle already. Do you want any?"

"Neither of you are to be intoxicated," Damar said.

"Then you'd best stop her because she's well on her way."

Damar glanced at the dressing room, unsure whether to stop Sawyer or prevent me from leaving. I intended to go whether he approved or not. I did not intend to stay on Terok Nor, especially during the Occupation of Bajor. Damar chose to pursue me. He rushed forward to block the door. Spreading out his arms, his thick body presented an inconvenient obstacle.

"I know you have no reason to trust me, Glinn Damar. I only want to talk to Gul Dukat. He needs to understand we've been abducted against our will."

"The opportunity to speak with the Gul has come and gone. Dukat desires to make an example of you and your friend. You will entertain his guests tonight and that is the end of it. Now sit on a couch and wait, while I deal with your friend."

A loud crash from the next room was followed by female laughter. Damar ducked as a black boot hurled past his head and struck the far wall. Three more shoes were thrown into the front room. Damar took a direct hit in the face with a red high heel. He winced and rubbed his nose, bristling with anger. I took advantage of the situation and ran to the door.

"I'm going to see Gul Dukat. Tell me where I can find him. If you don't stop Sawyer,

she is going to continue to make a mess of things. Make your choice.”

“If you desire to see Dukat, then you shall see him.”

Damar brushed past me. He opened the door and shoved me into the arms of two Cardassian guards. I hadn’t realized guards stood outside the room. I couldn’t tell if they were the same ones from sickbay. Cardassians looked the same to me; ugly, grey-skinned, bipedal lizards with scales and facial ridges. I had no idea why Sawyer liked them.

“Take this slave to Gul Dukat,” Damar demanded.

The guards grabbed my arms, apparently preferring to drag women through the corridors instead of providing a friendly escort. Taken to a turbolift, we traveled six levels in silence. Marched through another oval corridor lit in blue, we arrived at a door. A feeling of dread settled over me. I’d gotten what I asked for. One of the guards pressed a button on a panel. I heard a chime. Before I could change my mind and retreat, the door opened and I was shoved inside a dimly lit room.

Catching my footing before I fell, I smoothed out my gown and stared at Dukat. He was seated on a couch, reading something on a com-padd. His eyes lifted. The intensity and coldness reminded me of chips of blue ice. I was clearly not welcome in his quarters.

“Why are you here? I did not send for you. I told Glinn Damar to prepare you and your friend for this evening’s entertainment. The gown you chose is hardly suitable. You might as well be dressed in armor. I cannot see any flesh.”

“That’s the idea,” I replied. Dukat glared in a threatening manner. Coming to his quarters no longer seemed like a brilliant idea. “I believe your glinn is interrogating Sawyer. Frankly, I doubt you could handle both of us, despite your reputation with the ladies.”

Dukat tossed aside the device and rose to his feet. I kept expecting a director to call ‘cut’, a film crew to appear or hear someone say this was all a gag for the comic con. No such thing happened. I remained facing the most dangerous Cardassian in the galaxy. Unless I wanted to spend the last few minutes of my life begging for mercy, I knew I’d better watch my mouth.

“I asked why you are here. I have made my intentions quite clear. Had I known you

would be this difficult, I would have sent you to security and locked in a cell.”

“I came here to apologize, Gul Dukat,” I said, holding out my hands. “Sawyer and I didn’t really get a chance to make a good impression on you. This situation is as strange to me as it is for you. This station isn’t supposed to exist in real life. Nor are you. Sawyer and I come from the 21st century. We were headed to Chicago on an airplane. The storm we flew into produced heavy turbulence. One minute I was conscious and then we ended up here. I’d like to hear your thoughts on this matter. Do you know anything about time travel? Do you think the Dominion might be behind this? I admit I really don’t know much about either.”

“You’re the first spy to offer an apology followed by an extravagant story,” Dukat said. “While I can be a forgiving man, I am neither gullible nor naive. As you’ve taken the liberty to come to my quarters, at the least I can be a hospitable host.”

The Gul walked around me. He stared at me as if I was something he wanted to buy, which in a sense, I guess I was. I had come to the wrong person for help. This was my first chance to look at Dukat, up close and personal. His gray skin darkened at the base of his ridges. For a lizard man, he smelled nice, a combination of spicy and pungent.

“Would you like something to drink? Some kanar, perhaps?”

“Sawyer said the thick stuff Damar drinks is horrible.”

Dukat raised an eye ridge. “And just how does your friend know what my first officer drinks?” He approached a bar, lifted a decanter filled with a pale pink liquid and filled two glasses. His long legs brought him to my side in three strides. He handed me a glass. I took it from him, sipped, and found it tasted like cherry schnapps.

“It’s a bit hard to explain,” I said.

“I find the truth far more palatable than fabricated lies. Time travel is a possible explanation. However, I doubt the Dominion is involved. What I do think is the Federation created this elaborate scheme and placed two attractive females here to distract me. I imagine the reason is the USS Enterprise is in route to this station. Captain Picard apparently thought you could lower our defenses. I intend to find out before he arrives. You will not enjoy the interrogation I have in mind for you and your friend. Everyone

talks. Few survive the ordeal.”

I avoided meeting his gaze. Dukat disturbed me on several levels. Sawyer was right about Dukat being sexually attractive. However, I was correct to believe he was dangerous. His charm was an illusion. I knew he plied me with alcohol to loosen my tongue.

“Despite what you think, we are not spies. My friend thinks she’s in a hospital on Earth. She doesn’t believe any of this is real.”

“You do?”

“Someone arranged to have us brought here. Where I come from the Federation and Cardassian Union don’t exist. Yet, here we are, three hundred years in the future, in some kind of mirror universe. I hate to admit it, but we’re at your mercy, Gul Dukat.”

“I am not known for being merciful, Helen.” Dukat tapped my nose with his finger. “However, there is another way you can convince me of your honesty.”

“How?”

Dukat finished the last of his drink and placed his glass on a table. He removed the glass from my hand. In the next instant, he ripped open the front of my gown. His gaze was menacing.

“This is the part where you scream,” he said.

* * *

SAWYER

Damar found me seated on the floor amongst a pile of clothes, drinking straight from the bottle of kanar. He grabbed my arm and yanked me to my feet. I nearly dropped the bottle.

“Don’t be so aggressive,” I grumbled.

“You have had enough kanar, woman.”

Already drunk, I swayed into him. Damar stood a few inches taller and packed forty more pounds of solid muscle. The bottle was taken from my hand. He finished the last drops before placing it aside. When he turned back, he ripped the sheet away from my body, staring at me with lust in his eyes. My nostrils flared as I caught his scent. I slid my arms around his neck and kissed his jaw. He jerked his head back, sneering at me.

"I forgot. Most Cardassians don't like to kiss. It's a shame. Your lips are one of your best features. Where I come from kissing is a national pastime. Would you like to give it a try, Damar? I mean, we are alone. I am more than willing to teach you."

"I prefer you remain silent and submit."

Damar let me kiss him, though he didn't respond. I slid the tip of my tongue across his bottom lip. His arms tightened around me. Without warning, he threw me onto the bed. He moved fast, fumbling to unzip his pants. I stared at his erection, colored a dark gray with ridges that I felt certain would add to the pleasure. He held his cock like a weapon.

"Turn around and spread your legs."

Assuming I could do whatever I wanted in my own dream, I slid off the bed and reached for his cock. I caught hold of it, pulled him toward me, and licked away a drop of moisture from the tip. He tasted like pumpkin pie. Damar caught his breath as I slid my lips around him, sucking until his knees buckled. He pushed me away and sat on the bed.

"What's wrong? Don't they have oral gratification in the 24th century?"

"These things you do...it is not our way. Perhaps Dukat will be intrigued with what you offer. I require only penetration to satisfy my needs."

"Don't be a prude. Take off your clothes. Show me everything, Damar. After all, you are my first Cardassian," I said crawling toward him.

"This is the slave quarters. Others may find us here."

"Then hurry, my handsome glinn. I won't take no for an answer."

Damar considered my request and stood to remove his armor, never looking away as he peeled off an under layer of padded garments and removed his boots. He stood before me, naked and glorious, while I devoured his muscular body with my eyes. The ridges extended along his arms and thighs. From between his legs, his cock emerged from a slit, reminding me of a lizard. His cock thrust upwards, ridged on the sides, colored a darker shade of gray. With a smirk, he strutted to the bed and lay beside me. The sheets were dirty. We were not the only ones to have sex in this room.

You may commence your instructions," he said.

"With pleasure, Glinn Damar."

Damar was an eager student. He learned fast, as curious as I was about the differences in our bodies. His nipples were sensitive. When I pinched one, he let out a deep growl. Eager to touch his cock, I wrapped my hand around it. The heat coming from his cock was intense. As I stroked him, he responded by biting my neck. He was a bit of a brute. I learned fast he wasn't interested in foreplay. He climbed on top of me and with military precision thrust his cock into me. I slid my legs around his waist, amazed I was able to feel the ridges rubbing against my sensitive flesh. I lifted my hips to accommodate his size and girth. Damar thrust against me. I slid my hands over the ridges on his shoulder and along his neck. The ridges extended beneath his ears. With a groan, he increased his tempo, showing no sign of tiring. After what seemed hours, I started to worry for my safety.

If I had concerns, they ended when I hit my first orgasm. I muttered his name and he reacted by flipping me onto my stomach, lifting me upwards and slid into me, holding my waist as he commenced his steady thrusts. Using my elbows as a brace, I lifted my head. His hands slid along the length of my back and reached for my breasts. He squeezed as he pounded into me. I let out a snarl that seemed to excite him further. He gave a final thrust, grabbed my hips, shuddering, and flopped beside me.

"Dukat will not be pleased. You were to be his."

"He had his chance," I said.

Pressing against his heated body, I laid my head on his shoulder. One leg was draped across his mid-section and I let my fingers slide across his smooth scales. His stomach was flat, the muscles easy to trace and I reached lower, finding his cock withdrawn into a slit. He had the same anatomy as a lizard. Interesting, I thought, able to smell his pheromones, thick in the air.

"You were amazing, Damar. Can we do it again?"

"I admit the experience was satisfying. Humans are different from Cardassian and Bajoran females. You are smooth inside. I would have you again, Sawyer. I have my orders. You must prepare for tonight. Choose whatever you desire to wear. You are beautiful and do not require much preparation. Keep your hair long. That's how I like it."

"I'd rather retire to your quarters for the evening."

“You do not object having coupled with me?”

“Not at all,” I replied. I slid my hand across his muscular chest, tracing the ridges led to the center of his biceps creating a small spoon similar to the one on his forehead. “Is there any reason other than Dukat we shouldn’t be together? Do you have a mistress on this station?”

“No. I have a wife on Cardassia,” Damar said. “And you? Do you have a mate?”

“I date a guy on and off. Nothing serious.”

“Date? I don’t know what you mean.”

“It’s a courtship ritual,” I said kissing his shoulder.

“Dukat will insist on seeing you in private. He will demand you tell him everything, about where come from, who sent you, and how you came to be on Terok Nor. No one from Earth has come this far into the Alpha Quadrant. When Dukat questions you, do not expect him to be as understanding. Your friend made a mistake to see him alone. He will force her to submit and then it will be your turn.”

“Dukat would never force me. He wouldn’t have to.”

“Whatever you imagine Dukat to be like is most likely wrong. You may know of his reputation. You do not know him. Seducing the Gul will not save you. If Dukat decides you are a spy, there is nothing I can do to protect you.”

“I’m not worried about Dukat. I’m looking forward to seeing him in private.”

“Then you are a fool. I would not have you hurt, Sawyer.”

“Nice of you to worry about me,” I said. “Now kiss me. You need a lot more lessons.”

Damar sighed when my tongue darted inside his mouth. His kissing improved drastically. When he pulled me beneath him once more, I was convinced this was one seriously crazy, erotic dream.

* * *

HELEN

Gul Dukat's bedroom was different from what I'd expected. It was plush, from the rugs on the floor, to the drapes at the windows looked out at space. His bed was large and round. I imagined he'd been with hundreds of women in same bed. I felt slightly guilty I had been led into his room, knowing Sawyer wanted pleasure. I hardly considered his rough treatment a pleasure. He stood at the door gazing at me appreciatively, as I rushed behind his bed, starting at him, terrified. The fur blanket on the bed came from a creature with dark purple fur with black and white speckles. I assumed it was something he'd killed and skinned and I felt no less as trapped.

"I won't be forced," I whispered.

"I will take what I want, with or without your consent. Yield and I will be gentle, Helen."

The command left me no choice. I had to cooperate. I approached Dukat on unsteady legs and stood before him. He slid his arms around me and kissed me. As his tongue slid into my mouth, I realized he'd mastered the art of kissing some time ago. I saw no reason to resist or fight. I let him do what he did best. Removing my gown with nimble fingers, Dukat stepped back to admire my figure as the material fell to the floor and then unfastened the front of his pants. I started to panic when it became clear he wasn't going to undress. He reached into the front of his pants, removing an engorged erection with ridges and I backed away from him, stumbling against the bed and fell onto my backside. He advanced toward me. Instinct told me to fight and not submit. He moved fast and caught a handful of my long red hair.

"I enjoy resistance more than submission," he announced.

Yanking my head back, he leaned over me and kissed my neck. His tongue slid over my skin. I caught my breath as he laid me on the bed. Moving over me like a large panther, he parted my legs with one hand, still holding onto my hair. He didn't kiss me again. He didn't caress or speak honeyed words. His full weight fell on top of me. I was excited and terrified as his immense cock slide into where it needed to go. His steady thump

commenced, slow at first, gathering speed, until I clutched his shoulders. A scream caught in my throat as an orgasm hit me. Oh, he was good, for someone so rough and brutal. I imagined this is precisely what Sawyer would have wanted and felt slightly guilty. I gritted my teeth and refused to make sounds. He gave a grunt and shuddered. I felt slickness on my inner thighs. He flopped beside me, gazed at the ceiling, not bothering to hold me in his arms. I pulled the pillow over my body; it was over.

“Curious,” Dukat said. “You make no sounds. Did I not please you?”

“I’m the quiet type.”

“One day, you will not hesitate to cry out of my name during the act of love,” Dukat said in a stern voice. He caught hold of my chin. “Sex is an art form I have mastered. Had your friend chosen to come in your place, I have no doubt her screams would be heard by everyone on the station. There was no passion in your touch. The next time you are with a Cardassian, be sure to make some degree of noise, as it may not be someone as understanding as me.”

“I’ll remember,” I said feeling immeasurable small. I’d given him what he wanted, at least physically. I had hoped by sleeping with him, he might offer to help us. I was wrong.

“Tell me more about your friend.”

I sighed. “Sawyer thinks she loves you. She doesn’t see you for what you are and holds you a pedestal. It will be a long fall when your pedestal topples.”

Dukat rolled on his side to stare at me. “Careful, girl,” he said. “Did someone provide you with a dossier on me? A profile on my background, military history, and perhaps a recording? I am sure Sawyer viewed it multiple times. If you are honest, you may find me in a forgiving mood. Who are your superiors? Are you with Section 31?”

“The Federation doesn’t acknowledge Section 31 and we’re not spies,” I said gazing at the ceiling to avoid his eyes. His fingers curled around my arm. “If you must know, I work for the Dallas Police Department. I’m a dispatcher. My father is the police captain and my brother, Henry, is a detective.”

“If you are familiar with law enforcement, then you are familiar with what happens to criminals who are caught and convicted. Why settle for the lowly post of a dispatcher?”

Hmm? Do you not have higher ambitions?"

"Not really," I said. "The paperwork I can handle. I'm not a bad shot on the gun range. My father took me on several calls, a drug bust that ended with him shooting a suspect, and two domestic assaults. No thanks. I like being a dispatcher. I'm told my voice has a calming effect. I can't see myself shooting another human."

"Then you are a coward," Dukat said.

"I don't care what you think. I happen to enjoy my life on Earth. I want to get back to it just as soon as possible. If you won't help us find a way back home, then find someone who can. You said the Enterprise is coming here. I'm sure Picard would help us."

"It's not my custom to return spies to their masters."

Dukat straightened his clothes, zipped his pants up, and sat with his back against the headboard. He still wore his boots, while I lay on the bed, naked, reduced to the status of prisoner, slave, and his personal plaything. I had only myself to blame.

"What did your friend do for a living?" he asked. "She had no difficulty handling my soldiers and Glinn Damar. Fighting comes naturally to her. Was she a police officer?"

"If you want answers, talk to Sawyer."

"I am talking to you at the moment."

"What do you want me to say?" I asked furious when he removed the pillow from my arms. I tried not to react as he fondled my breast, thinking it odd now he wanted foreplay. "All I know is you're supposed to be this powerful Cardassian. Will you help us or not?"

Dukat's hand stilled. "Oh, you are a very clever spy. The damsel in distress is a familiar role played out by many Bajoran women," he said. "I will find out who sent you, Helen. You can rely on it."

"Sawyer is a writer," I said. "Look at this from my point of view. Sawyer and I are not special. This doesn't make any sense. You must know what is going on. This can't be the first time this has happened."

"I recall a story I heard once on Bajor. A prophesy written thousands of years ago about time travelers who arrive to cause great havoc. The Bajorans have many prophesies.

They are a superstitious lot who find spiritual meaning in the smallest things. I'm simply trying to ascertain your purpose here, Helen, before I decide what to do with you."

"Just put us on the next freighter bound for the Federation," I said. Hearing fear and frustration in my voice sickened me. I was a coward.

Soft chiming noises at the door brought Dukat to his feet. He walked to the door and glanced at me. I pulled the blanket to my chin, shivering in fear.

"Stay here until I return for you," he ordered. "I have not decided if I will share you with my officers this evening. You will know of my decision soon enough. Until then, consider this room as your prison cell. I will not have a spy walking freely about my space station."

"What about Sawyer?"

"I tolerate your questions because you amuse me. I allow you the freedom of my quarters because it pleases me to do so. Do not press me or you will experience Cardassian justice."

With little gem bestowed on me, Dukat left. I assumed he had to attend to his duties, giving me time to reflect on what had happened and what I needed to do in order to return home. I used the replicator and ordered red leaf tea, simply because I wanted to try it and I found it soothing. Heading into the bathroom, I showered, washing every inch of my body, trying to remove his spicy scent. When I opened the shower door to reach for a towel, a male Bajoran slave stood handed me a towel. I grabbed it from him, wrapped it around my body, and snatched another off the counter to dry my hair.

"I am Vanya. Gul Dukat has ordered me to take you to the slave quarters to prepare for his guests. The other Earth girl is waiting there for you."

"I could care less what Dukat wants."

"Please. Don't make this difficult," he said trembling with fear. "I am to dress you for tonight. Put on a robe and follow me."

Annoyed as hell, I put on my robe and followed the Bajoran into the front room. Two Cardassian guards waited for us. I was returned to the room where I'd left Sawyer. She sat in the front room, alone, dressed in a skimpy blue skirt, a black harness top and

black boots. She'd pulled her hair into a ponytail. Dangling earrings flashed when she turned her head. She'd taken the time to put on makeup and pale pink lipstick. A fetching sight, I thought.

"Quite nice," Vanya said. "Now for you. Should I select your outfit?"

"We don't need your help, pal," Sawyer said. "Return for us in a few minutes."

"Do not attempt to escape or we will all be punished."

The Bajoran left the room. I gave a nod when Sawyer held out a cute little black dress. She handed me a pair of pair of gold sandals wrapped to my knees. She made quick work to curl my hair and helped me on with makeup. I stared at my reflection in the mirror. I'd never looked quite as sexy. I still did not intend to cooperate.

"How was your interview with Dukat?" Sawyer asked, pissed.

"I think you should have gone in my place. I never want to see Dukat again. Nor do I want to be taken to a room filled with Cardassian officers. Don't look so angry. I'm sure he'll summon you soon enough. I doubt you'll enjoy it any more than I did."

"Your problem is you don't appreciate Cardassians. They are alpha males with a healthy sexual appetite. Well, I have an appetite, too. I had Damar. Dukat is next on the menu. This is my dream, Helen, and I dictate what happens. Now come on. Quark's bar is where the action is and that's where we are headed."

"This isn't a dream, Sawyer. You have no control over anything," I said. "You're going to get us both into a great deal of trouble."

"Nothing I can't handle," she said, laughing as if the joke was on me.

SAWYER

Chapter Three

In my experience, if you acted as if you knew what you were doing, no one would bother you. On the way to Quark's bar, we ran into two older male Cardassians who nodded in approval as we walked past. Helen looked good in her short black skirt, with her red hair piled onto her head. My ponytail swung as I hurried along, focused on the heels of my black boots so I wouldn't trip. The heels clicked on the floor. As soon as we reached the nearest turbolift, I tugged on my blue skirt. It barely covered my backside. The halter-top pushed up my breasts and I feared if I wiggled too much, the material would bust at the seams. It was nothing I'd ever wear in real life.

"Is this made from plastic?" I asked. "Aliens and their weird materials."

"Like you know anything about aliens or alien material."

Helen flipped her middle finger at a surveillance camera. Several Cardassians walked past us, one whistled, and I waved as I tugged Helen onto the turbolift. She stared at the controls and I hit the button two. We turned to watch as the turbolift lowered, providing a view of the Promenade and at least ten levels on the space station, which reminded me of being inside of a clock. Everything was black or silver, a dash of maroon, with large bolts and pipes and bright red lights. Terok Nor had been used previously to melt ore and produce plating for Galor class ships and destroyers. It also housed hundreds of Bajoran slaves and served as a military base.

On what I assumed was the security level, a guard joined us. Helen crossed her eyes, giving him a sour look, while I patted the railing, eager to join a large crowd at Quark's bar. The guard gave us an appreciative nod. I flashed him a smile and turned to stare over the Promenade as we descended. The bar was full of people, granted they were aliens, reminding me of a typical bar on Earth. We joined the crowd at the bar, listening to a

pulsing electronic beat that served as music, played low over the speakers.

“Shame they don’t have a live band,” I said. “It will take a few drinks before I start liking this crappy music. What’s wrong, Helen? There’s no reason to be scared.”

“You’re acting like one of your heroines. This is your alter ego talking, not the Sawyer I know. The real Sawyer would be as scared as I am. Maybe this isn’t a good idea. I was told to say in Dukat’s quarters. Let’s go back.”

“Calm down,” I said. “I’ve always wanted to visit Quark’s place. It’s all about confidence. Just do what I do. Let’s have fun before the drugs wear off and wake up in a Chicago hospital.”

We walked past a group of Klingons. The five men stopped talking to stare. Klingons were of no interest to me. I ignored them and studied the races mingled in the bar. Some I recognized, most I didn’t. A strange looking humanoid with red skin and black horns caught my attention. He looked like a demon, until he smiled at me.

“Stop flirting and making eye contact,” Helen groaned.

In the lead, I pushed our way to the bar. Two Cardassian soldiers slid off their stools and offered them to us. I pushed Helen toward one, nearly toppling her into the arms of a Telerrite. The pig-faced creature was not at all to my liking. The Telerrite snorted at Helen. She took too long to sit down and a rude Klingon attempted to claim her seat. I slammed my hand onto my stool and threw a leg over it as if I was mounting a motorcycle. The Klingon moved on and Helen sat down. I tapped my hands on the bar, wanting to get Quark’s attention. The counter top was sticky. Helen kept her hands in her lap.

Quark turned around to face us. The Ferengi had large ears, sharp teeth, and wore a multicolored coat. He was exactly as I imagined. Three Dabo girls tried to fill drink orders were coming in fast. Most of the patrons at the bar were Cardassian. I noticed one male Romulan at the far end of the bar who I found attractive. I had promised Helen not to make friends. I waved at Quark to catch his attention.

“Hey, Quark! Two glasses of Romulan ale. Put it on Gul Dukat’s tab, will you?” I laughed when Helen grabbed my arm. “Dukat owes you a drink. Trust me. He owes me one too, and he can afford it. He’s rich.”

Quark walked over with a tall blue bottle with a round bottom. His eyes widened as he looked at Helen. With a towel, he rubbed the bottle, pulled out the cork, and turned toward me. An amused look appeared on his face. He smiled. His mouth was wide and his teeth sharp.

“Gul Dukat’s tab? Is that what you said?” Quark asked.

“I’m sure Dukat’s credit is good,” I said. “You should book a rock or jazz band here on weekends, Quark. If you played trivia on Tuesday, had a karaoke night on Wednesday, drink specials on Thursday, and a Girls’ Night on Friday, you could make a fortune.”

“I like money,” Quark said. He placed two round glasses in front of us. He at Helen as he poured the ale. “This is costly stuff. Do I get a name for my trouble? I’d like to know whom I’m serving. You have such lovely green eyes.”

“I’m Helen. That’s Sa...” Someone bumped her from behind. She sputtered, “Yor,” and took a swipe at an armored back. “Watch out, you big fat jerk!”

“Feisty, aren’t you? That was Gil Saja. A bit of a bore if you ask me,” Quark said. “Did you come in on a freighter? No? Just passing through, I guess. I could always use more help. You’re both attractive. Need jobs?”

“No, thanks. We’re not staying here long,” Helen said.

I grabbed my glass and took a sip of my first glass of Romulan ale. Sweet, evaporating on the tongue, the blue ale packed on helluva punch. I puckered my lips and downed the rest, and then slammed the glass on the bar.

“Fill ‘er up, barkeep,” I announced. Helen wrinkled her nose and pushed her glass toward me. “My friend doesn’t like Romulan ale. Do you have beer? She likes beer.”

“We have Klingon beer. Vile stuff,” Quark said.

“Perfect,” I said. “How about some Earth music? Whatever is playing doesn’t sound like music to me. If you have a microphone, maybe Helen will sing. She has a good voice.”

“I get it. You are professional entertainers. If you want to sing, be my guests. This should go over like a Bajoran plasma bomb.” Quark placed a bottle of Romulan ale in front of me. “If you expect payment for a live performance, I won’t part with a single bar of latinum. This round is free, if you’ll agree to sing.”

"I wouldn't dare," Helen said. "If my friend wants to make a fool out of herself, then let her. You might as well give her what she wants, Quark. Everybody does, sooner or later."

"If Yor wants to sing," Quark said, "then Yor gets to sing." He placed a handheld device on the table looked like an iPad. "Punch in anything you want, sweetie. The music will play over the speakers. We usually don't get requests for Earth music. I do enjoy Deltan love ballads."

"I know what Sawyer likes," Helen said. "Mind if I pick you something out?"

"Yeah. Sure," I replied.

A box of cigars was past toward a customer by a Dabo girl. I grabbed drank Helen's Romulan ale and downed it one gulp. As she typed in songs on the com-padd, familiar Earth music started to play. I refilled my glass and swallowed the entire glass to steady my nerves. Quark offered Helen a tall glass of dark beer. Helen seemed happy with its taste. She leaned across the bar. Her breasts brushed across the top. Quark ogled Helen's breasts as he leaned forward. She slid his fingers over his large ear. He groaned and wiggled his backside. Helen removed a com-link from his hand and gave it to me.

"Climb on up, sweetie," Quark said tapping the counter. "Let everyone get a look at you. I want these Cardassians to enjoy the evening. Happy Cardassians spend more latinum. Let's make them very happy."

"You want me to perform on the bar?" I asked.

"Certainly. You're a pretty girl. I'll make a killing," Quark said.

"I found your favorite song. If you want to win over these lizards, get moving Sawyer. Your song is about to play," Helen said. "Watch your footing. The counter is sticky and you're drunk."

"Hey, I heard that. My bar is not sticky," Quark said.

Producing a dirty towel, he started to wipe down the counter. He placed a glass of frothy beer in front of Helen. She raised the glass at me and then took a sip, a pleased look on her face as I heard a familiar guitar opening from a Nancy Sinatra song. Scrambling onto my stool, I crawled onto the bar, mindful I gave a few seated Cardassians a glimpse of

my panties as I stood. The crowd grew quiet as I rose and straightened my dress. Holding the com-link to my mouth, the familiar music blared over the spears. I realized I didn't remember the lyrics. I stomped across the bar in my black boots and sang whatever popped into my head.

"Folks keep saying welcome to Terok Nor.
It's occupied by Cardi's, a fact I can't ignore.
While I don't know exactly how I came to be here,
I'd rather be drunk at Quark's than down on Bajor.

These boots are made for walking,
And that's just what they're for.
One of these days these boots
Are gonna walk right out the door."

Spinning on my heels, I noticed Damar and several officers push their way through the crowd. I shook my backside at Damar when he reached the bar. His jaw dropped and he stared in shock. In time with the music, I placed my boot against his armored chest and belted out whatever came to mind.

"You keep saying all the same crap I keep hearing.
How you're in control, when baby you know that you're not.
You don't like kissing or partake in oral gratification.
From what I've seen, you don't like a helluva lot."

Pushing Damar back with my foot, the crowd went wild.

"These boots are made for walking,
And that's just what they'll do.
One of these days these boots
Are gonna walk all over you."

As I spun around, my ponytail flipped across my shoulders. I looked upwards and noticed Dukat, Constable Odo, and two security guards on the balcony. Dukat wore a stoic look on his face. Finally, I had the chance to perform for him. I was going to make him want me as much as I wanted him. I pointed at the Gul and sang directly to him.

“You’ve got the reputation of the Big Bad Wolf.
Everyone obeys living under your roof. Ha!
Well, I think it’s time for a little reeducation. Yeah.
Cause I take what I want, and I want Gul Dukat!

These boots are made for walking,
And that’s just what they’ll do.
One of these days these boots,
Are gonna march all over you.
Come on, boots. Get walking!”

Spotting two strong Klingons with their eyes on me, I dove off the bar and into their arms. I laughed and kissed a Klingon on the cheek. I wiggled out of their arms and waved at the crowd under maddening applause and cheers. Another old Earth song played as I pushed my way through bodies to reach Helen. She had a glass of Romulan ale waiting for me and threw her arm around my shoulders, delighted at my antics.

“What do you think? Was I any good?” I asked.

“I didn’t know you could sing. Quark wants an encore,” Helen said.

“Give me enough Romulan ale and I’ll do anything.”

I ordered more ale, aware Damar tried to get up the nerve to approach me. His friends taunted him and pushed him forward. He staggered toward me, a glass of kanar in hand, and meeting my gaze, he quaffed it down.

“You’re playing with fire, Sawyer,” Helen warned.

“Everyone enjoyed it,” I said draining my glass. Damar put his arm around me in a possessive fashion. “I don’t suppose you dance. What do you like?”

“I think you know,” he growled.

I started to grind to the music. Damar placed his hands on my hips. Helen slid off the stool and bumped her backside against him. Damar growled in annoyance.

“Oh, come on. Dancing is good for the soul,” Helen said.

“There will be no more dancing or signing. Come with me or you can spend the night in detention,” Damar said, angrily. “That means now.”

Giving us no time to respond, Damar took hold of Helen’s arm and dragged us both

from the bar. The audible sound of disappointment and boos from the patrons followed. Damar kept hold of us as we rode the turbolift, grumbling when I pressed against him, licking on his neck ridges. Guards waited for Helen on the next level. As she was hauled off, I managed to pull my arm free. I jumped onto Damar's back, piggyback style, and tapped my heels to his flanks.

My breath hot in his ear, I whispered, "If you hurry, we can party all night between the sheets."

"I am a Cardassian. I do not party."

"I'm talking about sex, Glinn Damar."

"In that case...."

Quickening his step, Damar carried me to his quarters. The door opened and he stumbled inside. He carried me into a large bedroom. The kanar he'd consumed had heated his brain, along with the words of my song, and with a snarl, he pushed me onto the bed and sunk to his knees. His hands closed over my knees, jerking my legs apart and in one fast move, he ripped off my underpants. Casting them aside, he leaned forward, his hands sliding along my inner thighs and then buried his head between my legs. His tongue moved in brush strokes and I grabbed a handful of his hair, withering beneath him.

"Oh, God," I groaned.

"Call me Damar."

* * *

Awakening with a start, I sat up in bed. I was not in a hospital bed, not did the room appear to be a Holiday Inn. Black, gray, and red furnishings from the floor to ceiling. A row of blue lights bordered a large round window behind the bed. Outside the window lay a field of stars that spread into infinity. This was definitely not Chicago.

"How can I still be here? Dreams don't last this long."

A prisoner of the sheets, twisted around my legs, I gave battle. Someone beat a drum inside my head. Waking up with a hangover and no recollection of the prior night, aching muscles gave testimony it had been epic. Clothes and empty bottles of kanar lay scattered across the bedroom. I rubbed my eyes and looked again.

Still in Damar's room, I thought. I took a moment to collect my wits and study my surroundings. A collection of Cardassian weapons hung on the wall. Ancient artifacts lined bookshelves. Tiny clay and stone statues of strange, alien figures surrounded jeweled box. On the far wall, hung a silver sword alike the others. The light shone on the blade and it sparkled. Back on Earth I had my own collection of swords, purchased at cons or renaissance fairs, though nothing as fine as this weapons.

"Damar, are you here? What time is it?"

In space, there is no day or night. Nor apparently were there clocks. I was curious and took my time looking about in his room, opening drawers, looking at 3- dimensional photos, taking inventory of his possessions. He had a drawer filled with war medals, which I found impressive. He was quite the decorated soldier. When I was through snooping, I found garments folded up on a chair, I presumed for me to wear. Everything was black from the underclothes to the shirt and slacks. I left them on the chair and slipped into the bathroom. The advanced technology baffled me. Somehow I managed to get the sonic shower working. Having ions' wash over my body was an unusual experience. I tingled all over by the time I finished.

Returning to the bedroom, I dressed in the spare uniform and found a pair of boots set out for me. They required me to stuff the toes with an extra pair of socks to fit. I stood in front of the mirror and brushed my hair. Pleased with the results, I walked into the adjoining room and headed straight to the replicator. I hit every button. When nothing happened, I used a vocal command to order Romulan ale. A glass of the blue, sweet liquid appeared. I drank every drop.

My headache vanished, leaving me a bit tipsy. The stuff was addictive as hell.

Since Damar did not return, I decided it was time to explore the station. There were no guards at the door. Nor was it locked and opened at the touch of a button. No guards stood in the corridor outside. Not knowing where I was going, I followed my nose. Something smelled delicious brought me into a corridor. Nothing to eat here, I thought. The odor had to be coming from behind one of the doors. I figured it was easier to return to Quark's place and order something to eat. I was amazed I ran into no one on the way to the

Promenade. I walked with confidence and by the time I reached Quark's, I felt I had a good feel of the layout. Quark stood behind the counter, drinking something in a cup, a plate of food set before him. I assumed a seat and stole what appeared to be a sausage off his plate. It tasted spicy. I turned around to study the Promenade. Shops lined the far side of the enormous chamber. A balcony offered a great view for scowling Cardassians. Overhead, I gazed at least twenty stories above me, and all around I saw surveillance cameras. I remembered Odo had multiple monitors in his security office, certain he had noticed my arrival and informed Damar or Dukat.

"Good morning, Quark," I said, snatching his last sausage.

"So, you've returned to the scene of the crime, Yor," Quark said. "The offer stills hands. You're hired if you want the job as an entertainer."

"Oh, I forgot about that."

"A performance neither I nor the Cardassians will soon forget." Quark grinned.

"May I have some Romulan ale?" I asked licking my greasy lips.

Quark walked over. "Charged to Gul Dukat, no less?" I nodded. "Okay. I give, Yor. Just who are you and your friend? We don't get humans on this station, and I would certainly know if you two were professional entertainers." He pointed across the room. "Are you part of the crew of Andorran captain? He drank himself into a stupor last night. Most of his crew sit in detention for disorderly conduct. They were drunk too. Since he paid four bars of latinum for the entertainment, I naturally assumed you were a crewmember."

"Sorry. I don't know the guy, and the name is Sawyer."

Several Cardassians approached the bar to order red leaf tea. Dabo girls tidied the table. Quark set a glass of Romulan ale in front of me. I drank the entire glass and found the bottle placed in front of me. Another glass went down just as easily in three large gulps. I had a buzz going and spun in my chair.

"You do like Romulan ale," Quark said laughing. He placed tea in front of the Cardassians and returned to me. "I would consider having you on staff a profitable acquisition. I made a large profit last night. How about it? You can start this evening."

"I don't know how long Helen and I are staying."

"Well, aren't you a little heart breaker," Quark said. He poured himself a drink and silently toasted me. He used his little finger to point. "Someone has taken an interest in you, Yor. Don't turn around. Gul Dukat is coming over to you."

As I started to turn to look, someone grabbed me from behind. Quark vanished behind the bar. I smelled cinnamon. It had to be Dukat and I sank against him.

"I don't think the male populace can withstand another performance," Dukat growled. He spun my stool around. "Why are you here? You're supposed to be in Damar's quarters."

"Have a drink. I'm putting it on your tab," Quark said.

"I only drink red leaf tea at this time of morning."

Quark placed a cup in front of Dukat. I slid off the stool and clasped my hands behind Dukat's neck. A few Cardassian guards gathered on the balcony watched us. I was surprised to see a group of Bajoran prisoners pushed along by an aggressive rotund guard. A wiser person would have released the gul, especially with guards watching. I nibbled on his long neck and noticed he arched his back.

"Oh, I get it. Yor is one of your new pleasure slaves," Quark said. "Lucky you. I happen to be partial to blondes. I met a human female on Legos VII. What an incredible evening we had on the beach under a cabana, sipping drinks with little umbrellas."

Dukat disengaged my arms and forced me to sit on a stool. He sat beside me and pushed aside the cup of tea. Quark produced a clean glass and filled it with Romulan ale. As Dukat lifted the glass to his lips, I slid my hand up his muscular thigh. He caught hold of my wrist and leaned forward until his forehead pressed against mine.

"You test my patience, girl."

"Give me a thorough investigation, Dukat. I might be hiding something. You'll never know if you don't look in the right places."

"This type of wanton behavior needs to stop...in public." Dukat leaned back and grabbed his drink. He watched as I twirled around on my stool.

"The lady is persistent, Dukat. You might as well surrender. I don't think the word

no is in her vocabulary," Quark said snickering.

"I'd never say no to you, sweetheart."

"Why is it you insist on addressing me in such an informal manner?" Dukat finished his drink, set it aside, and turned toward me. "As far as I know, we have never met. I would remember if you had shared my bed."

"You should be so fortunate," Quark said.

"I know everything about you, Dukat," I said. "You're married and have seven kids."

"A few more, in fact," he stated.

"You command Terok Nor. You're the Prefect of Bajor and you keep many pleasure slaves on this station," I said. Taking a quick swig of ale, I leaned against him. "You're in your forties. You have little tolerance for other races, and you always smile whenever you're about to kill someone. Sometimes you can be thoughtful, even sweet, only you never do anything without an ulterior motive because you like to have the upper hand. Did I get it right?"

"Close enough to be disturbing," Dukat said. "Can we at least agree you are my prisoner and I will make the final decision on....?"

"Yes," I groaned. "Yes, yes, yes."

"I haven't finished the question."

"Sorry. I was anticipating a proposition."

"This is far more difficult I thought it would be. I am accustomed to prisoners showing a great deal more sense when dealing with me. You are not in the least bit afraid. Either you have friends in the Bajoran Resistance and this is all part of an elaborate plan to kill me or you are more intoxicated than you appear to be."

"I'm not with the Bajoran Resistance. I'm not even resisting, Dukat."

"Ask her why she finds you so irresistible," Quark insisted. "Women usually find my ears my finest feature. I'd like to know what she likes about Cardassians. I'm just trying to be helpful."

Dukat gave a shake of his head as he took another drink. Quark refilled his glass. I

leaned forward, quivering with anticipation. I'm sure his expression was meant to be menacing. It had an arousing effect on me. I let out a loud moan.

"Very well," Dukat said. "What do you find so irresistible? Hmm?"

"Everything," I said. "Maybe it's because you're complicated and I like complicated men. What can I say, Dukat? This is a great place you have here. Terok Nor is precisely how I imagined it to be and so are you. I'm just so happy to be here. I don't care how it happened. We're finally together and that's all I ever want. In fact, I never want to leave."

"I offered Yor a job," Quark said.

"Stop interfering," Dukat said. He preened for more compliments. "What else?"

With a shrug, Quark grabbed a towel and moved away from us, polishing the bar. He clearly wanted to remain in a close approximation to listen in. Dukat inclined his head, indicating I had his permission to express myself.

"As far as I can tell, we've arrived during the Bajoran Occupation," I said. "It would be a mistake for you to join the Dominion in the future. Don't do it. I don't want to see you fall from power." I jumped off the stool and placed my head on Dukat's shoulder. "I know what you're thinking. What did you do to deserve a gal like me? I love you so much. The moment I saw you, I knew we were meant to be together."

"This is preposterous!"

Dukat pushed his glass aside. I turned his chair and stepped between his legs. Grabbing the collar of his armor, I jerked him toward me and laid a kiss on him. Behind me I heard Quark sighing. I felt empowered as Dukat's lips softened and pushed him back. A grin on my face, I took another drink. Dukat placed his elbow on the edge of the bar and rested his chin in the palm of his hand. Romulan ale had made us both a little drunk. He seemed to struggle to focus. He offered no resistance when I faced him and placed my hands on his thighs.

"Honestly, I don't know what to think about you," he said.

"Let me show you."

I planted another kiss on his lips. His arms slammed around my body and jerked me against his chest. I melted in his arms. In an instant, the kiss turned passionate.

“Now that’s what you call par’Mach,” Quark said.

Dukat broke off the kiss. “What did you say?”

“Wait! I know what that is,” I said. “It’s Klingon for a type of aggressive, sometimes violent romance love. Am I right?”

Dukat nodded. “Yes, that’s what it means,” he said reaching for his glass. He took a large gulp and slammed the empty glass on the bar. “Another one!”

“Whatever you want, Dukat,” Quark said as he refilled the glass. “When someone offers you love, Dukat, you don’t look a Venebian mole in the mouth. They have very sharp teeth.” He laughed. “Yor seems sincere in how she feels about you. I’m a sucker for romance. If I were you, Dukat, I’d question her in a holosuite, in a beach setting, right at sunset. We never get sunsets here. Maybe that’s what this place needs. A hologram set up so we can watch the sun rise and set, right here on the Promenade.”

“Will you stop interfering, Quark? You’re not helping,” Dukat said. “I have never met this woman until last night. I do not know why she insists she loves me. It’s obvious this is part of her cover story, a clever attempt to get me to lower my defenses. This will not happen.” He placed his hands on my shoulders. “If you desire to help, Quark, then learn how Saw-Yor and Helen beamed onto this station. Ask your patrons. Many ships come and go from this station. I am sure you can learn something.”

“Yes, Quark. Be useful,” I said.

I turned and found my glass was too far away to reach. I grabbed Dukat’s full glass, took a sip, and held the rim to his lips. A tiny smile appeared on his face. He took the glass from me and finished it. When he set it aside, he pulled me against his body and stared into my eyes.

“Isn’t the Federation sending the USS Enterprise here, Gul Duat? That’s what I heard. Maybe Yor is a goodwill ambassador. I know she didn’t come here with the Andorran captain. I don’t know why you get all the luck with women.”

“Quark, you’re interrupting,” Dukat said, never looking away from me.

“It’s a bit crowded in here,” I said. I slid my finger across his bottom lip. “Let’s take a bottle of Romulan ale and find a private nook to sort things out.”

Dukat slid his hands down my arms and took hold of my wrists. "Only Cardassian females are bold enough to choose their mates," he said. "I believe you said you would *march* all over me. Was that a threat?"

"I took artistic license with the lyrics. I would never harm a hair on your handsome head, Dukat. Nor would I ever side against you. I love you too much."

"I do not believe one word you say. Nor do I trust you," Dukat said. "There have been four assassination attempts on my life. The Bajoran Resistance is determined to kill me, which is why there is such a large military presence on this station. I have been forced to remove most nonessential personnel from this station. Unless you want to sit in a cell, I demand you tell me why you are here. I caution you to choose your words carefully, for I know a lie when I hear one."

"Well, don't trust Helen. She only slept with you because she thinks you will let her go. I know you are lonely, Dukat. I know you search for love, only you want find it with a Bajoran or with Helen. You can with me."

"I think not," Dukat said.

"Can't you tell Yor is sincere? I'd give anything for a woman to feel way about me," Quark said as he polished a glass. "If you don't take her to bed, Dukat, then please send her to mine. I'm very lonely."

My face felt like rubber when I smiled. Dukat tried not to smile back at me. Quark set another full glass in front of me and topped off Dukat's drink, doing his best as the barkeep to keep us plied with booze. I turned to the Ferengi, seeing double, and shook my finger at both bartenders.

"See, the boss sampled the red head first. Helen knew I'd already laid claim on Dukat long before we arrived. She only slept with him because I told her in a terrible situation the only person you could depend on is Gul Dukat. Then the boss tells me that I'm too easy. If I kicked and screamed, then he'd be interested. Now does make sense?" I was pleased when Quark shook his head. "No, it doesn't. Here I am, throwing myself at the man, and he still doesn't want to take off my panties."

"Oh, I'm sure he does. I do," Quark said, chuckling.

“No more ale,” Dukat snapped. “You are coming with me for questioning. There will be no beaches at sunset or par’Mach. It’s security for you.”

Dukat wrapped his arms around me and slid off his chair. He used me for balance as we walked across the bar, swaying as if we walked on the deck of an English frigate in a storm. We listed hard to starboard and slammed into a booth. Dukat fell onto the seat, dragging me with him. Somehow I ended up facing him. In an instant, we locked in a passionate embrace and kissed. Maybe it was the flickering lights or giggles from Quark that brought Dukat to his senses. He dragged his lips from mine, his eyes filled with anger, not lust. With a loud groan, he pushed me out of the booth. My knees started to buckle. He moved fast, grabbed hold of my waist, and hoisted me over his shoulder. He carried me out of the bar with a swagger, while I patted his backside like a drum.

“You are testing the limits of my patience, woman.”

“It’s just so firm!”

The pressure of his shoulder against my stomach was not a good thing or not. I thought I might puke and stopped drumming. Dukat carried me through a corridor and stopped outside the security chief’s office to place me against the wall. Held by a hand to my chest, and leaned me against the wall. He had to hold me beneath my arms to keep me from slipping to the floor.

“Constable Odo! Come out here at once!”

“It’s not going to hurt you to be nice, Dukat,” I said with a hiccup.

“Nice? You want me to be nice?”

“I want you to take me to your bedroom and show me your legendary skills with the ladies. Millions of people on Earth think you’re a bad boy. I happen to like bay boys. Are you listening to me? Because I don’t think you are. You’re not even looking at me.”

Dukat turned toward me. “I need not look at you to hear you. You’re practically shouting,” he said. “No woman I have ever met has demanded I take her to bed. I prefer to select my companions, not the other way around.”

“You’re just so...so Cardassian. Kiss me again.”

I gazed at his lips and tried to lift my arms to hold him. They felt heavy and

remained limp at my sides. Dukat snarled when my legs turned to jelly. He wrapped his arms around me and glanced at the door. Before he could shout for Odo, I felt a surge of raw power course through my body, as if someone had pushed a button to turn me on. I overpowered Dukat and pushed him against the far wall. His intake of breath ended as I kissed him. His response was immediate. He pulled me against his chest, returning the kiss with enthusiasm.

Someone cleared his or her throat behind us. Glancing out the corners of my eyes, I saw Constable Odo move into view. Odo looked visibly shaken by our romantic embrace. Dukat attempted to back me into the doorway, our lips still locked together, unable to disengage. It felt like someone had glued us together. Once inside security, Dukat used every ounce of strength to disengage and deposited me into a chair. He backed away, his fingers pressed over his lips, which surely tingled like my own.

“What seems to be the problem, Gul Dukat? You seem to have the situation well in hand,” Odo said in a dry tone.

“This woman is to be taken into custody,” Dukat ordered.

Odo glanced at me in concern. “What has she done?”

“Whatever it is, I didn’t do it, Constable Odo,” I said. “The only thing I’m guilty of is being in love with Gul Dukat. Now, if you’re going to arrest me for displaying affection in public, then lock me up. I won’t resist, unless Dukat wants me, too. Do you, my love?”

Anger flickered across Dukat’s face. He grabbed hold of my shoulders, keeping me seated in the chair. I was more intoxicated than I had been in a long time. There were several security guards in the room. I was unable to focus on their faces.

“What else do you know about me? About this station?” Dukat gave me a hard shake that made my guts boil. “Did Captain Picard send you here? He is to arrive this evening to discuss a treaty with Cardassia. Perhaps he sent you and your friend to sabotage this station. If that is the case, then I will present you to him this evening. You can be certain I’ll be watching his reaction. At the slightest indication of recognition, I will...”

“Picard didn’t send me here. I don’t know him. I just know about him.”

“I want answers and I want them now!”

I smiled wide and started to laugh. Dukat looked at me with pure disgust.

“Perhaps I’m wrong, Gul Dukat. Threats don’t seem to be helping,” Odo said. He hovered behind Dukat. “My dear, if you have anything to offer in your defense, I strongly urge you to do so. You arrived at Terok Nor without obtaining clearance through security. It is a matter of protocol. How did you manage to beam onto this station?”

“I have no idea. Nor do I know who brought me here or why. I haven’t done anything wrong, Constable Odo.” I paused to swallow reflux. “Romulan ale is bad. Very bad. Maybe Romulans are bad, too. If you don’t release me, Dukat, I’m going to throw up.”

“Allow me to be of assistance,” Odo said. He placed his hand on Dukat’s arm. The gul moved aside and Odo handed me a pale. I hoped it wasn’t his bucket. “Dukat, is this woman under arrest? I can hold her for disorderly conduct. You are aware she is drunk?”

“Of course I know she’s drunk, Constable!”

Unable to hold down the ale, I stuck my head into the pale and retched. It tasted sickly sweet and bubbled in my nostrils. A few more heaves and I felt I’d brought up everything in my stomach, glancing at Dukat and then handed the pale to Odo. Wiping my hand across my mouth, I sank low in the chair, stretching out my legs, holding my throbbing head in my hands.

“Let’s start from the beginning,” Odo said. “Who are you, young lady?”

“Sawyer Kincaid. I’m thirty-three years old and come from Earth. What am I? I’m a writer. I just published my first novel about a woman who falls in love with a robot. My parents are history teachers. My favorite Starfleet captain? None. I prefer Gul Dukat. How did I get here? No idea. Who sent me? The man in the moon. Is that everything? I hope so because it’s all I can think of at the moment.”

“There, Gul Dukat. This information is quite helpful,” Odo said.

Dukat crossed his arms. “Hardly satisfactory,” he said. “Perhaps torture will loosen her tongue. I assure you, Saw-Yor. You will break under torture. Unless you have something else to confess, then you leave me no other choice.”

“I know the Occupation ends badly. Cardassia loses Bajor and the Federation takes charge of Terok Nor. Out of desperation, you form a deadly alliance with the Dominion.

The Dominion is evil, controlled by the Founders, and they cause the downfall of Cardassia. Later, you fall prey to the Pah-Wraiths, die, and the series ends. You should have become a legate and ruled the Alpha Quadrant with me at your side."

I read the danger signs on Dukat's face. I had said too much. Odo handed me a glass of water. His uniform was different from what I expected. The dark gray and black uniform made him look formidable. I drank the water and handed the glass back to Odo.

"Thanks," I said.

"This is all very confusing, Gul Dukat," Odo said. "Romulan ale seems to act like a truth serum. At least, she believes what she is saying to be the truth. Either this is an elaborate lie or she is able to predict our future. Does any of this sound plausible? The Dominion? The Pah-Wraiths? Do you know what she is talking about?"

"Oh, it's starting to make a great deal of sense," Dukat said.

"Is there anything else you'd like to add, Miss Kincaid?" Odo asked.

"Well, you fall for Major Kira, a Bajoran. Dukat wants her, too. I can hardly fill you in on seven seasons in such a short span of time," I said. "The important thing is war with the Federation and Dominion must be avoided. For Cardassia to remain strong, she must pick her allies carefully. You need to side with the Federation. If you can't beat them, join them."

"I do not know Major Kira. Nor do I understand what you mean by seven seasons," Odo said. "What would you like me to do with her, Gul Dukat?"

"Interrogate her, Constable. Find out whom she knows these things. She already slipped through Damar's fingers. I expect you to hold onto her. I have better things to do with my time than listen to the ravings of a mad woman. Good day."

Dukat stormed out of the office. I smiled at Odo.

"I need to use the bathroom. Where is it?" I asked.

The Constable sighed and pointed at a door.

HELEN

Chapter Four

Clothes were scattered across the floor. After some experimentation, I figured out how to use the replicator and held in my hands a Bajoran-styled gown in lovely shades of dark green, maroons, and gold. I had spent the night alone. The quarters belonged to Cardassian officer and it smelled of body odor and cigar smoke. I had expected Glinn Damar or security officers to check on me. When no one came to my quarters, I decided to look for Sawyer. I found the front door unlocked. No guards stood outside my room. I considered the fact Damar, in his intoxicated condition, had forgotten where he put me. I was on Level 6. I headed to the nearest turbolift that would take me to the Promenade. With any luck, I'd find Sawyer seated in Quark's, matching drinks with Damar.

I found the bar deserted except for Quark. The Ferengi stood behind the bar, restocking the shelves, and offered a smile as I approached.

"If you're looking for Yor, she just left with Gul Dukat."

"Do you mean Sawyer?" I asked.

"Is that the name of the cute blonde with those big blue eyes? She had Dukat's completely spellbound. They drank an entire bottle of Romulan ale," Quark said. "Don't think I like gossiping. I love it. You should have seen the pair of them. Shame I didn't record it. All hands and smooches right up until the point Gul Dukat threw her over his shoulder and took her away."

"Where did they go?"

"To security. I told him to take her to a holosuite."

"Sawyer has been arrested? Why?" I caught hold of Quark's large, round ear. The Ferengi found ear stimulation a turn on. It was a very large ear. I pinched his ear to get a

quick response. He let out a groan of pain. "Where is security located?"

"Release me and I'll tell you," Quark said, flashing his sharp teeth at me. As soon as I let him go, he pointed to the left. "It's right over there. You can't miss it. With any luck, Constable Odo will lock you in the cell next to Yor. You humans are dangerous."

Before I reached security, I heard Dukat's voice. A muttered response came from Damar. I heard Sawyer's name was mentioned several times. I kept out of sight and edged around one of many pillars in the Promenade. Fortunately, Cardassians kept the lighting low, since they had an uncanny ability to see in the dark. As I moved around the pillar to avoid being seen, I slammed into someone and spun around.

"Garak!"

I blurted the name without thinking of the consequences. Elim Garak was my favorite on the show. His wide, round face was precisely as I remembered. This version of Garak had a deviant look. His eyes were set wide apart and darted from side to side, reminding me of a ferret.

"I should have known you'd be lurking about. Do you know who I am?"

"I never lurk. I sneak." Garak had the grace to look slightly ashamed, not it lasted long. Within seconds, a twinkle returned. "And yes, I know precisely who you are, Helen Monroe. I have been monitoring you and your friend since you arrived. If you are looking for Sawyer Kincaid, she is with Constable Odo in security. Perhaps now would be the appropriate time for you to tell me why you both are here?"

"That's exactly what I intend to find out," I replied. "It's some kind of galactic mistake. I need your help, Garak. You know we're not spies. You know everything. If Gul Dukat decides we are Federation spies, he'll shoot us. We have to get off this station. Can I trust you? Will you help us?"

"Dukat and I are not friends. Animosity has grown between us over the last decade. I'd like to solve this little mystery as much as you do. I admit I enjoy throwing kinks into Dukat's plans whenever and wherever possible. If I'm to accomplish this goal, we'll need to extract your friend from security. She is currently inside a cell. All we need is a little distraction and we can get her out. Wait here."

Garak left me behind the pillar. Within seconds, a blaring alarm sounded. He returned to hide behind the pillar with me, while Odo, security and officers ran past us.

"What is going on?" I asked.

"Just a little false alarm," Garak said. "We can hardly walk into security when it's crowded with Dukat's men. Now come along."

The scurrying Cardassians and Bajorans reminded me of ants. Within fifteen seconds of the alarm sounding, Odo and security officers headed off in separate directions. Garak led me inside the office. We found Sawyer seated in a cell. He lowered the force field and helped get Sawyer to her feet. She reeked of liquor, hardly in any condition to walk. Garak lifted her over his shoulder.

"Shall we?" Garak asked.

I was thrilled he was so willing to help, yet remained suspicious of his true motives. Garak didn't know me. I didn't know why he seemed eager to help. I didn't have much time to think on it as he hustled across the Promenade into his clothing shop. I was glad Sawyer was passed out or she would have laughed at my reaction. The fabrics and colors were incredible. I wanted to take my time and touch every material. Garak didn't give me much of a chance to gawk. He led me into the back room. I was surprised to find additional goods and material stacked neatly on shelves. Garak tossed Sawyer in a chair and slapped her. It had the wanted result. She opened her eyes and glared at the tailor. He stared to hit her again. I caught his wrist to prevent it from happening.

"She's awake," I said.

"Clearly," Garak replied.

"Sawyer? Look at me," I said. "We busted you out of jail. I think it's time we started to plan how to leave Terok Nor. Garak is going to help us."

"Why? I don't need help," she said. "What's the matter with the two of you? This is my dream. If you don't stop interfering, you're going to ruin...."

Garak placed a hypospray against Sawyer's neck. Whatever was in there worked, even before it stopped hissing and she fast asleep.

"Are you going to help us get off this station or not?" I asked.

“Oh, I’m already way ahead of you, Helen,” Garak said smiling. “Leave everything to me. Now let’s rouse this savage. Have a seat and let’s see if we can formalize a suitable plan, my dear.”

I gave a nod, none too pleased when Garak slapped her again.

* * *

SAWYER

Garak hovered over me, Helen at his elbow. I’d never liked Garak, for the simple reason he was an Obsidian Order agent. He owned a clothing shop and pretended to be a tailor. I knew he’d never stopped being a spy. There was an odor in the shop that reminded me of a Turkish Bazaar. Still feeling unwell from the ale, I remained seated.

“I see you both hit it off,” I grumbled. “No doubt, you’ve been sharing sewing tips. Use a hypo on me again and I’ll make a purse out of you, crocodile.”

“You’re lucky Garak is helping us,” Helen said. “Be nice.”

The Cardassian smiled. I thought it a sly smile.

“Cardassians do not believe in luck. Fate is another matter. Fate we do believe in,” Garak said. “You are right, Helen. Your friend does know who I am. Your theory that you learned about me from a televised recording takes on a new life of its own. I believe you. Now that you’re awake, Sawyer Kincaid, let’s get to know each other a little better. I’m sure you have hundreds of questions. I am here to answer them.”

Garak went over to a replicator and made three cups of what smelled like hot tea. He returned and handed Helen and I each a cup. I tasted the contents and found it similar to earlgray tea. We were in the backroom of his clothing shop. Helen sat on a stack of material, while Garak leaned against a shelf filled with supplies.

“Do you know where you are?” Garak asked.

“Yes,” I said. “We ended up in the southwestern border, near the Federation, Betazid and Trill domains. If we were looking at a map of the Milky Way, we’re on the Sagittarius tip of the centaur’s arm.”

“Nerd,” Helen muttered.

"You're quite well informed, Sawyer. If you provided any of this information to Gul Dukat, then I can well imagine he believe you are a spy," Garak said. "Arriving yesterday afternoon on Terok Nor, three hundred years in the future, is by no means an ordinary occurrence. I have spent the last twenty-four hours contacting my sources in Central Command, the Obsidian Order, and in the Detapa Counsel. Since I cannot very well tell my contacts who you are or and where you come from, alas, my sources were unable to help. I must assume you have been brought here through non-conventional means."

"Through magic, divine intervention, or someone is playing a joke," I said. "Then again, I could be in a coma or dreaming.."

"Oh, this isn't a dream, my dear. It's all quite real, I assure you," Garak said. "I can't verify you arrived on a ship, though I considered one might have dropped you off and vanished into the Demilitarized Zone. That would make it difficult to find. However, a signal was picked up yesterday from the planet of Panora in the DMZ, which is closely situated to Hdrok 4, a former Cardassian colony. I seriously doubt anyone has visited those two planets in years. They are off limits. However, I picked up a great deal of subspace interference, which happens from time to time, especially when an ion storm is moving through the solar system."

"Worth looking into," I said, wondering if the same storm had passed over Earth. "Maybe the Romulans and Klingons are behind our abduction. Of the two, the Romulans have the superior technology."

Garak nodded. "You are correct, Sawyer. Helen has told me about your world, specifically Dallas, Texas. The climate of Terok Nor seems to agree with her. You do not seem as...comfortable."

"It's too warm on this station," I said. "Nor did I like red leaf tea. I figure the hot tea has raised my temperature, along with the fact you slapped me several times."

"Well, it was necessary," Garak said. "Let us assume you have in fact time-traveled to reach Terok Nor. Whoever brought you here has access to power far beyond our own capabilities, including the Romulans. It would take a godlike entity to achieve this, though we Cardassians do not believe in gods. However, the Bajorans do. They have a complicated

religion and I am inclined to think they are involved.”

“As a Cardassian, I’m sure you think the Bajorans conspire against you,” I said, taking another sip of tea. It had a metallic taste. I didn’t like it and set it aside. “Because they are, Garak, and won’t give up until the Occupation has ended.”

“Be quiet, Sawyer. Who would have the power to bring us into the future?” Helen asked. “What about the wormhole aliens?”

“It is possible,” Garak said. “Aliens snatching humans off their home world to send into the future to study their behavior seems farfetched. However, I am convinced Gul Dukat is not behind this. But who would take an interest in you both and why? These questions I will answer in time.”

Loud shouts drew our attention to the front storeroom. Helen and Garak peered out from behind the curtain. I joined them. Cardassian soldiers commanded by Glinn Damar had entered the shop.

“May I help you?” Garak asked stepping into the open.

“I’m looking for two escaped prisoners,” Damar snarled. “Are they here?”

“Should they be?”

“Answer the question, tailor!”

I had no reason to hide from Damar. Moving around Helen and Garak, I entered the main room. I took a quick look around, snatched a leather coat off a hangar, and slid into it. Damar marched toward me.

“There you are,” he said in a gruff voice.

“I wasn’t hiding. I have been shopping, Glinn Damar.” I gave a whistle. Helen stomped out of the storage room, giving me a dirty look.

“You broke out of security,” Damar said. “Garak, I will deal with you later. Guards! Take these women into custody.” He turned and stormed out of the clothing shop.

“Well, that was rude,” I said.

The guards round up Helen and I as if we were intergalactic criminals. Marched into the Promenade, we found Gul Dukat in the center of a group of aliens who reminded me of bounty hunters by the manner in which they dressed. They were heavily armed, none

smelled or looked clean, and a few wore scalps dangling from their belts. As soon as Gul Dukat noticed us, he dismissed the aliens and approached. Helen crossed her arms over her chest, glaring at Dukat when he touched her shoulder. I rolled my eyes and made a disgusted sound. Dukat glared at me and lowered his hand.

“I thought I left you in security? How did you escape?”

“It wasn’t difficult,” I said with a shrug.

Dukat stepped away from Helen. He grabbed hold of my chin and tilted my head upwards. “When I ask a question, I expect an answer, Saw-Yor.”

“My friends released me. As I said, it wasn’t difficult to escape.”

“By friends, I take it you mean Helen and Garak helped you,” Dukat said. He released me. “Let me reiterate you are my prisoners. I have spent most of the morning searching the station for you. Where does Damar find you? Hiding in Garak’s shop.”

“We weren’t hiding,” I said, stuffing my hands into the pocket of the coat. “If it was so hard to find us, then you’re not half as smart as I thought. Helen is a tailor. Of course we’d go to a clothing store. Plus, she likes Garak. A lot.”

“Shut up, Sawyer.” Helen smiled at Dukat, making me want to whack her. He relaxed and moved closer to her. “I know I was told not to leave my quarters. Neither of us will cause you any further trouble, Gul Dukat.”

“Somehow I doubt that,” Dukat said though he smiled. He leaned toward her. “I like your gown. Did Garak give it to you? I’ll not have him paid with the sweetness of your honey.”

“Oh, good grief,” I groaned. “Helen, you and I are going to have words later. I thought I made it clear Dukat is mine. Stop throwing yourself at him. And you? You just jump back and forth like a toad chasing flies, don’t you?”

Dukat and Helen looked at me. The gul was furious. Helen was amused.

“She’ll do whatever is necessary to ingratiate herself to you,” I snarled. “I warned you, but for whatever stupid reason, you seem to favor her over me.”

Dukat snapped his fingers. “Take her away!”

I heard Helen snort as the guards grabbed my arms and marched me off. Furious,

Dukat had again picked Helen over me, I jerked free of the guards and lifted my right arm in the air to flip them both off. Dukat would figure out it was a mistake the moment Helen plotted with Garak to escape from Terok Nor. I was not going to warn Dukat again. He was a damn fool and would realize soon enough that the little red-haired Texas was nothing but trouble.

* * *

HELEN

"Where are they taking Sawyer?" I asked politely. "Back to security? Shouldn't I be going with he?"

"Come with me."

Dukat grabbed my arm and hauled me toward a turbolift. As it started to rise, he pressed me against the railing and hitched up my dress. He slid his hand between my legs, his fingers probing under my panties. I caught my breath as he slide two fingers deep within my body. My breath caught in my throat as he worked men into a frenzy. This time I failed to remain silent. He finally withdrew his fingers and licked them clean.

"Yes?" Dukat asked.

"I...didn't...what?" I grabbed hold of the railing to keep from swooning. I thought I hated Dukat, but when he turned on the charm, he really turned it on.

"Did I not say the next time you would scream? I think I have proved my point. No woman is silent when I exert every ounce of skill to bring her pleasure."

"You did...and how."

"Well, of course I did, my dear. In the future, I want you to be louder."

"Then, you intend to keep me...as a pleasure slave?"

"As my new mistress," he said. "Having observed you and Sawyer quite closely, I have decided she can serve me best in another way. I intend to introduce her to Captain Picard. Let us hope he does not recognize her or it will not go well, for either of you."

"You're using her to spy on Captain Picard."

"That's one way to look at it," Dukat said. "As I said more than once, you are both

my prisoners. I alone will decide what is to be done with you. For now, I am taking you to your permanent quarters. My quarters. As my mistress, you will have everything you could possibly want or need. Garak will prove an appropriate wardrobe for you. I will be escorting you to the reception tonight. Do look your best. Today, you hold my favor."

"And tomorrow?"

"You'll have to wait and see, my dear."

* * *

SAWYER

I sat behind Damar's desk, smoking a cigar, drinking kanar with a dozen soldiers of the Second Order. A gruff noncommissioned officer named Saja had taken a liking to me. Saja had a twisted scar on his cheek that reddened when he laughed. He'd told every nasty joke in the book, keeping us in stitches, while I interrupted only once to correct him about a differing description among the soldiers about the term 'fellatio'. From then on, the Cardassians relaxed and took a shine to me.

Damar sat on the edge of his desk, laughing along with his soldiers. He kept his gaze on me. I soon realized Damar and Saja were close friends. Saja's acceptance of me was important. I wanted Damar to like me. If Dukat wanted Helen, then I might as well focus my attention on the glinn. As a bed partner, he was one of the best I'd ever had.

"I'd like to see you in private, Yor," Zolon said. "If you are not busy later on, perhaps we could go to the holodeck." Most Cardassians were slightly grey. His skin was a pale shade of brown and his eyes were green. He had mixed heritage, not human. No one seemed to care he was not a pureblooded Cardassian. It made me feel good to know they were not as prejudiced as I'd been led to believe.

"I'd love to accept, only I think I'm busy tonight," I said glancing at Damar. I tapped the ashes on the floor. "One more thing, fellas. When you are romantically involved with a gal, don't sleep around. It's the surest way to either end up with a black eye, racked up credit or a social disease."

The soldiers laughed louder.

A garresh named Dunatar, which was a noncommissioned offer, refilled my glass. He had a lock of black hair refused to stay in place over his left eye ridge. Dunatar was attractive and appeared to be in his thirties. Most of the soldiers were close to my age. Saja was the oldest, well into his mid-forties, from what I could guess by counting the wrinkles at the corners of his alert eyes. I made a mental note of their names. Ikarus had brown hair and sharp blue eyes. Korvinus had pronounced ridges, while Jenrak possessed a preposterously square jaw. Ravon and Torgan, in their twenties, held the rank of gils, which made them were ensigns in Starfleet and slightly uptight. Glinn Damar was a first ranked lieutenant.

“Wait a minute,” Saja said. “You lads keep calling her Yor. Didn’t Dukat have a cousin with the same last name? Gul Raderus Yor! That’s it. I served with Raderus Yor after we graduated from the Cardassian Military Academy. He later became a gul, I didn’t.”

“If you mean Old Stuffed Shirt Yor, he was dishonorable discharged. I can’t remember the details. I read about him in my history class,” Ravon said. “Something to do with a defeat against the Klingons thirty years ago. Does anyone remember the battle?”

“If we lost, who cares,” Jenrak said.

Damar set aside his glass, his mood altered swiftly, and stood. “That is enough kanar,” he said, stubbing out his cigar. “Return to your posts. The Enterprise arrives this evening. Be sure you are sober when it arrives. You stand guard on the Promenade.”

“You heard the man,” Saja said. “One of you make that bottle disappear. Get a move on. We can’t be seen to be idle.” He turned toward me. “It was a pleasure, Yor. I’m sure I’ll see you again. Treat her well, Damar, or I’ll ask her out on a date.”

As soon as the soldiers left, Damar turned his dark blue eyes on me. In the bright light of his office, I thought he looked even more handsome. I placed my hand on his knee, leaving my cigar burning in a dish.

“I thought they’d never leave,” I said.

“You seem able to charm anyone. But I do not approve of the reference to Gul Yor. It may give the wrong impression.”

“Like what?”

“For one, that you have been cosmetically altered to appear human. In addition, the late Gul Yor was in fact related to Gul Dukat. My men now think you are Raderus’ daughter. I’m not sure Dukat will be pleased. For another, the Enterprise is coming here tonight. Dukat wants you to meet Captain Picard. You are precisely the type of female a man cannot refuse. It makes you dangerous.”

“Do I have effect on you, Glinn Damar?”

Damar lifted his chin as I placed my hand over the considerable bulge at the front of his pants. At his growl, I jumped up and threw my arms around his ridged neck. I kissed him. This time, he didn’t resist. His inquisitive tongue entwined with my own. I lost track of time as we kissed. When he finally drew back, he was breathless. We were both over heated.

“This is not a game, Sawyer. When you are introduced to Captain Picard, you will be watched. At the slightest sign of recognition, I will be ordered to arrest you as a spy. It will not go well for your friend either, though from what I hear, she has already bedded Dukat. Does that...upset you?”

“I’m sure Helen will do whatever it takes to when Dukat’s approval.”

“You sound jealous.” Damar trembled when I licked his neck. “Once is pardonable. Twice is an offense. Unless, this is what you’re after?” He grabbed hold of my arms. “Are you here to turn Gul Dukat against me? If you can separate us, put a wedge between us, he will have no trustworthy advisors. His enemies will be quick to close in around him. Is this why you are here?”

“I thought you liked me? I like you.”

“Come with me.”

Damar walked to the office door and opened it. He waited for me to follow. I wiped the smirk off my face and followed. As I walked past him, I slid my hand across his chest and gave him a serious come-hither look. His hand dropped to the small of my back, pushing me along down the corridor. As soon as we turned the corner, he spotted a maintenance room and jerked me inside. I was in his arms in an instant, his lips hot against my neck.

I had something else in mind. I pushed him back and crouched in front of him. As I started to unbutton his pants, he caught his breath.

"I did explain in detail what this is," I said in a husky voice.

Oral gratification might be new for him. He didn't resist. Within minutes I swallowed a mouthful of a tasty confection. He pulled me to my feet and fastened his pants. When I went to kiss him, he had great difficulty meeting my eyes. I thought it adorable he was embarrassed. I wrapped my arms around his neck and kissed his full, beautiful lips.

"This must be the last time. Gul Dukat has plans for you. If he learns I've been with you, I will be demoted or sent to Bajor."

"I won't say a word to Dukat. I give you my word of honor, Cardassian."

Damar smiled. "There's something about you that draws me to you," he said. "I've never found it impossible to resist the charms of a female. Yet, from the moment I saw you, I wanted you. Unfortunately, you belong to Dukat. You speak of honor. Do you know what it means? I have failed in this regard. The moment I possessed you, I dishonored Dukat."

"You did nothing of the sort," I said. I sighed as the door opened.

Damar left the storage room first. He motioned for me to follow him. I stepped in the hallway and tried to keep my expression stoic. His hand returned to the small of my back the moment we stepped onto a turbolift. We stared at each other, until the gate opened and he led me out onto the 6th floor.

"I'm nervous about tonight," I said. "I've never met the crew of the Enterprise. I do know who they are, Damar. I know a great deal about Starfleet and Cardassia. I saw it on TV. That doesn't make me a spy, just a fan."

Damar slowed his steps. "This is real, Sawyer. It's not a dream," he said. "Any interaction between you and Picard will be monitored. I must leave you. The matron will tell you what is expected. I am quite certain you will not like Gurgala. She is Cardassian. Her assistant is a Bajoran named Vanya. Do not look to him for assistance, if Gurgala takes a dislike to you."

"Will you be there tonight?"

"You will entertain Dukat's guests, as is our custom," Damar said.

Unsure what to say, I reached out and took his hand in mine. When we heard people walking in our direction, he pulled away, a serious look on his handsome face. He walked me to a door guarded by two tall Cardassians. Damar placed his hand on my shoulder. When the door opened, he pushed me inside a room filled with a dozen beautiful Bajoran women. I turned as the door closed to find him gone. A Bajoran male stepped forward. He was effeminate. He wore purple robes and a fancy earring that covered his entire ear. The Bajoran slave girls stared at me.

"I am Vanya."

"I remember you," I said, annoyed he didn't remember me. I heard someone snarl. A shiver of fear went through me as all the women backed out of the way, terrified, as a matronly Cardassian bitch came waddling up and pointed her ham-sized fist at me. This had to be Gurgala.

"Strip or you'll be sorry, Terran!"

"I'll dress in private," I said.

"You'll do what I say, slave!"

Gurgala grabbed my arm, twisted it behind my back in a flat second. The old toad dragged me across the room kicking and screaming. She waited while I stripped in front of the slaves. The male Bajoran placed a robe around my shoulders. I was annoyed as hell when my leather jacket was taken away. Vanya remained at my side while the old toad started yelling at the slave girls.

"You will be bathed, anointed, and dressed for the evening festivities," Gurgala bellowed. "Now hurry. Make yourselves beautiful, girls!"

"I suggest you do not resist further," Vanya whispered. "Matron Gurgala is not someone you want to anger. She will beat the disobedience out of you. Do you understand?"

"I hate her," I said.

Gurgala stormed toward us. She lifted a whip in the air.

"Gul Dukat made it clear this one is reserved for a special purpose," Vanya said. "I

do not think he would want her tender flesh bruised." He took the blow meant for me. He cried out and suffered a second strike.

"I'll cooperate. Don't hit him again," I said, about reach to deck the old broad.

"Then get ready," Gurgala snarled. "I have better things to do than waste my time with a stupid slave. Do your best, Vanya, or you'll be sorry you ever laid eyes on this abomination. Humans are so ugly and this one is the ugliest I have ever seen, with her yellow hair and square jaw. Use as much makeup as you need to make her look presentable." She whirled around and stomped through the crowd of slaves, ordering them to line up.

Vanya took hold of my arm. "Come with me," he said. "Have you ever thought about dying your hair red? Dukat prefers red-haired females." He hustled me into a large bathroom. "His current Bajoran mistress is a red head. You won't see much of her though. She has separate quarters."

I didn't want to talk about Helen and Dukat.

"What about Glinn Damar? Does he have a mistress?"

"The glinn has no special female lady," Vanya replied.

He motioned for me to enter an enormous Roman type bath, tiled in bright colors, up to five feet deep I found out as I dropped my towel and jumped into the pool. The water was almost hot. I came out spitting out water, swimming toward the side of the pool, while he took a seat on a bench, watching me.

"Glinn Damar is a private individual," he continued. "You seldom see him in the brothels or in the officer's lounge. You'll be serving drinks in the dining room tonight. Dukat is entertaining guests this evening, important guests from the Federation, Romulan and Klingon empires."

"I can serve drinks," I said.

"A positive attitude is the first thing a pleasure slave must acquire, if you are going to survive long in the brothel."

I held onto the edge of the pool. "You mean I am community property? This is bullshit."

“Yes, certainly, this is a brothel. All of the slaves here belong to Gul Dukat. They are his private stock. His favorites often serve his guests. He has advised me that you are to be considered one of his favorites. Tonight, you will serve drinks. If any of the guests ask for you, then you will provide them pleasure.”

“The hell you say.” I swam into the middle of the pool.

“You’ll do what you’re told,” Vanya stated. “That is the whole purpose of a pleasure slave, to provide pleasure to whomever the Gul selects to be your partner. You are very exotic. I have no doubt you will be selected. We have a great deal of work before you will be ready. Your temper must be controlled.”

“I can play along, within limits.”

“As a Terran, you are unique. You are meant for Captain Picard.”

I climbed out of the water, took a towel from Vanya, and wrapped it around my body. Vanya pulled out a small skirt and top from behind his back. I was horrified, simply horrified. I was expected to wear two strips of dark blue material and a pair of sandals.

“I’ll look like the Whore of Babylon,” I said groaning.

“You will wear what Gul Dukat wants you to wear. Now hurry,” he said.

With a growl, I grabbed the outfit out of his hands and put it on.

HELEN

Chapter Five

Dressed in an elegant red gown provided by Garak, I entered the living room to find Dukat waiting, impatient to leave. He wore his formal uniform and stood with his hands clasped behind his back. The two Dabo girls who helped prepare me for the evening left in a rush. I turned around for him to take a closer look and approve. His stunned silence was greater praise than the most effusive compliment.

“Shall we go?” Dukat held out his arm.

Feeling nervous and excited, I clung to his arm all the way to the reception hall. Everyone stared at us. I felt special and imagined we made a handsome pair. I was Dukat’s red haired mistress, I heard people whisper it, and decided it wasn’t such a bad fate. Dukat led me through the door. Cardassians filled the hall and a smattering of races I’d never seen before, including a weird fish-head race in long robes. Bajorans provided refreshment for the guests.

“I want you to enjoy yourself tonight, Helen,” Dukat whispered in my ear. “You may talk to whoever you wish. I will never be far from your side. You are far too beautiful not to keep any eye on. Ah, I see Garak. He knows what I want. Until late, my dear.”

Dukat left me with Garak, excused himself, and drifted toward Federation officers. I didn’t see Captain Picard or Commander Riker. Garak took hold of my arm.

“Good evening,” Garak said. “You look lovely. Now that I know your size, I will send more gowns to your room. It seems I have the privilege of keeping you company tonight. Would you care for something to drink? A little Bajoran spring wine, perhaps?”

“Yes, lovely,” I said.

I caught my reflection in a mirror, deciding I was one of the prettiest girls in the room, though I seldom felt that way back home. The sound of laughter drew my attention

toward a sexy blonde woman in a skimpy Bajoran costume. I blinked several times. I was Sawyer. She was the only one in the room dressed in an outfit that left nothing to the imagination. I assumed Dukat wanted to punish her for her brazen conduct on the Promenade. She served drinks and flirted with Cardassian officers. I noticed Damar sneering at everyone in the corner of the room. He chugged a glass of kanar.

"I want to talk to Sawyer," I whispered. "We're the ones who sprang her from jail and yet she's the one punished. It hardly seems fair."

"Dukat does what Dukat wants," Garak said.

Sawyer saw us coming and offered the tray of drinks. Garak removed two long-stemmed glasses and handed one me. As I sipped on wine, Sawyer scrutinized my apparel.

"This is too much," she said. "You dress like a Cardassian lady and come in with Dukat, while I serve drinks. I have nothing nice to say to either of you. I told you that you should have let me in security. Now things are worse. I am a slave. Go away."

"I'm sorry," I said. "I didn't know this was going to happen."

My apology was met with a lack of enthusiasm. Turning on her heels, Sawyer served the last drinks on her tray to a pair of Klingons. She used the tray to deflect a pinch from a Klingon and headed to the bar. The Klingons waylaid Garak to ask him a question about Sawyer, while I slid around them and hurried after my friend. The bartender, a Bajoran, set various sized glasses with different contents onto the tray.

"I said I was sorry. It's not like I have another option. If didn't try so hard to get Dukat's attention, you'd be wearing my shoes. You might show a little sympathy."

"Are you serious? Your shoes are huge!" Sawyer drank a glass filled with green liquid. Her eyes bugged out of her head and she gasped. "You...you have a lot of nerve, Helen. I warned him about you, but he doesn't care. You are Dukat's new mistress. I consider this is a betrayal and warn you to stay out of my way...slut!"

I was shocked at her venom. She really was angry with me.

"It's not like I'm his only mistresses, Sawyer. I'm one of many. Look, I'm sorry he didn't pick you. Had you gone to him our first night here, I'm sure I'd be serving drinks. You know why I went. You said he's the one to turn to in time of trouble. I did what you

told me to do. Anyway, I thought you liked Damar.”

“Mind your own business.”

An influx of Federation officers entered the room. People started to whisper and turn to see who had arrived. My hand landed on her shoulder.

“Brace yourself. Captain Picard just arrived.”

Sawyer turned around and gasped. Captain Jean-Luc Picard and Commander Riker walked straight toward Gul Dukat. She ignored the tray filled with drinks. Her cheeks had turned bright pink. She had a thing for Picard as well.

“Calm down,” I said. “This is our chance to get out of here. All we have to do is introduce ourselves to Picard. If we play our cards right, we can beam onto the Enterprise and go home.”

“Dukat is watching me,” I said. “If we say the wrong thing, I will be arrested and shot as a spy. I’m staying right here. You go talk to Picard.”

“No, you’re coming with me,” I said taking hold of her arm. “I have no intention of remaining on Terok Nor. Please, Sawyer. I want to go home. Convince Picard to help us. I’d rather be on Earth in the future than stuck here. I’m miserable.”

“Fine, you big baby.”

Grabbing the tray of drinks, Sawyer followed me through the crowd, sloshing most of the contents on the floor. Sawyer fell behind. As I turned to look for her, Commander Wil Riker brushed past me. He took only look at Sawyer and whistled. I tapped him on the shoulder. He turned toward me and grinned.

“I’m Commander Riker. You’ll have to excuse me for starting,” he said. “I wasn’t aware there were humans on Terok Nor. You’re not a pleasure slave. Are you a Federation ambassador? You look like one. In fact, you are beautiful.”

“The name is Helen Monroe. My friend is Sawyer Kincaid,” I said. “We’re just visiting Terok Nor, Commander Riker. I’m not an ambassador. However, if you can arrange it, we’d both like to join you on the Enterprise. We want to go back to Earth.”

“Speak for yourself,” Sawyer said, interrupting.

Riker was handsome and nearly as tall as Dukat. He seemed far more interested in

Sawyer than me, then again, she wasn't wearing much. I was relieved Riker whispered in Sawyer's ear, not mine, for Dukat had turned to stare at us. The commander took the tray of drinks from Sawyer's hand, set it on a table, and took hold of her arm. At Sawyer's look of shock, I wondered what Riker had asked her and tried not to snicker.

"I'm sure I can beam you straight into my quarters," Riker said.

"Uh, no," Sawyer snapped. "Helen, please explain to Commander Riker that I am not a pleasure slave. He wants me to board, all right. Him!"

"We're guests of Gul Dukat," I said.

"In that case, you should meet Captain Picard," he said. "I'm sure he would be interested to know two humans are on Terok Nor. I'm sure your story is interesting. You can tell it to us both."

"Think Picard would show me his famous maneuver?" Sawyer asked. Sarcasm lay thick in her tone. Riker laughed. I gave Sawyer a stern look.

"I think you misunderstand what the Picard Maneuver is, Miss Kincaid. It isn't something he does in private, although I'm sure he could. We have a nice bar on the ship called Ten Forward. Are you free after dinner? I mean both of you, of course."

"I'm here with Gul Dukat," I said. "You will have to ask him, but I'd love to join you on Ten Forward. Please ask him."

"What about you?" Riker asked.

"Yeah, sure." Sawyer set the tray on a table. She grabbed a glass of wine and drained it in one gulp. "Now let's go meet your captain," she said, annoyed as hell.

"Don't forget to ask Captain Picard about his maneuver, Miss Kincaid," Riker said, trying hard not to laugh. "In fact, I insist. I can't wait to see his reaction."

The commander offered his arm. I placed my hand on his forearm, surprised he slid his arm around Sawyer's waist as he led us over to Picard. The captain spoke with Dukat and a Klingon diplomat. I started to panic when Dukat glanced at me. I carefully removed my hand from Riker's arm and stepped aside. Dukat's eyes narrowed as Riker led poor Sawyer right up to Picard.

"Captain Picard, excuse the interruption. I'd like to introduce you to Sawyer

Kincaid," Riker said. He lowered his arm and pointed at me. "This is Helen Monroe. They recently arrived at Terok Nor. They are guests of Gul Dukat. Isn't that interesting?"

"A pleasure to meet you both," Picard said, in a melodious voice. "Gul Dukat, I was not aware humans were here on Terok Nor. If you don't mind, I'd like to know how this is possible. As far as I know, no Federation ambassadors were asked to join this reception."

"Please," Dukat said. "Ask whatever you like, Captain Picard."

"Not ambassadors then?" Picard asked, his eyes on me. "No, you're not dressed like an ambassador I have ever met, except perhaps on Delta or Orion. What ship did you arrive on, Miss Kincaid? Surely not one of ours?"

"I didn't bring her here," the Klingon grumbled. He spotted a tray of spicy meats drift and followed his nose. His departure did not lessen the tension in the air.

Dukat stood next to me, his eyes on Sawyer. He reminded me of a buzzard waiting for his turn to feast on the corpse. I hoped my friend would play it cool and not say anything stupid. Damar had moved in closer, his hand lowered to his sidearm.

"Go on. Ask him," Riker insisted. He grinned at Sawyer.

"I'd much rather hear about your famous maneuver, Captain Picard," Sawyer said. "Is it something you do in or out of bed? Your commander didn't properly explain it."

Riker howled with laughter. Somehow, Sawyer kept a serious look on her face. Picard stared at her, not sure he heard right and lifted his chin.

"It's a military maneuver," Picard replied. Sawyer finally smiled. "Yes, well, that will be quite enough, Commander Riker. I am not amused." He turned to Dukat. "This is all very strange, Gul Dukat. Neither lady came here on board a Federation ship. I know every ambassador in this quadrant. I would remember if any had been sent to Terok Nor. It was my understanding we are the first to make overtures of friendship with the Cardassia Union. Are you, perhaps, testing me? To what end?"

"I assure you it is not a test, Captain Picard," Dukat said smiling wide. "However, I am equally surprised to hear neither name is known to you. Miss Monroe has certainly acted like a good will ambassador, while Kincaid works at Quark's, a local proprietor of alcohol, gambling tables, and Dabo girls. She's quite the entertainer. She sings and dances."

“Came all this way to perform, did you?” Riker said with a smirk. “I didn’t know the Cardassians enjoyed burlesque? I guess I was wrong. We do at Ten Forward.”

“I assure you, Gul Dukat,” Picard continued, “I have never met either lady before. Nor did I know anyone from Earth had come this far into the Alpha Quadrant. They did not come on the Enterprise. While the Federation cannot prevent civilians from venturing to all corners of the galaxy, neither is in Starfleet or I would recognize them. Regardless of why they are here, I think it would more appropriate if they joined us on the Enterprise. Until a treaty is reached with Cardassia and the Klingon Empire, I would feel more comfortable knowing both ladies are safe on board my ship.”

“My guests are lax in telling you how they came to be here,” Dukat said. “They claim to have time-traveled from the 21st century to my space station, Captain Picard. I’d welcome any explanation you might have to offer. Since their arrival, I have tried to learn how this was accomplished. As of yet, neither has offered a reasonable explanation. I look to you to resolve this...mystery.”

“If you mean the Federation is behind this,” Picard said, puffing out his chest, “then I take offense, Gul Dukat. We do not time travel. Nor would we send two beautiful women to the Alpha Quadrant to add to your pleasure slaves. Now, either you agree to my request or I see no further reason to remain on Terok Nor. Allow me to take these civilians into my custody and return them to Earth. This is clearly a Federation matter and one I am as anxious as you to resolve.”

“As friends, of course,” Riker added. He winked at me.

“I have always wanted to see the Enterprise,” Sawyer said. She leaned toward Picard and I knew she was about to say something stupid. “I hope you have not yet married Dr. Crusher as you’ll only divorce a short while later. You might want to your heart checked out. One of these days, your ticker is going to give out. You do have an artificial heart, correct? I’m not sure if it happens before or after you are turned into a Borg or not. Data, by the way, has a twin named Lore. He’s an android.”

“Artificial human,” Picard correct, though he stared at her in shock.

Riker started to laugh. “Out maneuvered, I’d say, Captain Picard. We have met the

Borg, Miss Kincaid. We did not like them. Q, in fact, is the one who introduced us. I'm sure the captain would love to tell you all about Q. Isn't that right, sir?"

"Q? I'd rather not." Picard frowned as he pulled at the end of his jacket.

Sawyer had lost her mind. I wanted to tell her that she couldn't go around talking about a TV show. I wanted to leave on the Enterprise. Alienating Picard, as she had, I doubted he'd agree to let us board his ship. I considered asking Dukat if I could trade places with her. I doubted he'd let me leave, either, for he'd taken hold of my arm.

"Is this a joke, Gul Dukat?" Picard asked, all stiff and prickly. "I assure you. The Federation will not stand for this type of charade. I came here with the intention of discussing options for a treaty or an alliance with the Cardassian Union. I will to visit the Klingon Empire next."

"Sir, I can explain," Riker butted in.

"I think I can as well, Commander," Picard said. "Making a mockery of this historic visit by surgically altering two Cardassians to appear human is in poor taste, Gul Dukat. Commander Riker, you may wipe that smile off your face at your earliest opportunity. If you arranged for this little joke, we will see how funny you find it to be confided to your quarters for the next twenty-four hours."

"Oh, at the least he should be confined to quarters," Dukat said.

Picard's proud tone set off my temper. I spoke before I realized I'd done so. "Gul Dukat hasn't said one thing, yet you make threats," I said. "This doesn't sound like the Federation I've come to know and love. I can't remember how many times the Federation has paddled around the Prime Directive to get what they want from other planets. You can posture all you want, Picard. Personally, I think you owe Gul Dukat an apology."

Picard glared at me, while Riker no longer looked amused. If I'd wanted to leave on the Enterprise, I'd lost my chance in a moment of blind anger. Dukat laughed. The Federation officers already thought I was an imposter. I wanted to throw off Dukat's arm and beg them to take me with them, but I'd been the one stick my foot in my mouth.

"There, there, Helen. Let's not agitate Captain Picard," Dukat said. "I can assure you, Captain, neither lady is a Cardassian. I insist you take Miss Kincaid to the Enterprise. I

find I do not need an entertainer, after all. Miss Monroe, however, will remain here.”

“Why?” Riker asked. “If they are humans, then they should be allowed....”

“As soon as Miss Kincaid changes into something more appropriate,” Picard cut in, “I will most certainly allow her to board the Enterprise. It seems someone must shed light on this little game you play, Gul Dukat. Dr. Crusher can verify whether she is human or not. In the meantime, if any harm comes to her friend, I will hold you personally responsible.”

“Of course. I expect nothing less from the Federation,” Dukat said. His famous, deadly smile remained on his face.

My chance of escape faded. I wasn’t going anywhere. All I could do was make the best of things and hope my friend had sense enough to convince Picard to help us.

* * *

SAWYER

“Come with me,” Damar growled.

Led out of the hall and into a nearby room, Damar shoved me toward a table where several Bajoran gowns lay. He behaved melodramatic and slammed his fist against the wall. He winced in pain. I lifted his hand to my lips and kissed the injury.

“Better?” I asked. I lowered his hand and leaned forward to kiss him. His lips tasted like kanar. For a moment, he responded and then pushed me away.

“I do not know why you continue to behave in this manner,” he said jerking his hand free. “Picard now thinks you are our spy. He has only agreed to beam you onto his ship to question you about Dukat, while Helen will remain here as a prisoner.”

“Don’t make me go. Send Helen. She doesn’t want to be here. I do.”

Damar pointed at the gowns. Furious I was being sent from Terok Nor, I removed the little dress, letting it drop to the floor. Damar gasped. Meeting his gaze, I put on a long brown dress and slid into a pair of soft, leather boots. He held out a small gold brooch. I waited as he fastened it to the front of my dress.

“What’s this?” I asked.

“This will allow us to see and hear everything that happens.”

“Is this what you really want? Do you want me to leave?”

“It is not my decision to make. Gul Dukat wants you to board the Enterprise and learn all you can from Picard. You came here as a Federation spy. You leave as a Cardassian agent.”

“What if Picard won’t let me leave? Then what?” I asked unhappy.

“Just do as you’re told. I will escort you to the transporter room. Picard and Riker will return to their ship after dinner. Until then, you will be a guest on board the Enterprise. If nothing is recorded, we will assume you removed the device. If that occurs, I suggest you not return to Terok Nor.”

“And if you hear what you want to know? Will I be allowed to return?”

“I am not in command as you made it so clear last night during your little performance,” Damar said. “No harm will come to your friend as long as you do what you’re told, Sawyer. Prove you are loyal to Cardassia. Find out what the Federation is really after. I have no doubt Captain Picard will return you to Terok Nor when he realizes how much trouble you are.”

“And if he doesn’t? What if he won’t let me return?”

“Then Helen will remain here without you.”

I wasn’t going to convince a glinn being a gul didn’t make you brilliant, neither at military tactics, politics, or in love. Damar would have only resented me for putting down his boss. He escorted me to the transporter room. He said nothing as I stood on the transporter pad, feeling quite miserable with the entire situation. An officer at the controls glanced at me. I wasn’t prepared for the feeling of my cells broken down, moved a great distance through space, and made to reappear again on the other side.

One moment I was looking at Damar and in the next, I stared at Worf, the Klingon security officer on the Enterprise. The tall, muscular Klingon scowled at me. Miles O’Brien, the engineer, stood beside him. He looked amused.

“Are you still dating Troi or did you break up with her?” I asked Worf.

"Mr. O'Brien," Worf grumbled. "Please take this woman into custody. The captain said she could be a spy. She is to be locked in the brig. He will speak to her later."

"In the brig! You can't be serious?" O'Brien said. "She's not a spy."

"How can you tell?" Worf asked.

"She's human."

Gul Dukat had already tossed me into a cell. I was not about to be sent to one on the Enterprise. I stepped off the platform and approached O'Brien.

"Either take me to Guinan or send me back to Terok Nor."

"Worf, I'll take her to see Guinan," O'Brien said.

"I have my orders," Worf said.

"Guinan will know whether or not she's a spy. And she is quite attractive." O'Brien walked over to me and offered me his arm. "Allow me to escort you to Ten Forward for a drink. You might do better under fire after a few drinks. I suggest the Irish stout. It's my favorite."

"The name is Sawyer. Are you married?" I waited for O'Brien to nod or shake his head. He merely laughed. "Fine, then let's get drunk. I'd rather not face Picard sober."

"You must be Irish," O'Brien said as we walked out of the transporter room.

O'Brien, I liked, especially since he took me right to Ten Forward where Guinan was serving drinks. I was done talking about TV shows and insulting people. O'Brien had not heard anything I'd said earlier. He didn't think I was strange or crazy. We sat at the bar. Soon, Guinan came over and gave me a hard look.

"You're not supposed to be here," Guinan said with calm authority.

"I know. How did it happen?" I asked. "You're supposed to know everything."

Guinan glanced at O'Brien, concern wrinkling her face. Her big brown eyes hid many secrets, I thought. She gave a nod that made my stomach turn over.

"Now this is interesting," Guinan said handing me a drink. It looked like a beer. I sniffed. It smelled like it. I tasted, yep, it was beer. She handed me a bowl of pretzels, which I ate within two seconds and placed out another for me. "I'd say you come from the 21st century. You're not the first time-traveler I've met, Sawyer Kincaid." She peered intently at

me.

I stared back at Guinan and I munched on pretzels. The Cardassians hadn't fed me dinner. I was starving. O'Brien slammed his beer, confused as hell.

"Further, you seem to know who we are," Guinan said. "You have us at a disadvantage, Sawyer. None of us knows you or your friend Helen. Let me give you some friendly advice. Don't say anything else about your own reality. Some things are best kept secret."

"I agree, Guinan. I've said too much already."

"You're safe here," Guinan said. "Picard will figure out how to send you home."

"How do you know this, Guinan?" O'Brien asked. He wasn't buying any of it. I was already on my second beer and third bowl of pretzels. Guinan took the bowl from me and glared at O'Brien.

"Miles, please go to the replicator and get our new friend something to eat," Guinan said. "Sawyer hasn't eaten a decent meal since she arrived at Terok Nor. She was on her way to Chicago when she flew into an ion storm. It was quite an unusual storm, in fact."

"How do you know that?" I asked.

O'Brien laughed. "Now you know how I feel," he said. "Her perception is uncanny, isn't it? Gives you the willies, it does. One hamburger coming up." He walked over to a replicator and ordered just what I wanted.

"It's my job to know these things," Guinan said. She reached across the bar and placed her hand over mine. "Be careful, Sawyer. You must stop telling people about their future. Technically, most of the things you think you now have not happened yet. Most things may not happen at all. Nothing is predetermined."

"Then this isn't a dream. I'm not laid up in a hospital in a coma."

"No, it's not a dream. For you, it is an alternate universe. Yet, you are on the Enterprise. Everything you see, touch, and feel is real. I think I know who brought you here, Sawyer. What I don't know is why. If you would stop to listen to what you say to people, you'd realize you give the wrong impression. I know you are not a Federation spy. You must accept what has happened. Returning to Terok Nor would be a mistake. I urge

you to allow Captain Picard to sort this matter out and not Gul Dukat.”

“You really are a psychic. Can you also predict the future?”

“In a way. So can your Cardassian friends. You’re wearing a bug.” Guinan pointed at the brooch. She removed it from my cloak and tossed it into a pitcher of water. “Gul Dukat can’t hear or see everything that goes on, not now. You can’t trust Dukat, Sawyer. He’s dangerous. I hope you believe me. Your life is in danger.”

Guinan removed the pitcher of water and placed another glass of beer in front of me. I was miserable. She had removed the monitoring device. Damar had told me not to return if contact was broken off. Now I looked suspect to the Cardassians and Helen remained a prisoner. Riker and Counselor Troi entered the bar. I downed my beer.

“I take it you don’t want to talk with a Betazoid,” Guinan said.

“Having my thoughts read is the last thing I want,” I replied.

Laughing, Guinan lifted her bar towel up to her face. Apparently, I was funnier than I thought. She kept on laughing, drawing over a curious Riker and Troi, along with O’Brien who returned with a hamburger and fries. I was thrilled and once the food was placed before me, started to wolf it down. Riker and Troi stood behind me, waiting for me to finish, while O’Brien sat down to drink with me. Guinan poured drinks for all.

“How did the party go, Commander?” Guinan asked.

Riker shrugged. “As expected,” he said. “Cardassians are so....”

“Rude,” Guinan said. He nodded.

“I think I have been rude as well, Commander Riker,” I said. “You have all been very nice to me, but I can’t stay here. I can’t leave Helen on Terok Nor. Nor do I want the Enterprise to encounter the Cardassian fleet. You must leave Cardassian space. I don’t know what Dukat is planning, but I think it might be a trap.”

“I was starting to think the same thing,” Riker said.

“I’m sorry I wasn’t nicer to you, Commander,” I said. “Don’t get the wrong idea about Gul Dukat. I don’t think he intends to incite a war against the Federation. He doesn’t. Someone else in Central Command might. I know none of you like or trust Dukat. He means well. He simply needs someone to show him the right path.”

“And you think this person is you?” Counselor Troi asked.

“Shouldn’t you be riding motorcycles and wearing leather?” I asked. Guinan cleared her throat. “What I mean to say is, while I’ve enjoyed meeting all of you, I think I should talk to Captain Picard. He may be the only one who can help me.”

“Just who are you?” Troi asked. She had a suspicious look in her eyes.

“We were trying to figure that out when you arrived,” Guinan said. “When Sawyer is through eating, take her to the Captain’s office. He’s waiting for her.”

I drained my beer glass and stood. On impulse, I shook Riker’s hand and Guinan’s, on purpose avoiding to make contact with Counselor Troi. I feared she would read my thoughts. Grabbing O’Brien’s arm, we left Ten Forward, though I regretted not spending more time with Guinan. My guide provided a brief tour of the Enterprise, allowed me to powder my nose, and took me to Captain Picard’s office. I felt comfortable with O’Brien. I trusted him. Outside of the captain’s quarters, I started to get nervous. O’Brien rapped on the door and flashed me a smile.

“It will be okay,” O’Brien said.

I heard Picard say, “Enter.”

“You’re up to bat,” O’Brien said. “Don’t worry. Picard is a good guy.”

The door swooshed open. I entered Picard’s office. He stood with his back to me, staring out the view port at Terok Nor. I wondered what was going through his mind and considered the fact he might be trying to memorize details about the station’s defenses to report to Star Fleet headquarters.

“Please. Have a seat, Miss Kincaid.”

At the sound of his voice, I froze. It wasn’t Picard’s voice. The man turned to face me. His features altered into the powerful alien named Q. Everything clicked into place. Q seemed pleased with my stunned reaction. He approached and stroked my cheek as he walked around me.

“So, you’re the one behind the abduction,” I said. “How is this possible? You’re not a real person. None of this is real!”

With a snap of his fingers, the office decor turned into a sumptuous living space. It

was a room on Terok Nor. His Starfleet uniform turned into a Cardassian uniform. Ridges appeared on his neck and he looked a bit like Dukat.

“Oh, it’s all quite real. Humans have a difficult time comprehending things when their sense of reality radically alters. While I’m not surprised you’ve had a difficult time accepting what has happened, Helen accepts things at face value. Aren’t you the one who said random coincidences have a higher meaning? Well, a higher force is in charge of your destiny. Me! Anything is possible, Sawyer. This is a game, one I manipulate so I can observe your reactions. You and your friend are not the only players. The Enterprise is involved as well as everyone on Terok Nor and Bajor, including their gods and demons. Toss Gul Dukat into the mix and you have a delightful game of Cat and Mouse, only he doesn’t realize I hold the cheese in front of his nose. All I have to do is move my hand and he’ll follow.”

“Are we dead? Is this the afterlife?”

Q crossed his arms as he approached, still circling me like a vulture. “You disappoint me,” he said. “I assumed this is precisely where you would want to be and will do whatever I want simply to be close to Dukat. I have also given you Damar. Am I wrong about you? Isn’t this what you want? To be among your beloved Cardassians?”

“Well, I admit I like both Cardassians.”

“And there is no reason you can’t have both, Sawyer. Additional players in this elaborate game make things much more exciting. I can continue to add players as long as you and Helen participate. Everything you see around is real, as real as you want it to be. This is a game to determine what will happen to Cardassia, the Federation and Bajor. But who will win, lose or die? That remains to be seen.”

“Sounds like you’re peddling a bunch of crap,” I snapped. “What about the show?”

“A broadcast to get your attention. It’s the only thing that isn’t real, Sawyer. It was bait and you took it and ran with it. I set up everything, naturally.”

“Naturally,” I replied.

“All you have to do is accept this is real, Sawyer. If I told you everything, it wouldn’t be half as fun for me.” Q appeared behind me in an instant, rubbing my shoulders. “Didn’t

Damar feel real to you? Wouldn't you like Dukat to feel just as real? Or perhaps the great Captain Picard? Don't you want to play the game?"

"I want answers! What is happening back home? Our families must be worried sick. Did the plane crash? Are we in a hospital in a coma?"

"No one at home will miss you or even knows you're missing. The plane is held in suspended animation. It has neither crashed nor landed. You and Helen were taken off the plane by me and brought here. Frankly, that part was easy. Someone else interfered before I could deliver you to where you were meant to go. Now don't ask who. It's all part of the game, Sawyer. As much as I hate to admit it, in a way, I am also playing the game and don't control everything that will happen. What fun would that be?"

"What do you mean by that?" I asked, starting to sweat. "Who interfered?"

"With a wave of my hand, I sent you through time and into the wormhole. You didn't arrive on Terok Nor as expected. You will have to figure out who intervened. All I wanted to do was come here and explain the rules. There are no rules!"

"Guinan knows what's going on!"

"You can't believe Guinan. In fact, you shouldn't believe what anyone tells you, Sawyer. That's part of the fun. Stay here as long as you like, a few days, weeks, months, or forever, but be warned. If you die in this reality, this mirror universe, there can be no going back to your own time and place. The plane will crash and your family will mourn your deaths. Should you desire to stop playing the game, at any time, and return home, simply call my name. But don't. Stay and see if you can alter Dukat's future. After all, your hand is stuck in the universe's cookie jar. It's up to you whether or not you get the cookie or not. Enjoy!"

Q snapped his fingers.

I found myself in a harsh, alien terrain in the middle of a fierce sandstorm. I attempted to get my bearings only to be knocked to my knees by a gust of wind. A bitter, cold wind howled. Swirling sand devils moved like tornadoes on the horizon back dropped by four moons of different colors and size. The planet looming over me reminded me of Earth, blue seas and large continents.

The air was thin, difficult to breathe. Each gust of wind pelted me with grains of sand cut my skin. Q had brought me to this strange place to die. A few more minutes in this hostile place without finding shelter meant the difference between life and death. Holding one hand in front of my face, I stood and walked with the wind at my back, stumbling forward, praying I'd run into some type of protection from the storm. Each step felt heavier than the last. My lungs started to burn and I gasped for air, wheezing each time I inhaled. I took several more steps and felt a hard push from the wind lifted me off my feet, slamming me into a large hard object. The wind flattened me to its surface. It wasn't a rock. It felt like metal and as I sucked in a mouthful of air, I heard a loud click.

A red light pulsated from a revealed doorway in the side of a shuttle. My frozen fingers managed to curl around the edges of the entrance, holding on as the wind attempted to toss me aside. The sound of a deep voice shouted into the wind. Hands reached out to grab hold of my wrists, yanking me inside the shuttle. I slammed into a large Cardassian as the door closed to the shuttle.

"I've got you," a deep voice said.

Shivering from the cold and fear, I was able to breathe more easily as my rescuer pulled me onto my feet. A calloused hand gripped my jaw and lifted my head. I stared in shock to see Gul Dukat. He helped me into a seat and handed me a thermos. I opened the lid and discovered it was water. Several gulps helped ease the pain in my throat. Dukat knelt before me. He rubbed his hands over my arms and shoulders, until I felt warm. I finished the last of the water and set aside the thermos.

"How? How did you...?"

"Find you? Precise coordinates were provided by the Enterprise," Dukat said. With a tap on my nose, he stood, and walked toward the controls of the shuttle. Flipping switches, the engine rumbled as he prepared to depart. "As to why Captain Picard sent you to this particular Bajoran moon called the Prodigal, I don't know. Nor why there is any atmosphere or air, for none of the five moons of Bajor are inhabitable."

Examining the interior of the shuttle, I found it to be smaller than expected. Two chairs were placed in front of a control panel and a short bench on the sidewalls.

Cardassian markings covered the bulkhead. Dukat quirked an eye ridge as I sat in the copilot's chair.

"It takes three hours to get here from Terok Nor. I've not been gone that long."

"Actually, it's been more than eight hours since Picard sent word you'd been transported onto this moon," Dukat said. "Fortunately, the Kornak was able to bring me here in record time. It would seem Picard suspected you were a Cardassian spy or he wouldn't have dared place you in this type of danger. Now that I know what he is capable of doing, I have no intention of brokering a treaty with the Federation. If he would treat a fellow human in this type of callous fashion, I cannot believe a peace treaty would be in the best interest for the Cardassian Union. In any case, I learned what I needed to know about the man."

Dukat flipped a switch and the engine started, lights flickering on the control panel in a pattern held my gaze. The shuttle flew upwards, hammered by the wind, forcing Dukat to concentrate, so I said not a word as he flew us out of the storm and into a sky filled with stars; it was my first ride into space, a thrill I'd not ever forgot, nor that my life had been saved by Gul Dukat.

"Before the brooch was dropped into the pitcher of water...." Dukat paused, "I heard the splash. I take it Guinan was the one to do so and will not blame you. As I was saying, I heard what the Enterprise crew said to you. They claim you are not a Federation spy. Picard left the reception hastily and raised his shields the moment he returned to his ship, only to depart without explanation. The Kobrak meant to follow the Enterprise out of Cardassian space. Instead, I came to find you. The Enterprise has since warped out of Cardassian space."

"Picard isn't behind this. It's an alien named Q. He's the one responsible for bringing Helen and I here. Q is as powerful as a god, Dukat. He sent me to this moon in the blink of an eye. I'm sure he wanted to see if you'd come after me. We're nothing but game pieces on a galactic-sized board. Q is watching to see who will win, lose, or die. Picard and his crew are being force to play Q's game as well. Refuse to play and I think he'll arrange to let us die."

“Did you refuse to cooperate?” Dukat asked.

“I didn’t say what I’d do. All I know is if you hadn’t come for me, I’d be dead.

Thank you, Dukat. But I am a bit confused. Why did you bother? I’m nothing to you other than a problem.”

His blue eyes narrowed. “The terms of the message received from Picard were quite clear. Come alone or Sawyer Kincaid will die. Once I boarded the Kobrak, I knew saving you was the right thing to do,” he said. “We’ll rejoin Gul Vardon and return to Terok Nor.”

“It makes no sense you’d risk your life to find me. You didn’t know if coming to the Bajor moon was a trap or not.”

“Must everything be explained to you? I made the decision to come for you. There is no reason to press me for additional information. It is what it is, Sawyer.”

Dukat looked away from me. I could see his hands clenched on the controls, betraying his emotions. He actually cared about me. We flew past two more moons, one green and another blue, both beautiful and I assumed equally as deadly as the one I had been on. I glanced at Dukat and found him staring at me. Knowing he could have ignored the message and let me die, yet had risked his own safety to speed to my rescue meant more to me than anything he could have said. I loved him more than ever. He had won my complete loyalty and my heart in one simple act of heroism.

“What precisely did Q tell you?”

“All I know is he sent us through the wormhole and lost contact with us after someone else beamed us onto their ship. He wouldn’t say who it is, but he was surprised it happened. He meant to deliver us to the Prophets. I know it looks like the Bajoran Resistance is behind this, Dukat. I swear to you I do not work for the Resistance or the Federation. I am loyal to you!”

“I believe the Prophets want Cardassia to pull out of Bajor. I have not met these aliens, though I know they exist. Nor have I met Q. I must take your word he is what you say he is. Whoever abducted you from Q must have placed the implants in your heads. It seems many already play Q’s game. Explain the rules and how we defeat him.”

“Q said there are no rules. But if Helen and I want to return home, at any time, we

can send for him. There is one problem," I said. "Our bodies on Earth are held in suspended animation. If we die here, we die there."

Dukat's eyes hardened. "If this is the case," he said, "then we must make certain you do not die. From now on, you will do precisely what I say. I meant to take control of this game. I do not play to lose, Sawyer. If you are loyal, as you say, then you will help me."

"Q did mention one thing, Dukat. He said we could help change your future. I took it to mean for the better. As to how to win Q's game, I have no idea, but I'll play."

"What do you hope to win, Sawyer?"

"A place in your heart," I answered without hesitation. He nodded.

The fact I hurtled through space in a shuttle failed to impress me. I was too upset at what Q had done so enjoy the ride. Q probably watched us. I was safe, for now, and alone with Dukat. Brushing the sand from my dress, I looked to find Dukat heading toward a Cardassia Galor class cruiser. Acting on impulse, I rose from my chair and crawled into his lap. I wrapped my arms around his neck and placed my head on his shoulder. His arms wrapped around me and for a moment, I pretended he was mine.

"You place a great deal of faith in me," Dukat said. "Since you are so eager to know what it feels like to be my lover, I will give you a small sample, Sawyer. I am in command here. Remember that and do not take it to mean anything else but what it is."

Dukat lifted my head. His mouth claimed mine as a tractor beam locked onto the shuttle. With a gentle tug, it pulled the shuttle toward the Cardassian warship. Showing amazing strength, Dukat he lifted me in his arms. He moved away from the controls and knelt behind the chairs. With care, he laid me on the floor and leaned over me. His passionate kisses lit a fire within my soul. Before I was able to wrap my arms around his neck, in one smooth motion, he pulled my dress up to my waist. His hand slid between my thighs and he smiled when he felt no underpants. Repositioning his body, he bent over me with his head between my legs. At the feel of his hot breath, I let out a groan.

"I'm covered in sand."

His lips glided across my inner thigh. "I think I've earned this as much as you," he said, in a throaty voice. "We're already on board Gul Vardon's ship. There's no need to

leave the shuttle until we arrive at Terok Nor. Relax and enjoy what I offer.”

I closed my eyes, unable to think of anything else as his face buried between my legs and commenced licking me. Two fingers slid within me as his tongue centered on the sensitive nub. I cried out and heard him growl in response. In my mind, I was traveling at warp speed when the first orgasm hit. I nearly blacked out from the sheer intensity of his tongue. A trail of butterfly orgasms swept across me as his fingers returned, plunging into me until I screamed, “My Gul,” and heard him chuckle. The pleasure continued for what felt like hours, and when Dukat finally lifted his face, it was slick and glistening. He licked off one finger and stuck the other in my mouth. His eyes narrowed as I sucked on his finger, wishing it were something else.

“I said only a sample,” Dukat said in a husky voice. “I admit it was well worth coming all this way for you, Sawyer. There will be time later for more, but you will have to wait for it.”

He jerked his hand free, stood, and pulled me to my feet. It took seconds for him to fasten his pants and with a yank on my arm, I tumbled against him. His tongue plunged in my mouth and my knees collapsed. I clung to his shoulders, his strong arms wrapped around my body. He lifted me into the air, walked a short distance, and suddenly dropped me into the chair. He sat into the pilot’s chair and glanced nonchalantly out the windshield at the interior of the Kobrak’s hangar.

“Let us be brutally honest with one another, Sawyer. I am well aware Helen does not feel the same about me. The intensity of what you feel for me requires a wall to be placed between us. Love can easily turn into a weapon and so can passion. I will not be controlled by either, so if you desire to remain on Terok Nor, you will do so under my terms.”

“What are your terms?” I asked.

“Quite simple. You will no longer throw yourself at me and make a spectacle of yourself in public. This means you will not throw yourself at me. From now on, you will to do what I say, when I say. You obey me. Helen is content to be my mistress. I have something else in mind for you. I recall you said you would march all over me during your

performance the other evening. I am also aware my men call you Yor. This is given me a wonderful idea.”

Dukat glanced at the controls. He calmly pushed buttons. The floor beneath us turned in the hangar to face the blackness of space. The shuttle sailed out the opening of the Kobrak, dipping downward. The space station was directly in view.

“It should be me, not Helen who is your mistress. I love you.”

“Learn to accept the fact your roles are different. Helen offers no threat, for she wants nothing more than my protection. I can control her. As for you, I recognize ambition when I see it reflected in others. You are ambitious. Like me. There are always rules to follow, to be broken, or bent to your own will. I need to understand what Q is planning in order to make the correct moves and to find out who sent you to Terok Nor. If you truly love me, Sawyer, then you should want to be as helpful as possible.”

He was right, of course.

“Q said he made a mistake by not escorting us to Bajor. I am worried whoever it is means to harm you through us. You must find out what the implants are for, Dukat, and who is behind this as soon as possible.”

“You’re afraid for me, yet not for yourself or your friend.”

“I’m worried about all of us, Dukat. If I can help you find out who else is involved in this absurd game, then that’s what I’ll do.”

After a long pause, Dukat reached over and wiped his finger across my cheek, stealing a fallen tear. He laughed throatily, showing his fine white teeth, as he held up my tear in triumph. “I have never met a Federation agent I could not break,” he said.

“That’s not what I am or I’d have left with Picard.”

“Blunt, honest, sincere. You hide nothing from me,” he said, pleased. “Help me find out who placed the implants in your heads. When you discover the truth, you will come and tell me. Someone will pay for attempting to control my destiny. Just make certain you are on my side when that day comes, Sawyer.”

“I am yours, Gul Dukat. I swear to be faithful and loyal only to you.”

His mood switched faster than I expected. He relaxed with a heavy sigh and flew

the shuttle toward Terok Nor, finding an open hangar where he could land. I noted several alien ships docked at the station. The Cardassian warship was nowhere in sight.

"I believe you will go far as soldier. You are quick to defend me, yet lack discipline, and require a tight leash. So far, no woman in the Second Order has impressed me. I keep none on Terok Nor as they distract my men. I command the Second Order. I am Prefect of Bajor and Master of Terok Nor and twenty more stations just like this. I have a fleet of ships and a hundred thousand soldiers to do my bidding. I did not get to where I am by being charming or nice."

"Saja mentioned a cousin of yours, a gul named Raderus Yor. Damar says his men believe I am Gul Yor's daughter. They think I'm a Cardassian and arrived appearing as a human for nefarious reasons."

"Fortunately, I made the connection as soon as I heard Quark call you by this name. Surgery has been arranged," he said. "You will become a Cardassian soldier in the Second Order. You will follow orders and prove your loyalty to Cardassian and to me. Perhaps, if you please me, we can enjoy another rendezvous in the future."

"I will do what you ask."

"I believe you and that's why I picked you to be a soldier and not Helen. She lacks the qualities needed to make a loyal and obedient soldier. I know I can depend on you."

Dukat flew into the hangar and turned off the controls. Outside the shuttle, I saw a squad of soldiers arrive. He placed his hand on my knee. I felt compelled to place my hand over his and noticed the moment I do so, the lights in the shuttle flickered on and off. We sat in the dark, with the exception of light coming in from the window, and I assumed he had turned off the controls.

"As of this moment, you will be known as my cousin Ren Yor, and train to be a soldier. As a Cardassian, you will have status and respect on this station. Therefore, you will show respect to me at all times. You will show the same respect to Glinn Damar. I will assign him to train you."

"Yes, Gul Dukat."

"See there? It is possible for you to obey. This is a promising sign. Come."

The Gul stood and led me out of the shuttle. The soldiers stood at attention as we walked past and entered a long hallway. Dukat walked fast, I kept close beside him, and as we turned a corner, he stopped and looked in both directions. No one else was in the corridor. He pulled me into his arms for one last kiss.

“You surrender at the slightest amount of affection. Interesting,” Dukat said as he cupped my face in his hands. “Report to sickbay, Yor. Dr. Quirin is waiting for you.”

“He is? Now?”

“I’m already several moves ahead of you. Try to keep up, cousin.”

My smile faded as Dukat led me around a corner. Five more guards waited in the next hallway and the Gul turned, walking in the opposite direction. I was led to sickbay. Dr. Quirin was waiting. He took me into a private room. I changed out of the dress and lay on a table. He covered my body with a sheet. A few minutes later, he returned, a serious expression on his face and placed a hypo against my shoulder. I closed my eyes and drifted off in a drug-induced sleep. And I dreamed.

I dreamed I saw my naked body lying on the table. Dr. Quirin and two surgeons in masks leaned over me. My eyes were closed and I didn’t move. The phenomena lasted only a few seconds. Returned to my body, I felt nothing, no pain, as the surgery commenced. It was impossible to say how long it lasted, when I heard voices, I tried and failed to open my eyes. Perhaps I still dreamed.

“What have you to tell me, Doctor?” Dukat asked, irritated. “How are things progressing here, hmm? This is more extensive than I realized.”

“All is well,” Quirin said. “The cosmetic surgery is a success. The DNA you offered has worked splendidly. Look at the bio-screen. The implant started to emit a high-level frequency when surgery commenced. I do not think it’s Federation technology. In fact, I have never seen anything like this before.”

“Remove it,” Dukat demanded. I stirred and felt something brush across my forehead, a finger, smoothing hair away from my face. “Can you do remove it without harming her?”

“It’s impossible, Gul Dukat. I tried already and nearly lost her. I would not advise

trying it again until we know precisely what it is. I think we should involve the Obsidian Order. They may know what this implant does and who put it there. The other human has one as well. I will take a look at, but have no reason to believe it is any different.”

“I will ask Garak to make inquiries,” Dukat said. “When you are finished, bring Helen here. I have decided to make her look Bajoran. I cannot risk having two humans on board this station. I am quite certain the OO has already taken an interest.”

“Yes, sir. They will need a cover story.”

“It is all arranged. Meet my cousin Ren Yor. Garak will finalize the details of her background. Now finish your work, Doctor. You have your orders.”

The voices fell away.

Coolness spread across my body. I felt a sheet though my skin, a pillow beneath my head, and I opened my eyes to find I was in Damar’s bed. I knew it was his bed because it smelled like pumpkin pie. Only half awake, I touched my face. I felt ridges around my eyes. Ridges ran from my ears to my shoulders. My skin remained smooth, yet I was able to discern the tiniest of scales like snakeskin, only finer.

Rising from the bed, I entered the bathroom and gazed into the mirror. My skin wasn’t grey. It was a light shade of brown, like Zolon, and my hair had been dyed black to match my eyebrows. The rest of my body remained human. Perhaps a second surgery was needed, more extensive, to make me complete. From the shoulders up, I was a beautiful, proud Cardassian. I ran my fingers across the foreign object at the top of my spine. On contact, the implant started to throb.

I returned to the bed, exhausted, and fell asleep.

Images of a barren landscape, the ruins of buildings covered in sand, a large crater-pitted moon the color of pale green offered an alien backdrop. Under my boots were scattered hundreds of humanoid bones snapped under my weight. Cardassian graves were sacred, yet something had disturbed them, digging up the corpses. I heard a soft whine and noticed what looked like a dig digging a hole in the ground. The whines turned to a snarl as it lifted its head, staring at me with large, red eyes.

“What are you?” I screamed.

The beast flashed its fangs as it attacked me. I had no weapons. I took a knee, finding a long femur on the ground and held it up as a weapon. The snarls faded away. I lifted my head and stared at five moons over Bajor. When I lowered my gaze, I knelt in a graveyard. Bajoran and Cardassian markers stretched on for miles. As I stared at one that read Gul Skrain Dukat, I heard the beast snarling behind me. I spun around. The wolf-like creature opened its jaws and blackness swallowed me.

HELEN

Chapter Six

In the morning, I joined Garak at Quark's bar for to enjoy a cup of Cardassian coffee. We ate a Bajoran sugary confection that reminded me of cotton candy and cake rolled into one. While I chewed, tears welled in my eyes. I tried my best not to cry. I had awoken to find I was Bajoran. The ridges on my nose moved as I chewed. As a Bajoran, I felt more vulnerable than I had as a human, for I was now officially a slave.

"Sawyer has not returned," I said in a glum voice. "Of course I feel abandoned. You asked, I answered. Nor have I seen Dukat. You say Dr. Quirin altered my appearance to protect me from an Obsidian Order agent who is coming here. How can you sit there and reassure me everything will be all right when they're like the Gestapo in Nazi Germany?"

"Yet, the result of the surgery is impressive," Garak said. "Agent Torell will never suspect you are human, not as long as you keep to the story. Everyone thinks you and Sawyer departed on the Enterprise. It's my job to make certain your stories stick. If you want to know the details, which I am sure you do, then I suggest we adjourn to my store. I am sure I can find us something stronger than coffee to drink. And I have instructions from Gul Dukat to provide you with a new wardrobe, one that befits your new position as his mistress."

I noticed Quark trying to listen in on what we said. He leaned over the bar, a hand cupped around his large ear. He was so conspicuous, one corner of my mouth pulled into a smile.

"Come with me," Garak whispered. "While we wait for your friend to join us, you can pick out the materials you like and a few patterns. I am more than happy to make the gowns."

“I know how to sew.”

“Of course you do,” Garak said. “This is why you and I get on so well. I can already tell we are going to be good friends, Helen. Now brush the crumbs off your lips and let’s hurry along before nasty little Ferengi demands to know our business. One of the things I like least about Quark is his inability to mind his own business.”

Garak led me to his store. The owners of a number of other shops had yet to arrive and it was quiet on the Promenade. As soon as he unlocked the door, I rushed into the shop, delighted to be taking my time to examine the clothes. Cardassian garments lacked bright colors that I favored. Garak went behind the counter. He set out an assortment of material samples and tuned a monitor around to face me. Patterns appeared from a number of different cultures, zipping past at a fast rate, until he settled on Bajoran patterns. The Bajoran fashions suited my taste, simple, layered, with long skirts and vests that had a country-like feel to them. I stacked the samples into appropriate groups, matched by color and texture, feeling as comfortable with Garak as I did with my girlfriends.

“Terok Nor is not at all like I’d imagined it to be,” I said, favoring a stack of gold and green samples. “I thought it would be a dark dungeon, filled with chain linked fences and armed guards at every corner. It’s not a dark and dreary place. Your shop proves Cardassians do appreciate beauty, art, and the finer things in life.”

“I appreciate the compliment,” Garak said as he placed a gown on the counter. It was precisely what I had in mind. I held it up to see if it would fit. “What is your assessment of your situation here, Helen? I do not mean as Gul Dukat’s latest mistress. I refer to the reception last night with the Enterprise crew. Captain Picard struck me as a competent officer, a man of high moral standards. I do not think he was impressed with Dukat, and I know Dukat did not like Picard. Still, when two powerful men come together to discuss a treaty, it takes time to iron out the details. Without care and forethought, it is easy to create creases and wrinkles.”

“Why ask my opinion? You forget I know a great deal about you. Does it matter if I think Cardassia will refuse to sign a treaty? Cardassia doesn’t want to join the Federation, and the Federation will insist on it, pushing until they get their way or until the wrinkles

become permanent creases. I'm not naïve, Garak. I don't think Picard wears shinny armor or rides a white horse, any more than I think Dukat wears a black cowboy hat."

"And yet, he is not a one woman man," Garak stated. "Do not fall prey to his charms or the lies he weaves, Helen, or you will be utterly broken and invariably replaced."

"Where did Dukat go last night?"

"On a secret mission, one where he left in a hurry on a shuttle. He boarded the Klaxon to travel to Bajor and returned hours later in the company of Miss Kincaid."

"They were together?"

Garak smiled. "One would think after he altered your appearance without your permission that you'd realize Dukat does what he wants, when he wants. Make no mistake, Helen. That man is always several moves ahead of most people. I say most because I am not one of them. I also think you are the loveliest mistress he ever picked."

"I hate him," I said, recoiling. "I didn't ask for this, Garak. His touch repulses me. In fact, I don't know why I didn't leave on the Enterprise. The thought of having him buy me a wardrobe, so I look suitable on his arm, disgusts me. Sawyer wants him. Sawyer can have him."

"Dukat does the choosing, not the other way around," Garak said. "If I were you, I would not be so quick to serve Sawyer to Dukat on a silver plate. Accept the fact you are Dukat's mistress. Be glad he did not turn you into a pleasure slave and hand you over to his men. Your new status allows certain rights not previously offered. If you play your cards right and make him think he must have you, no matter the cost, you may survive what has destroyed so many other women."

I set the gown aside and sagged against the counter. "I get no choice in what I want. Sawyer knows I want to go home. All she had to do was ask Picard."

"Let's not cry over spilt kanar," Garak said. "Since Dukat has paid me, I suggest you take advantage of what he offers. You can have whatever you want in my shop. In fact, if you spend more than he's already paid, he will not only be impressed, he will respect you for it. Therefore, I suggest you be as extravagant as possible."

"By spending his money I'll earn his respect. It can't be easy."

“Even powerful people have weaknesses and such weaknesses should be exploited whenever possible,” Garak said, sounding pleased. He knew far more about Dukat than I did and I listened to every word. “Men like Dukat want what they can’t have, and they’ll use any means to obtain it, especially if it remains unobtainable. I don’t mean love or sex, Helen. Dukat’s weakness is his obsession to be in control, so don’t give it to him.”

We spent the morning in his shop, admiring his inventory. Garak let me select materials and patterns, promised to make me an entire wardrobe, and found jewelry to complement each dress. I chose an open front robe of a dark green and put it on. I found a pair of slippers to match the robe. They fit perfectly.

Garak used the replicator to fix us lunch. He ordered a Bajoran peasant pie and apple wine. We sat at a table in the backroom, a place I considered my safe haven, and enjoyed the meal with my new friend.

“To someone who appreciates sewing as much as I do,” Garak said, as he tapped his wine glass against mine.

“It’s always been a hobby. You’re fortunate you have a second talent.”

“I did not start out as an agent for the Obsidian Order,” he replied. “You mustn’t think all Cardassians are the enemy, my dear. Once, the Cardassians were peaceful, spiritual people. They created some of the greatest works of art in the entire Alpha Quadrant. I was born in a place surrounded by ancient ruins, filled with archaeological treasures, testimony to a prosperous civilization devoted much of their time to prayer to the gods. Over the centuries, corruption spread, we lost our faith, and our planet depleted of natural resources required the exploration of space to survive. The age of exploration turned into one of conquest. We found what we needed on other planets, including Bajor.”

Garak drank his wine and refilled our glasses.

“I will tell you a secret, Helen,” he said. “I want Cardassia to join the Federation. As long as Dukat remains in power, it will never happen. Not in my lifetime.”

“People can change, Garak. They can learn from their mistakes.”

“Not Dukat. In his mind, he does not make mistakes. He is just like his father and ambition destroyed him in the end. You’d be wise to remember this, Helen.”

I nodded and continued to eat my lunch. I imagined a life with Garak instead of Dukat. It was a shame Garak wasn't interested in me. We'd have been a happy couple in our clothing store. I urged him to tell me more.

"Central Command controls the military on Cardassia. The Detapa Counsel seated forty greedy politicians who control the civilian sector and oversee Central Command, to keep them in line, of course. The military cannot sanction a war without their seal of approval. However, there are many in Central Command and the Detapa Counsel who believe we have grown weak and push for greater expansion in the Alpha Quadrant. Our warships invade, steal resources, technology, and enslave other races."

"Like Bajor," I said.

"Yes, like Bajor," Garak said. When we first came to Bajor, like so many others, they believed our promises. It has been this way for the last fifty years, this greed and lust for power. Bajor was annexed and those who rebelled were killed. Millions, in fact, died. It is not entirely Dukat's fault. He has been Prefect for the last eight years. For failing to quell the rebellion, Central Command sent him to Terok Nor, and for months he has waited, itching to return to Bajor."

"Of course he killed millions," I said. "He's a monster. None of this is right. Where are the Bajorans on this station? I thought Terok Nor had a Bajoran ghetto. I thought they manufactured ore or something. Are the Bajorans kept in terrible living conditions in the bowels of the station and beat unmercifully? What about the slave pits? What do they look like? Does Dukat keep people in chains or in cages?"

Garak stared at me. "There is no ghetto here, Helen," he said. "Many Bajoran families live here. They have jobs, operate stores, and have better lives in some way than those who live on Bajor. The slave pit is not what it implies. True, Bajorans are still treated like slaves, but slavery legally ended five years ago under Dukat's administration. For a Cardassian to own a slave is against the law. Old terms die hard, Helen. The pleasure girls are still called slaves by some Cardassians, the matron treats them as such, but it is not as dreadful as you imagine. However, they don't have the same rights or earn the same wages as citizens of the Cardassian Union. You would be surprised at the luxury the pleasure girls

live in, Helen. They can leave any time they want. They do not because they prefer to live in comfort. Whatever you think Terok Nor is, Helen, you operate under a false illusion."

I thought about my father and five brothers. Henry was the eldest, a collector of vintage guns, and the one who would have loved to join the Cardassian military. My younger brothers were still in school and in their spare time helped around the ranch. We each owned a horse and my mother tended to her small zoo of barn cats, dogs, goats, and chickens. My mother had taught me how to sew. She sold fresh eggs to the community, sat on the city council, and considered herself an active citizen. If my mother had known I lived in a world where slavery was condoned, she would have taken out my father's .44 and start shooting Cardassians.

"Forget it," I said, thinking I would investigate the station on my own time. "If the term slave is used by the Cardassians, then they certainly think of the Bajorans as slaves. I need to read everything I can to understand the world I live in. Some things are not readily available on my com-padd. Tell me about the Obsidian Order."

"The OO is known for its diligence and ruthlessness," Garak said as he cleared away our empty plates. "The Order is the eyes and ears of Cardassia. Some say no citizen sits down to dinner without each course being duly noted and recorded. They are more efficient than the Romulan's *Tal Shiar*, and that is saying quite a bit. No one, not even the Federation's Section 31, is as cunning or as lethal as the OO."

"So, you admit you're still in the Order."

"Not at all," Garak said, his mood turning sulky. He stepped away from me and peered out the curtain into the front room. "I told you before the OO is sending someone here to investigate you and Sawyer. I am the one who reported two Terrans arrived and two Terrans left on the Enterprise. Your disguises are partly due to me. I suggested to Dukat we change your identities and keep you where we can keep our eyes on you."

"What big eyes and ears you have, Grandma."

"Is that meant to be funny?" Garak asked.

"It's a fairy tale back home," I said. "It's not important. I think we should return to Quark's to see if Sawyer is there." I stood and approached Garak. He took me by the arm,

his head tilted to the side, a curious expression on his face. "What is it?"

"You won't mention to Sawyer or Dukat what I told you?" he asked. "I wouldn't want Dukat to have an excuse to terminate my work here. It might lead to all sorts of unpleasantness for both of us."

"Not a word, you sly eel."

Returning to Quark's bar together, I kept thinking Garak was dropping crumbs and leading me along the wrong path. I feared my new friend might be deceiving me. The Obsidian Order frightened me too. Dukat, in his own way, had protected me by changing my appearance. In his own way, I supposed it was a nice thing to do.

"Hello, Garak," Quark called out. He waved at us from behind the bar. He stared at my new outfit and smiled. "Very lovely, I must say. The green brings out your eyes."

"Thank you," I said.

We sat in a booth. I noticed Damar and three soldiers drinking their lunch at the bar. The Cardassians made a great deal of trouble for the Dabo girls working the tables. Damar and his friends pinched and fondled the girls. Had Sawyer been present, I knew she would have been thoroughly disgusted.

"I wish you didn't have to see such debauchery. It's disgusting," Garak said. "Glinn Damar is the worst. You can find him here most nights getting drunk with the Dabo girls."

Gul Dukat strode into the bar, looking impressive and stately in his armor, followed by a female Cardassian officer in a black uniform. Dukat went over to Damar, whispered in the glinn's ear, while the female Cardassian approached our booth. She was exceptionally attractive and had long black hair. She drew a number of looks from the soldiers and officers. The way she swaggered with confidence reminded me of Sawyer. By the time she reached my table, I knew this Cardassian was my friend.

Sawyer reached for Garak's drink and drained the contents. "That's awful," she said setting the cup aside. "What is it?"

"Red leaf tea," Garak replied.

I sat straighter. "You look good as a Cardassian."

"I am a Cardassian," Sawyer said.

“Sit down this minute. I want to know everything. Are you all right?”

Sawyer nodded as she slid into the booth beside me. “I’m sorry I didn’t contact you when I returned,” I said. “I was a bit out of it last night. You know better than to think I left you behind. You’re my best friend. We have to stick together. But from now on, you must call me Ren Yor. I am Dukat’s cousin. I am to be a soldier. I thought Garak would have told you. He’s to provide the details of my cover story.”

I glared at Garak. “He didn’t tell me that part of it,” I said. “I’m a Bajoran slave. My story is simple. I’m from Bajor City and my parents are tailors. I was selected to be Dukat’s new mistress and sent here. I know you wanted to be with him. Is that why you didn’t ask Picard to take us with him?”

“I never saw Picard, Helen. When I boarded the Enterprise crew, I met Guinan,” Sawyer said. “She knew who I was, Helen. She knows where we come from, but not how we got her. She also told me never to talk about the show. It turns out it’s not real, Helen. I know because Q is behind all this. The show was actually a way for him to find us. He didn’t elaborate why, but he did say we were brought here to play some elaborate game. I never got to talk to Picard. One minute I was on the Enterprise, and the next I was on a Bajoran moon. I would have died if Dukat hadn’t rescued me.”

Garak cleared his throat. He didn’t say a word.

“Why didn’t you ask Q to send us home, Sawyer?” I said. “What happened to the plane? What does everyone back home think? What’s going on?”

Sawyer told me everything I needed to know about her conversation with Q. I had more questions, but she didn’t have the answers.

“There is one little glitch, Helen. If we die, we can never return home. The plane will crash with everyone on board. Q said we could stay here as long as we want. Helen, I want to stay here. I don’t want to go back.”

“Sawyer, I don’t want to be Dukat’s mistress. I want to go home.”

My best friend looked furious. Apparently, I had said the wrong thing. I thought she’d jump at the chance to be with Dukat. I provided her an opening and yet she didn’t take it. Why she wanted to be a soldier, I didn’t know, since it seemed putting her life on

the line for a bunch of stiff-necked, war-loving Cardassians was crazy. At least she no longer thought it was all a dream.

"There's nothing you can say to change my mind," Sawyer said. "I thought you'd be pleased to know Dukat believes us and has offered his protection."

"No, I'm not pleased, you idiot. I'm pissed Q didn't bother to talk to me. I would have told him that I don't want to play this game. Neither should you."

"Such drama. You both are doing precisely what Dukat wants," Garak said. "If he can create a rift between you, neither of you are much of a threat."

I waved Garak to be quiet. "Sawyer, the only reason Dukat changed our appearances is because the Obsidian Order is sending an agent here to investigate the two missing humans. You know very well this puts us in a great deal of danger." I noticed Garak grimace. He was upset I had told his secret. Sawyer didn't look surprised. "You knew about the agent? Did Dukat tell you?"

"Of course," she said. "That's why I'm now Ren Yor. The funny thing is Quark thought my name was Yor from the start. Saja thought I was Dukat's cousin, disguised as a human. I suppose you both think this is just a coincidence."

Garak frowned. "It's hardly a coincidence. Dukat is extremely intelligent. If we are playing Q's game, he will do whatever it takes to win, at the expense of everyone else. Just how do you win the game?"

"I have no idea," Sawyer said. "I guess not die."

As I prepared to give them both a piece of my mind, Sawyer's attention drifted to Damar. He sat on a stool, two Dabo girls curled under each arm. Dukat stood with another Dabo girl who had her arms around him. For some reason, I was not pleased either.

"Damar has been here since we arrived," I said. "He probably thinks you left Terok Nor without saying goodbye. You can't blame him."

"I can and do!"

A glass of Romulan ale was set before Sawyer by a Dabo girl. She drank the contents in one gulp and slammed the glass onto the table, glaring at the Cardassians at the bar.

"I suggest you mind your temper, Yor. A display of jealousy is not the right course

of action. Dukat is in command here," Garak said, in a firm tone. "Now that you're his cousin, you will be expected to play the part to perfection."

"They know we're watching," I said. "They're both probably trying to get a reaction from you, so don't fall prey to their game. And don't expect me to call you Yor. It's a stupid name and I won't do it. You'll always be Sawyer to me."

"You better call her by that name. Agent Torell is coming here and he is quite shrewd. Either except your fate, Helen, or go home. If Torell suspects you are humans, he order your arrest, torture and execution. Dukat, on the other hand, will be shipped off to a remote outpost with the rank of gil. As for me, I will be killed."

"I'm supposed to just play along, Garak?" I asked.

"This is a complicated game concocted by a very capricious and manipulative alien, children. What troubles me most is Q told Sawyer he lost contact with you both after sending you through the wormhole. Without knowing the specifics of how long it took for you to be projected three hundred years into the future to the time of your arrival on Terok Nor, there it will be difficult to ascertain who intercepted you, for how long, or what their purpose is by sending you here instead of Bajor. Until I learn more, I suggest you both behave according to your new identities."

"Great. I really am a slave," I said. "And Sawyer is Dukat's niece who wants to play soldier with the big boys."

Dukat turned toward us. He left Damar in the company of three Dabo girls and swaggered toward us. The moment his eyes met mine, I knew he approved of my new Bajoran appearance and gown. Despite how much I hated the Gul, I felt a strong sexual response that made it difficult to view him objectively. There was no doubt in my mind I wasn't the only woman left befuddled by his tactics in the bedroom. As he neared, I felt my knees tremble and my cheeks flush. All logic fled from my mind. At a nod from Dukat, Sawyer stood and stepped aside. He slid into the booth next to me and placed his arm around my shoulders.

"Good afternoon," Dukat said kissing me on the cheek. "You look beautiful, Helen. I told Garak to spare no expense on your gowns. As my new mistress, I desire you to look

your best.”

“I was beginning to wonder when you didn’t come to see me last night,” I said. “I missed you.” The words came out of my mouth as if programmed. I pressed against Dukat with the eagerness of a cat wanting to be petted by its master. It was impossible to resist his charm. I let out a soft moan when he caressed my cheek with his lean fingers, wondering why I felt unable to resist.

Garak frowned with such intensity I knew I had displeased him. I didn’t feel I needed to explain why my body responded to Dukat, or why I felt safe in his presence, when Garak had seen this all before. Sawyer, however, failed to react. I thought she would say something mean to make me feel bad. Her eyes remained glued on Damar.

“Forgive me for not returning to you last night, my dear. I had a great deal to do, while you were kept entertained by Dr. Quirin. I’m sure Garak has filled you in on why the surgery was necessary.” Dukat looked right at Garak. “I asked for your assistance and discretion. I do not want Agent Torell briefed when he arrives. Nor do I want you to confide in your contacts at the OO about anything. You will assist Helen in learning all she can about the Bajoran culture and how to conduct herself as my chosen companion.”

“I am discretion itself,” Garak said.

“What about Sawyer? She has no military training,” I said. I thought twice and added, “Anyone could be your mistress.”

“Not just anyone, Helen. I chose you be my mistress,” Dukat replied. “A uniform suits my cousin more than a gown. See how tall Yor stands and how proud she looks. I have arranged for her to train with Damar. He believes he is to train a new recruit. I have told him nothing else.”

“Well, you certainly seem eager to play Q’s game,” I said. “You arranged all this just to see Damar’s reaction? Don’t you think he needs to know about Q?”

Dukat smiled. “Perhaps later,” he said. “I can’t have everyone on the station know we are being manipulated by a higher force. Think of this as a training exercise for your friend. I want to see how she performs.”

The Dabo girl placed another round of kanar on the table. A glass of Romulan ale

was provided for Sawyer, but she remained at attention. At a snap of Dukat's fingers, Sawyer turned. He pointed at the glass of blue ale. She drank the entire contents, set the glass aside, and returned to her former position. Anyone in the Bajoran Resistance would think twice about attacking Dukat with his new bodyguard watching over him and I realized this was precisely what he wanted.

"She's not a trained dog," I said, annoyed.

"No? Watch what happens," Dukat replied taking a sip of kanar. "Ren Yor, go over to Glinn Damar and tell him your training is to commence now. As such, Damar is no longer off duty. I find his drinking and fondling of Dabo girls inappropriate. Tell him so. If Damar refuses, then force him to leave with you. Now go."

Sawyer saluted Dukat, a proper Cardassian salute, and I realized far more had happened during their long absence from the station. Dukat had moved into the position as Sawyer's controller as well as her commander. His hand pressed over my knee as if to remind me that I too was under his control.

"Yor? Why do you hesitate? Is my cousin intimidated by a few Dabo girls?"

"No, sir."

"Must I repeat the order? I do not like to repeat myself, Yor. Impress me."

Sawyer marched in her tall black boots toward Damar, acting like a programmed robot. She gave a toss of her hair and came to a halt behind Damar. His friends stared at her as she placed her hands on her hips. I took hold of Dukat's hand and pressed it to my cheek. I didn't know where my strange behavior came from, but I wanted him to pay attention to me and not Sawyer. I was his mistress, after all.

"You take the time to make her a Cardassian. You give her the identity of your cousin, no less, and now send her to fight two Dabo girls."

"Yor is a soldier. I gave her a direct order," Dukat said. "Let's see how much she wants to please me. Later, it will be your turn, my dear. It's all part of the game."

"Excuse me. I didn't close my shop," Garak said, rising to leave. He looked angry with me. "I'm sure you know best about these things, Gul Dukat. I am but a humble tailor. I'd best go before something is stolen."

Dukat laughed as Garak fled from the booth. The tailor darted between the patrons and soon was out of my sight. Garak had warned me not to give in to Dukat. I wanted to resist, I really did, but my body betrayed him. I wanted him. Dukat sipped on his drink, chuckling under his breath as Sawyer tapped Damar on the shoulder. He shrugged her off.

“Oh, God. Sawyer is going to get hurt,” I whispered.

“Call her Yor at all times, Helen. I insist.”

The Dabo girls and Damar ignored Sawyer. She again tapped Damar on the shoulder. Whatever she said to Damar caused him to turn around and snarl at her. His three friends moved out of the way. Sawyer caught one girl by the arm and dragged her off her stool. She pushed the girl into the arms of a seated guard. The second girl tried to break free from Damar. He angrily waved off Sawyer. She grabbed Damar’s arm, wrenched it behind his back, and brought him rising from the stool. The Dabo girl turned to run and stumbled into a nearby chair. She knocked over several drinks and landed on a patron’s lap. Damar managed to break free from Sawyer and grabbed the front of her jacket. He lifted her off the ground and slammed her against the bar.

“No fighting!” Quark cried. “No fighting!”

Heated words exchanged between the pair. Damar raised his fist. Sawyer pushed him backwards and threw a punch. He took the blow in the jaw and stumbled into a table. Before he caught his balance, Sawyer slammed into Damar like a linebacker on a football field. They crashed into the same table and hit the floor. She was on her feet before Damar. He roared in rage, knocked aside a chair, and charged her like a bull. Sawyer held her ground, let him slam her into the bar, and then gave him a head butt. The Cardassian thug grunted in pain and stepped back, holding one hand over his eye. Blood gushed from a cut on his eye ridge. While Damar attempted to regain his senses, Yor pushed another Cardassian off his stool, seized his drink and took a large drink. She turned back to Damar and spat the contents in his face.

“Swine,” Sawyer shouted.

“Can she do this? He’s her superior officer?” I asked as Dukat laughed.

“Of course she can. I gave her a direct order.”

Damar's face twisted in drunken rage. The glinn threw his arms around Sawyer and lifted her off the ground. She wrapped her arms and legs around him like a monkey. Her teeth sunk into his ear and he let out a howl of pain.

"Yor certainly has spirit," Dukat said. "Damar is one of my best fighters in hand-to-hand combat, when he's sober. Yor is a natural warrior. Now you know why I chose her for this task instead of you. Your talents are in the bedroom, my dear."

"It's not fair. She cares for Damar, and she's in love with you."

Dukat ignored me. "Yor shouldn't drink Romulan ale. Nor should Damar drink kanar in excess," he said as he slid his hand over my breast. "Haven't you noticed ale has an adverse effect on your friend? I am sure Garak is watching this fight from afar and taking notes. He is still with the Order, Helen. Never forget, least you tell him too much about yourself and about us."

The scuffle between Damar and Yor attracted a number of soldiers who entered the bar to watch. Sawyer broke free from Damar and punched him in the jaw, knocking him to the floor. He stood on shaky legs and raised his fists, still not defeated. Cheers filled the Promenade as the soldiers placed bets on the fighters.

"You have to stop this, Dukat," I begged. I brushed his hand away.

"Helen, darling. I think I know what is best for both of you."

Dukat kissed my cheek right as Sawyer clobbered Damar in the face. Apparently, the Cardassians, unlike the U.S. Army, allowed fighting in the ranks. She struck her superior officer several more times and dodged every punch Damar threw.

"This will teach Damar not to sample my property without my approval." Dukat smiled when I gave him a surprised look. "Who could resist her? Just look at her!"

"What happened last night?"

"Nothing for you to be concerned about, my dear."

Dukat pulled me closer and kissed me. As much as I wanted to respond, I felt compelled to watch Sawyer beat the crap out of Damar. She was so strong, I wondered if Dr. Quirin had given her strength enhancers. Sawyer even moved like a professional boxer, while Damar fought like a drunk in an alley. It was so comical I laughed and so did Dukat.

“See there? I told you this would be entertaining.”

Holding her fists before her, shuffling from one foot to the other, Sawyer taunted Damar to make a move. Damar said something that caused the soldiers to laugh. It was a mistake on his part. Sawyer let out a savage roar that sent chills down my back and shoved Damar over a table. He landed on his backside, near a cringing Dabo girl.

“I have seen enough,” Dukat said. “Come with me, Helen.”

Dukat helped me out of the booth. He kept hold of my arm as we walked past Sawyer. Damar remained on the floor, knocked senseless, while soldiers thronged around my victorious friend. Lifted onto their shoulders, Sawyer was carried around the bar. The Dabo girls fled behind the bar and joined Quark.

“I can’t believe it. She won,” I whispered.

“She has earned a place among my soldiers. They’ll respect her now. Who knows? I might actually make her an officer. There is something about her I find quite interesting.”

“If you’re trying to make me jealous, forget it. I don’t know who you think I am, but I’m not some timid little Bajoran slave. Don’t treat me like one or I’ll show you how a girl grows up with older brothers. You learn to defend yourself at an early age. I can shoot and fight with the best of them.”

“Not enough to be a police officer. In that you failed, Helen. This is why I selected Yor to be a soldier and you as my lover. Now be silent.”

Dukat walked with me to a turbolift. He took hold of my hand and kissed my knuckles. I locked eyes with him. He lowered my hand and placed it over his erection. Heat spread across my palm. Embarrassed at the thought someone might see us, I jerked my hand away, winching when he laughed.

“It’s time I returned you to your quarters. I must make my usual rounds. I will see you later for dinner. Wear something more...revealing.”

“And Sawyer?” I caught a flash in his eyes and corrected myself. “I mean Yor. I don’t want any harm to come to her, Dukat. Promise me that you’ll protect her. Please. She told me about Q’s game. She has no business being a soldier. I don’t want her to die.”

“I’ll protect both of you, my dear. You have my word.”

With a jar, the turbolift came to a halt. Dukat jerked me into his arms, kissed me until my knees weakened, and placed a key card in my palm. He existed without another word. The palm of my hand still throbbed from touching him. I closed it around the key card. As I entered my new quarters, I knew this was exactly what I wanted and Dukat knew it. The spider had caught me in his web.

SAWYER

Chapter Seven

"This will cost you, Garresh Yor," Quark said, about as disgusted as he could be. "I added it up. You me seven latinum bars and unless Gul Dukat intends to pay for the damages, I will expect you to pay me for the damages. You are his cousin and you are the one who destroyed my establishment."

"I will," I said. "Calm down."

I licked blood off the back of my knuckles and glared at the agitated Ferengi. A garresh was the lowest rank on the totem pole, yet I reveled at the knowledge I was in the Second Order. While I signed a com-padd, assigning Quark to receive my first week's wages, Damar climbed to his feet. He nursed a black eye with a glass of kanar. I felt guilty at what I had done, especially to someone I cared for, but kept my heartfelt apology locked in my throat.

As far as Damar knew, I really was Dukat's cousin. If he had been sober, he would have figured out it was a disguise. Saja and the soldiers knew who I was, or rather believed I was who they always thought me to be. I was Ren Yor, Dukat's cousin, and they gathered around me. Everyone wanted to buy me a glass of Romulan ale. I thought their behavior strange since I had embarrassed Damar, their commander.

"You're squared away, Quark," I said as I met his gaze.

Quark's eyes widened. "Why did you agree do this, Yor? Do you really desire to be a soldier? You were so lovely before you added those ridges. I had hoped to acquire you as my new lounge singer. I take it Glinn Damar doesn't know."

"He's drunk," I said. Saja appeared beside me. "Help me take Damar back to his quarters. You know I would not have done this if Gul Dukat had not given me a direct

order. I care about Damar, Saja.”

“I knew who you were all along. You can’t fool me,” Saja said laughing. “You look like Dukat, only you’re a lot prettier. Come on, old man.” He pulled Damar off the stool.

“No more kanar. You can hardly walk the way it is, my friend.”

“Leave me alone,” Damar snarled.

“No, sir. You are going to bed,” Saja insisted. “Up you go now!”

With Saja’s help, we managed to drag Damar to his quarters. Saja deposited Damar on his bed and pulled off his boots. He set out a glass of water for Damar, a wet towel, and placed a bucket beside the bed.

“I’ve done this many times,” Saja explained. He helped me unfastened Damar’s cuirass and set it aside. “The rest you can remove, Yor. Oh, I know you two are an item. Make it up to him, will you? He is a sore loser.” He left us alone.

“How are you feeling, Damar?”

“You have shamed me, Garresh Yor. If you were not Dukat’s cousin, I would have you whipped for your insolence. Why am I to train you? Didn’t you attend the Academy? How could you be a garresh if you did not? Explain.”

“I’m Sawyer and this is a cover story. The Obsidian Order is sending an agent here. Dukat thought it best....”

“No,” he said, staring at me. “No, you can’t be.”

“I’m so sorry I hurt you. I didn’t want to. Dukat made me.”

“He did, did he?”

Damar pushed me away. He kept the towel on his forehead, his eyes closed. I crawled on top of him and unfastened his pants. He grumbled as I pulled off his pants and tossed them aside. Off came the socks. One eye open, the other covered by the towel, he lifted upwards so I could remove his padded undershirt. I threw it onto the floor.

“Explain why,” Damar said. “You are now a Cardassian, and not any Cardassian. Your cousin is the most powerful gul in the Union. I don’t understand why I wasn’t briefed.”

“Gul Dukat wanted it to be a surprise. Don’t you like me this way?”

"It makes things more complicated. I suppose Dukat ordered you to deal with the Dabo girls and me," he said. I covered him with a blanket. "Embarrassing me in front of my men is unforgiveable. Saja will never let me hear the end of it. You have a great deal to learn if you think this is appropriate behavior."

"It was a direct order. I really am sorry."

"That does not excuse your behavior," Damar said. He caught his breath as I stared to remove my uniform. "You realize this changes the situation between us. I would not feel comfortable sleeping with the cousin of Dukat. I'll arrange to have a room assigned to you on this floor. You wanted to be a soldier. I'm giving you an order. You're dismissed."

"Shut up, Damar."

I kicked off my boots, tossed my jacket aside, and removed my clothes. Damar growled when I climbed into bed. He scooted away, a poor attempt to escape. I caught him before he fell off the edge. As he turned to face me, I slid my arm around him and placed a kiss on a purple bruise on his cheek.

"Stop fussing over me," Damar grumbled. "I'm too tired to give you what you want, Yor. As I said, an intimate relationship between us is inappropriate."

"I don't care. You're supposed to train me," I said as I slid my hand beneath the top of his shorts. "So...train me."

With a growl, Damar wrapped around me and kissed me. Most intoxicated men would have passed out from the amount of booze he'd consumed, but Damar was a Cardassian; he rallied. When at last we lay exhausted, wrapped together, I heard his soft snores in my ear and finally let my poor dear glinn sleep.

In the morning, Damar rose early. We shared breakfast together and then headed to the holosuite. I was excited as we entered and stood in a cold, sterile room. He walked to a control panel, slid a computer chip into a slot, hit several buttons, and turned toward me.

"As a fostered child, I was segregated from the other cadets at the academy," Damar said. "My education and military training were paid by the Cardassian Union, not from relatives who disowned me, which I repaid in full after eighteen years of service. Though this is only a program, Yor, you will be treated as I was...with disdain and disapproval by

those students whose parents have paid for their children to attend this school. You will spend four hours in the classroom and four hours on the training field. The teachers will not be lenient with you and you will be expected to perform at a higher level than students with parents.”

With a flicker of lights, the program commenced. I gazed at the impressive Cardassian Military Academy, spread across four miles, a network of buildings and wide green training fields. Cadets marched past in black uniforms and turned to salute Glinn Damar. Dressed in similar attire, I held a duffle back over my shoulder and a com-padd. Damar escorted me to the main office to enroll. I found it all intriguing. Damar wanted me to experience what he had during his four years at the academy. I knew little enough about the history of the Cardassian Union and felt eager to attend classes like a real student.

“Will everyone believe I am Dukat’s cousin?”

“Of course,” he said. “It’s a program, Yor, modified just for you.”

“This is my first time in a holosuite. It looks so real.”

“Safety protocols have been engaged, Yor. During your combat training, it will feel real,” Damar said. “You will not be harmed. Not only will you be taught hand-to-hand combat, you will learn how to conduct yourself as a soldier. After eight hours, the simulation will end and you will return to my quarters. If for any reason there is a problem, you have to halt the program and either continue or leave the holosuite.”

We halted outside a tall building with glass windows, the shape reminding me of a pyramid from which students filed out of, headed toward class. The Cardassian students glanced at me. No one approached us. I felt close to panic when Damar turned, prepared to leave me at the door without introducing me to the facility. I caught hold of his arm, unsure I actually wanted to play along and experience what he had. He disengaged my fingers and gave me a stern look.

“Dukat wants you to be a soldier. Do what you’re told, Yor, and you will fit in.”

“You’ll be monitoring what happens in here? Right?”

“As much as I can. I will see you in eight hours.”

Left on the doorstep like an unwanted child, I entered the building and headed to

the office, joining six more Cardassians in line. The students were younger. They didn't realize I was a thirty-two-year old woman. A teacher came out of an office, noticed the line, and glanced at a digital clock on the wall. His face was wrinkled and his hair bone white. The ridges on his face were far more pronounced than I'd ever seen on any Cardassian. For some reason, I disliked him at once.

"I am Professor Algar and your advisor. All seven of you will follow me. You are late for class," he said, passing out a list of classes to each of us. He paused beside a young male Cardassian in front of me. "Corat Damar. I know your late father's family. I see the Union has paid for your education, as well as the freshman behind you." His beady eyes peered at a list in his hand. "Ren Yor: Daughter of Gul Raderus Yor of the Fourth Order. Your father is also dead. No one mourns cowards. Just looking at you displeases me."

The students turned to stare. I wasn't prepared to be questioned about my background. I had been told my parents were dead, though I did not know how it had happened. Gul Yor had lost a battle against the Klingons and I assumed this was why the professor considered him a coward. The young version of Damar sneered.

"I believe we are late for class, Professor Algar," I said. "As I have already been enrolled and my education paid for, I see no reason to listen to insults."

"Like your late father, you do not know when to keep your mouth shut."

I glared at the professor, refusing to be intimidated.

"Damar will be your study partner," Professor Algar continued. "His family is no more reputable than your own. The rest of you pair up. Since we have an odd number here, I will assign one of you a study partner among the other students. Freshman Durgan? That would be you." A tall boy with a square head stood at attention. "Now, come with me."

Trailing behind the professor, I felt a tug on my duffle bag. An older cadet took the duffle bag from me and handed me a folded piece of paper. I assumed she was Professor Algar's intern. As she walked off, I opened the paper, on it was written the number 11. I figured someone would tell me what it meant later and stuffed it into my pocket.

Nervous, I kept beside Damar as a door opened to a large classroom, filled with two hundred or more students. Damar grabbed my arm and pulled me into the back row. The

rest of the fostered students joined us. A young girl with a habit of biting her nails sat beside me. She smiled at Damar and me. I liked her at once.

"I'm Marna."

"Ren Yor."

I wondered if Marna was her family name. Cardassians always used their family names and seldom their first names. She tapped my arm and pointed at the front of the room. Professor Algar walked to the podium. He was apparently one of our teachers. I glanced at the course list. Our first class was Military History 101, followed by Strategy and Tactics, Technical Support, which I had no idea what it meant, and ended with Logistics. A large monitor behind the professor flickered on. I stared at alien symbols that made no sense to me.

"I can't read a thing," I whispered to Marna.

The girl smiled as she reached out and tapped a Cardassian pin attached to my left breast. The words on the monitor and com-padd appeared in English. I should have known to tap the pen. To her credit, she did not make fun of me or ask why I needed a translator. After a tedious hour of listening about Cardassians warfare, we took a test. I used the com-padd to input my answers, hoping they were right. A push of a button sent my results to Professor Algar's terminal. We filed out of the room with ten minutes to spare before we were to attend the next class, Strategy and Tactics.

I followed Damar and Marna along the walkway, admiring flowering cactuses that grew wild on the campus. The flowers provided a home to a curious purple beetle, which rubbed its wings together, making a humming sound.

"It's a cakada," Marna explained. "They appear in the spring and live only a week before they die. Female mate with the male the moment they are born and afterwards eats him. The eggs are laid on the cactus and hatch in ten hours. It seems a harsh life, I know. The cakada leave behind a residue that stimulates the growth of a cactus. They have a mutual need for one another to exist."

"Why are you being so kind to her? Any first grade student knows what a cakada is," Damar said, thrusting out his chest. "I suppose because you are related to the Dukat

family you've been able to advance in class, despite your ignorance. Perhaps you should be Marna's study partner. I intend to advance quickly and do not have time to tutor an inferior cadet."

"What I lack in knowledge, I'll make up for in combat," I said, already irritated by Damar's lack of empathy. "For the record, I have a BA in Professional Writing and played on the college softball team. I can play the clarinet, piano, and sing." Damar stared at me. "I no more intend to explain my background to you than to Professor Algar."

"It's all right," Marna said. "I will be your study partner, Yor. Damar, do not be so hard on her. I lack the physical skills required to graduate. If Yor helps me, I will be more than willing to help her with her studies."

"Fair enough," I said.

"First bugs. Next, it will be how to replace a photon pack," Damar grumbled. "I doubt Yor knows how to tie the laces on her boots. She thinks she can get by on her looks."

I laughed. "Do you find me attractive, Damar?"

"No more than I find a cakada's green coloring pleasant."

Storming off, Damar headed to our next class. Students filed toward a smaller building bordered by tall, thin trees with red leaves. In the distance, I heard the sound of a bell. Marna gave a nod. We ran across the lawn and entered the building. We reached the door as the bell silenced.

The room was smaller and at each desk was a monitor. Another professor stood at the front of the class, already in mid-sentence about the deployment of ground troops. I had played enough video war games on Earth to know how to align troops and besiege a fort. Damar typed in his own battle plans. Marna gazed at her monitor, uncertain of her tactics, and finished last.

We played out the entire scenario. I noticed her screen turned red within seconds, a sign her troops had been defeated. I lasted longer than the rest of the students and had a crowd gathered at my desk by the time the bell sounded and my troops took possession of a Klingon fort with limited fatalities. A few students applauded before they filed out of the classroom. Damar lifted his upper lip in a snarl, while Marna patted me on the arm.

"You did well, Yor. I'm impressed," Marna said.

Damar stood. "One should excel by their own merit or fail trying," he said, in a cold, flat tone. "I am sharing a room with you, Yor. I suggest you remember we are graded not only by our performance in class, but on our attitude and behavior outside the classroom."

"If you don't get chip off your shoulder, Damar, you'll never rise above the rank of glinn," I said, angry with him. "Come on, Marna. We have five minutes to get to our next class. Damar can make a new friend or walk by himself."

Three hours later, my head swam with information. The students went to a mess hall for a late lunch. I saw with Marna and Damar, aware the regular students remained segregated from the fostered children, taking no personal interest in us. Finding the sterile environment far too hostile, I introduced myself to the students seated at our table and received a variety of curious looks from the students. On the way out of the mess hall, Damar pulled me aside. He waited until the rest of the students filed past before he spoke.

"This is only your first day, Yor. Stop trying to be popular. Everyone knows your father shamed himself in combat and that's why he was banished. No one trusts you. All you do is look foolish."

"Tonight, I'm going to suffocate you with a pillow," I replied. Giving Damar a little push, I hurried out the door and found Marna waiting with five of the foster students. Damar might disapprove I wanted to make friends. I didn't see any harm in it. His brutish manner was inexcusable. I let him walk alone to the training field. Another professor waited beside a table arranged with a dozen different blades. The students had broken off into groups of twenty. The regular students forced to be included among the foster students looked resentful and angry. I pushed to the front of the students, staring at the weapons and found myself signaled out to fight with another student. It was Damar. The teacher handed us Cardassian blades and we walked into a large circle.

"Aren't you going to show us how to use these weapons?" I asked the teacher.

"We already know how to fight," Damar snarled.

Damar swung the sword, clearly proficient in its use. Apparently, the cadets learned how to fight when they were young. No one else needed an introduction on what type of

weapons lay on the table, or how to use them. I was the only one who did not know what I was doing. In college, I had been on the fencing team for one year. I had also seen enough movies to assume I knew how to handle a blade.

At the teacher's nod, Damar attacked, mercilessly, hacking away at me. I used the blade to defend myself, unable to match his footwork or his speed. He backed me toward the edge of the circle.

"You are weak," Damar said. "Useless. No skill at all."

As his sword lifted, I charged toward him, knocking him onto his back. I heard Marna and my new friends cheer as I held the edge of my blade to Damar's throat. Raw, brute strength propelled by anger had helped me win. Yet, the look on Damar's face was one of admiration, not scorn. I climbed off his chest, stood, and extended my hand to him. Damar readily took my hand and I pulled him to his feet.

"Next time it won't be as easy," he said.

"Then show me how it's done properly and I won't have to knock you on your ass."

Damar nodded. "Consider it done."

At the end of the day, I was worn out, thinking only of taking a shower, eating a hot meal and sleeping. Marna was assigned to room 12. A girl named Septa was assigned to her room who turned out to be Damar's study partner. I felt less inclined to worry about Marna, for Septa was friendly, and the pair seemed to like one another. As I entered Room 11, I found my duffle bag on the floor. Damar sat on his bed, watching as I removed my boots and unpacked. I placed my clothes in a dresser and heard Damar kick off his shoes.

"You can shower first," Damar said. He was quite handsome and as of yet unspoiled by his service in the military. I doubted he'd ever drunk kanar and if he'd ever been with a woman. "Each room has a replicator. What do you want to eat for dinner? I'll fix whatever you want while you shower. We can study afterwards."

"Study? Marna is my partner."

"I have been working on the designs for a sub-retractor works like a magnet. One flip of a switch and you could easily disarm your opponent. In fact, you'd be able to catch any metal-based blade as soon as it left your opponent's hand. I've not been able to

configure the design so it can fit on your wrist. My prototype is far too large and must be attached to a gun belt. I'm anxious to show it off in Technical Support. I thought we might be able to try it out later."

"I didn't know you were an inventor, Damar."

"There's a great deal you don't know about me. I am also a skilled musician and have written a few songs. I normally sing in the shower. If you promise not to laugh, I'll be more than happy to perform for you, Yor."

"An inventor and a musician. I'm impressed. Would you rather take a shower with me? You can sing while I wash your back."

His mouth dropped open. "I...I would never assume to take such liberties with you. We hardly know each other," he stammered. "It never crossed my mind you actually liked me. I've never...." He grew tight lipped and stared at the floor, struggling to find the words.

"Relax, Damar. I'm only teasing you."

"It's not that I object," he said lifting his eyes.

I'd never noticed how bright blue his eyes were since I was used to seeing them red-rimmed from excessive drinking. For some reason he'd given up working on his inventions and no longer sang. It made me sad to learn he'd given up hobbies he'd loved in his youth. I wondered what had happened to change him. He was a private person. I'd opened a door and he seemed receptive to letting me into his world. I walked over to him and ruffled his hair.

"I've never been with someone before. I take it you are experienced?"

"Just how old do you think I am, Damar?"

"Seventeen, like me. All freshmen are seventeen."

"It will happen when it happens, for both of us."

Damar started to sing. "She offered to love me in the soft moon light. We lay on the grass, beneath the silver glow, lost in each other in the quiet of the night," he sang, in a rich baritone. He fell silent when I leaned over and kissed him. "What...what are you doing?"

"I can stop."

“Ren, don’t tease me,” Damar said in a husky voice.

“Hold that thought. I won’t be long.”

Laughing, I removed my jacket, tossed it onto the bed and entered the bathroom. I stripped, leaving my garments on the tiled floor, and entered the shower. Water turned on at a touch of a button. It felt real. I washed every inch of dirt from my body. When I stepped out of the shower, I found a towel on the counter that hadn’t been there before. I assumed Damar had left it out for me. I stood in front of the mirror, amazed to see the face of a teenager. My black hair lay damp on my shoulders. I dried it with the towel, brushed my teeth, and entered the room without a stitch of clothes on, prepared to teach the boy a few things about the art of love.

Damar lay on the bed, his shirt off, a book in hand. He stared off into space. I laughed, thinking he was being goofy. He didn’t react. He was frozen in place.

“Did you forget the time?” a familiar voice asked.

I spun around. Glinn Damar stood behind me. Taking a quick glance at the younger version on the bed, still frozen in time, I turned toward the real Cardassian and found the older Damar staring at me. He was angry. It was a familiar look I’d seen on the face of the younger, hologram version that I’d hoped to wipe away with an hour of pleasure in our dorm room. I couldn’t change what had happened to Glinn Damar in real life. But I had thought I could improve the attitude of his younger version. Not to be intimidated by his glower, I placed my hands on his shoulders, feeling the roughness of his armor beneath my fingers.

“I like it here. I like...you.”

“I was far more impressionable at age than you realize. I didn’t couple with a woman until I married,” he replied. “You’ve been in this holosuite for more than ten hours or didn’t you notice the time? What you experience here is for educational purposes only. The food you eat has no sustenance. You could stay here forever and die here from starvation and dehydration. Remove the safety protocols, however, and a single sword thrust would kill you.”

“You were very sweet as a boy.”

"It's a pity you weren't my real study partner, Ren. I am sure I would have learned a great many things from you. I am now."

His arms closed around my waist, drawing me close. His kiss was hard and brutal. For a moment I wondered if Glinn Damar was a hologram as well, finding him as solid and real as everything else on the holosuite. The young version faded, leaving us alone in the room. He backed me toward my bed, silence replacing the former sounds of voices in the corridor and as he pulled me beside him to sprawl onto the mattress, I wondered if every day would be like this, going to the academy and finding the real Damar waiting for me afterwards.

"I won't share you with my younger version, Yor. You belong to me, not the boy. Don't leave me waiting again."

His lips softened beneath my own and only until he lay beside me, naked, exhausted from a passionate interlude did I realize I was famished and thirsty. The program ended once we were dressed, standing in a large room with metal walls. I felt a sense of loss leaving the holosuite and a life was nothing more than fantasy. He led me to his quarters and ordered a meal from the replicator, along with a pitcher of water, sitting beside me as I ate and drank my fill, and then stood.

"I have a few hours before I must return to Ops. Come to bed."

"And in the morning?" I asked.

"You'll return to the academy. A month will pass each time you return. Your friends will react as if you've always been there. Everyone you meet, existed in real life twenty years ago. Most are no longer alive. Marna never graduated. She died in combat training. I know you'll want to save her, but what happened in the past cannot be changed."

"Why are you doing this, Damar? Why train me this way?"

"Because I want you to know who I was, and why I am the way I am."

"I can live with that," I said taking hold of his hand.

"Hence, why I want you to attend the academy. I am trying to keep you alive, Yor. When you've learned all you can, you will graduate. At that point, I will train you on the holodeck or assign Saja to do the same."

"I'll learn all of your secrets, Damar."

"Not all."

I showered for real this time, able to select water whenever I wanted to, now that I knew how to use the controls. The water felt different on my skin than on the holodeck. I paid attention to the subtle differences between the hologram and reality. Damar waited in bed for me, the lights off. He pulled the blankets aside in order for me to crawl in beside him. He covered me with the blanket and pulled me into his arms.

"Be gentle with the boy. I was not liked and had few friends at the academy. Marna was my best friend and my study partner."

"Thank you for letting me into your life."

Damar gave a curt nod. "Perhaps you are not so different from me after all."

"Born to be a Cardassian?" I asked.

"Something like that," he replied before he kissed me.

HELEN

Chapter Eight

For the next few weeks, I lived a life of luxury and sexual exploration with Gul Dukat as his newest and latest mistress. Despite the uncertainty of my position as the Gul's woman, I grew used to waking up beside him. Lying on my side with his body curled up behind mine like two spoons, I felt happiest during these quiet morning hours. When I lay next to him, his breath at my neck, every muscle in his large body relaxed. It was a moment in time in which I could enjoy his company. In the silence, there was no need for games or pretense. He was with me, I was his woman, and I felt satisfied with how things had evolved between us.

"Must go," Dukat said in his sleep. "The Resistance...all of them must go."

"Dukat? Are you awake?"

He released me and rolled over onto his stomach, pushing me away from him without knowing it, obviously still asleep. I wasn't used to him talking in his sleep. This was new. The details of his command and the difficulties came with it, he kept private from me. I assumed his sleep revealed his inner most concerns. There was serious trouble on Bajor with the Resistance, but for genocide to be the final solution to the Cardassians problem with the Bajorans was surely not what he meant.

Death begets only death, I thought. I pulled the covers over both of us, noting by the clock on the mantel in an hour he needed to rise and go on duty. I tried to go back to sleep. He needed to rest. He didn't keep regular hours and spent his time in his office or at Ops. He ran not only the space station, he oversaw the entire Second Order. The order had one hundred thousand soldiers and crewmen manned forty ships, sizes and classes varying from warships to freighters. More than half of the Second Order stationed on Bajor

required his attention, another responsibility that weighed heavy on the gul. I had read a great deal about Cardassia during the hours I was left alone. I also listened intently to Dukat whenever he joined me for dinner.

Dukat had told me every soldier or crewmen of quality went to the military academy on Cardassia Prime. There were twelve military Orders. A gul commanded each order, sometimes a legate as was the case with the Fifth, and each had the same number of soldiers and ships, though not necessarily the same duties. The First Order served Central Command, their motto 'death to all', told their story. The Fourth Order patrolled all Cardassia controlled star systems, looking for the terrorists and rebels. It was a well-oiled war machine.

The intercom broke the silence and ended my reverie. Dukat opened his eyes, sat up with a start, and glanced at me. The tiny alarm informed us someone waited on the other end to talk to him. It continued to bleep.

"I was having a nightmare. It's comforting to find you beside me," Dukat said though he did not explain the details.

"What's on today's agenda?" I asked cuddling against him.

"As lovely as you are, my dear, there is always work to consider." Dukat rose, put on a robe, and sat before the console. "Gul Dukat here. What is it?"

"It's about time you were awake," a woman snapped. I couldn't see the monitor. From the way Dukat reacted, stiff and angry, I had a feeling it was his wife Mikelya. The voice was cold and lacked any affection. *"After what I've been hearing, I would think you would have something else to say to me. Don't bother. I know you're not interested in hearing about your children, so I'll come straight to the point. I've heard the Enterprise arrived at Terok Nor, leaving behind two humans who for some reason vanished overnight, and now you've taken on a new Bajoran lover and have a new female officer. Coincidence?"*

"Of course it is. The humans you mentioned were part of the Enterprise crew and have returned with them to the Federation. I need not explain myself further."

"While I'm not surprised how you go through women with as little regard for their feelings as you've even given to my own, I would think you have more sense to flaunt your women in public."

There are those in Central Command who are saying you're sympathetic to the Federation. I need not tell you how embarrassed the family is over this. I have tried to quell the talk. It's grown out of hand. I have no other choice to visit you."

"You'll do nothing of the kind!"

"Don't be foolish, Dukat. I am joining Legate Mikor and will be coming to Terok Nor. Mikor is eager to convince Central Command and the Detapa Council to put him in charge of an invasion against the Federation. I thought you should know. Gul Raynor of the Klaxon will bring us to the station. Agent Torell is with us, Dukat. He is displeased with the gossip. Your lewd conduct has made it necessary for me to salvage what I can of our family reputation and honorable name before you bring shame to us all."

"How soon can I expect your arrival?"

"I'm taking a pleasure cruise at the moment. We'll join you at the end of the month."

"Mikelya, please, be reasonable," Dukat said, keeping his temper in check. "I do not think your presence at Terok Nor will ease the tension here, nor help restore our family honor, which by the way, I do not feel is in jeopardy. I will not tolerate a visit from you at this particular time. Give my love to the children and stay home."

"I've made all the arrangements. Your son will be graduating from the academy in a month. I will not be at Terok Nor for long as I will be there to see him receive his gold ring. I doubt you will, however, find the time to join us."

"I have every intention of attending the ceremony," Dukat said.

"For me, there is no choice. I am a Gul's wife. I have a duty to you and our family."

The monitor went blank.

"I thought you were divorced for some reason." I said. The woman sounded terrifying. I was afraid what would happen when Dukat's wife arrived. I doubted I would remain in his quarters and wondered if I'd be tossed into the slave pens.

"If only that was the case. Cardassians avoid divorce. It is considered shameful and I would prefer not to have it stain my military career," Dukat said. "Her father is on the Detapa Council and wields considerable power. When she learns about Yor, I have no doubt she'll start digging skeletons out of the closet. I suppose it's my fault for not

considering my wife in all of this. She's shown so little interest in me until now. We have four sons and one daughter. They apparently do not keep her occupied, so she is coming here to annoy me. Mikor most likely influenced my wife's decision. They knew each other before we married. However, I am now told she is fond of Gul Raynor."

"And the OO agent she mentioned?"

"Agent Torell? He is the reason why you are a Bajoran. As long as you behave as my mistress and confide in no one about your true identity, there's no need for you to concern yourself with Torell, my work, or my wife. They won't arrive for another week, giving me enough time to prepare for their arrival. Now, you'll excuse me, my dear. Duty calls."

Dukat dressed and left without saying goodbye. I lay in bed, unable to fall back asleep. All I could think about was the wife of Gul Dukat coming to the station, accompanied by an agent from the Obsidian Order.

* * *

SAWYER

After graduation from the academy, I said goodbye to hologram friends I'd come to cherish and returned the computer chip to Damar. Living a fantasy-life and returning to reality each evening had taken its toll on me.

The experience had in some ways felt like a vacation. It had altered how I felt about Cardassia and my place in the militaristic culture. Perhaps was the whole intent behind Damar having selected his own past for me to live. Now I was back to reality, I vowed never to return to the academy. My daily routine changed. Every morning, Damar and I sat at the kitchen table, ate breakfast together and traded stories about our home worlds, our conversation easy and friendly, for I recognized the boy in the adult and loved both. I felt certain Damar loved me as well, though it wasn't anything we spoke about. I imagined our lives together in the future. I was happy with Damar, truly happy. I'd not yet convinced the real Damar to pick up a musical instrument and sing to me. I often heard him singing in the shower.

During the afternoon, I had combat training with Damar and when he was

occupied, he sent Saja or one of the other soldiers to practice with me on the holodeck. When Damar's work scheduled altered, I spent my evenings reading. I missed the academy. Most nights, Damar came in late. He crawled into bed with me, made love to me and afterwards fell asleep in my arms. I knew better than to get comfortable with the status quo. Dukat, not Damar, would eventually decide whether or not I was ready to be a real soldier.

"Your thoughts are light years away this morning," Damar said.

"Saja, the old war dog, has been working me hard. My shoulders are stiff, that's all," I said pouring a cup of coffee for myself. "I think we hiked twenty miles yesterday."

"Be careful in the holosuite when I'm not around. Cardassians are physically superior to your race. Saja has assigned Dunatar, Zolon, Jenrak, Komash and Ikarus to help train you because they are the best. If you cannot keep up with them, then you need to say so or you could injure yourself."

Damar sipped on hot fish juice, the smell was ungodly, while I took coffee. The kitchen was clean and tidy. We ate taspar egg with yamok sauce and Larish pie. When I'd been human, I'd refused to eat Cardassian food. My taste buds had changed, but the odor of yamok sauce still disgusted me as well as fish juice. I indulged in neither.

"I can find no flaws in your training. You were born to be a Cardassian. I am proud of you. You could pass for a Cardassian anywhere," Damar said. "However, I am concerned the family name of Yor will draw unwanted attention. It did at the academy, yet you overcame the odds. It won't be the same in real life."

"I don't mind being Dukat's cousin. In fact, I like it."

"Of course you'd say what is expected. You should take time to learn more about the Yor family. Garak has provided the documentation. Read it after your workout and you'll understand why Professor Algar was so hard on you."

"I won the old crocodile over in the end. I can do the same with anyone."

"I'm serious, Yor. You will not like what you read about Gul Yor." Damar set his eating utensils aside as he pursed his lips together, folding his arms across his chest. "I told you before our relationship is not appropriate. It cannot continue this way. I seldom contact

my wife, but people talk. I find my thoughts frequently drift to you. You've become a distraction. As of tonight, you will move into your quarters across the hall. Perhaps I will visit you from time to time. However, we can no longer be roommates."

"I know you married Katyana when you were twenty years old. You have no children. There's no real bond with her other than a legal contract."

Damar glowered as he sipped on his juice. "Cardassians are a traditional people. We have a duty to the Union and to our family," he said. "Duty and loyalty are paramount. Every Cardassian citizen has his or her place, rank, or position. We are a socially conscious people. One only dines at meals with another of equal or greater stature, and our marriages are politically motivated. Love has nothing to do with it. I do not love my wife, Ren. It still does not change the fact I am married and you are perceived to be my mistress. Dukat will eventually insist we live apart. As I cannot divorce my wife, I think it is best we alter the arrangement as of today."

"I see I have no choice in the matter," I said.

"To be a Cardassian, a real Cardassia, family must come first. Whether you love your spouse or not is beside the point. Divorce is discouraged to protect the offspring, which are denied certain rights if and when that occurs. Elders are revered and respected and remain in the household of their children. Advanced age is seen as a sign of power and dignity. Children are valued and well looked after. It is not uncommon for several generations to live under the same roof."

"But not foster children."

"This is a separate matter. I was fortunate to marry well, Ren. We did have a child. The boy died a few days after childbirth. Katyana and I have tried to have another. It has not resulted in children," he said, his tone clipped and hard. "I believe the loss of the child hurt her deeply. Cardassian parents devote much time as well as resources to their children. I've been careful not to father a child with you, Yor. Dr. Quirin gives me a weekly shot, and until I am required to see my wife, then I will continue to do so."

I thought of Vanya, the eunuch pimp at the brothel. He'd said Damar was not known for permanent liaisons with other women. He was devoted to his wife out of a

sense of honor. He would not set Katyana aside for me. I didn't want our relationship to change, but it was obvious he was going to insist I move across the hall, permanently. I cleared the table and placed dishes in the replicator where they vanished.

"Why is there such a social bias against orphans or illegitimate children? Young Damar told me it is disgraceful to have children out of wedlock. He also said orphans are often left to die. It's hardly a child's fault to lose its own parents." I followed Damar into the living room. "These children have no status and are just cast aside. I witnessed firsthand the prejudice against orphans at the academy. It's not right, Damar."

"I care not to discuss my childhood. I was fortunate to have married well."

"Adoption should be sanctioned by the Union. It would be considered an honor to adopt a child, no matter who they are or where they come from, Damar. All children have a right to have a family and to be loved."

Damar slid into his armor, letting me help him with the buckles. "It's how it has always been," he said. "I know you mean well, Yor. There are limits to what we can and can't do."

"Do you love me, Damar?"

"I haven't mentioned my feelings because I am married. I will not deny I have strong feelings for you. I'm certain my wife knows I am involved with Dukat's cousin and this weighs heavy on my mind. I not spoken to her about us, for I do not want to upset her. Katyana is a private person. Like me."

"And if she came here?"

"My wife would not come to Terok Nor unless sent for. She is not like Dukat's wife. Mikelya will arrive soon. Your friend will be tucked away, hidden from sight until she leaves. Cardassians are protective of their families. Now that you're a Yor, you must be careful with what you say about me or about Dukat. You must refrain from offering opinions on politics or the military. You must guard what you say to Helen, Garak, or the soldiers you have befriended like Saja. He is my friend as well, Yor. Saja asked if I will divorce my wife. I do not want such a rumor to get back to my wife. I will not shame her."

"I don't talk to Saja or anyone else about us," I said, feeling defensive.

“People know about us, Yor. Everyone knows.” Damar pulled me into his arms and kissed my forehead. “I told Dukat it was unwise to enlist you as a garresh. He did so anyway. He’d reviewed the tapes of your training and believes you are ready to serve in the military on an official basis. It means anyone who wants to look into your fabricated history can do so. Everything you’ve gone through in the last few weeks is part of your cover story. It had to feel real if you are to be believed when questioned by the Obsidian Order. Agent Torell is dangerous, Yor. Our affair places us in a precarious situation.”

I wiggled free of his embrace and sat on the couch, pouting. Damar retrieved his disrupter pistol from a shelf and hooked it onto his belt.

“What exactly is my family’s status?” I asked.

“The Yor family is poor. None holds high ranks in the military or has political influence. I have nothing to gain by having a Yor as my mistress. Most people believe you are using me to further your own career.”

“I wouldn’t want anyone to think I’m sleeping with you to rise in rank,” I muttered. “Nor do I want people thinking I’m using my family connection to Dukat to climb the ladder of success. You might have mentioned this weeks ago.”

“I’m telling you now.” Damar walked over. He grabbed my arm and pulled me to my feet and into his arms. “If you really were Ren Yor, if you were truly a Cardassian, I might reconsider divorcing my wife,” he said. “As I said before, things are complicated.”

A beep from the com caused Damar to set me aside. He sat behind his desk. I plopped onto the couch. The familiar voice of Dukat invaded the sanctity of the room.

“You’ve apparently heard the bad news. My wife will be coming here, Glinn Damar. She will arrive within the week with Agent Torell, Legate Mikor and Gul Raynor. The Fifth is coming here. I foresee no good will come from this visit. Ren Yor is to assume active duty immediately.”

“Yes, sir,” Damar said.

“Yor may be more useful than I anticipated. One more thing, Damar. I do not want Ren Yor talking to the wrong sorts like Torell. Her true identity is to remain a secret. And on that note, do give my warmest regards to my little cousin. I hope she intends to make me proud for giving her what she wanted most - to serve me as a soldier of the Second Order.”

"She may yet break," Damar replied.

My temper swelled at the comment.

"Oh, I think you'll find she is quite resilient, that is why I chose her for this particular position, and gave her to you to train," Dukat said, his tone firmer this time. *"See that Yor doesn't disappointment me. I'm depending on you, Glinn Damar."*

"Yes, sir!" Damar waited until the screen turned black before he stood. "You heard what Dukat said. The moment Agent Torell arrives, he will start asking questions about the two missing Terrans. He will most certainly want to know more about you. I fear you will break under his form of interrogation, Yor."

"I won't break. I'm not weak."

"Perhaps," he said. "As of today, you will be listed on the duty roster. I will assign you as a guard outside my office. You will also move into your new quarters. If you're ready, we are scheduled for the holodeck. I have an hour before I must report for duty. You can take out your anger in combat."

"Good. Because that's precisely what I'm going to do."

Damar ran me through a battle he said was known as the Balkan Raid, a war on a colonized moon started by illegal Klingon settlers. It took place fifty years earlier. My choice of weapons were blades of different length. I killed dozens of Klingons before Damar requested we take a break.

"I don't need to stop. I'm not tired. Let's practice with laser rifles."

Damar took me by the shoulders. I resisted the urge to kick him, still angry from our earlier discussion. "Humans have the strength of a Cardassian child," he said. I do not understand why your strength and skills seem to be accelerating. You are not tired, yet I am. Do you agree something is amiss?"

"Maybe it has to do with the implant in my head. Dr. Quirin can't figure out what is it, nor can Garak," I said. His eyes widened. "You did know about the implant?"

"What are you talking about?"

"I had it before I came here. Dukat knows about it, only neither of us know who put it in my head or how to remove it. Dr. Quirin has never seen this type of technology before,

so I have to live with headaches on a daily basis. I can usually work through the pain on the holodeck. At night, I have to rely on some tranquilizers. I didn't tell you because I thought you'd put an end to my training."

Damar stopped the program. The scenery faded. We were left standing in a large room with gray walls and dim lights. My swords vanished.

"If the headaches get worse, I want you to see Dr. Quirin." Damar slid a lock of hair over my ear. "Keep your curls away from your face. You must style it like a soldier, not a wild woman. I suppose you want to keep training." I nodded. "Then you will put on a real cuirass to get use to its weight. It will feel different from a projected image."

"It's about time," I said.

Damar had brought a large bag. He removed the cuirass and helped me put it on. It was black and heavier than the simulated one, as he said it would be. He helped me buckle it on and again smoothed my hair over my ears.

"I am impressed. Don't think I am not. The trick is to impress Agent Torell and Legate Mikor. Mikor is from Batal City where Ren Yor was born. Dukat is throwing a reception tonight and wants us to be present. No matter what is said to you by our illustrious guests, do not say more than you must, and do not improvise. You are from the country, not the city. The Melakor Province was once fertile farmland. Raderus Yor had a farm there and moved when the crops started to die. That is the official story."

"What really happened?"

"He and his wife died."

"And?"

Damar frowned. "Read the report provided by Garak," he said. "What actually happened to your parents is unknown. You will know enough to sound believable. As of today, you are my new aide. Dukat insisted. It is an honor, I assure you."

"My father was exiled from Cardassia after he lost a battle against the Klingons. The soldiers call him a coward. Even Professor Algar thought the same."

"I doubt you'll be asked personal questions," he said. "All anyone needs to know or believe is you are Ren Yor. Remember your training. Behave as a proper soldier at all times."

Keep the cuirass on. We are done for the day.”

“I would prefer to remain a while longer and train,” I said.

He gave a nod and left the holosuite. I turned the program back on. Armed with my two swords, I attacked the Klingons and showed no mercy.

HELEN

Chapter Nine

I stood behind Dukat, Damar and Sawyer. I felt nervous as we waited for the arrival of Legate Mikor, Agent Torell and Mikelya Dukat. After a month of being a Bajoran and Dukat's mistress, I still wasn't used to my new face. The nose ridges felt awkward and I felt uncomfortable. Nor did I understand why Dukat wanted me present. I thought he was going to hide me in a corner until our guests left the station. This was apparently not the case. As Dukat's prized 'red haired mistress', as I often heard recanted by the soldiers and Dabo girls, I was put on display. Dukat's wife would surely tear me apart the moment she laid eyes on me.

A quick glance at Sawyer confirmed while she'd been apart from me, training to be a soldier, she'd adapted to her role as Dukat's cousin. She looked impressive in her armor. Her black hair was too long and hung past her shoulders. I was surprised Damar allowed her to wear her hair in this fashion, for she appeared wild. It struck me this was the impression Dukat wanted. Garak had told me about her cover story. Ren Yor had arrived from another star base to be groomed as a proper soldier.

With a shimmer of light, four figures appearance on the platform. Legate Mikor was silver haired and highly decorated. He was shorter than most Cardassians I'd seen on the space station. Another Cardassian in uniform stood beside him. I assumed it was Gul Raynor of the Klaxon. Raynor was tall, thin, and handsome. He offered his arm to a beautiful yet formidable looking female. This was Dukat's wife. I wondered if Madame Dukat was sleeping with Raynor. They stepped forward and blocked a fourth figure on the transporter platform.

"Greetings," Dukat said, stepping forward. "Welcome to Terok Nor, my dear."

“Husband.” Mikelya broke away from Raynor and held out her hand for Dukat to kiss. “Of course you know Legate Mikor and Gul Raynor. This is Agent Torell.” She moved aside and motioned with her hand at the fourth member of the group.

Agent Torell was small in stature and dressed in a dark green tunic. His eyes were, deep, fathomless black pools. I tried to hide behind Damar and Sawyer. Torell spotted me. A slight smile twisted his lips as he was acknowledging my fear was justified.

“Allow me to introduce my cousin. This is Garresh Yor,” Dukat said. “I told you she was coming to this station, Mikelya. Greet your cousin with a warm embrace.”

“I most certainly will not,” his wife snapped. “Why you bothered to locate Yor after all these years eludes me. Her presence adds only further shame to our families..” She glanced at Damar. “I see you’re still here.”

“Madame Dukat,” Damar said. “You’ll be pleased to know Garresh Yor is my new aide.”

“Pleased? It’s embarrassing to be connected to the Yor family,” she replied. “I want as little to do with her as possible. What’s wrong with her? Doesn’t she salute?”

Sawyer responded and saluted Legate Mikor and Gul Raynor. She bowed her head at Dukat’s wife. The ill-tempered woman walked past Sawyer on the arm of Raynor. Mikor followed behind them without waiting for Dukat. I noticed Torell watched Sawyer with interest. I dropped my gaze when Torell approached, wishing Garak had joined us. Torell slid around Dukat and Damar to train his black eyes on me.

“And who is this, Gul Dukat?” Torell asked. “A new pleasure slave? I did not expect you to provide entertainment for me. You are thoughtful.”

“This is Helen Mryess, newly arrived on the station,” Dukat said. “I can’t vouch for her temperament or abilities, although she is undeniable attractive. I can have her sent to your quarters, Agent Torell. Glinn Damar, see to our guests. If you’ll excuse me, I see to the rest of my quests.”

The look I shot Dukat should have incinerated him on the spot. I felt betrayed, abused, and manipulated. The last few weeks had not been as romantic as I imagined. Dukat had trained me to pleasure the OO agent. I felt utterly wretched. Dukat had to know

I was hurt that he offered me to the agent. He did many things I didn't understand or approve. If Dukat thought I'd forget or forgive him, he was wrong. As soon as Dukat left the transporter room, I was at the disposal of Agent Torell. It was foolish to hope Torell would dismiss me without further thought. He licked his lips as I was led away by two guards and taken directly to Torell's quarters, feeling like a lamb led to the slaughter.

I examined every inch of the living room, wondering Garak had arranged from hidden surveillance cameras and found none. Angry and frightened, I ordered a glass of Bajoran spring wine from the replicator. I sat on the couch, wondering what I was supposed to do when the OO agent arrived. It seemed I was to sleep with him. It did little good to spend my time thinking of devious ways to exact revenge on Dukat. He didn't care about me, not at all.

After an hour and several glasses of wine, the door slid open. Torell glided into the room as he had a way to defy the gravity of the station. He glanced at me as he headed straight for the replicator. He ordered us both a cup of red leaf tea. I stood, nervous as he placed the cup on the table, and removed the glass of wine. He took the glass back to the desk. Seated at the computer, he slid a data rod into a slot. Something appeared on the screen that held his interest, as if he'd discovered the mysteries of the universe. As he took a sip of tea, I glanced at my own cup. I'd already had too much wine and hesitated before drinking the tea. It tasted bitter.

"Am I to remain or leave, Agent Torell?" I asked in a soft voice.

"Stay and be silent."

The agent's tone left no room for argument or disobedience. With a sigh, I drank more of the tea and set it aside right as Torell glanced at me. He walked across the room and stood in front of me. I felt like a horse inspected for purchase. I kept my chin held high, composed on the couch, trying to appear calm and relaxed.

"I'm quite aware you are Dukat's new mistress, Helen. You're far too beautiful to be anything less. No doubt he sent you here to spy on me," Torell said. "Of course, now that his wife has arrived, it does put Dukat in a difficult position. Be thankful she is involved with Gul Raynor. Does this surprise you? Mikelya Dukat knows her relationship with her

husband is wearing thin. She's wisely selected another gul to marry, if and when a divorce is arranged."

"It is her choice," I whispered.

"Is this all you have to say, Helen Mryess? I thought this news would please you."

"I am a slave. Do you really care how I feel?"

"Not a slave," he responded. "Cardassia abolished slavery earlier this year. You are a pleasure girl. A whore. I hear there are many Bajoran whores on this station. And if I ordered you to disrobe and join me in bed?"

I lifted my eyes. I didn't like what I saw in his eyes. I stood and put a hand on the clasp holding my gown together, not saying a word. Torell broke into laughter. He stopped after a few seconds and wiped tears from his eyes.

"Oh, you are a gem. Perhaps later. In the meantime," Torell said, as he joined me on the couch, "We will get to know each other."

I glared at Torell, suspicious of what he'd do next.

"I must admit I did not expect to be treated to such a lovely companion on my first night here. Dukat has surely trained you well. I cannot object. Why would I? I am a man and you are a woman. It is perfectly natural for me to bed you."

"I am at your disposal."

"Yes, you are, my dear. Quite literally, in fact."

I felt the heat from his body. He took the cup from my hand and placed it beside his cup on the table. His eyes held my gaze as he grasped hold of my hands. His flesh was cold. A shiver run its course along the length of my spine. On alert, I stared hard at Torell. His eyes had the look of a defiant. I feared what he liked in the bedroom. He turned my hands over to study my palms.

"Such soft skin. A few callouses, but nothing out of the ordinary. How long have you been on the station?"

"A few weeks," I said.

"Where do your people come from?"

"Bajor City. My parents are humble tailors."

“Ah, an honorable profession. One shared with Garak. How long have you been Dukat’s mistress?”

“Not long. Gul Dukat has many mistresses.”

Torell smiled at my response. “I’m glad to hear you say it. I wouldn’t want to discover I’d taken Dukat’s favorite mistress to my bed,” he replied. “It would look bad on my record if I was found dead in the morning. Dukat is not the type of man who likes to share his play toys. He is jealous, possessive, and unforgiving, as his wife has told me many times during our voyage. These traits have not won him friends among the Bajorans, yet he continues to choose Bajoran mistresses despite the fact he has been left to rot on this station for the last eight months for his inability to restrain the Bajoran Resistance.”

“I’m not with the Resistance. Nor are they as strong as you think,” I said. “The Resistance won’t drive Cardassia out of Bajor. It would require political pressure from outside sources.”

What was I saying? I fell silent, alarmed I had said too much.

“Did you put something in my drink?”

Again, he smiled.

“It’s merely tea. Here. I’ll take a drink myself.” Torell took my cup and took a deep swallow before he set it aside. “There’s no need to feel nervous. People like to talk around me. It’s fortunate I have many questions to which you hold the answers. The opposite is true also. You have questions I am sure I can answer.”

Maybe it was Torell’s slimy demeanor or maybe he had spiked the tea. I felt my inhibition fade. My fear and nervousness vanished, leaving me more curious than anything else.

“I don’t know what questions to ask,” I said.

“I am sure you want to know why you’re here, how you got here, and what is going to happen to you.” Torell slid toward me so our legs touched. He lifted his arm and reached around to touch the back of my head. “You have an implant right here. I know because my people placed it in your head, Helen. You work for us.”

“What do you mean? Who is ‘us’?”

“Come now, Helen. I know you are human,” he said. “Dukat has gone to lengths to hide this fact from me. I assume he believes I will confide in you. Little does he know I sent you to kill the great Second Order Gul. Am I worried you will tell him? Certainly not. While you have that implant in your head, you will do whatever I say and I order you not to tell him anything about our discussion.”

I felt the implant twitch. I sat straighter.

“I don’t understand,” I said. “The Obsidian Order wants Dukat dead?”

Torell stood. “Questions only bring more questions and answers can wait.” He extended a hand to me. “Bed first and then we’ll talk, my lovely, sweet Helen Monroe.”

Unable to resist, I took his hand and stood. I felt like a robot and I followed him into the bedroom. I did what he told me to do. Perfunctory caresses, enough to get him aroused, and ended in a hurry. I lay beside him and stared at the ceiling.

“Now that you understand I have control over you, Helen, we can have our little chat,” Torell said. “Let’s start by having you tell me everything you know. It shouldn’t take that long, for you are human, after all. Your race is not that intelligent.”

Torell whispered a word in my ear. I stiffened as a rush of memories, impressions, and sensations spewed from my lips. When I finished, I again stared at the ceiling, as if my memory was wiped clean. I couldn’t remember what I had told him. Torell reached over and took hold of my hand, twining his fingers between mine.

“Let me explain what you said to end the look of confusion on your face, my dear. The Prophets helped Q move through time and space to select two humans from Earth’s past. For what reason, I cannot say. I intercepted you both in the wormhole. I implanted devices in your head that compel you to do certain things, when the time is right. Whatever you think may or may not have happened in your past on Earth are false memories, placed in your mind to help lull Dukat into a sense of safety. Dukat does not suspect you work for me. Nor will he know, for the moment we leave, I will make certain you forget.”

“But why us?”

Torell’s grip on my hand tightened. I tried not to wince.

“Because, with your help, we can pull Dukat’s fangs and make him less of a threat.

Without your help, Bajor and all her people are doomed. You see, I want to help the Bajoran Resistance defeat Dukat. I want him to lose favor with Central Command and the Detapa Council. Before I have him killed, I want him to suffer the humiliation of losing the power he has grown accustomed to. We, Helen, are those who know Dukat is evil and must be destroyed. We are many and we will succeed. The circle keeps spinning around and around, like the thoughts inside your pretty head. Will you do what I say?"

"Yes," I replied.

"Where is the other girl you came with? Hmm? Where is Sawyer? I want you to be truthful, Helen. Can you tell me the truth? I was told two Terrans arrived at this station and departed on the Enterprise. Is this true?"

"Sawyer did leave on the Enterprise."

The implant tingled. I resisted the impulse to tell Torell about Sawyer. The result was a splitting headache. He continued to question me. I continued to resist, until I brought on a migraine. He finally tired of hearing short answers. We both dressed and returned to the front room. The cup of tea was placed in my hands. It had to be drugged, I thought, as he told me to drink it. I did so. I heard his voice and the pain in my head faded. I looked at Torell as I squeezed his hand, playing along, playing Q's game as he did, though he did not seem to realize he was a participant. Nor did I fill him in on Sawyer and Q's conversation on the Enterprise, at least I didn't think I had told him.

"What do you want me to do?" I asked.

"Whatever I tell you to," he replied. "Now, I want you to relax, my dear. You will not discuss any of this with Dukat or Garak. In fact, you will not remember the details of our conversation after you leave this room. We will talk again. Meanwhile, I will find out what Dukat has done with your friend. You are dismissed."

After I left Torell's quarters, I felt my headache evaporate. I remembered the details of our experience in bed and very little else. Something had changed, however, for I noticed the hardened Cardassian guards scattered out of my way. Each step I took toward Dukat's quarters added confusion and anger. Dukat had given me to Torell and I was furious by the time I arrived on my floor. A feeling of pure rage grew to such intensity, I

was in murderous mood when I arrived at Dukat's quarters. I used the keycard to enter and caught Dukat by surprise. He stood at a large round window, the Klaxon in view, and lifted his hand to me. Unable to control my anger, I grabbed the nearest item off a table, a com-padd, and hurled it at his head. His amazing Cardassian reflexes allowed him to step out of the way. The padd slammed into the window and broke into pieces. Before I could grab something else to hurl, Dukat charged toward me and pinned my arms behind my back.

"Get off of me," I shouted.

"What a shame it is to waste all that energy on something unproductive when instead...." Dukat trailed off as he bent his head to kiss me. He took a sniff. Anger twisted his features into a horrible grimace. With a muttered oath, he shoved me to the floor. "You have the nerve to come to me without stopping to wash off his scent!"

It took a minute for Dukat's words to sink through the ringing in my head. I imagined his countless mistresses had felt the same after he offered them to his guests. I hated him. He had made me look Bajoran. He had given me to Torell, and now he had the audacity to condemn me for obeying him.

"I wouldn't have Torell's scent on me if you hadn't offered me to him," I snarled. I struggled to my feet and pushed my hair away from my face. "You planned this from the start! You knew I'd be fair game for any VIP coming here! I hate you! I do!"

Dukat sucked in his breath. "Come now, Helen," he said, his mood changing with a rapidness I had come to expect. "It was the only way I knew would keep you safe from my wife. She is far more dangerous than Torell. What happened?"

My voice cracked in a sour laugh. "You gave me to an Obsidian Order agent! What do you think happened? I had him screaming for more. What do you care? I have had enough of these games, Dukat. I don't care what anyone says. I'm going home!"

I started to walk away, only to be stopped by Dukat. He gave me a hard shove. I flew backwards. My head impacted with the window and I fell to the floor. Dukat knelt beside me, his face was inches from mine. I could see how furious he was, holding onto his temper by a thread. If he touched me again, I would kill him.

“No one speaks to me in fashion!” Dukat pulled me to my feet. “I gave you to Torell to learn what he knows. I thought you would return and tell me, willingly, glad to be back in my arms. This does not seem to be the case. You are stubborn, Helen. Give me one reason why I shouldn’t give you to my men and be done with you!”

“Because I am pregnant,” I lied.

Bewilderment replaced his anger. He released me and took a step back. “This is can’t be true,” he said in an incredulous tone. “How can you be certain?”

“I just know.”

“I want to verify this myself.”

My heart leaped to my throat. I was close to panic. Dukat retreated across the room to retrieve a small device. He returned and ran it over me. His brows knit together and he ground his teeth in frustration. I took it to mean I was, in fact, pregnant. I placed my hands over my stomach. Dukat lowered the device and opened his mouth. A chime at the door interrupted whatever he was going to say. Dukat tossed the device onto the couch. He offered no apology as he grabbed my arms and set me on the couch. He turned to face the door and relaxed his stance.

“Enter,” Dukat said.

With a quick pat, I straightened my gown before the door slid open. Gil Ravon stood outside, looking flustered. My first thought was Torell had located Sawyer. I waited anxiously for Ravon to speak.

“Sir, Legate Mikor and Gul Raynor are here. They’d like to speak with you.”

“Thank you, Gil Ravon. Send them in.”

Masking his emotions, Dukat glanced at me. I snatched the device off the couch and hid it in the folds of my gown. I sat prim and proper, avoiding his gaze, and simmered in my hatred. Movement at the door distracted Dukat. I glanced at the device, a tricorder, and stared at the results; pregnancy confirmed. I stuffed the device into the cushions and wished I could turn invisible as Raynor swaggered into the room. He looked around, as if he mentally placing his own furniture in position, and appraised me.

Something clicked in my head. I knew what game Raynor played. He wanted

Dukat's job, wife, and mistress, leaving Dukat with nothing. Behind Raynor stood Mikor, a friendly smiled on his face, and I knew both men meant to harm Dukat. Yet, I said nothing, I didn't want to, letting Dukat deal with his guests as he saw fit.

"Good evening," Raynor said.

"Greetings, old friend," Mikor said as he walked in and extended his hand to Dukat. "We haven't had a chance to have a real talk since we arrived. I wish it were under better circumstances. I'm afraid we have come with bad news."

"Not at all," Dukat said. "I am here to help."

Maybe the blow to my head had damaged the implant. It tingled, yet the usual commencement of pain did not occur. Something was amiss. I felt an immense dislike for Raynor and Mikor. My hatred for Dukat altered as well. I felt strangely loyal to the abusive bastard and wanted to help him. So many feelings coursed through my mind that all I could do was sit and stare at Mikor and Raynor as sat at a table, wondering which of them was the greater threat. They did not come to renew old ties with Dukat. Nor had Torell. No, Torell, was the enemy. Three predators had come to Terok Nor. I watched, confused, as Dukat offered refreshment, talking about the good old days, delaying the bad news.

I noticed Mikor laugh when it was appropriate. Raynor merely glowered and made no attempt to hide his hatred for Dukat. However, Dukat was all smiles and charm. I wondered how Dukat could feign good humor after our terribly quarrel. He seemed to think I would behave myself and not say a word, for he did not glance in my direction, nor offer me a glass of kanar. His guests received royal treatment and plied with kanar, while I was ignored.

Another chime at the door caught the guests and I by surprise.

"Ah, Glinn Damar has arrived," Dukat exclaimed.

Into the tiger's dent walked Damar and Sawyer. Damar displayed bravado, making me think of a balloon full of hot air. One jab from a sharp pin and he would fly around the room. He straight to the bar and poured two glasses of kanar. He handed one to Sawyer and sat at the table. Sawyer stood beside him.

"Yor, you may be seated by my mistress," Dukat said, sounding bored.

Sawyer walked over and sat next to me. She handed me the glass of kanar and winked. I was glad to see her and though I disliked kanar, it helped ease my nerves with each sip. No wonder Damar drank so much of it, I thought. Sawyer crossed one leg over the other, tossed an arm behind me, and gazed at the men.

“Well, let’s hear the bad news,” Dukat said.

Mikor put down his glass. “I know how anxious you are to have your full powers as Prefect of Bajor reinstated,” he said. “Spending time on this station has accomplished nothing more than age you, Dukat. Central Command expects great things from you. How can you oppress an entire planet and bring them to their knees when you twiddle your thumbs behind your desk?”

“Careful,” Dukat said, narrowing his eyes. “I am a tolerant man, Mikor. While I respect your office, it doesn’t mean I respect the man who holds it.”

Raynor bristled as Mikor waved his hand. Damar laughed.

“I deserve that comment,” Mikor said. “Let me rephrase what I said, Dukat. I have come to Terok Nor to offer a way to redeem yourself. Now hear me out.”

With a bounce, Sawyer rose from the couch. She walked to the bar, grabbed a bottle of kanar, and stood beside Mikor. He glanced at Sawyer as she refilled his glass. Her slight distraction allowed the legate to gather his thoughts.

“Thank you, my dear. Most thoughtful.”

“Yor, be seated,” Dukat ordered. “Leave the bottle.”

Sawyer set the bottle on the table and walked to the bar. She grabbed a bottle of Romulan ale and one glass, returning to sit beside me. She took the empty glass of kanar out of my hand, set it aside, and handed me the clean glass. I didn’t like Romulan ale any better than kanar. She filled the glass with ale, placed the bottle on the floor, and took the dirty glass in hand. I wondered what game she was playing, until I caught Raynor glance at her. If she was meant to distract Dukat’s guests, she did a good job.

Mikor continued. “I have been informed by Gul Tycheck that a group of Bajoran resistance fighters have taken refuge in the Dakur Province. Fort Varnok is currently being built in area, relying on Outpost 9 to keep the natives in line. A recent attack on Outpost 9

has killed more than five thousand Cardassians and Gul Parnal is dead. Gul Tychek has too few soldiers to make a thorough search of the northern hills, where he believes they are hiding. Just think of it, Dukat. If you could eliminate the rebels, you could return to Bajor, a hero, with your full powers as Prefect reinstated."

Damar took a swallow of kanar. "There are plenty of mountains and caves for the rebels to hide in," he said "If Parnal is dead and Tychek too afraid to search for the rebels, then we must return to Bajor to quell this rebellion and take control of the planet."

"I agree, Glinn Damar. I most certainly agree," Mikor said in a cheery voice.

Dukat shot Damar a quelling look. "Somehow, I believe this is more than the usual band of renegades," he said. "Who is leading the Bajoran Resistance?"

I tensed. Sawyer nudged my thigh with her knee. I tried to relax.

"Niyal Gora," Raynor stated.

"The same rebel leader who has evaded you over the last five years, Dukat," Mikor replied. "It is because of Gora that Central Command sent you to Terok Nor to lick your wounds. Parnal was in the Fifth, like Tychek, and I command the Fifth. I could send another Fifth Order gul to Bajor, Dukat. There are many guls who would like to be the new Prefect." I noticed Raynor sat straighter in his chair. "Instead, I come to you with Central Command's blessing. Tychek believes at least two more rebel leaders are with Gora. Their gorilla style tactics make it impossible for Tychek to send a large force into the hills to search for them. He's already tried and failed."

"Now we know the truth," Damar growled. "Parnal let his defenses down and paid for it with his life. Tychek is as incompetent as I remember. He lacks the skill to catch the rebels, not the resources."

"Mind your tongue, Damar," Raynor snarled.

"Both of you be silent," Mikor said. "Central Command has asked Gul Dukat and the Second Order to assist the Fifth." He leaned toward Dukat. "This is your way to get back into Central Command's good graces, old friend. For the last eight months, you have festered on this station, not allowed to return to Bajor as punishment for your failure to capture Gora. Though you remain Prefect, it is only a matter of time before you are

replaced. You must lead the attack on Gora or lose Bajor."

"I have not been idle, Legate Mikor," Dukat replied. "I have returned many times to Bajor to oversee the forts and outposts. Why now? Gora has never stopped harassing our soldiers. What happened at Outpost 9 is unfortunate. I have said all along the Fifth should be replaced by the Second on Bajor. The Second would not have allowed this to happen.

Raynor finished his drink and slammed it on the table. Mikor gestured at the Klaxon gul to remain silent. I saw a smirk on Sawyer's face and wondered if Dukat staged a show for the benefit of his guests.

"Gul Parnal was well loved by the Fifth," Mikor said with a sigh. "His friends in Central Command want revenge and expect you to oversee this matter, personally, Dukat. It is now or never." He spread out his hands. "Return to Bajor and find Gora. Do so and you will be allowed to your former residence in Bajor City or obtain a new one. It is time to take possession of what is rightfully yours. As for Gul Raynor and I, we are here to represent the Fifth, obviously, and to help you defeat the rebels." He paused and took a quick sip of kanar. "You seem surprised."

"Somewhat," Dukat replied. He smiled. "I did not expect you to show such loyalty when others have turned their backs on me. I suspect my wife asked for your help."

"You know I am fond of Mikelya. I do not like to see her unhappy. I would gladly give her anything she wants, including helping you resume your role as Prefect."

"Madame Dukat asks and you respond," Damar snarled. "Gul Dukat does not need your permission to take what is rightfully belongs to him. Further, any comments about Madame Dukat should be made in private."

"Be at ease, Damar," Dukat purred. "I am not offended. I am well aware my wife has been unhappy since we left Bajor. She is a proud woman."

"And you have made her suffer," Raynor said as he stood. "I take offense in sitting in a meeting while your Bajoran mistress is present. Are you deliberately trying to sabotage our efforts to defeat Gora? For all we know, our mistress is in direct contact with the rebels. I will not remain here and discuss battle plans while she is present. Nor do I care to address military matters with your cousin in the room."

Damar rose to his feet. "You will not address Gul Dukat in that fashion, you spineless eel," he thundered. "You command one ship, Raynor. Dukat commands the entire Second Order. He is Prefect of Bajor. Not you and not Legate Mikor. For too long the Fifth has been in the way on Bajor. It is time you withdrew your forces and allowed the Second to clean up the mess that you have made in the last eight months."

I glanced at Sawyer, concerned a bloody brawl was about to break out. She patted my knee and jumped to her feet. Her laughter caught everyone by surprise. Sawyer approached the table. The men stared at her, reduced to silence.

"Finally, we'll see some action on Bajor," she said. "United we stand, divided we fall. Of course the Second and Fifth will stand side by side. We are loyal to Cardassia and must remain strong, if we are to defeat these rebels. So, when do we leave, cousin?"

"There's the famous Dukat family spirit," Mikor said with a chuckle. "See there, Raynor. Dukat's cousin is eager to kill our enemies. Shall we unleash this young warrior on the enemy and see what she can do?"

"I wholeheartedly agree," Dukat said. He finished his drink and set it aside. "Both of you sit down. This is a friendly meeting, not a war room." After Damar and Raynor resumed their seats, he continued. "Anything else I should know, Mikor?"

"This is a sanctioned mission," Mikor said. "Take whomever you want to Bajor. Gul Raynor will offer escort and his crew, if needed, isn't that right?"

"The Klaxon will be honored to take you there and offer support," Raynor said. He crossed his arms as he glared at Sawyer. "I'm curious to see if you will stand your ground or tuck tail and run like your father at the Battle of Varnog, Fourth Order scum that he was."

"Nonsense," Mikor said before Sawyer responded. "Gul Yor was a friend of mine when we were boys. There is no reason to be insulting, Raynor. You will not easily provoke Garresh Yor. She's been trained by Glinn Damar and his reputation as a warrior is one to be respected. No other officer in the Second Order is as highly decorated."

"In drinking kanar, yes, I agree," Raynor snarled.

"Well, if everything is settled, I see no reason to delay," Dukat said. He stood and

pulled back Mikor's chair. "We can discuss the details on the Klaxon."

Sawyer stood back as Damar and Raynor rose from their chairs. The two men glared at one another, while Dukat walked Mikor to the door. It opened with a swoosh. Raynor turned about and marched out the door. Sawyer reached for Damar's unfinished glass of kanar and drank the rest of the contents.

"I appreciate this, Mikor," Dukat said, keeping the door open. He acted as friendly as ever. "I am also glad you told me my wife interceded on my behalf. I know how close the two of you are. Of course I know how many times you accompanied her social functions, while I have been stationed on Terok Nor. Bringing her here was a good idea."

"She insisted," the legate replied, looking embarrassed. "Despite our differences, Dukat, I want you to succeed. Having me at your side will ease the tension between our Orders. Raynor means well. After the last few weeks playing host to Mikelya and I, a bit of action will do Raynor some good. It isn't true, you know, what they say."

Dukat leaned close to Mikor and whispered in his ear. The continual mention of Dukat's wife, in such personal terms by Mikor and Raynor made me curious what was really going on. This new comment made me wonder which man Madame Dukat entertained in bed. Mikor was advanced in age, at least twenty years older than Dukat, while Raynor was young and handsome. Both men seemed equally interested in her, yet Dukat did not seem to care, either way.

"Give me an hour. We will join you in the transporter room," Dukat said as he patted Mikor on the shoulder. He showed the legate out. As soon as the door whooshed closed, he turned to Damar. "I was right. The Fifth have been maneuvering behind our backs since they first arrived on Bajor. Having my wife involved to this degree may work to our benefit. She has both of them eating out of her hand. Clever girl."

"You mean your wife is manipulating both men?" Sawyer asked.

I wondered the same thing. Neither Dukat or Damar answered her. She glanced at me and smiled wide. It seemed Mikelya Dukat was a proficient game player.

"Raynor would sooner stab you in the back than help," Damar said glowering. "Mikor actually threatened you. He wants to be Prefect. I would not mind if a rebel killed

old man or Raynor. Both speak about her as if they are personally involved." He fell silent. "My apologies, sir. I did not mean to imply anything."

"Now, Damar, it's well known my wife and I have a turbulent marriage," Dukat said, eyeing me out of the corner of his eyes. "Bring Saja and your best men. I am certain we will not find any rebels. The Fifth wants to set a trap for us, so we must take every precaution not to fall into it."

Damar and Dukat spoke quietly as Sawyer hurried over to me. She sat beside me and took hold of my hand.

"Don't worry," she said. "I'll be fine and I'll make sure nothing happens to Dukat. I'm so excited. I never thought I'd get to go on a real mission."

"Remember what Q said. If you die here, you die back home. I will probably die as well. Boom. Right?"

"Not is going to happen. I may even bring you back a souvenir." Sawyer kissed my cheek and stood. "We won't be gone long, Helen. I'm sure Garak and Quark will keep you company. You finally get to do whatever you want, so try and have a little fun."

"Come, Yor." Damar motioned for Sawyer to follow him. They left in haste.

With a heavy sigh, Dukat entered the bedroom to pack his gear. I decided to enter the room and talk to him before he left. Seated on the edge of the bed, I watched him stuff items into a duffle bag. I felt a pain in my heart. I was going to miss him.

"Are you sure it's a good idea to take Sawyer with you? I'll be left here with your wife and Torell. What if they pay a visit? What am I supposed to do? Hide?"

"You will be fine and so will Yor. As for my wife, avoid her as best you can," he said. "Visit Garak as often as you like. I will leave Komash with you. He's one of Yor's training partners and very reliable."

Dukat removed clothes from drawers built into the wall. He added them to the untidy stack inside of the bag. While he fished around inside a drawer for something, I took everything out, refolded his clothes, and repacked for him.

"You don't have to do that, Helen."

"I know. I want to."

"First we quarrel and now I must leave you. After everything you heard, what must you think of me?" Dukat knelt in front of me. He held my face in his hands and gently kissed my nose. "I apologize for hurting you." He kissed my forehead. "I apologize for sending you to Torell." A kiss landed on my lips. "If you were Cardassian, my behavior would not seem strange to you. Couples frequently bicker, it is our way, and sometimes it leads to more aggressive behavior. Had I known you were pregnant, Helen, I would not have done so. You must admit. This could not have come at a worse time."

I turned my head, hurt by his comment. "I don't want a baby any more than you do," I said, able to feel a tear slide down my cheek. I started to cry.

Dukat released me and stood. "See Dr. Quirin after I leave," he said. "You have another headache. I am the cause this time. I hate to see you cry. This is not how I wanted to part company. I understand if you would prefer to end this relationship."

"What does that mean? What happens to your pregnant mistresses?"

"Usually, at this juncture, I send them home."

"I won't return to Earth without Sawyer!" I glanced at him. He frowned.

"Then madam, it seems you will remain on Terok Nor."

"As what? Are you casting me out?"

Dukat leaned over and grabbed the strap on his bag. He hauled it over his shoulder. "I anticipate returning within a week, Helen. Two weeks at the longest," he said. "If I were you, I'd carefully consider what I did next."

I wanted to claw his eyes out. I wanted to hold him tight and kiss him. I wasn't sure which emotion was stronger, my rage or my ill-placed affection. He walked into the living room. I followed him, wringing my hands, unsure what I should do or say. I felt helpless and I was afraid.

"You are cruel. Heartless," I said. "I'm sure you left bruises. Where I come from, no woman would tolerate such abuse. Your way is not our way."

Dukat's eyes narrowed to slits. "My wife will most likely spend her time on the Promenade. If she visits Garak's shop, hide in the backroom. Komash will report to me directly. I will know whom you see and what you do. When I return, we will discuss this

matter and decide what to do.”

“I hate you!”

“How you feel is completely beside the point, my dear.”

Unable to answer, I ran to the couch, sitting with my back to him, hoping he’d leave. I didn’t hear the door open. When I finally turned to see if he’d left, I found him staring at me with such tenderness it made me feel guilty, me, the victim. My entire attitude changed like the colors of a chameleon. I was dependent on him, on what he provided, and afraid I’d be cast aside. If he didn’t want me, no one would. I ran to him and threw my arms around his neck, pressing my head against his chest. A soft, girlish voice came out of my mouth made me sick to hear.

“Will I hear from you? Will you contact me from Bajor?”

“When I can, I will try to do so.”

“I don’t like parting this way either.”

Dukat dropped the bag. His arms closed around me and he pressed my head against his armored chest. I hoped it meant he cared for me. I wanted him to care, only I was afraid it was an act. So many other women had come and gone from his life. I wondered where all his bastards were sent. I felt horrible for the lives they must lead.

“Your reason for wanting to stay in touch is to be expected,” he said. “Know I have plans for Ren Yor. I will see no harm comes to her.” He kissed the top of my head. “Now, calm yourself. I will return.” He set me aside. “Until then, be well, Helen.”

My words had no effect on him. I’d told him I hated him. In the heat of the moment, I’d meant what I said. As he left me alone, I knew it wasn’t true. No matter what Torell wanted from me or why I’d been brought to Terok Nor, I did not hate Gul Dukat. It was far worse. I had fallen for the most dangerous, ambitious Cardassian in history. Part of me hoped our child might bind us together, for I wanted desperately to belong to him and cling to the notion he might, one day, feel the same about me.

Somehow, Gul Dukat had become my entire world.

SAWYER

Chapter Ten

The southern provinces of Bajor resembled New Mexico. Purple mesas, sparse vegetation included a dozen different varieties of cactus, and deep valleys swept across the horizon for hundreds of miles with not one cloud in sight. It was late summer and hot. We stood at the top of a ravine twisted in a serpentine fashion into a valley. It's lackluster name reflected on my com-padd spelled out EK-12. Caves pitted the walls of the ravine and in the shadows of the rocks grew slender trees with red leaves and bark with thick thorns.

A small green lizard with a three-foot long tail slithered over my boot. I peered over the edge to watch it vanish into a hole. One hundred feet below, five military transports, painted in a camouflage pattern suited the colors in the landscape, cooled their engines. Fifth Order soldiers stood in ranks beside the vehicles. I noted the Fifth's flag bore an insignia slightly different from the Second and memorized it for future reference. An officer shouted and the Fifth soldiers lifted their guns to their shoulders as rocks shifted under my boot.

"Careful," Damar said. He grabbed my arm and pulled me back from the edge of the cliff as it collapsed. "Curiosity gets soldiers killed, Garresh Yor. Mind what you're doing and stay behind me."

"I'll be more careful next time."

"'Yes sir' will suffice, Garresh Yor. You're a soldier. Act like it."

Damar's blue eyes crinkled at the corners. He was concerned for my safety. I didn't want to be a problem and joined one of two squads comprised of twenty men each. Saja gave me a stern look, his helmet tucked under his arm, and brought us to attention. We waited for our turn to climb down a narrow path into the ravine.

Now that I shared Dukat's DNA and his blood pumped through my veins, I did not sweat. I did not know how it was scientifically possible. I was more Cardassian than human and reptiles were made for this type of weather. All of us wore a flared clamshell cuirass covered the torso, affording protection against hand-held weapons and limited protection from energy weapons. The flexible armor was molded from carbonitirium fibers, cut wide at the shoulders to accommodate the neck ridges, it's style evolved from ancient Cardassian ceremonial armor dating back to the First Hebitian civilization. Additional armor under my arms and behind my knees were sandwiched inside pockets of polymer cloth. It felt like a custom-made turtle shell. I was excited. This was precisely what I'd wanted to do, fight beside Dukat and Damar as a Cardassian, and now I was one of them.

Descending into the ravine required me to use my laser rifle as a counter-weight to avoid tumbling over the side of the path. Halfway down, two soldiers stepped off the slope and slid down on their backsides, receiving hearty guffaws from the Fifth Order soldiers. At the bottom waited the biggest Cardassian I'd ever seen. He had broad shouldered and hair cut short so it stood on end. A long scar ran the length of the left side of his face. He saluted Dukat and Mikor with the right closed into a fist, raised to the right shoulder, and lowered at half-mast across his chest before he swung it down to his side. The Fifth Order repeated the saluted and stomped their right feet.

"I am Dal Rogo. The Fifth is at your service, Prefect Dukat," he said. Battle lust gleamed in his dark eyes. His voice was impressive and deep. "Gul Tychek sends his regards, sir, as well as the best soldiers from Fort Varnok."

The moment Dukat landed on Bajor, he assumed command of the Fifth, not Legate Mikor. Military protocol was all very interesting. Since Dukat was the Prefect of Bajor, no matter what military Order was present or who led them, while their boots where on Bajor soil, it meant they were his to command. Dukat possessed more power in his little finger than any gul, jagul, or legate on the planet, and there was no doubt in mind this included every officer in the Cardassian military. Mikor was a politician, not a soldier. The Fifth might be his to command, but the old man looked out of place among younger, stronger fighting men. Raynor and Damar stood next to Dukat, their backs to me, close enough for me to overhear as

they scanned the cliffs, now above us.

“What is the situation?” Dukat asked. All the officers had raised their face shields in order to look each other in the face. Damar used binoculars to scan the terrain.

“After the rebels attack on Outpost 9, Gora moved his men into these hills,” Rojo said. “The amount of zefron crystal deposits in this area interferes with sensors readings. Gul Tychek has spent weeks searching from Gora. The main force broke into smaller groups. They could be anywhere. If we head south, we may be able to pin them between our assault troops and Fort Varnok where Tychek waits for us.”

“Break into squads and search each cave,” Dukat ordered. “Glinn Damar, tell the scouts on the ridge to provide cover. I want Gora, alive or dead. A reward will be given to the soldier who finds the rebel leader. Have your men move out, Dal Rogo.”

My squad was led by Gil Ravon. He relied on Saja, his rank equivalent to a sergeant, to tell us what to do. Dunatar, Jenrak, Zolon, Korvinus and Ikarus accompanied me. I considered these men as my friends. We searched through caves for the next few hours, finding no sign of rebels, not even old campfires. It was tedious work. We did not pause to rest. We sipped water from our canteens, popped salt tablets, and ate protein bars to maintain our energy. Outfitted with sanitary pouches, I was able to urinate in my pants. I emptied it when it was full through a thin tube into the sand.

In methodical fashion, we covered fifteen miles before Dukat ordered a halt at EK-10 for the night. A small lake was in the center of the valley, surrounded by the thorny trees. The water was brown. Clawed paw prints around its edges made it clear we were not alone in the arid countryside. Each squad made their own small camps. No one was allowed to build a campfire. Field rations consisted of a black cracker tasted like rye bread. Thermal blankets offered warmth for the temperature dropped at night. We had everything we needed, with the stars and five different sized moons to offer a spectacular view.

“Sleep with your weapon at your side,” Saja said. “Let’s not give the enemy a target to shoot at in the night. Oh, they’re out there, Yor. No doubt the rebels have spotted us. We’ll move out in the morning. Get some shuteye. You’ve earned it.”

“No fires?” Mikor’s voice carried to me on the breeze. He placed his pallet beside

Raynor and Rogo. "It's already dropped to near freezing. I did not expect conditions to be this primitive. I brought a tent. I detest sleeping on the ground."

"No tents. You'll get used to it or you won't," Dukat said. He slept with the higher-ranking officers and two bodyguards from the Second Order.

Damar placed his blanket and backpack next to mine. Conversation was kept to a minimum. I placed my pistols and swords within reach as I made my pallet.

"How are you holding up?" Damar asked. He sat beside me, chewing on a protein bar and offered me his canteen. I took it from him.

"I have a few blisters. No other complaints. The Fifth have a few women in their ranks. I am as tough as any of them," I said. I guzzled the water and returned the canteen to him. "I admit this is not what I thought it would be like."

"Be glad we did not run into any rebels on your first day. For the last five years, we have been harried by these terrorists. They're used to living on the run and are little more than wild animals. You'll see your share of blood soon enough."

Damar insisted I remove my boots. He examined the bottom of my feet. I was embarrassing, for it was obvious I receiving special attention. With a dermal-replicator, he healed the blisters and told me to put on clean socks before I my boots back on. The cold night air had me shivering before I lay down. I pulled the thermal blanket around me, glad it provided warmth, too tired to care I slept on the hard ground. As soon as the soldiers quieted, Damar lay beside me. His arm crept around my waist, hidden beneath our blankets, and I drifted off into the weary sleep of a soldier.

In the morning, we ate another vile black cracker, took salt tablets, and emptied our sanitary pouches in the sand. Damar discreetly pressed a hypospray against my neck. In seconds, I felt bolstered by the energy shot, eager to join my squad. He patted my shoulder and I ran over to Ravon and Saja.

"Gul Dukat is taking us into EK-9 today with A Platoon. Dal Rogo will take B Platoon into EK-8," Ravon said. "Same routine. Search the caves. Shoot anything that moves."

Another dusty, hot day produced no results.

I came across the skeleton of something that resembled a dinosaur. I didn't know what

it was and hoped we wouldn't run across a living specimen. By the time dusk fell upon us, I started to think Gul Tychek had sent us on a wild goose chase. Dal Rogo returned with a bag of Bajoran weapons. He informed Dukat they'd found a small band of rebels. The deaths of the Bajorans had excited the Cardassians excited. We were allowed campfires as a reward. The noise by the soldiers was louder than it had been the night before. Everyone was eager to rise early and hunt down the rest of the rebels.

I again made my pallet, aware I was covered with dirt and grim. There was no privacy to clean other than to wash my hands and face. Dunatar and Ikarus made a fire which scrub brush that produced white smoke. About to point this out to Damar who was in the process of setting out our field rations, Zolon tossed a handful of green powder into the fire. The smoke died out, leaving only crackling flames.

"This smoke retardant is effective," Zolon said. He laughed. "For something that smells like ass." The soldiers laughed.

"How are, Yor?" Damar asked. "I assume you are growing accustomed to the gravity on this planet. Your step is lighter today."

"I'm okay, sir," I said. "After being on the space station for so long, being on the ground takes a bit of getting used to. I could hike for miles in the holosuite. Not out here."

"Bajor is a Class M planet like Earth. You keep to the fast pace, but you're not drinking enough water. Take this. It will help."

Damar handed me a pill. I didn't ask what this was either, popped it into my mouth and felt it dissolve. I drank more water from my canteen and ate a cracker. Dukat joined our group. I figured he would tire of the company of Mikor, Raynor and Rogo. His two bodyguards made their pallets at a distance. Dukat patted Saja on the back, shared a private comment, and glanced around for somewhere to sleep and spotted me. He tossed his backpack beside me and commenced making his bed for the night.

"You remember one training exercise we had to do as recruits, Gul Dukat? The Klin'Ha?" Saja said with a laugh. He warmed his hands at the fire. "The instructors kept us fighting for hours at a time, until we were so exhausted we puked."

"Those were the days," Dukat replied. "You don't mind, do your, Yor? Rogo snores

like a dragon.”

Campfires glowed in the night all around us. I had a feeling Dukat baited the rebels into a night assault. His rifle was placed on the opposite side of his blanket, away from me. He sat down and took a sip of water from his canteen. Saja turned around and glanced at me.

“Are you interested in learning the Klin’Ha, Yor?”

“What is it?” I asked.

“It’s a lengthy wrestling match that prepares you for battle. The rules are simple. The opponents fight to win by any means necessary. means you win by knocking your opponent unconscious. The winner continues to fight until he in turn is defeated. It can get bloody, Yor. Jenrak. Korvinus. Give Yor a demonstration.”

The soldiers grumbled and entered the circle. I assumed the exercise was meant to keep us on the edge. Obedience and cohesiveness were valued in the Cardassian military. Damar ate his black cracker, crumbs left on his blanket. As the two soldiers removed their armor and commenced to wrestle, Damar placed his hand on my knee. I was sure Dukat noticed Damar’s claim on me and it bothered me for some reason.

“You’re aroused,” Damar whispered. “I can smell you. Calm down.”

“Everything is new and exciting. I’m finally learning what it means to be a real Cardassian soldier. I want to wrestle. I’m not tired.”

“Watch and learn.”

Korvinus and Jenrak circled each other, trading slaps before they slammed together. There was a flurry of arm movement and kicks. Jenrak went flying through the air, landing hard at Saja’s feet. Jenrak was slow to rise.

“I thought you were good at this, Jenrak,” Saja said. “You’re out. Next!”

Without having to signal, Zolon took Jenrak’s place. This time the competition lasted a bit longer. Both men grappled on the ground, straining to pin each other in a headlock. It looked like neither would ever give in. Korvinus finally collapsed. Laughing, Saja helped Korvinus to his feet and gestured for the next contestant. Five more men fought Zolon and each lost to him. The big Cardassian was unstoppable.

“Zolon is one of the best,” Damar said.

“And tiring out fast,” Dukat said. He leaned toward me. “Your face is sunburned. You should wear sunblock or you’ll start peeling skin off those ridges.”

I nodded and turned back to the match. The soldiers were getting louder. My squad wasn’t the only one who wrestled. It wasn’t a game to the Cardassians. It was a blood sport and the Fifth participated in it as well. The losers had their share of broken noses and black eyes. Rogo soon joined us, a victor from a match in the Fifth Order camp. He had removed his armor and looked like the size of a freight train. Dukat and Damar leaned in front of me to place a wager on the fight. Dukat bet Zolon would lose in their first round, while Damar believed he’d last three rounds.

“Rogo will win,” I whispered.

The two big men squared off against each other. Fifth Order soldiers drifted toward our camp to watch, cheering for Rogo as they passed around a bottle of kanar. The giant Cardassian charged toward Zolon with a loud roar. They traded blows, bloodying each other with each punch to the face, boxing, not wrestling. Zolon last four rounds before an upper cut from Rojo dropped him onto his back. Zolon had to be carried to his pallet.

“Who is next? What about you, Damar? You look strong enough,” Rojo bellowed.

“I challenge you, Dal Rogo,” Dukat said.

Under the pale moonlight, Dukat stepped forward as the soldiers cheered. He motioned at Rogo to approach. They slammed together, grappling, using their legs to trip each other, while at the same time going for a headlock. Rogo was larger, however, Dukat was a skilled fighter. He threw Rogo to the ground. Damar slapped my back, laughing, as Rogo slowly rose to his feet. Dukat punched Rogo and leveled him to the ground. He stepped back to give Rogo time to stand, showing no mercy as he swept his leg across the ground and knocked the giant off his feet. The big man landed on his stomach, unable to rise when Dukat jumped on top of him, pinning him to the ground.

“Dukat wins,” Saja shouted in triumph.

As the soldiers cheered, Dukat lifted his arms in the air and turned his back on his fallen opponent. He didn’t notice as the big man stood, drawing a knife, until I shouted. Dukat spun around as the knife sliced through the air. He jumped back, avoiding a serious

cut, and kicked dirt in Rogo's face, momentarily blinding him.

"This is a friendly contest," Saja shouted. "It is not a fight to the death."

"Rogo means to kill Dukat," I whispered, feeling sick to my stomach.

Damar glanced at me. "Dukat needs a dagger to make the fight fair," he said. "As his second-in-command, it would be an insult for me to do so."

"But I'm his cousin. Right."

I drew a dagger from my boot and tossed it close to Dukat's feet. He scooped it off the ground and pointed it at Rogo, as the men started to cheer. The dal lunged at Dukat. With a quick parry, Dukat knocked the dagger aside and kicked Rogo in the chest. As soon as the big man recovered his breath, they moved together, moving fast, steel on steel. Dukat sliced Rogo several times across the chest. Blood splattered into the fire, making it sizzle. They circled around each other and again traded blows. Rogo failed to notice Dukat's leg fly out and kick him in the knee, until it was too late. A hard shove sent the big man tumbling into the campfire. Sparks flew in every direction. Rogo roared in pain as he scrambled out of the flames, only to be punched repetitively in the face by Dukat, until he collapsed to his knees. Rogo dropped his blade and toppled to his side like a massive tree. He was unconscious.

"Dukat wins," Saja shouted.

Ikarus picked up both daggers. He slid Rogo's dagger into his boot and returned my weapon to me. The Second Order soldiers cheered and ran forward to congratulate Dukat. As Rogo was dragged off by Fifth Order soldiers, I wondered if someone else in their ranks would attempt to kill Dukat during the night. With their champion defeated, the Fifth returned to their campfires and settled in for the night.

"Yor, fight me," Dukat said with a chuckle. He tossed my dagger aside.

"I'll be pulverized," I muttered.

"Do you best." Damar patted my shoulder. "Prove your worth, Yor."

After the fight with Dal Rogo, I thought Dukat might call an end to the match and with reluctance entered the circle. Dukat lifted his bloody fists as I faced him, lifting my hands in front of me. Dukat was confident and in control. His hands moved in a blur as he came at me. Before I knew what had happened, I landed on the ground near Damar, dirt in my mouth.

“You asked for it,” Damar said with a chuckle.

I pushed myself onto my knees, still dizzy and stood. At my approach, Dukat caught my arm. I jerked free and slapped his hand away. He laughed as I attacked. I threw my arms around his body and tackled him to the ground. Clinging to Dukat like a leech, I wasn't prepared for him lift his upper body, turn, and power slam me to the ground. His weight forced air with whoosh out of my lungs. Gasping for air, Dukat flipped me onto my stomach, trying to catch my arms while I struggled like mad to get free.

“You're strong,” Dukat snarled.

“What's the matter, Dukat? Are you going to let a little girl get the best of you?” Saja asked. He laughed when I escaped and crawled across the ground. “If you want to defeat Dukat, you're going to have to do better than that, Yor.”

“Engage,” Damar shouted.

Rushing toward Dukat, I again threw my arms around him, lifting him several inches off the ground. He seemed as surprised. The soldiers laughed even harder. Holding his hands together, he brought them down into the middle of my back. My knees buckled and fell onto my face. Dukat slammed on top of me. As we struggled for dominance, I managed to roll onto my back and throw my legs around Dukat's waist. He dropped on top of me, struggling to grab hold of my wrists, and I felt desire awoke in the pit of my stomach. It spread fast through my body. I stopped moving and let Dukat pulled my arms above my head. We both grew still while the men cheered. I felt the press of his erection against my pelvic bone. Our eyes locked and he caught his breath.

“The fight is over,” Dukat announced. “I win.”

While the men cheered, Dukat stood and brushed dirt from his pants. A quick glance in my direction and he walked off, vanishing behind a line of boulders. It seemed like an invitation to follow. Damar started to rise to help me. Saja beat him to it. The old gil pulled me to my feet, wiped a stream of blood from under my nose, and lifted my arm into the air.

“Our little warrior,” Saja shouted. “Will you fight with me now, Yor?”

“I think I broke my piss tube,” I muttered.

“You're supposed to remove before you right, Yor.” Saja pointed in the direction

Dukat had taken. "That's the way to the latrines," he added. "Damar, remind Yor next time not to piss herself."

Annoyed when I heard Damar laughing, I scurried away, unfastening my pants and withdrew the annoying piss bag and tube. I had a backup in my kit and tossed the one I held aside. My pants weren't wet, nor had the bag been punctured. It had been an excuse to follow Dukat. Moving quietly along a trail, I heard Dukat speaking to someone in the dark. I listened for a minute. He was on his com-link, talking to Helen. I walked past him, aware I needed to urinate. The stench helped me locate the latrines. Several holes were dug in the ground. I pulled my pants to my ankles and squatted. A sigh came out of me along with a stream of urine.

"You shouldn't be out here without a weapon," Damar said. He appeared in front of me with his rifle. "A good many soldiers have died in this fashion. Finish and I'll escort you back." He tossed my kit beside me, turning his back.

Each of us packed moist wipes in a convenient sized package. I washed my backside and front, tossed the towel into a hole, and kicked dirt over it. I fastened my pants and approached Damar. He pulled me into his arms and kissed me. It wasn't the most romantic location.

"You taste like blood," he said. "Come on, warrior girl."

I followed Damar back to camp. Dukat stood talking to Saja and glanced in my direction as soon as I lay on the blanket. Damar covered me with a blanket and I fell asleep within seconds. In the morning, we continued our search through the hills. Ravon found a prior hideout used by the Bajoran rebels. We were disappointed to find they'd moved on. We made camp that night in EK-4, within fifty miles of Fort Varnok. I shared guard duty with Saja, Dunatar and Ikarus. I was allowed to catch only a few hours of sleep before we were on the move again.

On the fourth night, I was allowed to sleep. I took a private moment to wash at a small stream tucked away in a canyon. Soldiers stood on the cliff above. I didn't care if they watched. I finished, feeling more hygienic, and returned to camp. Dukat and Damar had their pallets on either side of my own. The night before I'd awoken to find Dukat's hand cupping

my breast in his sleep. I assumed Dukat had Helen on his mind. It meant nothing. I placed my cuirass at the top of my pallet, removed my books, and fell onto the blanket, so exhausted I didn't stir when Damar approached.

"Did you eat?" Damar asked. "It doesn't get any easier. Thanks to your squad, we found a fresh trail. We'll locate the rebels tomorrow."

"Every inch of me is sore."

"Get some rest. Tomorrow will be a busy day."

On most nights, Damar held me in his arms. I rolled onto my back, pulled the thermal blanket to my chin, and listened to both men fussing with their pallets. Damar finally lay down beside me, while Dukat removed his armor. Aware I watched, Dukat stretched his arms over his head. The campfire was kept low, providing no warmth. Its golden glow made Dukat's features appear more alien than usual.

"It's quiet tonight," Dukat said as he lay beside me. "When it's quiet like this, it usually means we're being watched. We'll be fortunate to log in a few hours of sleep. How are you holding up, Damar?"

"No complaints, sir."

Dukat grew silent, never taking his eyes off me as he pulled the blanket over his body. I was painfully aware of my sexual attraction to Dukat. It was impossible to suppress my desire having him this close each night. At the touch of Damar's hand against my back, sinking to fondle my ass, I felt my body respond. A familiar tingle spread over me as Damar caressed me. I felt his breath warm on my neck. His body heat made me break out in a sweat.

"You are enjoying Bajor, cousin?" Dukat asked covering his mouth to yawn.

I nodded as Damar's hand slid between my legs, rubbing me through my pants. A soft groan escaped my lips. Dukat lifted an eye ridge. He had to know I was being fondled from behind, for his nostrils flared, picking up the scent of my arousal.

"It's...good to be on solid ground."

Damar removed his hand long enough to slide it under my shirt. His hand was warm and calloused as he cupped my breast beneath my bra. Dukat's eyes narrowed as Damar, his actions unseen beneath the blanket, tweaked my nipple with his fingers. I felt like a pagan

shield maiden bedded between her two favorite men. Dukat lay on his back, gazing at the stars, while his hand went on a private quest to seek me out. As his fingers brushed across my hip, he rolled toward me.

“Relax,” Dukat whispered.

The Gul went straight for the front of my pants. Unzipping them, he gave the slightest nod and my hips involuntarily lifted, while Damar yanked my pants to my knees. Shocked and yet excited at this new twist in the game, I caught my breath as Dukat reached under my shirt to caress my breasts. Damar, in turn, reached from behind to slip his hands between my legs. I was wet, enabling Damar ease to glide to fingers inside, while Dukat’s lean fingers sought the tiny nub between my legs, rubbing fast. Both men worked together, aware what the other was doing, while I hoped the soldiers remained ignorant.

I was close to coming when Damar removed his hand, giving Dukat full rein, and then pulled one arm behind me. His erection waited for me. I placed my hand around it, felt his hot breath on my neck, stroking him. Dukat thrust his fingers deep inside as I moved against his hand. Damar’s hand returned to fondle my breasts. It was madness to let them touch me at the same time. I wanted both Cardassians and they wanted me. I thought I’d scream when Dukat removed his hand. He caught hold of my fingers and inched closer to me, letting me touch his hard cock. Dukat slid his fingers within me once more, his lips an inch from my own as I jerked off two Cardassians under a starry night sky.

Damar came first, leaving his thick, sticky moisture in my hand. Seconds later, Dukat’s eyes closed and he presented me with a handful of slickness.

“Enough,” I whispered.

I wiped my palms on the blanket beneath me. I was overheated and parched. All I wanted was a drink of water. I flipped onto my stomach, yanked on my pants, and reached for my canteen. I grabbed it, popped the lid and took a long drink, dribbling water into the sand. By the time I settled under my blanket, feeling confused and nervous, I hoped both men would go to sleep and leave me alone. Damar rolled me onto my side, spooning me from behind. As his arm slid around my waist, Dukat grabbed my arm and pulled it around his chest as he pushed his backside against me. I was penned between both men.

“Good night, cousin,” Dukat said, sighing.

He kept hold of my hand, until he fell asleep and his fingers slid free. I kept my arm around him while Damar continued to hold me. As I started to fade off, I was convinced I’d pulled off the most deviant sexual act of the century.

On the fifth day, I walked beside Damar with my squad. Dukat, Raynor, Mikor and Rogo were in the lead. Both platoons followed behind us into EK-3. We’d tracked the Bajorans into this lonely box canyon, riddled with dozens of caves. A wide stream ran through the middle, bordered by trees. Dukat paused to wash his hands in the water. Rojo let out a loud grunt as a phaser blast slammed into his chest. He toppled to the side, dead before he hit the ground.

“They’re on the ridge above,” Saja shouted.

One of the scouts screamed as he was pushed over the side of the cliff. I went into a crouch as laser fire erupted all around us. Damar pushed me forward. We took shelter behind a rock, while the platoons turned, facing either side of the bluffs and returned fire.

“Stay down,” Damar shouted. He lifted his rifle, firing at figures appeared at the entrance of the caves. In tight formation, the platoons made quick work of the Bajorans. Bodies lay dead on the ground all around me. I hadn’t fired a single shot.

“Hold your fire,” Dukat shouted at last.

The order was passed on. When the last soldier stopped firing, an eerie silence fell over the box canyon. Saja and my squad moved forward, splashing through the stream, disappearing in the trees ahead of us. A minute later Ikarus returned.

“One of the scouts confirmed the rebels have entered the Valley of Shadows. They’re trying to draw us into cursed place,” Ikarus said.

“Gil Ravon, notify Gul Tychek the enemy are headed in his direction,” Dukat said. He sent Damar back to take command of the two platoons. Now that Rojo was dead, Damar had seniority, with the exceptions of Dukat, Raynor and Mikor.

“Do we pursue them or not?” Legate Mikor asked. He’d dropped his pistol in the battle and retrieved it off the ground. “You know what place that is, Dukat. I do not suggest we follow the Bajorans into this particular valley.”

“I care not about the Bajoran superstitions. We are going after them,” Dukat said.
“Remove Dal Rogo’s insignia Raynor. He was your friend. Be quick about it.”

Raynor knelt beside Rogo. He removed the dead officer’s weapons and insignia, which he slid into his kit. The Fifth Order was stirred up, eager to press on. The platoons formed ranked behind us. Damar and Saja stood at the front, prepared to continue our pursuit into the next valley. No one explained why this particular canyon was called the Valley of Shadows. I didn’t like the sound of it and thought it the last place we should enter.

“Gul Raynor, take ten men and climb onto the east ridge to provide cover. Glinn Damar, do the same. I’ll take command of the platoons,” Dukat ordered.

Raynor selected five squads and moved out. Damar took fifty men and started to scale the right side of the canyon. It would take both officers another thirty minutes before they were in position. The dead were gathered and placed in a line on the ground. I counted more than twenty Cardassian bodies and twice many Bajorans. One of the rebels caught my attention. I walked over to the body, nudged it with my boot. The body rolled over and I stared in shock at a dead Klingon.

Dunatar joined me. “It’s a turtle head. I didn’t expect to see a Klingon,” he said.

“Why would a Klingon be fighting with Bajorans?”

“We’ve been at war with the Klingons on and off for the last one hundred years. He’s most likely a mercenary, Yor. Niyal Gora is a terrorist. The Resistance isn’t what it used to be. Since Dukat has been on Terok Nor for the last few months, the Bajoran Resistance has been paying outside killers to help do their dirty work.”

I moved closer to Dunatar. “Why is Dukat stationed at Terok Nor?”

“Punishment,” Dunatar said. “The Occupation has not gone well, Yor. Central Command believes we’ve expended too much men and resources. They pulled Dukat out to let things settle down. Between you and I, it’s just a plot to trick the Bajorans into lowering their guard. Central Command is going to provide Dukat with everything he needs to take full control of Bajor. Niyal Gora is the last real leader of the Bajoran Resistance. I’m sure we’ll find a few more Klingons and a Romulan or two before we’re through.”

With a nod, Dunatar led me back to our squad. Ravon was in the process of putting

away his com-link when we fell in beside Dukat. Gil Torgan and Gil Saja each led a squad along either side of the stream. Legate Mikor fell in with Torgan, dragging his feet, while I sent with Saja. Dukat, Ravon and Dunatar trotted along beside me.

“Sir,” Ravon said to Dukat. “Gul Tychek says he’ll send out another platoon from Fort Varnok to cut off the rebels escape into EK-1. He won’t enter the Valley of Shadows.”

“Tychek will do whatever I tell him to do,” Dukat snarled. “Everyone is afraid of the Valley of Shadows. This fear has become more than a little inconvenient. One of these days, I’ll send a brave officer into that valley to clean out the nests of rebels. Move out.”

I spotted Damar and his team moving fast along the ridge, trying to overtake and pass us. Raynor’s group was further behind, not able to match Damar’s speed.

“Why can’t the Klaxon spot the rebels from space?” I asked.

“We’re on the continent of Bha’hagh, in the Southwest Quadrant of the province of Dahkur. These hills are rich with minerals which can and do cause sensors to malfunction,” Dukat said, taking a sip from his canteen. “Bajor has large deposits of uridium, used to construct warships, as well as gold, silver, iron, granite, marble and zefron. Zefron is a power crystal only found on this planet. It’s what shines on the ground beneath our feet. It can be found in the EK valleys, it can cause false sensor readings.”

“And the Valley of Shadows?”

“Don’t let the name fool you. Sensor readings give false impressions we call ‘ghosts’, which is one reason people think this particular valley is haunted. It has the largest deposits of crystal.” Dukat handed his canteen to me. I took a sip and handed it back. “Drink more than a sip. We’ll see fighting before the day is through. Remain hydrated. Take one of those booster shots Damar brought with him.”

I drank a large mouthful of water. It had a metallic taste from the canteen. I handed it back to him. The valley we approached was more lush and green than any we’d seen.

“What’s EK mean, sir?”

“Ecological Karst,” Dukat said. “Karst is a word for limestone country with underground drainage. The stream we are walking is fed by an the underground water system. If we dug deep enough, we’d find a subterranean river. This whole area fifty million

years ago was a vast ocean. There are more than forty EK valleys and canyons, spread over eight hundred miles. Now enough questions, Yor. We're entering EK-1."

Noticing Ravon, Dunatar and Saja lift their guns to their soldiers, I did the same. I slowed my step to walk beside them. Dukat sent the platoons jogging forward into the canyon. The cliffs stood one hundred feet where I spotted Damar and Raynor's groups take position. Ikarus appeared in front of me. He removed a tricorder from his kit, trying to take a reading and lock onto something. He motioned to our right where a network of deep caves punctured the cliff like beehives. The sun was setting and the entrances were dark. We continued forward. My senses were on high alert. Before we'd gone a hundred yards, a quick flash caught my attention. Something clicked in my head. I ran toward Dukat and tackled him to the ground as gunfire erupted on all sides. He pushed me away, scrambled to his feet, and commenced shouting orders.

Over the pounding of blood in my ears, I stood and lifted my rifle. I fired at a Bajoran who stood in the entrance of a cave. He toppled forward, tumbling to his death. My first kill, I thought, aware of a slight tinge in my right thigh.

"Advance," Dukat shouted.

As I put right on my right leg, it collapsed under me. I hit the ground and screamed as a burning pain spread across my thigh. I'd been shot. I heard Dukat's voice again and blacked out, only to regain consciousness to find him kneeling beside me. His hair was wild and his cheek was cut open, bleeding, but I no longer heard gunfire. Instead, I smelled burned flesh, as if someone charred steaks on a grill. Men were talking around me, their words made no sense, and I noticed a hypo in Dukat's hand. He pressed it against my neck and pushed. I felt a rush of drugs flow into my system and the burning sensation eased up.

"Silence, all of you," Dukat said in a stern voice. "You act like raw recruits on your first training mission. Yor is alive. Find Raynor. Let's get her beamed onto the Klaxon."

Damar appeared and knelt beside me Dukat. His face was flushed and he was out of breath. "You've taken a hit to your right leg," he said. "Dukat has given you a painkiller. Can you feel anything or not? We have to move you to higher ground. The communicators don't work because of the crystals. We can't contact the Klaxon or beam you out, not yet."

I thought for a moment, then shook my head. I didn't feel anything. Damar glanced at Dukat who appeared visibly shaken by my condition. I wondered why and went into a panic.

"What? Is my leg gone? Tell me!"

"Your leg is still there, but the sniper is dead," Dukat said. "With medical attention, you'll be fine in a few days. Where is that stretcher? What is taking so long?"

I grabbed Damar's hand. He held on tight.

"I'm sorry I let you down, Glinn Damar. I'll do better next time," I said.

"You did just fine, Garresh Yor. You saved Gul Dukat's life."

Ikarus and Dunatar arrived with a stretcher. It took five men to place me on the stretcher. I felt no bumps as the men moved to higher ground. Dukat and Damar walked on either side of me. My eyelids felt heavy and it was difficult to keep my eyes open.

"I am grateful for your quick thinking," Dukat said. "You may name your reward as soon as we return to Terok Nor. Dr. Quirin is more qualified than Dr. Lazlo who is stationed at Fort Varnok. We'll beam onboard the Klaxon in another few minutes. We're almost out of the canyon. Hold on a bit longer, my brave Yor."

"Did we kill Gora?" I asked.

"Spoken like a true Cardassian," Dukat said. "She'll live, Damar. Go make sure Ravon and Torgan have secured the prisoners. Maybe one will talk."

I lost consciousness at some point. When I awoke, I was on board the Klaxon, lying on a bio-bed, covered with a sheet. Dukat stood beside the bed. I vaguely make out Damar who stood at his side. Dukat noticed I was awake. I'd never seen him look so tender.

"She's back from the land of the dead, Damar." Dukat caressed my cheek as Damar merely nodded. Something had changed. I felt as if my leash had been handed from my trainer to my master.

"I'm glad she's alive," Damar whispered.

"Of course you are, Damar. We both are," Dukat said. "The color has returned to her face. I told you she'd be all right."

"Do I still have a leg?" I asked in a groggy voice.

"Yes, my dear. You have nothing to worry about," Dukat said. He leaned over and

kissed my cheek. "I am here, Yor. I promise not to leave your side until we arrive home. Give her another injection, Doctor. I don't want her to feel any pain."

The ship's doctor lifted a hypo and slapped it into my shoulder. Everything went dark. I knew I had to be unconscious, for I saw three golden figures beside me. I no longer lay in the bed. I stood before the Prophets. They appeared as a Bajoran woman and two Bajoran men. As I walked toward them, a wall of flames appeared. I stepped through it only to find they had vanished, leaving me standing in a valley filled with shadows. The shadow surrounded me and I felt cold, incredibly cold and lost consciousness.

HELEN

Chapter Eleven

I ran through Terok Nor, hoping I was going the right way to the sickbay, aware only Sawyer had been injured. Komash had brought the message. He was shocked into silence by my ensuing explosive tears. He didn't know if Sawyer died in this time-line that she'd die in the 21st century. What would become of me if she no longer existed?

With my heart in my throat, I arrived in sickbay and bolted inside, nearly slamming into Dukat's broad back. I'd obviously come at an inopportune time. He threw a disdainful look over his shoulder, which did not alter when he saw it was me. Not caring what Dukat thought, I pushed around him. Sawyer lay on a sickbed, covered in a sheet, her cheeks pale and eyes closed. I balled my hand into a fist and bit into my knuckles, too emotional to speak. Damar, of all people, took pity on me.

"Yor took a shot meant for Dukat. She saved his life," Damar said.

Dukat focused on Sawyer. He held her hand. His expression was tender, almost melancholy, and I feared my best friend was on the verge of death.

"What...happened?" I asked.

"The laser struck her right thigh," Damar said. "It has required surgery and several pints of Dukat's blood."

"What does mean?" I asked. "How can she have his blood? How is it even possible? I have her same blood type. Why didn't you send for me? Dukat?" He ignored me.

"She's more Cardassian than you realize, Helen. The wound is healing nicely," Damar explained. "I am sorry you weren't brought here sooner. Dr. Quirin only gave his consent for visitors a little while ago. Yor is your friend. You have a right to visit her."

"Thank you, Damar."

I realized his feelings for Sawyer ran deeper than I'd first thought. Poor Damar, I

thought, for Dukat stood next to the bed, holding her hand as if he'd never let go. I let out a loud sigh, not caring what he thought, for my friend was alive. One look at Damar told me he felt guilty he'd failed to protect her. She'd been his responsibility and risked her life to save Dukat's life. She had done what I had been afraid she would to protect her beloved Gul. Had I been her place, I wouldn't have done the same thing. I wasn't as brave or foolish. Nor would I give my life to save Dukat. I valued my own live more.

"I sent Garak to bring you here," Dukat said at last. "Why didn't you wait for him?"

"Komash said to come straight here."

I pressed my hand to my side to catch my breath, wondering why Dukat gave me such a cold reception. The moment I heard he had returned, I hoped he would come to see me. Instead, I got the news about Sawyer. Now I wasn't sure if and when we would talk about the pregnancy. Maybe he didn't want the child. Damn him, I thought. Would Dukat never burst into flames when I wanted him to? Damar came over to stand beside me.

"So many friends," Dr. Quirin said as he entered the room.

The doctor pulled back the sheet covering Sawyer. I nearly fainted at the sight of her mangled leg. Damar caught hold of my arm to steady me on my feet. Dukat ignored me and watched as the doctor ran a device over a large patch of raw, red skin that looked like it had gone through a grinder. The scar tissue puckered under the dermo-replicator. New gray scales appeared and blended with the rest of her skin.

"Will she be all right, Dr. Quirin? She won't be lame?" I asked.

"She'll be fine, my dear."

"Good. I was worried."

Sawyer must have heard our voices. Her eyes flew open and she bolt upright in the bed. There was no recognition in her eyes when she stared at me. I stepped forward to calm her. Without warning, Sawyer took a swing at me, but Damar caught her fist.

"Get away from me, Bajoran, before I kill you!"

Shock kept me pinned in place as she took another swing. It took both Dukat and Damar to restrain her. Dr. Quirin spoke quietly to her and used a hypo to sedate her. I couldn't hear what the doctor said. Sawyer lay back on the pillow, panting like an animal.

Finally, Dukat came over to me, took me by the arm, and led me from sickbay. I started to sink to the ground in the corridor and nearly fainted. Dukat put his arms around me, holding me on my feet, and patted me on the back as if I was a small child.

“What happened to her? Why did she act like that when I’m her friend?”

“Battle fatigue, medication, and your Bajoran ridges,” Dukat said. He wiped away my tears as I slid my arms around him. “Dr. Quirin has sedated her. The wound is not as serious as it looks, though I fear she may suffer from a mild case of amnesia. Damar will see to her comfort. Come with me, Helen, and we’ll talk. Everything will be all right.”

“With us? Did you think about us while you were gone?”

“I called you as often as I could, my dear,” Dukat said, though I could tell my selfish response bothered him. He frowned a little. “Perhaps I can help you understand Cardassians better by showing you another side of my people. Not everything is war and violence. There is great beauty to be enjoyed as well. This way, I can be alone with you for a while, and reassure you that you remain as my mistress. Nothing has changed, Helen.”

This was the first time I’d visited a holosuite with Dukat. I had spent the last few days in the holodeck, rising horses in Texas, though Quark had promised not to tell anyone. He was my new confidant, though we had to meet on the sly, and whenever I was able to throw off Komash who had guarded me like a guard dog. If had reported to Dukat about my comings and goings, the Gul did not see upset with me.

The door opened to reveal a scene beyond imagination. Cardassia was close to its sun. A haze covered the sky. The buildings were of a textured light gray stone reminded me of marble, and many had decorative sculptures. The colors were bright and the clothes perfect in detail. The people were polite and sedate. I openly gaped at the sights before me, drawing a chuckle from Dukat I failed to interoperate.

“I thought you might enjoy this, Helen. This is Cardassia Prime.”

“It’s lovely,” I said. “Is that the Cardassian Military Academy close by? Sawyer told me she went to the academy and graduated with high ratings. I’d like to see it.”

“Yes. Damar was insistent she attended the military academy and experience what he did,” Dukat said. “The academy is a few miles from here. You can see the buildings if you

look to the west.”

Dukat tucked my hand into the crook of his arm and escorted me down a narrow path running parallel to the street. My concerns for Sawyer evaporated and I relaxed in the beautiful setting. This was Cardassia, as close as I’d probably come to being there, and I felt as if I had a direct view inside Dukat’s mind. It was a place worth fighting for, worth dying for, and I sensed his great pride. I wondered how many non-Cardassians had seen this place. Flowers bloomed in carefully orchestrated arrangements, the colors vibrant and more intense than I could imagine. Vivid green vines covered sculpted rocks in wild disarray, curled around marble statues tucked into lush gardens where Cardassians sat on benches, watching their children playing and I realized that this was a public park.

“May I speak to the people? Will they understand me?”

“You’ve been wearing a translator since you arrived, Helen. I can speak nine languages without the translator, ten, if you include English. I have spoken Cardassian to you since you arrived, only you hear English.”

“I forgot,” I said. “It’s amazing, this modern technology.”

Dukat laughed and gestured for me to go and do what I wanted. I stopped to talk to a young mother who pushed her child in a pram. I sat next to an elderly man who played a board game against himself. Every conversation I had was pleasant. Time slipped past and before I knew it, Dukat returned to my side. The expression on his face confused me.

“Why did you bring me here?” I asked, tears in my eyes. “You know I will never be able to go to Cardassia. It only makes me feel I know so little of you.”

“Do you want to know more about me? Will this make you happy?”

Two arms came around me. I noted Dukat had removed his armor. My cheek rested just above his heartbeat. He stroked my hair until I quieted.

“I’m sorry if this has upset you, Helen. I wanted you to know what we’re fighting for, and perhaps to understand who I am.” Dukat turned and raised my chin with the tip of his finger. “I have only cared for a few things in my life. Cardassia, my career, and my family. I do care for you, Helen. I want you to have this child.”

“What about us?”

“I want to you too,” he said.

Lips brushed through my hair as I fought to control my anger. He thought he’d complimented me; I felt insulted. I wanted to enjoy the moment and not think about the future or his ulterior motives for bringing me to the holodeck. An ornate yet a delicate bracelet lay curled in Dukat’s palm. I was afraid the delicate looking metal would shatter when I touched it. He took it from his hand and fastened it around my right wrist before sealing the closure with a kiss to my palm.

“This is a bal-rath bracelet given by a man to a woman as a sign of commitment. It is a token of my deep affection.”

Shivers ran down my spine. I turned toward Dukat to kiss him. A searing pain ripped through the back of my head. It felt like a migraine, only a hundred times worse, and I fell to the ground. From a distance, I heard Dukat shout my name. The pain intensified and I grew fearful Dukat would kill me if I didn’t kill him first. A snarl erupted from my throat as I sprang to my feet. My fingers spread wide as I reached for Dukat’s throat, wanting to rip it open and feel his hot blood gush over my face. Strong hands gripped my shoulders, twisting me until I no longer faced my target. I howled in frustrated outrage, until an explosion of lights went off behind my eyes and I fell senseless.

I don’t know how long I was unconscious. Gradually, I made out Dukat’s anxious face hovering over mine. Deep scratches marred the right side of his face. Along the left side of his neck, a section was bruised. I reached out to touch the bruise, able to see teeth marks. Dukat flinched and moved out of reach. I sat up and lifted my hands to my face.

“What happened? What did I do to you?”

“Not to worry. I have suffered worse wounds. Perhaps now is time to explain what has happened to you and Ren Yor. On your arrival at Terok Nor, Dr. Quirin made a thorough examination of your bodies. An implant was detected in the back of your heads.” Dukat kept a careful eye on me as he knelt down touched the back of my head. “Here is where the implant is located. Yor has one as well. They are not Cardassian. We did not put them there and remain unsure as of yet who did.”

“Who did? What are they for?” I asked, frightened. I felt I should know, but I couldn’t

remember anything about an implant. The news had me terrified.

“I was hoping you might be able to tell me. Dr. Quirin suggests the implants are used to elicit different emotions in both of you. He also believes the implant allowed you to become pregnant, so quickly. There has never been a child born of Cardassian and human parents, at least not I know about. The child is growing faster than the norm. I had hoped your pregnant might negate these strong emotions caused by the implant. Sawyer reacts in a different way to hers. She is physical stronger and geared toward being a soldier. In fact, she is the first human to undergo surgery to become a Cardassian. It is not only skin deep, Helen. It is far more extensive than you realize. She is Cardassian.”

The implant throbbed and I remembered everything. I saw Torell in my mind and remembered he had told me I was programmed to kill Dukat. If I was assassin, it meant Sawyer was one, too. If I told Dukat about what I knew, I feared he would punish me. My only hope of survival was to pretend ignorance. He stood and carefully pulled me to my feet.

“Can the implants be removed?” I asked.

“Without knowing precisely what technology was used, Quirin thinks it would be far too dangerous. I don’t want to lose either of you.”

“It’s worth the risk,” I said. I did not want to be Torell’s agent. Nor did I want to lie to Dukat. “If they were removed, I’d no longer be in pain. Sawyer would not be as aggressive and she might remember who I am. As long as we have them, Dukat, we are dangerous, not only to ourselves, but to you and everyone else on this station.”

“Then you do know something about them?”

“Only that I want them removed.”

Dukat placed his hands on my hips and stared into my eyes “I believe you keep secrets from me, Helen,” he said in a grave voice. “I must consider the possibility you are both Federation spies, whether with or without your knowledge. Garak believes this may be the case. This Q who met with Yor has no loyalties to any galactic government. Q said he brought you here to play a game. There must be another a reason. I must know what Q wants, Helen. Quirin has the means of unlocking your memories, though I am concerned it may harm our child. The drugs used may cause you to abort the fetus and I do not want this to happen.”

“Then I am still your mistress?” I needed to hear him say it.

“Yes, Helen,” he said. “I do care for you. More than I should, in fact. I will have to spend time with my wife. I will try to save some for us. I hope you understand.”

I nodded. “And Sawyer?”

“Call her Yor, please. As far as I know, Torell does not know who she really is and I want it to say that way. Until she remembers who she was, Helen, it may be safer to keep you two separated. We’ll have to see. Hopefully, you both will regain your full memories. I can be patient. I can be understanding.”

I studied his face. He did not smile, so I believed he told the truth. It was one of the things I had learned about Dukat. He often smiled when he lied or intended to harm his enemies. His smiles meant many things. His frown was a dead giveaway he spoke the truth, though I didn’t think he was aware he was readily, at times. As he lifted my hand to kiss, I noticed the tiniest of smile appear on his face.

“Did Dr. Quirin give me something to ensure you could impregnate me?” I asked. “You say it’s the implant. I don’t see how that’s possible. For some reason, I have the feeling you knew I was pregnant before I did. Of all the players in Q’s game, I feel so helpless. You say I’m your mistress, only I feel like a prisoner. You think we’re spies. Of course you don’t trust us, not completely.”

“It is the same with you. You do not fully trust me either, Helen.”

I lowered my gaze. He had not denied Dr. Quirin had given me something to ensure Dukat impregnated me. Dukat said it was due to the implant. I didn’t believe him. I wondered if Torell knew I was pregnant. I felt certain he did, for Torell was as cunning as Dukat. Now my best friend no longer recognized me. I felt truly alone on Terok Nor.

“Within a few months you will give birth,” Dukat said, giving me a hard look. “It will be a shorter period than it is for either Cardassians or humans. Six or seven months. Quirin cannot be more accurate and for this I apologize. I know this causes undo stress, Helen. I will do everything I can to make you feel comfortable and protected.”

“As the mother of your child.”

“Let us enjoy the moment and not fret over the details.”

Spoken before he considered my reaction to his clinical appraisal of the situation and my condition, as well as my feelings, unspoken words hung in the air between us. My first instinct was to deny how I felt for Dukat. I spotted the scratches and bite marks again. I lurched behind a small bush, barely making it in time before I threw up.

"I'm sorry," I said after a moment. "I can't play this game, Dukat. I don't want to." I returned to him. "While you have been gone, I avoided Torell and your wife. I walk on eggshells. I don't know who to trust and I don't think you can trust me. You should send me some place or lock me up. I'm scared, Dukat. I don't remember attacking you. I don't know why I did. What if I seriously injure you the next time this happens? Please. Ask Quirin to remove it. I can live with the consequences."

"No, I won't risk it, Helen. I have invested a great deal of time and energy to ensure you are kept safe. The birth of this child means a great deal to me, as do you."

Dukat reached for me and I tried batting his hands away, failing miserably. Strong arms pulled me close again. I breathed in the scent was peculiarly his own and felt my nausea lessen. I sank against him and let him hold me.

"Consider the bel'rath as a token we accept each other as we are."

"Flawed? Deceitful? Cunning?"

His chest rumbled with laughter. "It's no different than most Cardassian marriages. You do accept me, don't you?"

"I feel like what you really mean to say is I agree to obey your every command."

"Of course you do. You're human," he said.

I stared at him. It was all about control with him, just as Torell has said it was, and as Garak had reminded me more than once.

"I'm not some docile creature you can control, Dukat. I may be your mistress, but I am not a slave. If that's what you think I am, then you don't really care about me."

"Cardassia does not condone slavery," he said, annoyed. "I will return you to your quarters and send Quirin to see you. I think it best if you are kept sedated. Oh, it will be mild, I assure you. It may help lessen your mood swings, which have grown during my absence." He put his arm around me and we walked along the path. "I would like to stay here longer,

but I have work to attend to. I'm sure you understand, Helen."

"Yes, my lord and master."

Dukat merely laughed.

After he left me at the door of my quarters, I considered seeking out Torell and asking him to remove the implant. The only reason I refrained from doing so was my fear he would discover Ren Yor was really Sawyer. It was only a matter of time before he figured it out. For that matter, Dukat would soon enough figure out my secrets. The situation for both Sawyer and I was horrible. She had been turned into a weapon, while I was to become a mother. I wanted to hate Dukat as much as I hated Torell. Both Cardassians wanted to control me and Sawyer. I felt sorry for us both of us.

SAWYER

Chapter Twelve

“Ah, Ren Yor. You are awake, at last.”

Legate Mikor’s voice drifted through the room. My eyes flickered to the doorway. I lay in sickbay, still recuperating from my injury. No one had been allowed in to see me all day with the exception of Dr. Quirin and Purcell. I had a headache and felt hostile to everything and everyone around me. It intensified as Mikor walked toward me.

“Don’t try to rise, Yor,” Legate Mikor said. His ridged face hovered above my own. His breath was bad. He fastened a pin on the front of my gown.

“What this?” I asked.

“I have promoted you to the rank of Gil for saving the life of Gul Dukat. You placed your own life at risk to save his, an act of heroism no one else readily displayed on the battlefield. Your loyalty has impressed me. Cardassia thanks you, Gil Ren Yor.”

Mikor stepped back and saluted me. I was overwhelmed by the swift promotion and the fact it was the Fifth Order legate who bestowed it upon me and not Dukat.

“Thank you for this great honor, Legate Mikor. I will not disappoint you, Gul Dukat, or Central Command.”

“There is something different about you, Ren Yor,” he said. “I’m well aware you are Dukat’s first cousin, twice removed, and share the same great grandparents. It’s something else. I can’t quite put my finger on it. I think you’ll continue to rise fast if you continue on this path, for the greater good of Cardassia.”

Rising up from the bed, I used one elbow to support myself. A rush of blood shot into my head. The implant vibrated. I lifted my hand to touch it and noticed the legate

stepped away from me, alarmed. Throwing my legs over the side of the bed, I tried to stand. Dizziness caught me unprepared. Mikor caught me before I fell and helped me sit on the bed.

“I apologize, Legate Mikor. My head hurts,” I said.

The old legate gazed down at me with fatherly affection. It made me uncomfortable to be alone with him. I didn’t trust him and felt suspicious of his reason for promoting me without Dukat’s consent. There was something dangerous about Legate Mikor. He reminded me of a shark waiting right below the surface to strike. I wondered what he really wanted, for it certainly wasn’t to bring comfort to me.

“I have something else for you,” Mikor said. He produced a small silver box. “Twenty pieces of latinum, I should think, will compensate your injury. It was a victory, Yor. A few surviving Bajorans fled into the caves. We’ll never find them now.”

“I can find them, sir.”

“Gul Dukat said you were easily motivated. I took it as an insult. I see now he means you are eager to find Niyal Gora. Excellent shooting by the way. You are a natural killer. Such instinct is commendable.”

“Thank you, sir.”

Mikor placed the silver box on my stomach. It was heavier than I expected. He looked behind him, as if someone was standing out of sight in the adjoining room.

“I too was born in Batal City. Does the Yor family still live there? It has become such a desolate place. I still remember better times, when the land flourished and how the youth would gather together for the harvest. There was a celebration at the Harvest Moon, with music, dancing, wine, kanar and plenty to easy. Those were the days.”

“All I remember is a barren place. My parents are dead and I had no siblings,” I said. I wanted a friendly face at my bedside, not Legate Mikor. “I admire Gul Dukat, not only because he is my cousin, sir. He is a great man. He has my complete loyalty as does the Second Order and Cardassia.”

Mikor smiled. “Of course you feel this way.”

“It is my duty to hunt down and kill those who would harm him.”

All at once my head stopped hurting and I felt a buzz of energy. I sensed the arrival of Dukat and five more Cardassians before they entered the room. Legate Mikor started to clap, I assumed my comment impressed him, but I changed my mind within seconds. Accompanying Gul Dukat came two guards, a doctor and Agent Torell. I felt my lip curl into a sneer as Torell met my gaze. His eyes were disturbing. I didn't like looking at him, so I concentrated instead on Gul Dukat as I swung my legs over the side of the bed. This time I was able to stand without swooning. Dukat stepped forward, more serious than I'd ever seen him, and I felt a surge of Cardassian pride as I saluted him.

"Gil Ren Yor," Dukat said. His voice was a smooth caress to my ears.

"Ah, the hero of the hour," Torell added.

The agent stepped forward. He had black shark eyes. I pictured myself strangling him and lowered my gaze. The implant tingled and I heard a voice inside my head tell me to kill Dukat. It repeated several times before I stared at Torell. It was his voice inside my head.

"Why are you here, Legate Mikor?" Torell asked. He sounded disapproving.

"I wanted to congratulate Yor," Mikor said. "I should have heeded your advice, Dukat, and waited until you arrived. Dr. Quirin says she suffers from battle fatigue and it has affected her memory. She remembers her hometown of Batal City well enough. If she has forgotten other parts, I am sure it has to do resurfaced memories about her parents."

"She spoke of her parents?" Torell asked, smiling wide.

"Never mind about that," Dukat interrupted. "Legate Mikor, had I wanted to promote her Yor, I would have done so. I told the medical staff Yor was not to be disturbed. You must understand. I do not give orders without a good reason, gentlemen. Yor needs to rest."

"A daughter of Cardassia deserves recognition for saving a favorite son," Mikor replied glancing at the agent for support. Torell said not a word.

"Sir, I am ready to return to Bajor and continue the search for the rebels. Legate Mikor has done me great honor here today," I said. "I want nothing more than to see the entire Alpha Quadrant become part of Cardassia one day. Conquest starts with Bajor."

Dukat clapped his hand on my shoulder. "You are full of surprises, Gil Yor. Your loyalty never ceases to amaze me. You seem fit to return to duty. How do you feel?"

"Better than new, sir. Better than ever."

A myriad of odors assailed my nostrils. Torell smelled like motor oil. Old Mikor had the ripe odor of urine, though I doubted he'd pissed his pants, he might dribbled a few drops at the arrival of Dukat and Torell. The scent Dukat gave off reminded me of oranges. I wondered if I was able to smell their emotions. Without knowing what he felt, it was hard to tell what the odor meant. Now that I knew Cardassians produced odors to match their emotions, I wondered why it had taken me so long to figure it out.

"In fact, Gul Dukat, I would like the honor of returning to Bajor," I said. "Agent Torell, perhaps you should accompany me. I have no doubt you could find a needle in a haystack. After all, I'm sure you did not come all this way to observe the operations of this station. The Order's assistance is vital if we hope to find the Bajoran rebels."

Dukat laughed. "Yor, you read my mind."

I noticed the legate glance at the door. He was more than a little nervous. I wondered why and stared at the OO agent. Torell stiffened and lifted his chin.

"I am an observer only," Torell said. "Surely, Gul Dukat, you will agree I would be of no use on Bajor. What do I know about soldiering? Your cousin from Batal City seems to think I know where the rebels are hiding. This is what you're mean, isn't it, Gil Yor?"

"Yes, it is. I intend to find out who tried to assassinate Gul Dukat."

"I am tempted to send Torell with you," Dukat said. "I think you need to rest. Gentlemen, let's go to my office and enjoy a glass of kanar."

"Wait, cousin." I walked to the bed to retrieve the silver box. I handed it to Dukat. "For the cause, sir. I suggest you hire bounty hunters to find Niyal Gora. Unless Agent Torell wants to help, then bounty hunters it must be. We can't rely on Tychek, after all."

"This was a gift, Gil Yor." Legate Mikor was confused. He frowned when Dukat opened the box and stared at the bars of latinum. Dukat glanced at him. "I meant it as a reward. She did save your life and deserves something in return."

Torell looked agitated. I wanted to laugh. I felt I was onto something and had

possibly found a worm in the apple; a black worm that went by the name Torell.

"My reward is the knowledge I have served my Gul," I said. "The latinum is mine to do with what I want, sir. If not bounty hunters, then bribe the Bajorans to tell us where the rebels hide. Anyone can be bribed. Anyone." I looked right at the agent. "Isn't that something they teach to operative agents? Or did I get it wrong?"

Torell stepped toward me. "I don't know who you have been talking to, but you have a bold tongue, Yor. Would you feel any different if I told you Gul Dukat has ordered twenty Bajorans on this station to be rounded up? One every hour will be executed, until someone steps forward with information leading to the capture of the rebels."

"Such extreme measures would not be necessary if Gul Raynor had obtained better intel before we went to Bajor," I said. "Gul Tychek certainly can't be relied upon. I think he needs to be replaced with a commander from the Second Order. The rebels are on the move. I'm only concerned about them. Not Bajorans on this station."

"Your cousin even sounds like you, Dukat," Legate Mikor said with disapproval. "Rash, imprudent and headstrong. Those insults against Fifth Order guls, my dear, are insults I take personally. I am the Fifth. It appears the two of you would do anything to defeat Gora, Dukat. Yor has awoken quite bloodthirsty. She said she would do anything to seek revenge on those who would harm you." His cheeks flushed with anger. "I'll not be accused of any wrongdoing. I relied on intel from my guls. I joined your mission as a courtesy. As my help is not wanted, I will board the Klaxon and return to Cardassia Prime."

"Gil Yor, you have insulted the legate. Apologize this once," Dukat demanded.

"No, no, Dukat," Mikor said. "Your cousin is still recovering from her wound. I should not take offense when she is clearly your devoted soldier. Agent Torell, you will remain and offer your assistance in the search for Gora. I insist."

"Why leave when we are so close to victory?" Torell asked as he stepped closer to the legate.

His scent changed from motor oil to gasoline. He hated Mikor, I was certain of it, and glanced at Dukat. His eyes met mine and he shook his head.

"I caution you and Gul Raynor to remain here. In fact, I insist." Torell stepped away from the legate and turned swiftly on me. "You speak boldly for a mere gil. Perhaps you should turn this one loose on Gora, Dukat. Do you think she is ready for command? Or will you execute one Bajoran every hour to satisfy this family lust for Bajoran blood?"

"Enough of this," Mikor snapped. "What Dukat does with the Bajorans is his own affair. I attempted to appease his wife by stepping in to help. I now regret having wasted my time coming here."

"I apologize, Legate Mikor," I said. "You have been more than kind, sir. I spoke out of turn. When you came in, I told you my head hurt. Dr. Quirin has me on so many sedatives, I don't know what I'm saying. Please. I did not mean to offend you."

Legate Mikor tilted his head back and laughed. "She is your blood, no doubt about it, Dukat," he said. "I accept your apology, Gil Yor. I dare not do otherwise. Your fangs are as sharp as your cousin's and twice as long. If the OO doesn't scare you, nothing will. Send Yor back to Bajor, Dukat. She'll catch your rebels."

"Dukat's cousin does not impress me," Torell snarled. "The two of you can swill kanar and pat each other on the back, while Yor throws ever Bajoran into the airlock. I care not. I intend to retire for the evening. I am tired and need to rest."

"You do look...tired," I added. I flashed a smile as Dukat would when faced with the enemy. Torell was an evil, little man. I again heard his voice in my head, but it was easier to ignore it when I was angry, and I was very angry.

The OO agent left the room and took his foul odor with him. Legate Mikor excused himself and followed after the slimy OO field agent, leaving me along with Dukat. He swore softly and tucked the silver chest against his chest.

"You offended Mikor and Torell," Dukat said. "You act too much like me, Yor. The difference is I command the Second Order. Do you really want Torell as our enemy? You realize he will report your comment to the OO. Yet, Mikor seemed anxious to release you on my enemies, among which I include Agent Torell. I had not realized you are a time bomb waiting to explode."

"It's Torell, sir. He's plotting against us."

The lights overhead flickered. Dukat sent his guards outside the room. He moved closer to me and the lights went out. The red glow from the monitors and bio-scanner left us in near darkness. He reached out and placed his hand on my shoulder. I took a step closer but did not dare touch him. The hairs rose on the nape of my neck as if an electrical discharged occurred. He must have felt it too for he dropped his hand.

“What happened between us on Bajor was unexpected,” Dukat said. “When we wrestled together, I felt something ignite in the pit of my stomach. It is like a fire, Yor. For some reason I cannot explain, the intensity of this inner fire concerns me. Is it Q? Is he pushing us toward each other, manipulating us to feel this way? Since leaving Bajor, it has not lessened and the lights have gone out. Do you feel it? This fire?”

“I have always felt it burning inside me.”

The lights turned on and we both sighed.

“Get dressed, Yor. You’ll find clothes in the bathroom. I’ll wait.”

A few minutes later, I joined Dukat outside sickbay. A line of Cardassian soldiers, all Second Order, my brothers-at-arms, stood in formation behind my beloved Gul. Dukat bowed his head and extended his hand. The soldiers twirled their rifles, stomped the butts on the ground, and stood at full attention. Saja walked toward us and saluted us.

“Sir, if I might be so bold, the men came to check on Gil Yor.” At the gul’s nod, Saja relaxed. “Yor, on behalf of the Second Order, the men and I would like to thank you for your bravery for saving Gul Dukat’s life. All of us would have gladly taken your place. You are indeed one of us. To Gil Yor the Brave!”

The soldiers cheered loudly. I did what came naturally and placed my hand on Saja’s shoulder. Dukat nudged me and shook his head. I dropped my hand, unsure what I had done wrong, until I noticed Saja wince.

“You have your strength back,” Saja said.

“I could wrestle the lot of you and win. Let’s share a glass of kanar this evening, Garresh Saja. I’d consider it an honor to buy the first round and offer a toast to our illustrious commander Gul Dukat.”

“To Gul Dukat!” Saja shouted. They men echoed it and again cheered.

At his signal, the Cardassians fell silent. Saja returned to his former position in front of the soldiers and marched off. I stepped away from Dukat, watching until the last soldier was out of sight. My hands were shaking. I was so excited I felt blood rushing through my veins. At the back of my skull, the dullest pinch of pain awoke my acorn. I felt a sudden urge to protect Dukat and went to stand beside him. I caught the scent of cinnamon and citrus. He was aroused and angry. I let my hand brush against his and met his gaze, staring at him with such yearning, I feared my heart would break.

“Am I to expect this sort of performance wherever we go on this station?” Dukat asked. “This is the first time the Second has ever honored an officer in such a fashion on Terok Nor. The men love you, Yor. How easily you make friends and enemies. What am I to do with you? Hmm? Name your reward.”

I felt tears well up in my eyes. “All I’ve ever wanted was to earn your respect,” I said. “I am a true Cardassian. You know what I want.”

“Careful, my dear. Do not get carried away with your feelings.”

Dukat motioned me to follow him. I did not budge. Annoyed, he grabbed my arm and jerked me down the corridor.

“Surely you can see you must remain in control of your emotions at all times,” he insisted. “You insult a legate and an OO agent. You pat the back of a gil to show your affection. We do not do things the Federation way. I strongly urge you to know the difference. If you have questions, ask Damar.”

“I don’t need further training from Damar. Nor do I want to be his aide.”

“I beg your pardon?” Dukat looked confused. He pulled me to a halt. “Explain. Have you and Damar had an argument? Is there a problem?”

“Most certainly. I have needs not being met.”

“Your meaning?”

“Sexual needs, sir.”

Dukat snarled in exasperation. He glanced in both directions before he dragged me into a small dark storage room. He closed the door. A light flickered on overhead. Everything I’d recently experienced had heated my blood until I could barely think. I

didn't give Dukat a chance to speak. With one move, I slammed his body into the wall, forcing my tongue into his mouth. The kiss intensified, until Dukat pushed me away and unzipped his pants. I let my pants fall to the floor and we slammed together for another passionate kiss. A fire raged inside me. We fell onto a stack of boxes, groping one another in a violent manner. I bit his bottom lip, tasted blood, and heard him snarl in response. His large body moved over mine, his hand slid between my legs, gauging my readiness before he impaled me.

I gasped as Dukat thrust against me, plunging with a force I thought would tear out my insides. Pain and pleasure made me forget everything else. With a low growl, I pressed my knees against his hips and bit his neck ridges. He released an angry roar and increased the tempo, moving harder, flattening the boxes and whatever was inside with each hard thrust.

"That's it. Harder," I croaked.

Dukat took me at my word and careless of any injury he might cause. His teeth sunk into my neck ridges. A howl tore out of my throat as he sucked on my flesh, branding me with his mark. Another thrust sent me over the edge. I saw stars before his mouth clamped over mine and reached another orgasm at the same time as his entire body shuddered. He sagged against me, breathing rapidly in my ear. Every inch of my body throbbed and quivered. Wrapped together, we waited until the other recovered.

"Is your leg all right?" he asked.

"I didn't notice. It feel fine."

His tongue snaked across his lips. With a nod, Dukat climbed off of me and helped me to my feet. We straightened our clothes and stood staring at one another. I had left a mark on his neck and imagined I had one as well. I noticed the box of latinum on the floor, retrieved it, and handed it to him.

"You have been rewarded for saving my life," Dukat said. "Learn to control your passions or this fire will burn us both, my dear. You should see how your eyes flash at me. I have angered you and did not meant to. Don't think I'm not flattered, on the contrary, I am not to be used to being so adored in this fashion. I think your wound is sufficiently

healed. Go about your regular duties.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Sir? So formal? We are in a closet.”

I smiled. “I don’t dare kiss you again.”

“I will try to join you for the celebration tonight,” he said. “I cannot promise I will be there, though I’m sure Damar....”

“Damar? Why would I want to see Damar?”

“He is your lover, Yor.”

“What are you talking about? Damar was never my lover. Do people say I we were? Tell me. What are they saying about us? You know I belong to you.”

“Curious,” he said, gazing deep into my eyes. “You really don’t remember.”

“Damar was never my lover. I trained with him, yes, but that’s all”

“Do you not remember arriving at Terok Nor or where you originally came from?”

“I arrived on the Karnok a few months ago,” I said. “I am you cousin from Batal City, twice removed. We share the same great-grandfather. I served on another space station before you sent for me. I can’t remember everything. It’s a bit fuzzy. When I try to remember, it makes my head hurts.”

“Then don’t think, Gil Yor. Follow orders and all will be well.”

The door slid open and Dukat left me.

Returning to my quarters, I took a long hot shower. I always took showers with real water whenever possible though sonic showers did a thorough job as well. I wrapped a towel around my body, dried off, and dressed in my full gear as though I prepared for battle. I etched blue kohl around my eyes and drew three blue lines down my right cheek in tribal fashion. I wanted to terrify the Bajorans and their allies on Terok Nor.

In my Cardassian uniform, tall boots, with the medal given to me by Legate Mikor worn on my left breast, I looked impressive. I wore two pistols and put on a shoulder harness designed by Garak to accommodate two swords of different lengths worn crossed on my back. This was not entirely how a proper Cardassian officer should dress, but it was what I wanted to wear. I had earned the right.

“Gul Dukat, I have not yet begun to fight!”

An insatiable urge to teach the Bajorans a lesson brought me storming onto the Promenade. I felt a surge of anticipation as I swaggered through the bar. I drew stares from new crews who had arrived at Terok Nor enjoying an evening at Quark’s bar. Cardassian soldiers mingled with visiting alien crews. All grew silent as I approached. On the far side of the Promenade, I spotted a group of whimpering Bajorans standing line against the wall. Twenty pathetic individuals who had withheld information about Niyal Gora. Gul Dukat and Glinn Damar stood to the side, while Gil Ravon separated the prisoners into two groups.

“They are going to kill a Bajoran,” a Dabo girl said.

I turned on the girl, my hand on my pistol. Quark stood behind the bar. He stared at me in such an insolent manner, I decided I hated all Ferengi.

“Petra is right, Gil Yor,” Quark cried. “They are going to execute the prisoners!”

“Shut you filthy, little, rodent mouth! You’re not fit to wipe Dukat’s boots on.”

I lurched away from the bar, hating Quark, hating all those on the station who were not Cardassian. People cowered as I swept past, drawing a few admiring looks from five Klingons. I had no idea what they were doing on Terok Nor and thought I’d inquire about them later. I approached Dukat and Damar as Gil Ravon selected the first prisoner to be executed. I caused a sensational disruption. Ravon turned toward me and stared. Dukat’s eyes opened wide. Damar’s jaw dropped as I placed my hands on my hips, feet braced apart, and snarled. “Who dies first?”

“Sir? What have you done to Gil Yor?” Damar asked.

“Apparently, created a monster.”

HELEN

Chapter Thirteen

"We've waited long enough for an answer," Gil Ravon said. "Perhaps some hands-on persuading will loosen a few tongues. Gil Yor? Take the prisoner and toss him out of the nearest airlock."

"With pleasure, sir," Sawyer said.

Her voice was one I didn't recognize, harsher, colder, matching her new appearance. Seated on a stool at Quark's bar with Garak and Torell, I watched Sawyer strike a young male Bajoran in the face. Blood flew from his mouth. I gasped and placed my hand on Garak's arm, unsure where the brutality would end. Sawyer again hit the man, blow after blow, until he fell to the floor. Two guards lifted the bleeding prisoner by his arms and led him away. Yet, she remained and glared at the prisoners.

"Until one of you tells us where to find Niyal Gora," Sawyer roared, "you'll each get a free right off this station!"

"She's changed," Garak said, grimacing.

"Deadly as well as loyal. This is the new improved Gil Ren Yor," Torell replied.

With a savage smile, I watched Gil Yor advance on the prisoners. I didn't see Sawyer in this fierce Cardassian. Nor did I think I'd ever see Sawyer again. She selected a girl about eleven years old to question. The Klingons seated at a nearby table placed bets on whether or not Yor would strike her. Dismayed and sickened, I turned to Torell.

"You have to stop her," I cried. "This isn't the way to get people to talk. Please. Whatever you want, I'll do it, just stop her!"

With a curt nod, Torell stood and made his way through the crowd. He reached Dukat and Damar and spoke to them. I was too far away to hear what the agent said. I

shivered as Yor turned and stared at me from across the Promenade. I had never seen such blazing hatred in my life. Afraid, I looked to Garak for support. He shook his head and took a drink of kanar. Quark tossed a rag onto the table and shook his head.

“I wouldn’t get involved,” the Ferengi said. “She’s not your friend. Not anymore.”

“Why isn’t Dukat putting a stop to this brutality?”

“Because he’s not your friend either, Helen. This is what he wants. He’s the one who turned her into this...this female version of himself.” Quark leaned toward me. “Since I don’t want to die, I mind my own business. I suggest you do the same.”

“Agreed,” Garak said.

Dukat stepped forward and Yor backed away from the girl. From a distance, I saw Yor’s lips whiten as they pressed together in a frown. Not saying a word, Dukat grabbed Yor’s arm and led her off. Torell remained with Damar and Ravon. No more Bajorans were led away. I had no idea what happened to the male prisoner. I had a feeling he was floating in space outside Terok Nor.

“Thank goodness for Torell,” I muttered. I took a sip of my drink.

“That’s one way to look at an OO agent,” Quark said. He dried off the bar with a towel. “Making friends with Torell will only get you into trouble, Helen. Getting chummy with me won’t be looked upon favorably either. Maybe you should return to your quarters, while you still can. I’d run if I were you, as fast as I can.”

“I’m not going anywhere.”

“We should both leave,” Garak added.

I watched Damar calm the prisoners. He was humane, at least I could say that about someone I’d always considered as a thug. Damar did not hate the Bajorans, he merely followed orders. The prisoners were released and the Cardassians moved on. Torell returned to the bar.

“A nasty business, the Occupation,” Torell said. He sat beside me. “I do hope Gil Yor hasn’t fallen from the ladder of success she seems so eager to climb. The new rank given to her by Legate Mikor has gone to her head. I hear she spent part of her childhood on Hdrok 4. A very dreary place. The only problem with the story is Raderus Yor and his

family died in an explosion on Hdrok 4.”

“You do like to hear yourself talk,” Garak said. “It’s obvious the girl lived.”

“Yor is a threat,” Torell hissed. “I came here expecting to find two humans. I didn’t expect Dukat to anticipate my plans. Garak, I have a feeling Yor is the other human. You’ve helped Dukat conveniently place her out of my reach. You, my dear, Helen, he gave to me freely.”

The agent placed his hands on my shoulders, kneading them so I recalled how he’d lain with me. I was repulsed. I never should have slept with him. I knew not to believe one word he said. He wasn’t part of the Bajoran Resistance. Torell was part of a conspiracy to kill Dukat. He’d only shown me what he wanted me to know about the Resistance and nothing else. He pretended to be my friend so I would spy on Dukat. I wasn’t going to make the mistake again. Garak, dear man, rescued me and pulled me away. We started to walk away from the bar. Torell hurried after us.

“I don’t care what you want anymore,” I said to Torell. “Dukat doesn’t want me talking to you. Stay away from me. If you don’t, I’ll tell Dukat.”

“She has already told me,” Garak snapped.

“Oh, threats. After we shared so much together, I thought we were in the same bed, in a manner of speaking,” Torell said. He glared at Garak. “You continue to play the good uncle and see your little Bajoran stays out of trouble. If I need anything, you know I won’t hesitate to ask.” The agent laughed and vanished in the crowd.

“I hate that man. He’s a snake,” I said.

“Agent Torell is also one of the deadliest operative agents in the Alpha Quadrant and I have no doubt we are now both in danger,” Garak said. “I’ll do whatever I can to help you. I promise. But I have now made an enemy Torell. When he strikes, it will be swift and deadly.”

“Then we have to tell Dukat what is going on.”

“Over our dead bodies, my dear,” Garak said, eyes widening.

* * *

SAWYER

Dukat kept his grip on my arm, not slacking for a second, no matter how hard I pulled. I was no match for an enraged Gul Dukat. I wasn't scared though. On the contrary, the idea of Dukat's anger excited me, all over again. His nostrils flared. He smelled arousal coming off me in waves. When we reached the security office, Dukat ordered everyone out and sealed the door. He pulled me toward the holding cells for privacy and spun me around hard by my shoulder.

"What do you think you are doing? That little stunt nearly incited a riot. Acting on impulse is not how an officer behaves, and certainly not in public."

I straightened, rubbing my sore shoulder. "The Bajorans are our enemy," I said, equally angry. "I treat them as we always have. Why did you bring me here in my moment of triumph, cousin? I intend to crush the Bajorans under my heel. All you have done is prevent me from enjoying their executions."

Dukat stared at me. "You actually want me to execute the Bajorans?" he asked. "It was an attempt to demoralize the Bajorans. Any who oppose me will surely feel threatened and attempt to flee the station. If any try to contact Gora and ask for help, we will pick up the transmission. What you have done is infuse them with patriotism."

"Perhaps I should have gone with Gil Ravon and thrown the Bajoran out of the air lock myself. Torell certainly doesn't think he carried out the order."

His face filled with rage. "You're listening to Torell now? It's bad enough he asked me to spare the lives of the Bajorans I was never going to execute in the first place!" He clenched his hands into fists. "You made me look weak, not strong."

"Torell no more thought you'd execute those prisoners than anyone else. You've grown soft, cousin."

An open hand caught me across my cheek. I tasted blood in my mouth.

"While Torell and Mikor remain on this station, you will proceed with caution," Dukat snarled, "for they will use whatever they can against me. If I cannot the few soldiers on Terok Nor, do you really think I will be allowed to return to Bajor? You flaunt your

status as my relative with war paint. War paint! Had I known the name of Yor would have this an effect on you, I would have turned you into a Bajoran slave. What you do reflects on me!"

"I was born a Yor. I earned my new rank."

Grabbing my shoulders, Dukat gave me a shake that rattled my teeth. I tried my best to fight an urge to strike him. The corner of his lips twisted into a sneer. He leaned forward, his teeth flashing as he spoke.

"Torell, Mikor and Raynor are unquestionably our enemies. They will watch you closer than ever. Whatever possessed you to do something so foolish? I can't beat the Bajorans into submission, not in public. Nor do I want to behind closed doors!"

"I asked you to send me to Bajor. I dressed for combat."

"Don't you dare interrupt while I'm talking! I don't want the Bajorans beaten into submission. I want to remove the troublemakers, the extremists, and turn Bajor into a productive member of the Union. I sent a special team into the EK valleys weeks ago to locate the rebels. The route we took was meant to flush them out of the caves. I have suspected all along the Fifth may be working with the rebels. I am after far larger game than you realize. Do not ever step out of line again, Yor."

"Kill those suspected of treason," I said. I turned to face him.

"I can't simply kill them, Yor. I must set a trap as well." Dukat grabbed my chin and forced my head to rise so I had to stand on my tiptoes. "A Cardassian does not lose their temper in public. To do so invites failure. This is a lesson Damar failed to teach you, so I see I shall have to administer it myself." He released his grip and took a step back. "Strip!"

"Excuse me, sir?"

"What don't you understand, Yor? Remove your armor and uniform."

"I am the guest of honor at a party this evening," I said. "I'll not be whipped for doing my duty."

"Regulation 47 states 'a commander may select the form of discipline as deemed necessary for any infraction or offence.' I won't whip you because I didn't bring you here for pleasure, Gil Yor. You're a soldier. I just gave you an order. Trust me. It will be far more

worse if you refuse to obey.”

Left with no other choice, I removed my weapons, armor, boots, and clothing. I placed my gear in a pile on the floor. Perhaps I took too long or kept my things too tidy. A well-placed kick from Dukat scattered everything across the floor. A pleasant smile appeared, only his eyes flashed a warning. He twirled his finger in the air.

“Turn and face the desk, Gil Yor.”

Placing my hands flat on the desk, I spread my legs, prepared to be whipped. Dukat’s heavy breathing added to my anxiousness. I heard the sound of a zipper lowered. A rush of pheromones filled the air with his scent. I experienced a tingle of electricity that created goose bumps on my gray skin. At the feeling of Dukat’s finger gliding along my spine, my knees nearly buckled. He stood behind me, moved closer, and his hand made a shocking assault between my legs. Insertion of his long thumb was immediate, abrupt, and lifted me onto my toes. I caught my breath as his other hand slammed into the middle of my back, bending me over the desk. With a brief shuffle of his feet, something long and hard was thrust inside me. I was not aroused, nor moist, and entry was forced. I cringed, in severe pain, releasing a sob.

“It’s supposed to hurt, Yor. This is punishment.”

I doubted any of his officers had ever been treated this way. His hands grabbed my shoulders in a bruising grip, holding me penned to the desk as he pounded into me, pontificating his reasoning for this assault.

“Perhaps our assignation earlier today gave you the idea you can conduct yourself as you see fit. This lesson in discipline is to teach you that I am the commander. I determine what happens on this station. I choose who shares my bed, who is questioned, who is punished, who lives, and who dies. Learn your place, Yor, or I will reverse your surgery and send you to Quark’s brothel. Can you learn to control yourself?”

One last thrust and Dukat was still. I felt a warm tickle running along the insides of my thighs as tears trickled down my cheeks. Too humiliated to speak, I nodded. I wanted to ask what he meant about reversing my surgery. What surgery? I didn’t understand. Dukat slapped my backside, a stinging blow, bringing my head around, tears in my eyes.

“Have you learned your place or not, Ren Yor?”

“Yes,” I groaned. “I understand and will obey, Gul Dukat.”

Choking on my tears, I remained silent as Dukat moved away from me to adjust his uniform. The cool touch of recycled air spread across my back. I waited for permission to move and quickly wiped away my tears.

“Get dressed. I’ll give you five minutes to report to me on the Promenade. Leave those ridiculous swords in this office and don’t wear them again on my station. Do you hear me? From now on you will dress like an ordinary Cardassian soldier. You’ll not strut about like some...some Dinobian peacock. Do not disobey me again. I’ve beaten Bajorans slaves to death for far less. I don’t care if you’re my cousin or not. I will be obeyed.”

Dukat left. I quickly dressed, salvaging my wounded pride and reported to the gul with a full two minutes to spare.

* * *

HELEN

Seated in my living room with Garak, after several glasses of Romulan ale, I felt no more relaxed than a woman sitting on a pincushion. Still able to picture Dukat frog march Sawyer into the security office, I took another sip of the sweet blue stuff. No matter how furious I’d ever made Dukat, he had never used this particular expression. I knew Death wore the same face and feared for Yor’s life. I slumped on the couch. Garak’s strong hand gripped my elbow as he took the glass out of my hand.

“You look dreadfully pale,” he said. “Too much ale?”

I took deep breaths, trying to control my rising nausea. I sent a silent plea to the heavens not to be sick. It didn’t work. I felt to Garak’s bathroom and made it to the sink in time. He heard my retches and came in, holding a damp cloth. He held my hair away from my face and placed the damp cloth on my forehead.

“Breathe. Just breathe. That’s it, dearest.”

Garak held me while I threw up blue goo into his sink. When I finished, he washed my face and hands and returned me to the couch. I placed my hands on my swollen

stomach, letting him see the advantage stage of pregnancy. I had hidden it from him until now. He showed only compassion as he sat next to me, holding me in his arms.

“Why didn’t you tell me you were pregnant, Helen? Why wait this long? Do you want this child? Does Dukat know?”

“Of course he knows. He’s the father,” I cried.

“There, there,” he said. “Let’s not focus on Dukat. I want to discuss Agent Torell, if you can do so and remain calm. Not only is Torell responsible for your abduction, Helen, he stirs the disconnect in the Fifth Order. He will not stop until he provokes a conflict with the Second Order.”

“What about the Resistance? Is he really helping them?”

“An unconfirmed source believes Torell is a member of an extremist anti-Cardassian group called the Circle,” Garak said. “Niyal Gora is a suspected member. Mikor and Raynor may be as well. I must continue to dig.”

I must have blacked out for a second, because my next awareness was of Garak waving a sharp-smelling vial under my nose. I coughed for a few seconds and took in a deep breath. I lay on the couch, a blanket pulled to my chin. My shoes off, my feet on Garak’s lap, he massaged them, helping me relax.

“That’s nice,” I said.

“I fear this pregnancy will be hard on you, Helen.”

“Torell’s implant makes me sick too. He placed it there, Garak, as sure a Dukat planted his seed in me.” I fell silent, mortified at my choice of words. “I’m trying to relax, I really am, but I keep thinking about what Torell said. He claims he works with the Bajoran Resistance, which makes him a traitor as well as Sawyer and I. Dukat accused of being Federation spies, but we’re far worse....we’re terrorists.”

Garak continued to rub my feet. “Not by your own volition, my dear,” he said. “None of this is your fault.”

“I don’t think that type of argument would sway a jury,” I said. “From what I understand of Cardassian law, anyone of treason is condemned before they go on trial. There is no jurisprudence. It’s a mock trial and the outcome is always death.”

“From what I know about Torell, he is thorough and most likely has figured out Ren Yor is Sawyer. It is possible he triggered Sawyer’s implant right before she struck the Bajoran prisoner. He did stop Yor before she killed him. A little test would be prudent on Torell’s part to make certain the implants work. It’s no wonder Dukat was angry with her, but this travesty was not her fault. You should not be angry with her, Helen. She needs you.”

“How can I help, Sawyer? I can’t get close to her without being in fear for my life,” I said. “If only we had something that would interfere with the implants. I keep thinking they work on a sub-radio frequency or something. I swear sometimes I hear Torell’s voice. Little whispers in my head make me wish Dukat was dead. If we could muffle his voice or interrupt the frequency, he couldn’t control us.”

Garak raised an eye ridge. “Why didn’t I think of that?”

“Then you can do it?”

“I believe I know precisely what to do. I must go to my shop,” Garak said as he slid out from under my feet. He covered me with a blanket. “Dukat will be coming here for the night, I assume. I think I’ll make myself scarce. Keep your chin up, my dear. Now that you are pregnant, Dukat will be more protective than ever. I didn’t think it possible, but it is possible his feelings for you are sincere.”

“You told me not to care for him. I think I’m losing that battle.”

“You’re not on remote control, Helen,” he said. “I’m not going to tell you not to love Dukat, especially in light of your pregnancy. I am going to remind you to be careful or you will get hurt. You can’t trust him with your heart.”

“Can I trust you?” I asked.

“You have chosen to do so, in any event. I shall do my best not to hurt or disappoint you,” Garak said as he walked to the door. “Good night, my dear. Rest well.”

He grinned at me. I shivered at the sight of it, imagining it was the same grin he used in the OO interrogation chamber. I hoped I could trust him, for he knew enough about me now to hang me out to dry. Me and Sawyer, I thought.

SAWYER

Chapter Fourteen

Forced to stand at attention on the Promenade, I waited for Dukat as he spoke with Bajoran storeowners. He reassured them no one else would be arrested or harmed. Ravon accompanied him. I did not see Damar in the Promenade or anywhere on the balcony. I was relieved, for I did not another lecture me about my conduct.

My pride was crushed, my body bruised, and my war paint washed away. My brief fifteen minutes of fame as Dukat's savior was over. Dukat would never allow me to return to Bajor to hunt rebels, not now. I kept my eyes lowered, able to hear Dukat and Ravon's voice as they approached. Ravon was loyal to the Second Order. He followed orders without question. I hoped he was not in trouble for following through on Dukat's orders and imagined somewhere in space, a body floated.

"Why are you still here? You're dismissed, Gil Yor," Ravon said. I saw no longer saw Dukat. I fell into step beside Ravon, limping ever so slightly.

"Are you joining us for drinks tonight?" I asked. "It's Saja's idea."

"I don't think it would be a good idea. I tossed the Bajoran out of the airlock," Ravon said. "Dukat is not happy with either of us. Between you and I, I approve how you handled the situation. If Dukat wanted only to frighten the Bajorans into submission, he should have been clear about his orders. The Second Order is fortunate to have you, Yor. Know this and enjoy the rest of your evening. As punishment, I'm on duty all night."

A better punishment than I had experienced. I made my way to Quark's and in a booth, aware the same Klingons watched me. Quark sent Petra over with a full bottle of Romulan ale. A chilled glass was set before me. I scowled at Petra, not for being Bajoran, but for having slept with Damar. I wondered how many Dabo girls had been in his bed.

They all seemed familiar with him and acted skittish in my company.

“I didn’t order ale,” I said without meeting her eyes.

“The Klingons did,” Petra said. “Nasty creatures.”

The girl pointed at the Klingons. One of them lifted his glass. I filled my glass and held it up in the air, one warrior toasting another. Petra moved on. My eyes drifted to a swarthy Romulan. He too nodded at me. So, the enemies of Cardassia approved my rough treatment of the Bajorans. I remembered the dead Klingon on Bajor, one of the rebels, and it made me wonder if the collection of misfits at the bar worked for the Resistance. I tried not to speculate as I waited for Saja and my friends.

After a few minutes, Dukat appeared and slid into the seat beside me. His hands dropped beneath the table, I wondered what he was doing, until I felt a hypo slam against my leg. As the drugs entered my system, every muscle relaxed. I sank forward against the table. Dukat placed his arm around me, grabbed my shoulder and pulled me back to help me sit straight.

“Better?” he asked.

“Much,” I said, embarrassed. “I await Saja and the rest of my squad. They are late.”

“So here you sit, drinking Romulan ale, purchased by an admiring Klingon. I’m not surprised. Many of the worst sorts have taken an interest in you. Perhaps I did overreact. I hope I have not bruised your pride.”

“It’s not my pride I’m sitting on, sir.”

Dukat laughed and patted my shoulder. The contact made the implant vibrate. I closed my eyes, shuddering, as I visualized a lone Cardassian colony on a distant world. I knew this place was called Hdrok 4. Three men appeared. Legate Mikor, Gul Raynor and Agent Torell beamed onto the planet. They were joined by a group of mixed races on the stairs of a large building with towering pillars. A feeling of impending doom made me gasp. My eyes fluttered open and I found Dukat pressed against my shoulder.

“What’s wrong?” Dukat whispered. “Your eyes glazed over for a moment. Did I give you too large a dose? It’s a painkiller, nothing more, and mixed with booze can be potent. Do I need to assist you to your room? You’re pale and I’m worried I’ve been far too

hard on you. What can I do for you? Name it.”

“I...I don’t know. I saw something. A place called Hdrok 4. Mikor, Raynor and Torell were there with a group of Romulans and Klingons. Hdrok 4 was where I lived after my father’s fall from grace. I remember I died when I was eight years old. Torell destroyed my father’s lab in an explosion that took out the entire colony. How can that be possible? I’m not dead.”

Dukat’s arm tightened around me. He wiped a tear away from my cheek.

“It is hard for me to explain, Yor. Yes, you died at the age eight, yet thirty odd years later, here you are on Terok Nor. I cared for my little cousin. I hardly knew her, but she was family, as are you. I don’t know why you remember these things. I have never mentioned Hdrok 4 to you before, and it is not listed as a colony in the Cardassian Archives. It never existed. You most certainly do, Yor.”

“Am I a clone? Is what I am? A clone of your cousin?”

He motioned for me to remain calm. I took hold of his hand beneath the table, squeezing hard, trying not to show emotion on my face.

“If it eases your mind, then yes, by all means, consider yourself a new, improved version of my little cousin. Batal City on Cardassia Prime is where you were born. Your father, Raderus, was in disfavor after his defeat at the Battle of Varnog and he was sent to the colony on Hdrok 4 as punishment. The planet is in the Demilitarized Zone. Garak didn’t supply you with this information, did he?”

I drank more ale.

“No, he didn’t,” I said. “Why would he, Dukat? What I saw comes from my own past. Those horrible men killed my parents, their friends, and destroyed the colony. But that’s not all. They returned recently to Hdrok 4. Perhaps the lab still remains where my father worked. They killed him so no one would find out their secret. I wish I could remember more.”

“Hush, little one. The curious are watching.”

I cast my gaze at the patrons. The Klingons remained, but the Romulan had vanished. A few Cardassians seated in a nearby booth glanced at us, whispering together. I

imagined everyone assumed Dukat and I were lovers. The gossip would spread fast. Not only did I sleep with Glinn Damar to advance, now I slept with my own cousin. From everyone else's point of view, I'm sure I appeared as cunning, cruel, and manipulative as Dukat.

"It has been a long day. You should rest." Dukat stood and held out his hand to me as Saja and my friends arrived. "Let me explain to Saja you're not feeling well. I'll escort you to Damar's quarters. You shouldn't be alone tonight. This won't take long."

I finished the ale and stood. Light-headed and groggy, I followed Dukat, walking through the middle of the soldiers. They parted, allowing me passage.

"Rest and be well, Yor," Saja said, a sympathetic look on his weathered face.

Leaving the Promenade with Dukat, I leaned on his arm for support. I was exhausted, unable to think about anything, except a pillow. Somewhere along the route, I passed out. What felt like seconds later, I found myself standing in the middle of the hallway, between mine and Damar's quarters. Dukat had one arm wrapped around my middle, leaning slightly to the side to keep me on my feet.

"What happened?" I asked.

"I carried you most of the way," he said. "Don't trouble yourself further by thinking about the past. We'll discuss things later. I would stay with you, only I can only be spread so thin. I will ask Damar to look after you tonight. And cousin, I hope you will accept my apology. I regret venting my anger on you earlier this evening."

I gave a heavy sigh when he pressed his forehead to mine.

"Why do I feel like this? Why is my memory so muddled?" I asked.

"As I said, we will discuss this later, cousin." Dukat slid his fingers across my cheek. "I'll return your swords to you. They are my gift to you, your true reward from your loving Gul. I will allow you to be independent in your dress, but this is the extent of my lenience. From now on, I expect you to act like a Cardassian officer. You are not a Klingon, so remember to keep your temper in check."

"Yes, sir."

"When we're alone, you may call me cousin or Dukat."

"Yes, Dukat."

"That's better."

Dukat held onto my arm and hit the chime at Damar's door. It opened and we entered the front room. Damar was seated at his desk, his armor on the floor beside him. He drank kanar from a tall green glass. Seeing it was Dukat, he leapt to attention and saluted. When he spied me hanging on Dukat's arm, he narrowed his eyes.

"Gul Dukat! I wasn't expecting you, sir. Is there a problem? Why is Yor here?"

"Oh, she's not here for discipline, Damar," Dukat said. "It would seem my cousin suffers from amnesia as well as a headache. She remembers her childhood with her father Gul Yor on Hdrok 4 and little else. Do you understand what I'm telling you, Damar? She does not remember anything else. I thought you might let her relax here for a while. I don't think it's a good idea to leave her alone tonight."

"I shall look after her, sir," Damar said.

"Good. I gave her a sedative. Be gentle."

Dukat placed me on a couch. He went to the replicator, while Damar stared at me, and ordered a glass of Romulan ale. Damar started to protest. He fell silent when Dukat placed the glass in my hands.

"Drink this, dearest. Damar will take care of you."

"I don't understand," Damar said, wiping a hand across his mouth. "I have been a bit lax in Yor's training. Perhaps in her discipline as well. I pledge you will see an improvement. Give me a week and she'll be a soldier you can be proud of. One who will bring glory and honor to the Second Order and Cardassia."

"She already has, Damar. I am proud of her, despite what happened on the Promenade. As I said, she's here to rest and not for chastisement. I have seen to that already," Dukat said, "and what she now needs is tenderness. I'm sure it will not be an imposition for you to spend the evening with my cousin."

"I'll do as you ask."

"It's an order, Damar. Good night," Dukat said.

I stood, feeling awkward when Dukat kissed my cheek, not wanting Damar to

suspect the true nature of our relationship. My cousin left in a hurry. When the door closed, I sank onto a couch, exhausted. Damar grabbed the whole damn bottle of kanar, drinking as he paced the floor, unsure what to do with me.

“It is a mandate officers act as representatives of the Cardassian Union at all times,” he bellowed. “Respect and knowledge of military protocol is expected of all Second Order soldiers. Officers are required to follow orders. Disobedience can result in the termination of service by a commander or the execution of a soldier. Apparently you need to be reminded your conduct reflects directly on me as well as Dukat.”

“Yes, sir.”

The bottle was thrown across the room. It shattered against the wall. Thick brown syrup oozed down the wall. Damar turned on me, exploding in fur, spittle flying from his lips.

“I know you were with Dukat! You smell like him! I will not and cannot compete with a legend! I wouldn’t even know how to try!”

“Don’t shout, Damar. My head hurts. I just want to go to bed,” I said with a grimace. I entered his bedroom, shrugged out of my armor, and collapsed on his bed. He stood in the doorway, glaring at me.

“You don’t deserve the promotion to the rank of Gil. It’s an insult. All Cardassian military personnel, soldiers and officers, fleet and ground crew alike, wear the same uniform. The Cardassian uniform is symbol of pride and strength to the Union, and a symbol of fear and respect to foreign powers. It reflects the Union’s emphasis on the military and our military might. Until I say you deserve your new rank, you will not expect special privileges.”

“Won’t you help me off with my boots?”

Rolling me onto my back, Damar took pity and removed my footwear. I didn’t ask for him do more. He took off my pants, socks, and my padded shirt. Helping me beneath the blankets, he sat on the edge of the bed, his back to me. It felt familiar to be in his bed and I wondered if I had in fact been his lover. It must pain him for me to forget that part of our relationship. I placed my hand on his back.

“Dukat said you have partial memory loss. Is this true?”

“Your pillow smells familiar.”

His shoulders sagged. “I’d hoped you would come to me of your own volition,” he said. “I thought we could talk about what happened on Bajor. It is obvious Dukat has claimed ownership of you. After all this time, I thought he meant for us...it doesn’t matter. This was to be expected. I was the one who overstepped my boundaries.”

“I don’t understand why he was so angry with me. I saved his life yesterday.”

Damar turned toward me. “Yesterday? Ren, you’ve been in sickbay for three days and nights. You were released this morning.”

“I can’t remember. It’s been a very long day. I’m so tired.”

“Dr. Quirin should not have released you from sickbay,” he said, in a softer tone. “How can you be expected to be a Cardassian soldier when you are human? It’s not only unfair to you, it’s unfair to every Cardassian soldier from the First through the Twelfth Orders. I would never allow a human to join the Cardassian army, yet Dukat has done so, and complicated matters by insisting you are his cousin. I do not think I can train you further. I will not sacrifice my honor to turn you into something you are not. Nor do I care to watch you destroy yourself to protect Dukat.”

Turning on my side, I stared at him, confused and angry. “I am not human. I am Cardassian. I’m Ren Yor,” I said. “I’m from Hdrok 4. I trained at the Cardassian Military Academy with you. After graduation, I served on Inok Nor, near the Romulan territory, and have only recently come to Terok Nor on a special assignment.”

“What are you talking about? You have no special assignment. Nor are you Ren Yor. You are human. You only look the part. Your memories of the academy are not real. You trained on the holodeck. None of what you remember actually happened.”

“Stop confusing me, Corat Damar. You were always a bully in school. I don’t need you to bully me now. My head hurts. Skrain gave me a painkiller, but it hasn’t helped. It’s made me feel worse. You make me feel worse and it’s your job to take care of me.”

“What do you want me to do?”

“You could start by massaging my back.”

Damar's troubled gaze made me feel nervous. I wondered if what he said about me being human was true or if he just liked being mean to me. I lay flat on my stomach. He tugged on the blanket to pull it away from my shoulders. I waited while he removed his armor and boots. The mattress sagged as he straddled me. His large hands kneaded the aching muscles in my shoulders and moved down to my hips.

"When I was four years old, Dukat sent me a doll. It came on a cruiser, delivered by an officer in a large box with a pink ribbon. I opened it on my sixty birthday. For the life of me, I can't remember what was inside the box. Today I gave Dukat a silver box and inside were twenty pieces of latinum. Mikor gave it to me for my bravery on the battlefield. I told Dukat to use it to pay those bounty hunters to find the rebels."

"What else do you remember about your childhood?"

"My family was poor, you know that, and my father was disgraced after he was defeated in battle. We were banished to a colony on Hdrok 4. I don't want to talk about what happened, Damar. It makes me sad. If Dukat hadn't paid for my education and sent for me, if I hadn't saved his life, no one would think twice about me."

Damar's laughter was harsh. He continued to rub the length of my back.

"You truly have no memory of your life as Sawyer Kincaid. I do not mean to confuse you, only to help. What if I said you came here from Earth with a woman named Helen? What if I told you that you are both human? She is Dukat's mistress. You are Sawyer. You were surgically altered to appear Cardassian. You are acting as Dukat's cousin to protect you from Agent Torell."

"I would say I don't believe it, Damar. I don't know who Helen is. I have never heard the name Sawyer. You and I shared a room at the academy. We were friends and lost contact after graduation. Is this why you're upset with me? Because we lost contact?"

"I truly have lost you," Damar said. His hands grew still.

"I remember the academy. Get into bed and hold me like you used to, Damar."

Removing his garments, he crawled under the blankets. I backed against his chest and sighed when his arm wrapped around me. I remembered how nervous he'd been in his youth, never doing more than hold me tight.

“Try not to think about your past,” Damar said. “Whatever this special mission is you mentioned, we can discuss it later. Get some rest, Yor.”

“Hold me tighter. I’m scared.”

“I will hold you as long as possible,” he said with a sigh.

HELEN

Chapter Fifteen

Every morning, Ren Yor greeted Dukat at the door of our quarters, right about the time he left to go about his duties. Every morning the pair exchange pleasantries, brief and formal as the doors closed upon them, leaving me to wonder as to the extent of their conversation. Yor guarded my door until Dukat returned. If by chance I wanted to leave and visit the Promenade, she went with me.

I missed Sawyer, the real Sawyer, not the alter ego she'd assumed. It felt as if she'd walked out of one of her novels. She had no memory of me or of Earth. Her two swords were always polished to a luster. Her armor suited her. She'd cut her hair short, like a man, and no longer wore makeup. Everything about her was groomed. I assumed Damar or Saja still trained her on the holodeck. She behave as a proper Cardassian officer.

During our usual afternoon stroll to the Promenade this morning, Yor walked behind me, showing no sign of wanting to talk. I assumed she'd had another restless night. She looked tired. We past many quant shops along the Promenade and went straight to Garak's clothing store, as we usually did. He was working on a jacket when we entered. Smiling wide, he hurried over to give me a hug. Yor stepped forward, placed a hand on Garak's arm and pulled him away.

"Do not touch the Gul's mistress!"

"We are friends," Garak said. "We are all friends, Yor. Doesn't she have any buttons you can push to make her react like a normal person? Her condition is far worse than I realized. She has no idea who she used to be. She believes she is Ren Yor."

"I am Ren Yor, tailor. Mind your tongue. Soon I will command the Alpha Brigade, returning to Bajor to defeat the last of the Resistance."

"The Alpha Brigade?" I said. "What is she talking about?"

"My, my," Garak said, clicking his tongue to the roof of his mouth. "You are quite the little patriot. Well, I'll tell you what, I'll make you a lovely maroon beret for you to wear on the day Gul Dukat formally announces the Alpha Brigade is installed into the Second Order."

Yor inclined her head, the manner entirely Cardassian, sickening me. If there was a human left inside of her, it was kept under control, not only Torell's implant, but by Dukat's DNA and tight reins. Nothing like being in two cages at the same time. It was no wonder she was a stranger to me and to herself.

"It would be appreciated, tailor. I will require three hundred in all. I want every one of my soldiers to match me. We will make a fearsome impression on the enemy."

Closing the door of Garak's shop, I turned toward Sawyer, trying to see the tall, lean blonde girl from Kansas under the ridges and gray skin. Her blue eyes remained the same, in color, not in what they reflected. While Garak cleared his throat, pretending to arrange material on a shelf, I approached the tall, statuesque warrior.

"Don't you recognize me, Sawyer? It's Helen Monroe, your friend. You're real name is Sawyer Kincaid. There has to be something left of her inside of you. You're from Earth, not Cardassia Prime. This story about being born Ren Yor from Hdrok 4, a cousin twice removed from Dukat is fabricated. We came here to Terok Nor, brought by Q, and decided to stay here. You are Damar's sweetheart. I am Dukat's mistress."

"Sometimes. It is not a serious relationship."

"I know you love Damar. I believe he loves you, Sawyer."

Her blue eyes turned glazed. She seemed to lose contact with her surroundings, as if something called to her from afar. If I concentrated too hard on what she was thinking, I felt myself drifting. I had to break off the strange connection I felt between us. When she finally gave a shudder and stared at me, I had the feeling the implant had overridden her attempts to access the information on Sawyer. I was left facing Ren Yor, a Cardassian, unbendable, unrelenting, and lacking the humanity that had made her so compassionate, kind, and loveable.

"I don't know what you mean, Helen. Everyone knows I was born in Batal City. I later moved to Hdrok 4. I went to the academy. I am Dukat's favorite cousin. He asked for me personally to join him on Terok Nor. Of course you are my friend. Any friend of Dukat's...."

"...is a friend of yours? Ugh. Garak, why does she have these memories? Has Dukat implanted the past life of his cousin into her head?" I was concerned. If Dukat had implanted a false life in Sawyer's mind, I wondered if my feelings for him were real or induced. It made me sick to my stomach.

"I spoke with Dr. Quirin and he assures me she has not been brainwashed," Garak said. "We have discussed this, Helen. At this time, I'm not able to verify any of our theories. There's no need to upset her further. What is clear is that she's torn between two different realities. Two different lives."

"Oh, Garak," I cried. "Just look at her. She's tuned us out completely. Is Torell talking to her? Is he telling her things? I don't dare pry. It's a little crowded in there."

"Let's try something, my dear. I have what you wanted."

Garak came around the counter and placed a maroon beret on Sawyer's head. He swallowed a lump in his throat when she placed her hand on it and tugged it off. She handed it back to him. With a polite smile, he replaced it on her head, tugged it down on the sides and stood back, admiring his work.

"I already heard about the Alpha Brigade and made this for you, Yor. It suits you," Garak said. "I think you should wear it whenever you're on duty. You look fierce. I do miss the war paint." He glanced at me as she stared at her reflection in a mirror. "I'm not without uses, Helen. The device is inside, magnetic in origin, which will negate the electronic surges from the implant. I wanted to try it out on Yor first. I made you a new dress instead. Would you like to see it?"

"Later," I said. I adored the tailor-spy at the same time I wanted to thump him. Where was my special devise to ease my own temptation to kill?

With my hand on Yor's arm, I stood beside her, gazing at her reflection. We'd been at Terok Nor for three months. She looked trim, while in comparison, I appeared to be in

my third trimester. Her eyes looked hazy. I wanted to help bring her back to reality.

“Think about your parents. Your parents were history teachers.”

“My father was Gul Raderus Yor.”

“No, your parents come from Earth,” I insisted. “You attended Kansas University and managed a book store. You just published your first novel. It’s no wonder you’ve confused your past with of Ren Yor. You always wanted to be a Cardassian.”

“This joke has gone on long enough, Helen,” she said, pushing me away. “If you and Garak continue to mock me, I will cease taking you on daily walks. As for the beret, it is suitable, Garak the Tailor.”

“Perfect,” Garak said. “Give it time to work, Helen. Meanwhile, my dear Cardassian warrior, I look forward to hearing about your further exploits of glory and honor. You might want to add a few pins to your beret. It will really make a statement and let people know what you’re all about.” He held out the very Cardassian pin I’d given to Sawyer on the airplane. He attached it to her beret.

“Thank you,” she said.

“Garak, do you mind if I speak to you in private? Let Yor admire how formidable she looks a while longer.”

“She can’t hear you, Helen. She’s mesmerized.”

Garak led me into the back room. I sat on a chair, while he ordered two cups of red leaf tea from the replicator. He handed me a cup. I set it aside.

“You want answers, I know. I’m not sure what is going on inside of her head, let alone yours, my dear. We both know Agent Torell came here to discredit Dukat before he has him murdered. There are holes in your memory too. When you try to think about what Torell told you, do you always get migraines?”

“It usually makes me sick to think about Torell,” I said. “I seem to recall him saying something about a code word. Yes, a code word must be used to activate the implants. That’s all I can remember. Sometimes, I can feel Sawyer, the real Sawyer, inside my head. At night, when I’m asleep, I dream about her. We’ve talk about many things. It’s all the more confusing when I wake up and see her standing outside my door like a robot. I want

my friend back, Garak. Someone doesn't want her to remember."

Garak nodded. "I don't think this person is Dukat. I believe he's as baffled as the rest of us about Yor's transformation. It's quite possible you and your friend are sleeper agents," he said. "A single code word when spoken may awaken you and you will execute your orders without hesitation. You are both assassins, Helen."

"Yor saved his life. Yor can fight the implant, I can't. There must be a way for you to help me remember what Torell told me. Hypnosis or a truth serum?"

"The implant won't let me take that path and I don't want to hurt you. Try to remember, Helen. The code word could be anything, the name of your first pet or Dukat's favorite color."

"What is his favorite color?" I asked.

"I have absolutely no idea."

"Well, don't make me remember the code word or I'll turn into an homicidal maniac," I said. "Where is the item you promised me? Negate my impulses."

"That's it," Garak said. "Torell controls the pair of you. Sawyer suffers from amnesia because Torell put the memories of Ren Yor in the implant. Why Torell would do this does not make sense, not yet, but it will."

I took a sip of tea and scalded my tongue. It wasn't safe to drink hot tea when overly emotional. I set it aside until it cooled.

"There implants have to come out, Garak," I said.

"Any untrained doctor who tinkers around with those devices could activate them or kill you by accident. If you were smart, Helen, you would take Sawyer home. Summon Q and leave, my dear. Back on Earth, you will no longer be pregnant. None of this will have ever happened. I expect neither of you will remember anything. I think it's for the best. Don't you?"

"I don't want to leave. I...I want to have this child."

"Even if your relationship with Dukat is fraught with difficulties?" Garak asked. "Dukat is not a kind man. Do you love him, Helen? Have you fallen for Dukat?"

"I don't know. I think so."

"Well, it's to be expected," Garak said. "I do not blame you. I do not judge."

"Sawyer would blame me. She loves Dukat, perhaps more than I do."

Garak stood and peered out from behind the curtain. "I'm not sure what she feels," he said. "Your friend seems to be an in advanced stage of some type regression. I am not a spiritual man, but I do wonder if it's possible if Yor is truly the reincarnation of Dukat's cousin. Oh, I know how it sounds. It's a matter of whether or not we are to believe Q brought you here upon the request of the Prophets. Perhaps you and Sawyer have a special mission. There are simply many questions I cannot answer."

"It sounds ridiculous, Garak. There's no reason to turn to religion to come up with an explanation. Torell mentioned the wormhole aliens. I'm pretty sure he did. Why would aliens want us to help them?"

"There are countless Bajoran prophesies about avenging warriors who come from the stars. Reincarnated heroes who return to save their people."

"I'm more concerned with Torell and the Fifth Order, Garak. You should be to," I said. "I don't want to Torell to force me to hurt someone. Dukat has been understanding, despite the fact I have attacked him twice already. I don't remember doing it, but I have seen the claws marks, Garak. His remedy is to keep me on a mild sedative."

"I'm still modifying your devise to cut off Torell's transmissions. I'll get it to you as soon as possible. You leave everything to your dear Uncle Garak."

The bell rang. Garak and I returned to the front room. Gil Saja entered the store and approached Sawyer. She turned away from the mirror and stared at him.

"A shipment of kanar has arrived," Saja said. "Glinn Damar wants us to meet him at Cargo Bay 5 to see it is safely brought on board."

"You know how Damar likes his kanar," Garak said.

"I cannot leave Dukat's mistress unattended. She'll have to come with us," Yor said. She kept the beret on her head. Saja admired it, noticing the Cardassian pin. "You'll get one too, Saja, as soon as Dukat confirms the Alpha Brigade can and will be formed. I mean to make you my first officer. I know you have seniority over me. I hope this won't be a problem. Maybe I'll be promoted again."

"It would be an honor to be your first officer," Saja said. "You are loved and respected by every soldier in the Second Order. None has risen faster than you. It is because you deserve it, Yor. I would follow you into the Fire Caves of Bajor and back."

There was pride in his voice. I glanced at Garak, rather impressed at Saja's statement, also worried the tailor-spy was onto something about the Prophets and Bajoran prophecies.

Escorted by Yor and Saja, we arrived in less than five minutes at Cargo Bay 5 to find Bajorans unloading large metal crates and stacking them along a wall. Yor kept me at her side as she approached a male garresh and asked to see the cargo list. She glanced over it, handed it back, and suddenly smiled. I turned around to see who had arrived. Glinn Damar stomped toward Yor and Saja. Damar took the same list from the garresh. He looked it over and frowned. Something seemed to be out of sorts.

"I did not realize you would bring the Gul's mistress with you, Gil Yor," Damar said clearly disapproving. "Take her back to her quarters at once and report to my office."

"We're missing several crates of kanar, Glinn Damar. Someone has already been here and helped themselves to the inventory. I suspect it's Quark or his brother," Yor said.

"Gul Dukat requested those crates sent to his room. Saja can see to things here. Take Helen back to her room, Yor. Now go," Damar said. His angry tone drew unwanted attention from the Cardassian guards and Bajoran workers.

"Is this about the other night? You know I..." Yor paused, her cheeks flushing.

"Keep your voice down and your temper in check, Gil Yor," Damar snarled.

I looked at the floor when Yor said in a voice filled with tense fury. "This isn't working. I can't seem to please you no matter what I do," she said. "If you dislike me so much, then transfer me to another base or assign me other duties. Saja can be your aide. I'm done."

"Your tone is inappropriate, as is your request. I've given you a direct order, Gil Yor. Do not make me report you to Gul Dukat. Return his mistress and report to the holodeck instead of my office. Since you apparently need more training, to lessen that tone of yours, and since you find me such unpleasant company, I'll assign Saja to continue your combat

training. Perhaps he'll be able to train you into being a proper soldier. Perhaps you'd rather spend personal time with him as well."

"Perhaps I should. You certainly run hot and cold."

Yor spun on her heels and motioned for me to follow. We left the cargo hold and headed toward a turbolift. Crewmembers from different ships walked past us, heading toward dozens of hangars on the station, reached on the same level.

"I apologize for bringing you here, Helen. Nothing I do pleases Glinn Damar. You said we were friends before we came here. Is this true?"

"Yes. I know you don't remember. You can trust me, Yor."

"Since returning from Bajor, Damar has chosen to sleep alone. He thinks our relationship is inappropriate because I am Dukat's cousin. It was a problem before we left, but we were lovers then. Now Legate Mikor promoted me. Damar is convinced I'm using him to advance in rank."

"Is it true?" I asked.

"Not at all," she said. "I love Damar. When I touch him, he pushed me away. I thought perhaps it had to do with Dukat. Damar is jealous. But I tell you, I am not involved romantically with my cousin. Damar spends more and more time with Dabo girls. I do not react well to someone deliberately trying to make me jealous, so I say things to hurt his feelings. I think he used to love me, but not anymore. His actions speak louder than words. I am deeply hurt by his behavior. What can I do to fix things?"

"Cardassian males are complicated. I can't tell if Dukat loves me or is just keeping me with him because I'm pregnant. I guess, hang in there. I'm sure in time Damar will see you care for him and will respond in kind. He's under a great deal of pressure. His responsibilities to Dukat and this station must be stressful. But that's not all. Damar is fighting against falling in love with Yor. Like Dukat, he's married, and any commitment to you is impossible."

"You are wise, Helen," she said. "I owe you an apology. If I could take back my previous actions in sickbay and on the Promenade, I would. It was wrong of me to strike you and the prisoner. I don't know why I did it. I was so angry at all Bajorans."

"I know why you did it. It's because of Agent Torell."

"Torell?"

"He's the one who put the implants in our heads," I blurted. "Oh, dear. I wasn't going to tell you this and now I can't take it back."

"Continue."

"Just what I said. Torell put implants in our head and is trying to turn us against Dukat. Torell wants to destroy him, and if you get in the way, he'll do the same to you."

Yor stared at me. "You and Garak know more than you have shared with the Gul," she said. "I have long thought Torell was behind it, Helen. I agree he is dangerous. We cannot let Torell carry out his plan. Torell means to kill Dukat, I just know it. Every night you must take precautions before you go to bed. Sleep with a weapon. Change the security code on the door. It is up to you to keep Dukat safe when he is asleep. Never let your guard down. Once I have proof Torell and his allies are plotting against Dukat, I will arrest them for treason and watch when they're executed."

Yor fell silent the moment we noticed five Cardassians molesting a Dabo girl in the middle of the corridor. The men pushed the girl in a circle, pinching her nipples, and grabbing at her crotch. The Dabo girl cried. There was nothing I could do to help her. However, the killer instinct in Yor flicked on like a light. She handed me a pistol.

"Protect yourself, Helen. I must put a stop to this before it gets out of hand. If for any reason they come for you, shoot them. It's set on stun, so don't hesitate."

"Be careful," I said with a nod.

I held the pistol steady as she stormed over to the four men. The soldiers were from the Fifth Order, on shore leave from one of several large Cardassian ships in dock at the station. I'd already noticed the soldiers from each Order were kept segregated from the others. The Second Order was the elite at the station and treated with respect. The soldiers of the Fifth Order clearly did not respect Yor. She butted into the group, put her arm around the girl and led her straight to me. I found myself holding the sobbing Dabo girl.

"Get her onto the turbolift. I'll be right behind you," Yor said.

"Not so fast," one of the men said.

A rough hand gripped Yor's shoulder and spun her around. One punch and she sent the male stumbling into his companions. Yor jumped into the air. Her boots connected mid-center in another Cardassian's chest. They both fell to the floor. She was on her feet in an instant, pounding another man in the stomach. The other two men glanced at each other and ran toward me. The Dabo girl screamed in terror. Yor gave a hard kick to another soldier and shouted, "Shoot them!"

I fired at the nearest man. He dropped. I shot the other soldier. His knees buckled and he toppled to the floor. I stared at the phaser in my hand, horrified at what I'd done, and hid it behind my back. Yor looked satisfied. Only one Cardassian remained conscious.

"Gul Dukat will not be pleased," Yor snarled. "It's my job to protect the Bajoran women. Nor will I allow you to handle them like a bunch of baboons. Take your friends and leave. You're stinking up my space station."

Now this sounded more like Sawyer and less like Gil Yor. The Dabo girl stared at Yor as she approached, sniffing tears, and her eyes filled with disbelief.

"Why did you help me? I thought you hated anyone who wasn't Cardassian. I saw you hit a prisoner. I don't know why you helped me." The Dabo girl bowed her head. "Thank you, Gil Yor. Thank you. And thank you, Madam Helen, for coming to my aid."

"I had to do something," I said with a shrug. "But don't tell anyone."

"I won't. I wouldn't dream of it."

Releasing the girl, I watched as she sank before Yor. She knelt with her arms clasped around my friend's legs. Yor lifted the girl to her feet and patted her on the shoulder.

"Return to the bar, Roxell," Yor said. "Don't tell Quark or anyone else what happened. Well, you might tell him I am sorry for my earlier behavior. It won't happen again. From now on, I will defend every woman on this station, no matter what race they were born. No one will ever treat you like again, Roxell. Not while I'm here."

"You know my name?"

The Dabo girl was shocked. I was as well. I didn't know what Yor did when I wasn't with her. It was obvious she'd taken the time to know the names of the Dabo girls on the

station. I glanced back at the Cardassians. One stood, his hand pressed to his forehead, staring at Yor in fear and confusion. I slid the pistol into Yor's gun holster, feeling satisfied at what I'd done. Yor hurried us both down the hall.

"I think, Roxell, the ladies of Terok Nor have met their Joan of Arc," I said. Both women stared at me. "It's a famous female warrior who led soldiers to war on Earth hundreds of years ago. She was the champion of the underdog and a saint."

"Yes, I like the comparison," Yor said. "Off you go, Roxell. All will be well."

The Dabo girl smiled and hurried back to the Promenade. Yor took my arm and led me around a corner as a security team ran past us.

"I wouldn't worry about them. Just keep moving," Yor said.

"Why does the Fifth Order dislike the Second Order so much?" I asked.

"The Fifth patrol the 'Iron Path,' a series of star systems with significant industrial capabilities. The ships and soldiers of the Fifth guard many such worlds. They protect shipping convoys from pirates and raiders. Their involvement in manufacturing and shipping makes them one of the most influential in Central Command. We don't like them in the Second because they rely on improvisation and unorthodox techniques."

"Like rape?"

Yor glanced at me. "The Second Order is considered the finest in the Cardassian Union. We alone have kept the Romulans and Klingons at bay. Both have been a threat to Cardassia for years, and only Dukat has kept them from encroaching into our territories," she said. "The Fifth are brutes and nothing more than pirates, if you ask me. They rest us because we control the Bajor System and oversee the Occupation."

"It's complicated," I said. "Like us. You don't hate me."

"I would like to be your friend."

"We are friends," I said. "All the Bajorans want is to earn their independence. They should have equal rights, the same as anyone else. As a Cardassian colony, they would no longer be treated as slaves, but citizens. Oh, I now Cardassia has outlawed slavery. You know what I mean. Dukat would listen to you, if you proposed this change. You could make things better for Bajor."

"I could try," she said.

"Let's talk more about over lunch. We can spend the afternoon together."

"Very well, Helen."

We returned to Dukat's quarters without further discussion and entered my living space finding it empty. I went right to the kitchen and opened a bottle of spring wine from Bajor, something I could drink while pregnant without harming the child. We sat together on a couch, drinking wine, reminding me of the good old days on Earth. I grabbed a controller padd and patched in rock music from Earth. Garak had located and transferred Federation records containing records of music from my era for me. She tapped her foot to the music, while I relived the fight in the hallway, wondering why Dukat had turned her into a warrior when all she really wanted to do was sing and dance.

"I like this music," Yor said, swaying in time with the beat.

"It's rock-n-roll. You've heard this group before. They're from Earth. Like us."

"Impossible. I have not heard this type of music before. Nor am I from Earth or I would remember."

I set my drink aside and turned toward her. "You're human underneath those ridges," I said, with a firmness meant to drive it through her head. "We met in college and since then have been best friends. You can remember those days. Focus and shut out the memories of your Cardassian life. Somewhere in that pretty head of your is Sawyer Kincaid and I want to talk to her. Listen to the music and remember Sawyer."

Yor's blue eyes clouded over. Her hand swept across her forehead.

"Damar wants me to remember. It hurts, Helen. When I try to focus on my past, the pain worsens. Most of my life is in shadows. My dreams frighten me. A rage builds inside that is difficult to control. Be careful, Helen. I don't want to hurt you."

"Come on," I said, not giving up. "You used to like to dance."

Yor set her wine glass aside and stood. I thought she was going to leave, instead, she removed her cuirass and let it drop to the floor. She moved away from me, dancing to the music, and I joined her. For a moment we might have been back on Earth, dancing to music on the radio. It ended the moment the door opened and Dukat entered. I came to a halt and

nudged Yor. She continued to dance, unaware Dukat watched with growing disapproval. Anger washed over his gray face. I moved in front of Yor and reached out behind me to grab her arm. She came to a halt.

“Just what do you think you’re doing?” Dukat croaked.

“Dancing,” I said.

“I was not talking to you, Helen. Gil Yor? Step forward!”

Yor stood at attention, staring straight ahead, not saying a word. A country song started to play, she hated this type of music. No response to the music, but her eyes widened as Dukat brushed past me and came to a halt within inches of his prized officer. Their eyes locked together in a test of wills. Neither seemed aware I remained in the room. The music skipped a beat and repeated the same words, “take me home, take me home, take me home,” until the hairs rose on the back of my arms. John Denver had never been so annoying. The track bounced again and the music cut off.

“What is going on?” I demanded to know.

The strange phenomena ended.

Yor gave a shake of her head, clearing the cobwebs, I supposed. “Shut up,” she muttered. “Just shut up.” I felt a tiny twinge in my brain, a voice spoke, “Kill him,” and simultaneously I lifted my hand, as she did, to rub our foreheads. A momentary look of confusion appeared on Dukat’s before he turned toward me. He grabbed hold of my arms, unaware of the danger, giving me a hard shake. Yor immediately relaxed and took hold of his arm to pull him away from me.

“We were dancing. There is nothing wrong with dancing,” she said.

My temper flared. “Dukat, I haven’t seen Sawyer in forever,” I snapped. “We were having a nice time before you charged in here like a mad bull.”

“You will kindly refer to her as Gil Yor and you will call me Gul Dukat in her presence.”

“I’ll do nothing of the kind,” I said, regardless of the anger flashing in his eyes. “The two of you stop it. There’s no need to discipline Sawyer. We were just having fun.”

“What did you just say? Did Yor confide in you?”

The two questions were fired like phaser blasts. His gaze remained fixed on me, while Yor backed away from us.

"No," I said, "but I know you don't like insubordination or disorderly conduct. Well, news flash! I'm not a soldier. Nor am I a Cardassian. I don't have to follow your orders, Dukat. Ren Yor is my guest. If we want to dance and drink a little wine, then that's what we're going to do. She is not on duty and neither am I!"

With a wave of his hand, Dukat dismissed Yor. She grabbed her cuirass and left. I stomped past Dukat and sat on the couch. Retrieving my glass of spring wine, I took a large gulp, glaring at Dukat as he walked to the replicator. He ordered a glass of kanar. Glass in hand, he leaned against the kitchen counter, facing me, and swallowed the contents.

"You're not in a good mood today. What's wrong?" I asked. "Have you quarreled with your wife again?"

"That's none of your business," he said. "I suppose you think I should be more civil to Yor. It's not the dancing I object to, Helen. Yor stunned two Fifth Order soldiers and bloodied three more within the last hour. I have no idea why and the soldiers refuse to say who started the fight. Their commander, Gul Tagrid of the Balkron, a heavily armed Keldon class cruiser, mind you, is furious. Those were his men she fought. I'm beginning to think you are a bad influence. Need I remind you the friendship you shared on Earth has dramatically altered. I do not want you reminiscing about your old glory days."

"Ren Yor stopped those same five of me from raping a Dabo girl. Her name is Roxell. I was with them. While the Fifth is here, it's not safe for any woman to be alone. You're lucky none of us were hurt."

Dukat set aside his glass. "I'll have Odo speak with Roxell," he said. "If this story is true, I'll advise Tagrid to keep his crew on his ship. Will this please you?"

"It's a start."

"Helen, you must avoid these types of situations," he said. "All this excitement is not good for you or the child. Stress, as you know, must be avoided. As a precaution, I will ask Dr. Quirin to up your dosage. It will not harm the child."

"No more sedatives! I want this implant out, Dukat. Either you and Dr. Quirin

figure out who manufactured these implants and remove them or I'll contact Q and ask him to return us home. Maybe I should do it now. I think I will." I turned away from him and lifted my eyes. "Q? Do you hear me? I want you to come to Terok Nor! Come take Sawyer and I home right this minute! I mean it! I want to go home!"

Dukat ran toward me and pulled me into his arms. "Hush, dearest," he said with urgency. "Let's not summon Q quite just yet."

"Why not? Let me go! Neither of us have to submit to this abuse any longer!"

"For the simple reason, I do not want you to leave," he said, his lips pressed to my ear. "How can you leave me now? I thought you cared about me, Helen. If you left with Yor, I would be left quite remorseful and filled with guilt. I would be broken hearted."

"I don't care," I said, stomping my foot. "I meant what I said. I want to go home!"

"Helen, I did not come here to argue," Dukat said. He pulled me close, tried to kiss me, and found my cheek presented to him. With a sigh, he released me. "The amount of time required to convince you of my genuine affection and desire to please is endless. I give you these quarters, clothes, jewelry, and you are still not happy. What goes on between Yor and myself is no more concern than what transpires between me and my wife. I now see my visit has only upset you. I will withdraw at once. You will remain in your quarters, Helen. No visitors. No Q. Is that understood?"

"I hear you, loud and clear," I said.

"I'm trying to protect both of you, Helen! You must trust me," Dukat said as he started to pace. It was time for a rant, I thought. Typical. "Dr. Quirin says her memory loss is temporary and will pass. Leaving might release you from this unwanted relationship, however, I will still be surrounded by my enemies. I need Yor to help me root out those who would destroy the very foundation of the Union. Before you say another word, I'm well aware I make demands, which seems cruel at times. My efforts to keep you happy and safe are of paramount importance. I only wish you felt half as what I feel for you."

"I...I care for you," I said. "At times, I...I'm even fond of you."

"And?"

"I miss you when you're gone."

“Good,” Dukat said with relief. “I feel exactly the same way, Helen. Rest assured. No matter what you hear about me, you remain my one and only mistress. I put you first before even my wife, and as for Yor, she under my command. This in no way implies she is under my control, however, she is a soldier and must obey orders.”

“Certainly,” I said, wondering what game he played at now. If he had said nothing, I would have thought nothing. Now I wondered what he did to keep Sawyer in line.

“No matter what unfavorable images others may paint me, Helen,” he said as he walked to the door, “I shall always come home to you.”

The music turned on the moment he left, the familiar voice singing, “Take me home, country road, to the place that I belong.” I put my hands over my ears and screamed.

SAWYER

Chapter Sixteen

"Yor, this is the last time I will tolerate disorderly conduct! Do you have any idea what people are saying?" Dukat pointed at the door. "Every Bajoran on this station now refers to you as Joan of Arc! I have no doubt Helen had something to do with it. This Earth title will invariably attract the attention of Agent Torell. I can only guess what he thinks. I *am* the Prefect of Bajor! I can't have my cousin regaled as the savior of the Bajorans. This places me in a delicate situation! Again, you make it appear I have lost control of this station and most certainly of my own blood relative!"

I remained silent. Dukat stated a fact. There was no reason to argue. I tried to keep my expression blank. With a heavy sigh, Dukat returned to his seat. I'd done everything he requested, as I had with Damar, but no matter how hard I tried, I continued to disappoint my commanders. The afternoon with Helen had been spoiled, first by the Fifth Order, and then by Dukat. I wanted only to retreat to the holodeck and kill Klingons.

"As a result of your earlier conduct, Odo reports five more fights broke out this evening between the Second and Fifth Order. Gil Saja has been reprimanded. It seems he fought a glinn from the Fifth to defend your honor. Saja and six of my best men now sit in security and Gul Tagrid is on his way here. You will apologize to him." Dukat stared at me when I continued to remain silent. "Well, say something."

"May I offer my opinion, sir?"

"Go on," he growled.

"If you allow Gul Tagrid's to mistreat Roxell and Helen, then every damn gul who sends his crew to this station for a bit of shore leave will act in the same brutish manner.

These women are not here to be batted about like balls in a cage. I urge you to remove the pleasure slaves from the station. In fact, all Cardassians must stop using the word slavery. Despite it being deemed illegal by the Detapa Council, the military still treats Bajorans as if they were property. Get rid of the slave pit and that awful woman Gurgala. No more presidential treatment for your guests. I will be glad to accompany the women to Bajor and see they are turned to their families. It is, after all, the correct move to make, Gul Dukat."

The Gul flew out of his chair in an instant. His face a mask of fury, he stalked around his desk and swatted the beret off my head. It fell to his desk. He craned his neck down as his icy blue eyes narrowed to slits.

"Is that Earth gibberish coming out of your mouth? Some reference to baseball," he snarled. "It sounds like insubordination to me."

"You did say I could voice my opinion, sir."

I felt an immediate sexual response from his predatory look and his strong spicy scent, a sign of his own arousal. My breathe caught in my throat. I grew moist as I placed my hands on his desk and spread my legs apart.

"What are you doing?" he asked.

"Assuming the position! Sir!"

Dukat spun me around and shook his finger in my face. "You're gone too far this time, Yor. My wife already told me that you gave your word there is no brothel on Terok Nor or any pleasures slave. You also told her pleasure slaves are Quark's employees and she believes you! Next, you'll tell her that Raynor is merely using her and to leave this station. I will not have you interceding in my personal or professional affairs. Is that clear?"

"It's only a matter of time before Raynor turns on Mikelya. It's in her best interest to leave. As for the Bajoran women...."

"Do not start that again. I won't listen to it. I alone determine what happens here."

"....they do not deserve to be treated this way." I took a deep breath. "Quark told the Dabo girls they only have to serve drinks from now on. The Ferengi is willing to hire the rest of the pleasures girls. If you are concerned about your wife, then give them mops and say you hired a new cleaning staff."

“Maids? I can’t have maids running around my station tidying things up!”

“Why not?” I asked as he paced the floor. “The Dabo girls can continue to run the gaming tables. Anything else should be kept off-limits while she is here. Please know I am thinking of your reputation. As always, I’m willing to stand guard at the Promenade to make sure the girls are not harmed.”

“You think far too much about things that do not concern you!”

I turned when the door whooshed open. Dukat stood beside him, a wide smile on his face, as Damar arrived with Gul Tagrid. The gul was a large man, with an oversized forehead and a stern face. Both men, however, looked angry. I snatched my beret off the desk and stuck it on my head. I felt less angry and confused when I wore it. Dukat spread his arms wide and laughed.

“Ah, Gul Tagrid,” Dukat purred. “To what do I owe this pleasure?”

“You know very well why I’m here, Dukat. Since when are Dabo girls off limits to my crew? That goes double for the pleasure slaves. I want an explanation and I demand an apology from your cousin. Until I do, I’m holding you personally responsible, Dukat.”

“This can all be easily explained,” Dukat said with a sharp glance at me. “My wife is here, as you know, and for the moment, this station cannot offer what it did before. Nor can your men continue to cause a disruption. Gil Yor was acting on my orders. I see I have no choice but to remove every Bajoran girl off this station to ensure their safety. As for an apology, I am advised your men attempted to rape a Dabo girl. I hope you’ll understand why I must take such measures. I will not tolerate rape on my station.”

Damar released a soft chuckle. I remained silent.

“This is not the story I heard,” Tagrid snapped. “My men paid for the girl’s services. Glinn Damar’s aide attack was unprovoked. They are nursing their wounds on my ship at this very moment. One officer has a broken collarbone. Another had a broken arm. Two more were stunned with a pistol. I wasn’t aware, Dukat, the Second Order was at war with the Fifth. This doesn’t look good. I want to know what you intend to do about it.”

“Your men assaulted me when my back was turned,” I said.

“Do you hear this, Dukat? Yor blames her actions on my crew,” Tagrid said in

disgust. "Glinn Damar led me to believe an apology was to be given. I am waiting."

Dukat looked at me, furious, though not necessarily at me. I caught Damar's intense look of concern as he gave a quick nod at me. I had expected Damar to be angry. Knowing he cared made me want to make amends before Tagrid started making more demands.

"I apologize for what occurred earlier today, Gul Tagrid," I said. "Please extend my apology to your crew. I hope they...get well soon."

"Very well. I accept," Tagrid replied. He approached me, a bold move on his part, considering Dukat and Damar stood on either side. His index finger jabbed into the middle of my chest. "You may think everyone loves you after saving Dukat's life. Those you injured do not share this sentiment. Apologies do not mend broken bones. Is disciplinary measure to be taken or not, Gul Dukat?"

"Your men will accept her apology and this matter will be forgotten," Dukat said in a cold voice. "I think it best if you return to your ship, Gul Tagrid. Until the Fifth can maintain discipline, they need not return to my station. We've all had enough excitement for one day. I have work to do. Unless you have something else to add, you are dismissed."

Tagrid bristled in anger. "How dare you address me in such a fashion," he shouted. "I'll not be dismissed as if I was some lowly garresh. I've earned my rank and my command. My crew deserves the right to come to this station and receive the same treatment you dole out to the Second. Hoarding pleasure girls has won you no favors with me or my crew. Off limits? There's a red head I hear who is quite beautiful. In fact, Gil Dorak said she fired the pistol, not Gil Yor."

Both Dukat and Damar stared at me. Tagrid smiled wide.

"I doled out the can of whoop ass entirely on my own, sir."

A minute of silent followed my strange comment. I turned around and sat on the edge of Dukat's desk. Dukat was right. I used Earth words as quickly as they popped into my head. I wasn't sure why. I didn't know how to stop it. Maybe I did suppress the memories of an Earth girl that I used to be. I looked up and found all three men staring at me. Before I could speak, Damar jumped into the conversation.

"You are referring to Gul Dukat's mistress," Damar said as he moved in front of me.

“With his wife here, we certainly don’t need you or your crew spreading gossip, Gul Tagrid. I must concur the only way to maintain law and order is to remove all Fifth Order crews from this station. Surely you realize if your men had laid hands on the woman in question, it is they who would require disciplinary measures. To harm any property of Gul Dukat is to harm him personally. If they had that would make you responsible.”

“I had no idea,” Tagrid replied. “Dukat, I did not the woman was your property.”

Dukat crossed his arms. “Well, it seems this matter is officially closed,” he said. “See Gul Tagrid is escorted off Terok Nor with the utmost care, Damar. I wouldn’t want any Dabo girls to attack him in retaliation.”

“I apologies, Gul Dukat,” Tagrid said, flustered. “I meant no harm!”

“Come with me, Gul Tagrid. I’ll escort you to the transporter room.”

Damar left with Gul Tagrid. I slid to my feet, aware the tension had lessened, along with the confusion inside my head.

“Should I mention my apology in my report, sir?”

“Be silent,” Dukat said. “You defend me even when you’re one step from a firing squad. You have no fear. None at all.” He searched my eyes. “Is it true Damar has been ignoring you these days? I suppose it’s partly my fault. Since Bajor, you’ve managed to wiggle your way beneath my skin, and in so doing, jumped from Damar’s bed into mine. It’s no wonder Damar is in a foul mood. Cardassians have a keen sense of smell.”

“I do not care how Damar feels or what he thinks.”

“You should,” Dukat whispered. “Damar is the only thing standing between you and complete domination by me. Without Damar and his rigorous training, you would be no more than a pleasure slave.” He leaned toward me. “If I learn Helen had any part of this and I supported a lie, I will not be pleased...with either of you.”

For a minute, neither of us spoke. I was not going to add a lie on top of a lie.

“You have won the loyalty of the Second,” Dukat said as he placed his hands on my shoulders. “It pleases me they have accepted you into their ranks. Continue your combat training with Saja and try not to irritate Damar. He cares for you, Yor. So do I.” He tapped me under the chin. “I think we are well beyond lessons in discipline, don’t you?”

Twenty minutes later, I left Dukat's office with no panties and command of the Alpha Brigade. I hurried to the holosuites. Saja, Korvinus, Zolon, Jenrak, Ikarus, Komash, and Dunatar waited for me.

"We were released the moment Gul Tagrid left the station," Saja said. "Odo speaks very highly of you, Yor. Did you really break Doric's arm?" He laughed and punched Ikarus in the shoulder. "I told you she did."

"Does Damar have a reason to be jealous?" Dunatar asked with a chuckle. He pursed his lips together. The rest of the men started to laugh.

"Hold on a second," I said. "Dukat has just agreed to let me form the Alpha Brigade. He said anyone who volunteers can sign up. My goal is to recruit three hundred men. When we go to Bajor, we will all wear berets and swords. I even asked Garak to design a brigade banner. Know anyone who would be interested?"

Seven hands raised. Zolon let out a gruff cheer. The men gathered around me, patting me on the back, and I knew I'd found my War Dogs.

"We fight Romulans today," Saja announced after we settled down. "It is one of my favorite battles. On the day of the siege on Talas 9, the Second Order scaled the walls and defeated the Romulans before the sun set. It was a glorious sunset."

This program was often used by Saja to train me how to scale walls and fight on the battlements. Romulan strongholds were my favorite. All eight of us reached the top of the wall, firing our pistols to clear out the nest of Romulans. I drew my swords at the first opportunity. This time my magnificent War Dogs grabbed discarded Romulan blades and raced along the battlements, slaughtering Romulans. Saja's war cry, the loudest of all.

We hardly worked up a sweat when something went wrong. The Romulans were supposed to retreat. They arrived in mass in the courtyard. They charged the battlements and cut us down. Safety protocols kept the Romulans' thrusts as mere illusion, as well as our wounds, which were gruesome. We fell where we died, laughing as the battle continued around us. It was a good day to die, I thought.

A flicker in the program sent the Romulans vanishing into thin air. White fluorescent lights appeared overhead. Four dark walls surrounded us. Damar walked into

our midst and glared at Saja.

“Would someone explain what is going on? Gil Saja?”

“Gul Dukat released us to train with Yor. Care to join us, Damar?”

“I think not,” Damar replied. “In case you are wondering, I altered the program. Yor needs to learn the meaning of defeat. The Alpha Brigade is a joke.”

The men quickly stood. One by one they filed out of the holodeck. Saja remained at my side. I appreciated his support, especially since I knew he and Damar were close friends. Saja put his hand on my shoulder and squeezed.

“I agree Yor should know the sting of defeat,” Saja said. “The Alpha Brigade was just formed today, Damar. Give us time to recruit. Give Yor time to improve. She will make a fine commander. Her performance gets better each time we scale the wall. This time she led the attack. You should have seen her. It was difficult for the rest of us to keep up. Zolon has grown so fat he could barely get over the wall. We need the training as much as she does, perhaps more.”

“I saw what happened,” Damar said glaring at me.

“We’re having a small celebration in the barracks,” Saja said as he collected his sword off the floor. “Bring Yor along with you Damar. It’s in her honor. I know the Battle of EK-1 happened two weeks ago. This is the first evening we’ve been off duty at the same time. There will be kanar, girls, and booze.”

“I’ll consider it,” Damar said.

Saja shrugged at me and left the holodeck. I collected my blades from the floor and prepared to leave. Damar blocked my path. He handed me a com-padd.

“You dropped this in the hallway when you fought Tagrid’s men. Nothing is on it. I checked. I thought you were told by Dukat to keep a daily log?”

“I don’t like recording my thoughts.”

Damar’s eyes flashed. “You will do what you are told, Yor. What happened in Dukat’s office was an invitation for the Fifth to rebel. Dukat and I supported your claim the fight was started by Tagrid’s men. I wonder if you told the truth.”

“Program start,” I said angrily.

Surrounded by Romulans, the first one attacked me was gutted in an instant. I smirked at Damar and lifted my blade to stab another enemy soldier coming toward us. Damar had no intention of fighting and ordered the computer to hold. The figures froze in action. I felt my temper rise and charged, knocking him to the ground. We rolled over across a stone courtyard and I managed to pin him beneath me. Straddling his chest, I jerked his hands over his head. I leaned over him and kissed him. He wrinkled his nose.

“Have you no shame, woman? I smelled Dukat the moment I entered the room.”

Without giving me time to respond, Damar threw me over his head. I landed hard on my back. My swords were not comfortable to lie on. I unfastened the harness, sat forward to remove them, and pulled a muscle in my back. Damar took no mercy on me. He walked over, let his unfastened pants to fall to his knees, exposing an angry, swollen cock. I slid my pants down to my ankles. He crouched on one knee, jerked my knees apart, and fell on top of me. Penetration was immediate. He thrust into me, but refused to kiss me, making noises as he attempted to punish me. It didn't take long before he made a final grunt, grew still, and then rolled off of me.

In silence, we straightened our clothes and stood.

“This changes nothing,” Damar said. “ I know I am not your favorite.”

Ignoring his comment, for it was undignified for a Cardassian to show such weakness, I reached for my swords. Blood rushed to my head. I staggered forward and crashed to my knees as a pain exploded at the top of my spine. Screams echoed in the chamber as I thrashed on the ground. Images of a plane, a red haired woman, a blinding light, and Q punctured its way into my mind.

“What's going on? Do I need to call the medic?”

Damar crouched beside me. He pulled me into his arms. His fingers searched until he found the implant. It throbbed with a heartbeat. I again screamed.

“What is this, Yor? Who put this device inside your head?”

Unable to speak, the lives of Sawyer Kincaid and Ren Yor blended together in a confusing orchestration of events and emotions. I had no idea what was real or fiction. The pain eased and the implant grew still. I blinked, able to see Damar, gazing at me with

concern. With trembling fingers, I touched his jaw, remembering how much I loved Corat Damar before I went to Bajor. Sawyer moved into the forefront of my thoughts, while Yor waited in the background.

“Say something. What do I do? Shall I sent for Dr. Quirin? Does he know?”

“I’m fine, Damar,” I said with a sigh. I pressed my cheek against his shoulder. “I remember, Damar. I remember everything about Sawyer. Why didn’t you tell me what we meant to one another? You’ve allowed me to believe I was no more than a subordinate officer. You never once told me we were in love.”

Damar frowned. “I...I told you we were lovers before your injury,” he said. “You seemed satisfied with the situation. I cannot and will not compete for your love. Nor will I stand in Dukat’s way. Are you sure you’re all right? Whatever this device is, it needs to come out.”

“Why do you have to compete? Why can men have more than one lover and not a woman? Is it so wrong to be with both of you?”

“If you remember Sawyer, then you know your suggestion offends me.” Damar helped me to my feet. “I am not particularly proud of myself. I took advantage of you in a moment of weakness. No doubt Dukat put the implant in your head. It is his way to control you. I will not interfere. This won’t happen again.”

“Torell put it there, Damar.”

“And why would he do that?”

“Because Torell wants....” I fell silent. Helen had told me about Torell, tried to explain his plans, only it sounded like an excuse. “I don’t care what he wants. I care what you want. What if I ended things with Dukat?”

“You would say anything, wouldn’t you, to get your way? I’m well aware you love Dukat. Don’t pretend you love me, for it too offends me.” Damar walked to the door, cold and remote. “Go to the party. I do not think I will attend.” He glanced at me. “If you only meant what you said, things might be different between us.”

“Damar, I do love....”

The words fell on deaf ears. The door opened and he was gone.

“Sawyer or Yor,” I said. “Who am I? Who do I want to be? Can I be both?”

I turned the program on and grabbed my swords. I stood on the battlements and let the Romulans to kill me, over and over.

Everything but the thought of Damar seemed unimportant. He was on my mind, I couldn't concentrate, and I ended the simulation. I returned to my quarters to shower and change clothes. There was no excuse for putting Damar through hell. I knew what I'd done to him, I knew the reason for it, and he was right, I did love Dukat. It wasn't the same type of love I felt for Damar and now that I remembered, it made it worse how things stood between us. I needed to apologize, though I wasn't quite certain how to make it sound any more sincere than I had before. I had to try; Sawyer insisted.

Saja had asked us both to the party. Perhaps if I asked Damar to go with me, I might be able to make some small amends for what happened on the holodeck. I made certain I wore the perfume he liked before I walked across the hall to his quarters. I hit the chime and waited an eternity before it opened.

Damar stood in the middle of his room, dressed in a fresh uniform, his hair damp from a recent shower. He held a glass of kanar to his lips. He saw me and swallowed the entire contents before setting the glass aside.

“What do you want?”

“To ask you to go to the party with me,” I said. He looked surprised.

“I didn't realize you wanted me to accompany you. Do you actually want to go? Or do you simply like making a public appearance with a man on your arm? Any man?”

“I want to go with you.”

“Very well.” Damar straightened his tunic. “If you want my company, then we should leave before I change my mind.”

I followed him out of the room. We said nothing as we walked to the barracks. Upon our arrival, the soldiers plied us with kanar and stories of battle. I drank more than I should and felt emboldened as the Cardassian cheered my name. I threw my arms around Damar, for all to see, and kissed him. The soldiers cheered louder. Drunk as well, Damar led me over to a bunk bed. We sat on the mattress and drank another glass of kanar.

"Cheers," I said.

He frowned at the Earth toast and slugged down his drink.

"More kanar!" Damar lifted his glass. A soldier filled it. "Perhaps after a few more of these I will not care what your name is. I haven't before and I have known many women."

"I'm sure you have."

"Women find my company pleasurable. I do not have to pretend I come first."

Damar leaned over and kissed me. "I like the perfume. It is more agreeable than the other scent you often wear. If you think to get me drunk and bed me, you'll be disappointed."

"Maybe." I finished my kanar. "Another round! Keep up, Damar."

Once the Dabo girls were called in, I knew debauchery was around the corner. Soldiers singled the girls they wanted from more than a dozen, eager to join the celebration, tired of hiding in their rooms. Couples lay in the bunks. Some kissed in the corner. The War Dogs gambled in a circle on the floor.

I leaned against Damar. He put his arm around me. I rested my head on his shoulder. Being this so close to him while others had sex made it impossible not to be aroused. It was a mad Cardassian world I lived in. My eyes surely conveyed my need of him. Damar set aside our glasses, pulled me close and kissed me. His kisses grew passionate and his fingers fumbled with the clasps on my jacket.

"Are you two going to gamble or not?" Saja asked. He sat on the bunk beside us. He held two cigars and waggled them. "From Quark. He said Yor likes them. Come play cards with us. There's plenty of time for love. Besides, I have latinum to lose, and I feel unlucky tonight. Maybe you can beat me for once, Damar."

"I'd rather not. I'm fine right here. So is Yor." Damar's hand slid over my breast, his manner so possessive I objected. I wouldn't be turned into a slave girl in the company of the very soldiers who volunteered to join the Alpha Brigade.

"I'll play," I said. "I'm feeling lucky tonight."

"Lucky Yor," Korvinus shouted. "I will join the Alpha Brigade." He was a grey-haired Cardassian with a battle scar on his cheek. He was more serious than the rest of the War Dogs, but I liked him. A few more men agreed to join.

Laughing, I sat on the floor with the War Dogs, lit my cigar, and waited while cards were dealt. With a new glass of kanar in hand, Damar sat beside me. We played *Drak*, a game similar to poker, and I won every hand, clearing the table. The soldiers patted me on the back and a bag provided for the latinum, thirty pieces in all. The group moved to the bunks and commenced a round of hard drinking. I was done for the night.

"You escorted me here, pal. Walk me home," I said with a grin.

Damar was more intoxicated than I realized. I kept my arms around him to maneuver us through the corridors and onto a turbolift. We staggered onto our floor. I made the decision to take him to his place. Somehow I managed to remove his clothes. He was snoring by the time his head hit the pillow. I started to undress and heard the monitor beep. I flipped it on and stared at a naked Petra.

"Oh, dear. You're not Damar." Petra placed her hands over her breasts.

"The crocodile is asleep. Shall I wake him?"

"Please don't. I'll never...sorry, Gil Yor. I'm so sorry."

The monitor went blank.

I stared at it for a long time, not sure if I had the right to be jealous or not. I'd made the proud Cardassian glinn feel he was only second best.

Covering Damar with a blanket, I returned to my quarters and laid awake most of the night. Nothing had changed between us. A wall stood between us that I had built, me brick by brick, with Dukat's name written on it in neon paint. I couldn't blame Ren Yor, for I had set out on a path the moment I arrived at Terok Nor, foolishly thinking I could have both Cardassians as my lovers.

In reality, I didn't have either man.

HELEN

Chapter Seventeen

“This is for you, my dear.”

Dukat held out a slim wand. I set aside my cup of tea and turned it over in my hands, aware I had no idea what it was for. He took delight each day finding another example that proved my ignorance of current technology. I

“No idea,” I said. I jabbed at him. “Do I used it to shock you when you snore at night?” Snickering, I set the wand aside and stirred my eggs with a fork, finding the yellow color as disgusting as the smell. Most Cardassian foods had sharp odors, and since I was queen of morning sickness, I tried to avoid them. He had cooked breakfast and insisted.

“It’s a personal recording device. Watch.” Dukat demonstrated the controls. “I want use to record your thoughts, Helen. You may find it easier to tell your secrets to an inanimate object than to tell me.”

“Like what? I have told you everything I can remember,” I said. I hoped Garak had not told Dukat about Torell and my meeting, the things that were said, what I still failed to tell him about the implants, and my reason for being at Terok Nor. Sawyer knew as well, yet he did not appear angry or overly suspicious.

“My officers use these to keep daily logs. I would think after I’ve spent an excessive amount of money on your wardrobe that you might reciprocate by telling me of your past. Star with Earth and work your way forward. You do not seem interested in confiding me, only sharing my bed. Indulge me and use it. Please.”

“If you to earlier, I wouldn’t be so tired when you arrived. I seem to recall last night you were tired and didn’t want to talk. I’m always willing to talk.”

“Sleeping with me is not confiding in me,” Dukat said. He sipped on his eat, his

plate clean, waiting on me. "I'd like to know what you and Agent Torell talked about, in and out of bed, Helen. Don't flash those green eyes at me. You cannot accuse me of lacking patience. I have been patient. I want to know about the implants, Helen. I felt quite certain Agent Torell told you. I have asked Garak and he claims he knows nothing. I'm beginning to think I have spoiled you to a fault."

For a second, I was tempted to throw the wand into the nearest wall. I decided such behavior would cause another argument. Dukat was not the easiest man to live with. I had not been allowed to work in Garak's shop for the last two days. I helped Garak by sewing in my rooms, happy to help him with the supply in demand. Most of the time, I felt like Dukat's prisoner, not his mistress. He gave me a stern look and left the room.

I picked up the wand and pressed the studs. It clicked on.

"You try being in my shoes for once and dealing with these migraines, this pregnancy, and all the other crap I have to put up with and then maybe we can have a nice long talk. If you want to know about the implants, what they do or anything else, why don't you have a nice long chat with Agent Torell? Am I acting overly emotional? My feet are swollen and ache, so yes, I am. Have I known for a long time that Torell put the implant in my head? Yes, but when I try to talk to you, it makes my head hurts. Why you just be more supportive and not make me record my thoughts? This is stupid."

"Helen? Are you recording something?" Dukat called out from the other room.

I lifted the end with the microphone to my lips. "You're sleeping with Yor," I muttered. "All those nights coming in so late. I should have known this would happen. I'm swollen like I'm carrying a watermelon, while she looks prettier than ever. Damar has to know what's going on between you too. You're nothing but a snake. I hope this is recording, Dukat. You need to know I'm not happy. You need to know I think you're a lying, cheating jerk! Oh, and Torell wants to kill you."

He came out, dressed for work, buckling on his gun belt.

"I didn't hear you, sweetheart. Did you say if you tried to record something?"

With a burst of tears, I stood and threw the device across the room. It struck the wall and broke in half. Not as sturdy as I first thought. Dukat swore at me, stalked over to the

devise, and picked it up, giving me one last angry look and left.

“Good,” I shouted. “I hope you can repair it and listen to everything!”

Straightening my hair and brushing my teeth, I decided to visit Damar’s quarters. I wanted to talk about our mutual problem: Ren Yor. I wasn’t sure of his schedule, but I knew it shifted frequently. Convinced confiding in him was the right thing to do, I slipped out of my room, noticing my guard, Komash, talking to Petra. Gathering my skirt in one hand, I hurried down the corridor and threaded my way to Damar’s quarters. My mouth was dry and my stomach churned with nausea before I reached his door.

Yor’s door was right across the hall. I prayed she wouldn’t come out and find me. I placed my fingers on the call button. A chime beeped inside the room. I held off for a moment longer before I took a deep breath and pressed again. The door slid open and I entered the dimly lit room. I couldn’t see Damar, but I heard liquid pour into a glass. The light from the corridor faded when the door closed, leaving me in virtual darkness, and I slowly crept toward the couch.

“Petra? You’re late. Take your clothes off and lay on the floor.”

“It’s Helen. Can’t you turn on a light? I can’t see.”

“What do you want?”

Damar’s voice was cold. For some reason, the tone scared me more than Dukat’s yelling. Bile rose in my throat. I prayed I wouldn’t be sick.

“I need to talk to someone. I don’t know who else I can talk to other than Garak and I’d rather not. It’s embarrassing.”

A light flickered on at a table. Damar sat behind his desk in his undershirt, stained with kanar and glared at me with red, swollen eyes. I turned to flee. It was too late. Without warning, my gorge rose in my throat. I doubled over, vomiting on the front of my dress and floor in great heaves. Damar was at my side, his shirt removed, placed under my mouth. He put one arm around my shoulder and guided me toward the bathroom. He was a bit unsteady on my feet. He did try to help.

“So it is true. You are pregnant,” he said.

Mortified, I shook my head and burst into tears. I looked at my reflection in the

bathroom mirror. I was a fright and started sobbing harder.

"I'm sorry I came here. I'll go."

"Hush now." Gone was the gruff, forbidding Glinn of a few seconds ago, replaced by kind words and gentle hands. "Many women have the same problem. Sickness from pregnancy is not a common among my people. It does happen. Remove your wet clothes and take a shower. I'll clean everything. When you're through, there's a robe on the wall you can wear. I'll be right outside, Helen."

"What about Petra?"

"What about her?"

"I saw her with Komash. Never mind," I said, turning to vomit.

Damar left me alone and I closed the door, took off my dress, and entered the shower. Officers were allowed to use water. I stood under the warm water, letting it hit me in the face, little sips and spits part of my master plan. I wish I'd stayed in my quarters, hating the way I'd looked in the mirror. My bloated face and puffy eyes greeted Dukat each morning. I cried harder. I'd lost my protector, host, and the man I'd started to fall in love with to another woman.

"What's wrong with me?" I said. "All abused women love their abusers. I've lost my mind, that's what I've lost. I have to be insane for coming here."

I sank to the shower floor in a pool of misery, wanting to curl up and die, rather than face Damar. The shower door opened. Strong arms picked me off the floor.

"Enough, Helen," he said.

Damar carried me dripping wet to his bed and placed me on the mattress. He had not put on a shirt. I noticed the size of his muscles, a body sculpted from rock, and realized what Yor saw in him. She had two lovers and I had no one. I sobbed into his pillow. Damar made me sit up, wrapped a towel around me, and commenced drying my hair with another. He didn't speak, he offered tenderness. He placed the robe over my body, flopped beside me, and pulled me into his arms, holding me until the sobs tapered into hiccups.

"Is it the implant or is this behavior normal for humans? I learned a few days ago Yor has one. Dukat failed to mention this to me. There are a great many things he fails to

keep me abreast of. What about you? Does he talk to you when you lay with him at night?"

"No, he is hardly ever there. I'm in hell." I pushed against Damar's chest so I could sit upright. "I came here to ask your advice. You're in the same boat."

"What are you talking about, Helen?"

I held my breath for a second and blurted it out. "Dukat has a new lover. He's been avoiding me the last few weeks. He says he's spending time with his wife, but I know that's not true. She's sleeping with Raynor or maybe it's Mikor. Maybe it's both. I don't know what she does in her spare time. I only know he doesn't care about me at all and we have terrible fights all the time. I'm scared of what's going to happen." I laid my hand protectively over my swelling abdomen. "It's growing way too fast. This isn't a normal pregnancy. I know that too and it's all his fault!"

Damar sighed deeply. "His behavior at times puzzles and infuriates me as well."

"Who is it? Is it Yor?"

"Why does that surprise you? They have been lovers since we returned from Bajor," he said. "I suppose part of it's my fault. When she claimed to have lost her memory, I didn't believe her. I thought she was playing a game. The other day in the holodeck, she remembered her life as Sawyer. I thought her apology when offered lacked sincerity. She offered to end things with Dukat, even then I rebuked her. You ask about Petra? Isn't it obvious? To forget her, I drink and whore. I want to shut her out of my mind and my heart, but nothing helps. Nothing."

"I didn't realize you were in love with her."

"Don't tell me you love Dukat? We are in the same boat, a boat filled with fools," he said. "Perhaps it's the blood they share. Dukat understands her better than I do. They think alike and want the same things - glory and power. Spare yourself and leave him before he breaks you entirely."

"Why does it hurt so much? I knew before we came here Sawyer loved him. I can never feel the way she does about him. I don't even want to try. I'm not sure how I feel anymore, Damar. I think I love Dukat, only he can't love just one person."

"It is a losing battle," he said. "Why fight it? They are the mirror version of each

other. Why get in the way? Their attraction is far too strong for them to resist. Who are we to stand between them?"

"But you love her and love him."

"Just words," Damar said. "I had hoped Yor loved me. I think part of her does, only at the night of her victory party, when I should have made love to her, I drank myself into a stupor. That fool girl Petra contacted me. Yor answered. I have not been alone with Yor since. I have made mistakes, Helen. I don't find you have made any other than loving someone who is not worthy of you. You are far too gentle a creature for this world. You should return to Earth and you know it."

"Does Dukat love her?"

"Does it really matter? Didn't you come to me for another reason?"

Damar tightened his hold, pulling me close again and brushing his lips over my forehead. His lips brushed again my cheek, tasting my tears. I held my breath, wondering if I was reading Damar correctly and felt his body temperature grow hot. My hand was on his thigh. I hadn't meant to place my hand close to his crotch, and it wasn't I had, he simply grew in size and I felt the tip nudge me. I hadn't come to his room to have sex. I wanted to be comforted. He'd been the one who had sent for Petra, I realized now, and he'd done so because he needed to be comforted to. He was hurting as much as I did.

His hand slid beneath the robe, caressing my breast. My nipples hardened as his fingers surrounded it, pulling softly, yet when I looked into Damar's eyes, there was no lust or anger. Reflected in his eyes was the same pain and sorrow I was certain shone in my own. He slowly lowered his head and kissed me. The light pressure of his mouth was pleasant. His lips opened against mine, our tongues met and then he groaned, the kiss deepening, intensifying, until my head swam in confusion. When we broke apart, he unzipped his pants, releasing his cock. The sheer girth frightened me.

Growling deep in his throat, he pulled me onto his lap, helping me straddle him. I rose upwards and sat on him, finding he fit almost perfectly. Both of us gasped at the contact. His hands held my hips as I rose him, a slow, steady thump, while he massaged my breasts. Unlike Dukat, he was interested in my swollen breasts. His fingers pinched my

nipples. I gasped again, arching my back to give him better access, while he moved faster beneath me. We reached orgasm quickly and collapsed on the bed. I felt shy and awkward as he covered me with the robe.

I refused to meet Damar's eyes as he dressed. He left the room and returned with my dress. It was replicated, a perfect version. Quick to put it on, I found my shoes, used my fingers to comb through my hair and entered the front room. I sat on the couch as he ordered us two drinks.

"Have a glass of kanar and relax. There's no shame in this, Helen. None."

"We won't ever speak of it. They must never know."

"As much as I'd like to see the look on Dukat's face, no, they must never be told."

Damar handed me a glass of kanar. I took a sip, found it sweet and not as disgusting as I thought it would be after being sick. He stood in front of me, his eyes on the floor, about to say something when the chime went off. I froze. My eyes widened with fear. Damar motioned for me to remain seated and sat behind his desk. He acted like he had done this before, I thought.

"Who is it?" he asked.

"Dukat. Open the door, Damar."

Bile rose in my throat. I placed the kanar on a table and ran to what appeared to me a wastebasket. As I threw up the sickly sweet substance, I realized it was a battle helmet. The door opened and Dukat strode into the room.

"She's sick. I shouldn't have given her kanar," Damar said. "You did not tell me she was pregnant. Nor did you tell me the humans have implants. I found her wandering in the corridor and brought her into my room."

I held the helmet to my chest. The smell in the room was overpowering. Without speaking, Dukat knelt and scooped me into his arms. Damar let me keep the bucket. He said not a word as Dukat carried from his quarters. The air in the corridor smelled clean and felt cool on my face. I placed my head on his shoulder.

"I'm sorry," I stammered. "I thought I could make it back, but...?"

"There's no need to apologize or explain."

Dukat carried me to his quarters. He placed me on the couch and sat beside me, holding my hand. His eyes were filled with concern.

"This is my fault," he said. "I have not been as sympathetic as I should concerning your pregnancy. I have spoken to the doctor. Quirin can give you something for the morning sickness."

"I just want to go to bed."

"Allow me to carry you," Dukat said. "This undo stress has taken its toll on you and I am concerned. It is the least I can do, my dear."

Dukat carried me into our room, placed me on the bed and helped me remove the dress. I reached for my underpants and realized I'd left them behind. I held my breath as I met Dukat's eyes. His eyes narrowed in sudden suspicion. I groaned, placing my hands on my stomach and tried not to gag. His expression altered. He seemed almost amused as he had at breakfast when he pulled the covers around me.

"I'll fix you a cup of red leaf tea. Leave the kanar to Damar. I passed Petra in the hallway," he said. "She told me where to find you. It's her night."

"I really don't want to know the particulars. It's none of my business."

"I doubt Yor knows Damar is seeing several Dabo girls."

"I said I don't want to know the details. Tea, please, and a little TLC."

"And what would be?"

Dukat put his hands on his hips, looking sincerely confused. He didn't think I'd slept with Damar or he wouldn't have reacted in this fashion. It came as a relief to know he wasn't angry and had come take care of me. I started to laugh. He crooked a smile at me.

"Tender loving care," I said.

* * *

SAWYER

I ended my shift on the Promenade later than usual. I considered going to Quark's bar, but didn't feel like bull shitting with soldiers or dealing with nervous Dabo girls. I'd

seen Damar earlier in the evening seated with Mila. Feeling jealous and angry, now that the Dabo girls vied for Damar's attention, I walked past Dukat's office. I noticed through the glass wall that he was bent over his desk, punching codes into a padd. Above him floated a global three-dimensional view of Bajor, with thirty Cardassian forts and twice as many outposts. He glanced at me through the window. I entered his office.

"What do you want, Yor? I didn't send for you."

"What do you think?"

"I am rather busy. It will have to wait until later. Come back tomorrow."

"No. I'm here now."

"If your needs are great, then I suggest you seek out a War Dog."

"Don't be crude," I said.

His eyes met mine. "Gul Raynor has temporarily left Terok Nor with my wife and Legate Mikor to show them the sights," he said. "I don't expect them to return for the next two weeks. I came in here to go over a few things. I won't be long. Helen is sick. This pregnancy...."

"What? What did you just say?" I died a thousand deaths in that instant. "I had no idea she was pregnant. The clothes Garak makes for her hides her stomach."

"You are self-absorbed," he grumbled. "I don't wish to seem cold-hearted. When I finish here, I intend to spend the night with her."

"Since when were you exclusive?"

Damar turned off the hologram and put away the com-padd. "I have been honest with you," he snapped. "The pleasure slaves have been returned to Bajor. What few I was familiar with who remain have found another officer. In these last three weeks, I have been more faithful to you than I ever have been to my wife or any mistress."

"Bravo! And they said it couldn't be done."

I applauded. Anger appeared on his face. He stood slow and easy, straightened his uniform, and casually walked to the door. With a push of a button, he locked it, closed the blinds, and turned toward me, already fumbling to unfasten his pants.

"Get on the floor on all fours. Turn your head from me. I won't have you looking at

me that smug way you do when you get your way. Be quick about it.”

Dukat stood there, expecting me to obey; I always did. I refused to do so this time and approached him. I knelt before him, yanked his pants to his ankles, nearly blinded when I looked up to find his erection pointing at me. His fingers slid into my hair, pushing my head toward him as I slid his cock into my mouth.

“By the Prophets. You could swallow a man’s soul,” he hissed.

I slid my tongue around the ridges, sucking as hard as possible as I dug my fingers into his lean buttocks. He thrust against my head, gaining speed. When I knew he was ready to burst, I drew back, and let him spring out of my mouth. As I stood, gliding my hands across his chest, he enfolded his arms around my body. Our lips brushed together. I bit his bottom lip and tasted blood.

“You dare inflict pain? Then I will return it in full measure!”

Dukat grabbed hold of my arms and backed me against his desk. His fingers moved to my buckle, the belt fell, and he unfastened my pants, letting them fall to the floor. With a chuckle, he dropped to his knees and parted my legs in a triangle. His eyes held my gaze as his head dipped between my legs. He was ravenous, and I threw my head back, stifling a scream. When he finally stood, I clung to his shoulders as he lifted me onto the desk and positioned himself in front of me. Impaled on his erection, both of us gripped the sides of the desk as he started to power slam into me. Items scattered from his desk and hit the floor. Our lips locked together. The pressure of my knees squeezing his sides set my legs to tremble. My hands locked behind his neck, a secured position, as he scooted me a few inches off the desk, his breath labored. When he closed his eyes to focus on the job at hand, I leaned forward and sunk my teeth into his neck ridges. A hand shot out and clasped my throat. He dipped his head and returned the bite.

Pain and pleasure shot through me. I clung to him as his thrust became frantic.. Every muscle in his body seemed to tense. His orgasm opened his eyes, catching him by surprise at its intensity, and yet he managed to slam against me a few more times. Another orgasm hit me before he fell onto my body to catch his breath.

“I can’t move,” I moaned, catching a quick kiss. “It was wonderful.”

"I'm Cardassian. We're not done, sweet girl."

Dukat leaned to the side, an arm dangled. He unfastened the top of our boots, and reached in the opposite direction to unfastened the others. As he lifted my lower half into the air, my boots and pants slid off. He kicked off his boots and stepped out of his pants.

His eyes momentarily closed, as if he was mentally reloading, before he repositioned me on the desk, ready to go again. The erotic bastard lifted my legs over his shoulders, standing tall and proud, so he could watch me. Still hard, he slid inside, hissing through his gritted teeth as he resumed his masterful thrusts. Sweat beads appeared on his brow, his expression grew serious, while I writhed in pleasure. I caught him staring at the window, turned my head, and caught our reflections, wondering who in space witnessed the carnal act. When he finally looked at me, he came close to the same time as I did.

"Satisfied, Yor?" Dukat withdrew from me. "Now, I really must finish my work. I have dozens of ships coming to Terok Nor. You have what you wanted. Do not seek me out in this fashion again. Is clear?"

"Yes, darling."

We quietly dressed. When he finished, he stood beside me, his arms crossed, a grin on his face. As I turned to leave, he yanked me into his arms, kissing me, hard.

I knew then, being in love with two men, would not last. Dukat and Damar. Each lover suited a different side of my split personality. Ren Yor would do anything for the love of Gul Dukat and she was in control. He must have felt the change in my kiss, for he responded with a rare moment of tenderness, renewing the quiver of my legs. It last only seconds before he broke free and held me away from him.

"What's wrong?" I asked.

"Don't show me love or tenderness. Not ever. This, what we have, is not love. It's passion. Two raging fires will eventually burn the other out, and this is how it will be between us."

"This is how Cardassians love. Real love. It's meant to be this passionate and this fierce. Anything else is a pale comparison. You've turned me into a Cardassian warrior and named me Yor. You made us cousins. I don't want to win one battle. I want to win the

war.”

“To conquer me? Do you think you’d want me if I sulked and sneered like Damar? I have seen what your love has done to him. Your fire consumes all, Yor. In this game, there can be only one victor, and it will be me.”

“Till death do us part,” I replied.

His hand grabbed a fistful of my black hair, pulling my head across his shoulder as he kissed my throat. I closed my eyes, only to find myself set aside, while he retreated to his desk. I caught hold of the desk to remain on my feet.

“Had you come to me that first night, this feeling between us might have grown into something permanent. You might have won the one thing you want more than anything else. My love. You’ll regret the confession of my true feelings come morning. I’ll deny everything I say here tonight, with every bit of my singed soul.”

As we stared at each other, his monitor turned on and static crackled over the speakers. The 3-D image of Bajor appeared above us, spinning out of control. A spark from his computer shut it off. Bajor vanished. I faintly smelled smoke.

“Why does this keep happening? The lights always flicker on and off. Now this.”

“I have no explanation for what just occurred,” Dukat said. “A faulty wire, perhaps. Maybe the Prophets have their eyes on us. I no longer think Q is interested in what we do. Q brought you here and he left you here. Don’t ask what my next move will be. If you love me, you will not say another word and will leave. I must think about this further. Whatever it is, I will not let it control my destiny.”

He wasn’t in control any more than I was, I thought.

From then on, I sought out Dukat whenever I wanted him. He allowed me to initiate sex or eagerly sought me out in return. We arranged late night rendezvous, he left meetings, or pretended to have worked to discuss with me, trifling excuses that allowed us to be together. He alone seemed able to control my turbulent emotions. He kept the voices in my head at bay when I was in his arms. I didn’t think about Damar’s feeling or Helen’s pregnancy. I avoided them as much as possible, while Dukat and I developed the skilled tactics of covert operatives to find ways to make love in every dark corner on the station.

One evening, as we stood on the balcony, overlooking the Promenade, he moved in behind me. His hands glided the length of my arms and curled around my wrists. Crossing my arms over my chest, he held my palms to my shoulders.

“Come with me now or I’ll take you right here,” he whispered.

Dukat dragged me away from the balcony and into the green house, our favorite place among the trees and foliage for stolen moments. Toppling onto the grass behind a stone fountain, we sought immediate gratification. Our voices mingled in soft cries. As I clung to his shoulders, collecting grass burns on my backside, a flock of hologram birds flew across our position. With a squawk, they flew into the fountain and faded from view.

“I still cannot explain it,” Dukat said as he held me close. “When we were in the hangar, the lights shorted out. This is not a coincidence.”

“I never thought it was and still think it’s Q, toying with us. We should go.”

His arms clamped around me. “You will see me later? If I do not have you at least three times a day, I am not happy. My mood swings have been noticed. When I am with you, I feel whole. When we part...”

“Empty,” we said at the same time.

When I returned to stand guard, I smelled Dukat’s scent and wild orchids on my skin and clothes. Damar walked past with several officers, not bothering look at me. He entered Ops. I didn’t care what he thought. He had the Dabo girls.

As soon as I was off duty, I found Dukat waiting in his office. I held him close in the dark. The Klaxon had returned to the station, bringing Legate Mikor, Gul Raynor, Agent Torell and Mikelya Dukat. Neither of us spoke about it, using what time we had left to satisfy our unquenchable desire.

It was late that night when I awoke from a nightmare. The light from twinkling stars and war ships cast shadows on the far wall. Dukat’s shadow glided toward my bed. He appeared in beside me, undressed, and crawled into bed. From the window, in the dark, the Cardassian fleet had gathered, dozens of ships. We made love with the same urgency we frequently displayed and afterwards lay wrapped in each other’s arms.

“Going to war with the Federation would be a mistake. I know there will be a vote

among the guls before it goes to Central Command and the Detapa Council," I said. "You will vote on whether Cardassia will bring Bajor under control or wage war against the Federation. Either way, you will be in command. How will the vote swing?"

"It will be Bajor. I'm sure of it."

"And not the Federation?"

"It would be unwise to do so, as you said so long ago. You saw the defeat of Cardassia in the future. While I'm tempted to prove you wrong, for I would cripple Starfleet, I will not tempt fate."

"You don't believe in fate any more than I do."

"I think we both have come to learn we have a destiny, Ren. I knew from the moment I saw you that one day you would fight at my side. Victory is what we both seek, and for to happen, it is best to fight a war with an assured outcome. One day, perhaps, we will battle Starfleet and regain the Demilitarized Zone. This is not that day."

My head rested on his head. I felt his heart rate increase. I lifted my head and kissed him in the glow of the ships, while shadows danced on the walls. It was impossible to see his expression.

"Dozens of commanders from each Order has arrived. The vote will be in two days. This is classified information, Ren Yor. I trust you explicitly, so I know you will not speak of it to anyone. I fear our private moments will become far less frequent. Security must be increased. I need you to stand guard. I will not be able to come to you like this again. It is hard on me as well, but don't say what's on your lips."

"A little bit of you, I imagine," I said. "I know what you want of me. I'll put my ear to the ground and listen to the rumblings of the Fifth Order. But we both know Agent Torell will continue what he started. He's after us and Helen. I will try to be kinder to her and to Damar. I admit it I have ignored them. You'll see a change in me and so will they."

"It is as if you can read my mind," he said, laughing.

I sensed he was about to leave and held him tight. With a sigh, he patted my hand and curled me under his arm, entwining his fingers with mine.

"You are willing to give so much of yourself to me and ask so little in return," Dukat

said. "Our arrangement, however, consume too much of my time."

"Each time I'm with you, I fear it will be the last."

My mood was far more serious than his own. He lowered his eyes, waiting for me to continue as he stroked my cheek.

"I told you once this is all a dream. I realize now that only applies to you. When I wake up and find you gone in the morning, no matter what happens next, I will love you, Skrain Dukat. Whether I'm your friend, lover, cousin, soldier, or enemy, I will love you forever. Somewhere, somehow, we are meant to be together. I love you more than I love myself. You will always come first."

"I know," he said, as if knew everything the future held for us.

"My heart is beating so fast I think it will burst."

"Let's find out," he said breathless.

We made love this time, enjoying our bodies, in no rush. When I finally lay beside him, content and yet frightened, he lay back, prepared to spend the night.

"I don't want it to end either," he said. "It's as though I hear your voice inside my head. There is no doubt we were made for each other," he said. "Tonight, I am yours and yours alone. Remember this moment, for it belongs to us."

Tears slid down my cheeks and onto his chest. He held me close as we settled down to sleep. I closed my eyes and felt him staring at me. When I opened them, the expression I caught was soft and tender. No defenses were raised. He hid nothing from me, revealing his true emotions in his gaze, and I knew he loved me in his own complicated fashion.

With Gul Dukat, nothing came easy.

HELEN

Chapter Eighteen

Bajoran men and women were busy cleaning the Promenade this morning. Banners hung from the balcony. Everything looked polished and clean for the arrival of Dukat's guests. Second Order guard stood at their posts, watching smaller groups off the warships and cruises from each military Order. Escorted by one of Constable Odo's security officers, I doubted visiting Cardassians appreciated the changes in protocol at Terok Nor. Non-Cardassians who were members of the Promenade Merchants Association brought in goods from shuttles, opened their stores as usual, while a crowd gathered at Quark's, the favorite watering hole. The quick observation allowed me to make conversation with Ren Yor as we walked through the open area.

"I heard Gurgala vanished. Did she fall into a black hole?" I asked. I received a glance in my direction. "Is this your doing? Of course it is, Yor. I'm glad you took to heart what I told you. Quark has more Dabo girls working for him. It's almost a pleasure to be here."

Yor kept emotion from her voice. "I might have made a few suggestions to Gul Dukat," she said. "With his wife here, I thought it best the brothel be shut down and the pleasure girls sent home. A few officers argued against it, especially Gul Tagrid. She's not the only reason for the changes. One hundred and thirty ships cruise in the nearby vicinity. Six warships have docked at the station. Nearly every top-ranking commander will attend tonight's meeting. Guls unable to attend due to their assignments abroad will be patched in. This is a rare occasion in Cardassian history, Helen. We are on the brink of war."

"Testosterone run rather high on this station," I whispered as we paused in front of a store window. "Surely not all of the girls left. You're hiding them. I know you are. Not every

girl wanted to return home. Quark says they are happy here and get paid well.”

“Those who remain are now employees of the Promenade Merchants Association and will receive wages.” Yor leaned close to me. “The girls are in a secured area on a lower level. Quark says the holodeck suites are more active than usual. It’s off-limits to civilians.”

We reached Garak’s shop and found it closed. Guards stood at across the corridor. Yor absentmindedly fondled the hilt of a dagger attached to her belt. She provided more information in a few minutes than she had in the last few months. As usual, she wore swords strapped to her back and slung on either hip. I felt safe in her company. Her athletic form made me a little self-conscious about my growing size. With a pull on my cloak, I closed it to hide the bulge.

“Do you remember anything about Earth? About us?” I asked, giving her an opening as wide as a barn door. She walked on. “I wish you remembered. I miss her.”

A smile played at her lips and I felt my heart leap in my chest. The baby did a summersault and I pressed my hands on my stomach.

“Sawyer misses you, too. Stop fussing with your cloak. I’m well aware you are pregnant. You hid it well for a long time. Why didn’t you tell me?”

“For the same reason you are pretending you don’t remember Earth,” I said, unable to tell if she approved of my pregnancy or not. I suppose it didn’t matter. “I need to take a load of my aching feet.” I sat on a bench, gazing at Garak’s shop, wishing I had the access code. I wanted to sort through the new arrival of material. “My dad always said things work out the way they’re meant to. I know you hate clichés, but it’s true.”

“Sawyer still hates clichés, Huckleberry.”

I stared at her. She smiled back.

“I knew it! Why did you wait so long to tell me? You should have told me the day it happened. Does Dukat know?” I was so excited I forgot about my aching feet. I stood and tried to hug her. She stepped back. “What’s wrong?”

“Torell is back,” she said. “I told Dukat that Torell is responsible for our implants. I can’t let I remember my life as Sawyer. Everyone must think I’m Ren Yor.”

“You should have told me you got your memories back.”

“Let’s not forget you kept a secret for me. I guess that makes us even.”

“I’m not keeping score. I’m just glad to have you back.” I reached for her again. Her fingers brushed across my hand. “No more secrets. Okay?”

Sawyer kept her chin high, her attention on the activity around us. A few soldiers from the Fifth Order walked past us without an escort. An officer from the Fifth sat on a bench nearby, watching watch us.

“Agreed,” she said. “But remember things can’t be like they were, Helen. I have a job to do, one I take seriously. Someone is always watching us. Always.”

“Nerd,” I whispered.

Sawyer, my Sawyer, laughed. The knots eased in my stomach, including the frequent kicks from the baby. I thought back to the day we’d met at college. We sat on the same row in English 101 and hit it off right away. All these years later and we were still friends. I hadn’t lost her after all. She gave a nod and we walked on.

“What do you think of Dukat’s wife?” I asked.

“Mikelya is a gorgon. I have to suffer her insults at occasional dinners. She remains on board the Klaxon most of the time. She says conditions here are far too primitive. There has been gossip about her relationships with Raynor and Mikor.”

“Then she is intimately involved with both of them?” I asked.

She shrugged. “Old lover. New lover. You know how it is.”

We headed toward the turbolift, a short walk from our position, since I’d earlier asked to go to the hydroponics chamber. Several soldiers from the Fifth came around the corner and slammed to a halt. The Cardassians stared hostilely as we walked by them. I felt nervous, unable to see the Promenade behind us or any Second Order guards. I moved closer to my tall, well-armed friend. Sawyer put her hand on my shoulder.

“Gul Raynor’s crew from the Klaxon,” she whispered. “They must have ditched their escort. Keep close to me. I need to get you out of here.”

Two soldiers fell in with the crewmembers. They followed us.

“Are you able to run?” Sawyer asked as she drew her short sword.

“I’ll fly if I have to,” I said.

“Take the turbolift. Go to Odo’s office and stay there. Tell Odo to bring as many security guards he can muster. I’ll give you time to escape, Helen. Now get moving.”

Sawyer turned around, while I quickened my pace. I reached the turbolift too late. Someone else summoned it on another level. I was going to have to wait for its return. I glanced over my shoulder. Ten men from the Klaxon crew stood in front of Sawyer. She held her sword at her side, tapping it against her leg like a baton.

“Glinn Gorsh, first officer of the Klaxon, your reputation precedes you,” Sawyer said in a loud voice. “You are a notorious brawler, boozier, and cheat at cards. You also have an inability to follow orders. This area is restricted. Return to the Promenade.”

Gorsh was a heavyset Cardassian, with a head as large as a bucket. He had more ridges and nodules on his face than I’d ever seen on a Cardassian; it was one serious skin condition. Sawyer was outnumbered, yet calmly drew her longsword and moved to block three men from reaching me.

“You must be the famous Gil Ren Yor. I heard about you,” Gorsh said with a chuckle. “Our commander says you’re the one with all the bright ideas. The pleasure slaves have vanished. Now who would have thought a female officer could lead the great Gul Dukat on a leash. Frankly, I prefer his mistress waiting for the turbolift. I’m afraid it won’t reach her in time. It’s been held up by one of my men.”

“If you lay a finger on Dukat’s mistress, I will be forced to maim or kill you.”

Glinn Gorsh let out a guffaw. “Did you hear that? Dukat’s cousin from the country is refusing to let us ride the little Bajoran slut.” He drew a long dagger. “You’re surrounded, Yor. I don’t think you can stop us, do you?”

I punched the button and kept tapping, hoping the turbolift might appear. I had no com-link, no other way to call for help short of screaming. It’s precisely what I did. I let out a scream that echoed down the corridor and kept screaming for help.

Gorsh signaled his soldiers to advance. As they converged on Sawyer from both directions, she engaged. Her swords sliced through the air. Two crewmembers dropped to the floor. While she cut and stabbed, bloodying the Klaxon crew, the turbolift arrived. Seven more Fifth Order crewmembers arrived, pushed me aside, and ran toward the battle. Each

drew a dagger to avoid the noise made by Cardassian laser pistols. Sawyer roared like a Viking shield maiden and spun in circles as she attacked the newcomers. She impaled two more men on her swords.

Stumbling into the turbolift, I hit every button in my panic to reach Odo's office. As the turbolift rose, I cringed at the sounds of swordplay and cries of pain. The noise faded when I reached the next level. I'd counted on her battle cries to echo in the Promenade. I placed my hands on my swollen belly and ran to Odo's office.

Several Second Order guards were inside and turned toward me.

"Glinn Gorsh and twenty Klaxon guards are fighting Ren Yor near Garak's shop," I shouted. "She needs help! Where is Constable Odo?"

Odo appeared beside me. "Stay here, Helen. We'll handle this."

I sat in a chair facing a wall of monitors. Unable to see Sawyer, I punched in a few numbers on a keyboard. A monitor flickered on and showed her fighting Raynor's crew. Odo and seven security guards ran out the door. I was left alone.

Grabbing a com-link on the counter, I contacted Damar on Ops. I heard his voice.

"Get to the Promenade, Glinn Damar! Corridor 2. Hurry. Raynor's crew attacked Ren Yor! She's in trouble!"

The com-link dropped from my hands at the same time Sawyer was disarmed and dragged to the ground. A scream caught in my throat. A wall of bodies blocked her from sight. I saw a dagger lift into the air and hit a button to turn on the audio.

"This bitch is mine," Gorsh snarled.

My implant started to throb. I felt a stabbing pain in the top of my spine. Warmth spread from my head throughout my body, filling me with rage. I felt what Sawyer felt and saw through her eyes. I lay on the ground, stripped of armor and clothes, with my arms and legs held by eager hands. A second past and a tingling sensation made the hairs on my arms stand on end. I lost the mental contact as Sawyer let out a fierce roar. She broke free from her captors, grabbed Gorsh's head, and snapped his neck. Thrusting his body aside, she jumped to her feet, armed with Gorsh's dagger. She moved faster than the Cardassians around her, swiping the dagger through the air on the move. Five Cardassians collapsed to the ground

holding their throats. Two more dropped with their hands held over their faces.

Garak had told me she'd learned a form Cardassian martial arts called *Telais Ta'Rom*. Her training made her far more deadly than I ever imagined. It was a bloodbath. She sliced apart the crewmen and managed to dodge laser blasts that slammed into the walls. Bile rose in my throat she stabbed the last man standing. Blood sprayed across her body, drenching her in red. Bodies lay on every side of Sawyer. The walls dripped with blood.

She stabbed her swords into a body and found her clothes. In seconds, she stood dressed. Odo and his security guards appeared. They ran toward her. She held up her hands and stepped away from her weapons.

"Yor, it's all right," I cried.

Sawyer must have heard me. She looked at a surveillance camera, right at me. I again felt mental contact. Her rage was too powerful. My stomach turned over and bile rose in my throat. I sagged in the chair.

"Release me. Sawyer, release me. I can't bare your rage."

"Then stay out of my head!"

Contact broke in an instant. My head pounded. I clasped my hands around my skull and screamed.

* * *

SAWYER

Odo surveyed the carnage. His officers moved among the bodies, looking for survivors, while he pulled my swords free. He kept them. I noticed my cuirass near Gorsh's dead body. At his nod, I was allowed to pick it up.

"Helen is in my office," Odo said. "She advised Glinn Gorsh attacked you without provocation. Are you injured, Gil Yor? Do you require medical attention?"

"No."

"You did this, Gil Yor? Alone?"

"Yes."

"I have never seen anything like this in my life. Say nothing else."

“What happened here?” a loud, gruff voice shouted. It was Damar. He ran toward us with Saja at his side. Both held pistols and came to a sudden halt. They stared at the bodies and looked at me. Only Saja looked proud. Damar wore a look of horror.

“Glinn Damar and Gil Saja,” Odo said. “I am advised the Klaxon crew attacked Gil Yor while in the company of Dukat’s mistress. Allow me to sort this matter out.” He pointed at me. “Yor needs medical attention. You’d be leave at once.”

Blood dripped into my left eye from a cut across my forehead. I wiped my fingers across my eye as a stabbing pain exploded at the top of my spine. Damar caught me in his arms. Another pair of hands helped lift me into Damar’s arms. Saja grabbed my swords and followed as Damar carried me to the turbolift.

“We can’t carry her through the station like this,” Saja said. “You have a med-kit in your office, Damar. Let’s clean her up there. Most of this isn’t her blood.”

“Agreed,” Damar growled.

I blacked out in route. When I came too again, I sat in Damar’s chair. He crouched in front of me, washing the last of the blood of my face. Saja collected a stack of bloody towels and a bowl of water. He placed them inside a replicator and closed the panel. Damar finished and took hold of my hands. Tears trickled from my eyes, but the pain in my skull had subsided. He lifted a finger and wiped them off.

“Thanks for coming for me,” I whispered.

“Eight of the Klaxon crew are dead, Yor. Seven more are seriously injured and five fortunate to be alive. Odo said you fought them alone.” Damar glanced at Saja. “We may have trained her too well.”

“It was self-defense,” Saja said. “Odo said as much.”

“Helen was there. She saw. She’s my witness,” I said. “In truth, I can’t really remember what happened. I just saw red and everything happened so fast.”

“Dukat should be here any moment,” Damar replied. He lifted my hands to his chin. “Before he arrives, swear to me it was in self- defense. Did you say something to anger Gorsh? Did you provoke his men in any way? It doesn’t matter what was recorded or what Helen says. I must hear it from your own lips. Say you were defending yourself and Dukat’s

mistress. Gul Raynor will insist on disciplinary measures against you. He will insist you are shot for killing fellow Cardassians."

"It happened on Dukat's station. It looks bad," Saja added. "Very bad."

"Raynor's crew meant to rape Gul Dukat's mistress. They were in a restricted area, without a security officer. I told them to return to the Promenade. More of the Klaxon crew arrived and the rest is a fog. I can't remember, Damar."

"This has gone on too long," he said, glancing at Saja. "I must insist Dr. Quirin remove the implant before we have a full scale rebellion with the Fifth Order."

Saja snorted. "It's just what that little vole Torell wants. He put Raynor's crew up to this. I know we can't prove it, Damar. Yor wouldn't attack anyone unless she was threatened. We both trained her. Do you think the implant increases her strength and speed?"

"I believe what I saw," Damar said.

The office door opened and Gul Dukat walked in followed by several soldiers. He noticed my armor on the floor, the straps cut, and my swords and beret placed on Damar's desk. Not a drop of blood remained on my gear, yet I felt my chest constrict. One word from Dukat and I'd be shot over the incident. Damar released my hands and stood. Saja came to attention. Both men remained beside the chair. My stalwart protectors, I thought.

"What happened, Glinn Damar?" Dukat asked in a smooth voice.

"The Klaxon crew attempted to defile Yor and your mistress."

"That's a strong accusation, Damar. Have you viewed the surveillance tapes?"

"Constable Odo states Glinn Gorsh and his men entered a restricted area where they encountered Gil Yor and Helen. More than a dozen Fifth Order soldiers stood against Yor. It can hardly be called anything but self-defense. Odo is questioning the survivors to hear their versions.

Dukat nodded. "Very well," he said. "Gul Raynor will join me to discuss this matter. He did sound please at the death of his first officer. He said Yor snapped his neck."

"All it takes is eight pounds of pressure," I muttered.

"The Klaxon crew gave Yor no other choice, sir," Saja said. "Had she not stood her ground and attempted to run, the outcome would be quite different. Both Yor and your

mistress would be in dead or in sickbay with serious injuries.”

“This I’m well aware of, Gil Saja,” Dukat replied. “I assure you both, no charges will be brought up against Gil Yor.” He sent the guards out the door. “With Torell back, sniffing around, I have no doubt he instigated this assault. Raynor is merely a puppet. I can see now Yor was right to send the pleasure slaves back home and the rest to an undisclosed location. These tactics are unfitting of Cardassians. Assaulting women on my station to incite a riot is unforgiveable. I want all of you in my office when Raynor arrives. He’s gone too far this time. I intend to arrest him and hold him on charges for instigating this attack.”

“Agent Torell is expecting you to do that,” I said. The men looked at me. “There is still the matter of the vote to consider. We cannot arrest Raynor at this time, sir. If I must be sacrificed to ensure the vote goes in our favor, then that’s what must be done.”

“For the greater glory of Cardassia,” Saja whispered. “Vole dung. Neither Dukat nor Damar would harm one hair on your head, Yor. Ten more men have signed up to join the Alpha Brigade. The incident today has instilled patriotism in those loyal to Cardassia.”

“Hold on,” Dukat said. “Yor, how do you know Torell was involved?”

“When Glinn Gorsh had me on the ground, I felt the implant activate. In those few seconds, I heard Torell’s voice in my head. I saw him and Legate Mikor at the laboratory where my father worked on Hdrok 4. They visited when I was a child and returned twenty years later to complete the experiment. It’s not Cardassian technology. It’s Romulan. I believe Torell and Mikor have a secret alliance with the Romulan Empire. This isn’t about a war with the Federation. These two men and Gul Raynor want civil war.”

The room remained quiet. Saja stood aside for Dukat. The Gul walked over and reached around my head to touch the implant. I convulsed. Damar held me to the chair while Dukat bent me forward, parted my hair, examining the lump more closely.

“This makes no sense,” Damar said. “A civil war would kill millions of Cardassians. What does Torell and the Fifth hope to gain? Do they want to place Legate Mikor on a throne, with Gul Raynor as his commander, and Torell in charge of the Obsidian Order?”

“Yes, I believe this is what they want,” Dukat stated. “Yor, you continue to mention Hdrok 4. I believe it may be necessary to send someone to the former colony. I want to know

what is there, Damar. I also want to know what Torell and Mikor promised the Romulans for their help. We need to send someone reliable to Hdrok 4 to look for clues."

Saja cleared his throat. "Pardon me," he said. "Are you saying Agent Torell placed this implant in Yor's head on Hdrok 4? To what purpose?"

"I believe Torell sent two assassins to my station. One is Ren Yor and the other is my mistress," Dukat said. He stared right at me. "The real Ren Yor died in a fire when she was eight years old. Torell and his conspirators murdered the Yor family and destroyed the colony to hide what they'd been doing. This is Sawyer Kincaid from Earth, one of two humans who arrived at Terok Nor a few ago. It was necessary to alter their appearance to hide them from Torell. He came to investigate the two humans, but I think he knows I tried to trick him. As of yet, he has not informed the OO. Obviously, I can have no more incidents like this happen on my station."

"You tricked me," Saja muttered. "I was sure she was your cousin."

"She is my cousin, Gil Saja," Dukat corrected. "Dr. Quirin has seen to every detail. What baffles me is how she remembers my cousin. It is possible Torell downloaded the information in her implant. The only other person who knew what I intended to do was Garak. As he supplied her cover story and stands the same risk as I do for falsifying records, I find this hard to believe. Nor can I call it a coincidence."

"It's disturbing, that's what it is," Saja said. "It sounds like reincarnation."

"Ridiculous." Dukat walked around the desk, his back to us. "I no longer believe in reincarnation than I do in Garak's theory the Prophets chose Yor and Helen for some higher purpose. What and where they came from is not my top priority. Finding proof Torell and his friends plot against are paramount if we are to prevent civil war."

"What are your orders, sir?" Damar asked.

"Send a ship to Hdrok 4. Gul Toran of the Govatt is from the Fourth Order, but he is discreet and he is loyal to the Union. Saja, you will accompany him to Hdrok 4 and report to me what you find. Damar, I want all transmissions coming to and from Terok Nor, on all frequencies, to be monitored and blocked, if necessary. I will advise Garak to monitor Mikor, Torell, Raynor, and my wife at all times. I hate to think my wife stands against me, however,

all signs point to this. If they are in bed together, I want to know when and where they will strike next. I also want to be in a position to launch my own counter move.”

“Gil Saja, go at once,” Damar said. “Select six of our best soldiers to accompany you. As you are headed into the DMZ, Gul Toran must proceed with caution. Romulans may be operating in the area. Report to me as soon as you arrive at Hdrok 4. I’ll advise Gul Toran of the particulars and ask him to beam down with you.”

Saja saluted and left the room. Dukat went to a replicator. He ordered a glass of kanar and handed it to me. Damar sat in a nearby chair and used his com-link to contact Gul Toran. I felt relieved to know the Fourth Order remained loyal to the Second Order. Sides would be soon chosen and the Orders split. It made Cardassia weak. I had dozens of questions to ask, but took the glass from Dukat and remained quiet.

“Drink this, cousin. Let us worry about the particulars.”

“The Fifth Order has been discontent with the Union for some time,” Damar said. Dukat ordered to more glasses of kanar and handed one to Damar. “They want expansion into solar systems not our own. This attempt to convince Central Command to wage war against Federation is a means to weaken the Second. You will be ordered to lead the invasion and will take the brunt of casualties. Mikor must be a fool if he thinks the Fifth will survive and pick up the pieces. If the Romulans support him, they will want payment and that means giving them part of Cardassia. Will you advice High Command or the Obsidian Order?”

“You think Torell acts alone and the OO is not aware of his activities,” Dukat said as he eased into a chair across from Damar’s desk. “It’s possible, not probable. I’m not saying the OO supports Torell. I will discuss this with Garak. For now, place Helen in a room near yours and my cousin. Post two trusted guards outside her door. If Torell has caused Yor to attack the Fifth twice, I fear Helen may be called into action.”

“From the start, you knew Torell was using us?” I asked.

Dukat laughed. “Ren Yor, there is very little I do not know about what goes on behind the scenes,” he said. “I did not get to where I am by sticking my head in the sand. When you feel fit enough, I want you to stand outside my office door. Dab a little war paint on your cheeks. Let’s see if the Fifth make another move. Damar, assist Odo in the security of this

station. I can't worry about every little thing, every minute of the day."

"Yes, sir." Damar set aside his drink and stood to leave.

"Stay here with Yor," Dukat said. "I'm sure Raynor is waiting in my office." He promptly left the office.

I finished the kanar. "If you both know Torell can put a button and make me twitch, then why do you let me know your plans? Shouldn't I be locked up? I don't understand why either of you trust me. I'm a lethal weapon."

"You pass every test presented to you," Damar said, setting aside his drink. He walked to my chair and pulled me to my feet. "This implant gives you superior powers and insight into the enemy. You have become the most valuable soldier in the Second Order."

"Does this mean you care about me?" I asked.

Damar pulled a strand of hair away from my eyes. "Dukat has no intention of letting harm come to you. He trusts you and he concerned for your welfare," he said. "I hope this brings you some comfort."

"That's not what I asked."

"Of course I care, but you are not mine," Damar said. His fingers pressed against my lips to silence me. "Ravon is waiting outside. He'll take you to your quarters. I must pay a visit to Odo and address the security on this station. You have no duties for the rest of the day. Go rest. I'll check on you later."

"No, I'm not going to hide in my quarters," I said. "My reputation depends upon making a public appearance as soon as possible, Damar. I cannot let the enemy think I am weak."

"Weak? No one would ever say that about you." Damar grabbed my beret and stuck it on my head. "You now command twenty-five soldiers in the Alpha Brigade." He handed me one sword at a time. "Go stand watch, Yor. Put the fear of death in the hearts of the Fifth."

"Yes, sir."

HELEN

Chapter Nineteen

Dukat held me close. We stood in the bedroom. He was dressed in his best uniform, while I had woken up from a nap. My hair was messy and my clothes wrinkled. The bed sheets remained twisted, evidence of a struggle against demons in my nightmares. I felt safe with his arms around me and wished he didn't have to leave.

"You smell good. Sadly, I can't stay for long," he said. "Perhaps you would like to join Yor and Garak at Quark's this evening."

"I'm allowed to go out after what happened today?"

"Of course, if you prefer to remain here, curled up in bed with a book, I have no objection. I intend to stay the night with you. I'll be very late. My wife will accompany me to the reception. The vote will held afterwards behind closed doors. As you know, my wife's father sits on the High Council. She will speak on his behalf and voice his desire to deal with Bajoran rebels. As expensive as it will me for the council to provide me with additional troops and armaments, it will not be half as costly as a war against the Federation."

He never offered details of his plans. It made me happy to know he cared enough to check on me to make sure I was all right. The added treat was to hear about the vote. It seemed a step in the right direction for our relationship to be kept involved in his personal affairs.

"I thought your wife hated you," I said.

"Mikelya has put aside her personal feelings. She knows how important this vote is to me, her father, and Cardassia. Despite appearances, my wife supports me, at least

politically. I have her word of honor she'll stand at my side tonight and do her best to convince the guls to vote with me. Mikor and Raynor will not be pleased. Nor will Torell when he learns his efforts to coax her into seeing things his way have failed. A month long pleasure cruise, wine, and candlelight have not swayed Mikayla into turning her back on family and home. She does what she needs to do. As long as she is persuasive and the results go as planned, I am grateful for her assistance."

Dukat kissed my forehead. I wanted more and lifted my face. It had been so long since he made love to me. A mistress in name only, I thought. I hoped he would return to my bed that night. It must have shown on my face, for he placed a gentle kiss on my lips.

"You are beautiful," he said. "While it is tempting to join you in bed, my dear, I am late and must go. Damar has doubled security. There is no reason to worry about your safety this evening. Change into something nice and enjoy yourself. I will see you later and tell you everything that happened."

"Really?"

"Why, Helen, I want you to be part of my life. Don't act so surprised," he said with a chuckle. "Oh, one more thing. You will be moved into new quarters. Pack everything you want to take with you. Komash will arrange for everything to be moved. You'll be next to Yor and Damar. It's far safer this way. I'm sure you agree."

Dukat left the room without waiting to hear my response.

Stunned by his announcement, I packed my things in a bag, feeling tossed out with the bath water. I put on one of my best gowns, pulled my hair into a bun, and tried not to cry as I put on makeup. Dukat wanted me to go out for the evening. He wanted me to look my best. I did want he wanted on remote control. By the time I finished, I heard a bleep at the door. It opened and Sawyer and Komash entered. I pointed at the bedroom and he headed into the room to collect my things.

"You'll be right next to me like in the dorms," Sawyer said.

"Where is your war paint?" I asked. "If I'm going back out, then you are going to look like the Devil incarnate. "

I brushed past Komash, his arms full with my luggage, found a jar of blue eye

makeup left in the bathroom and returned to Sawyer. She sat down in a chair while I painted three war stripes on her cheek and filled in the spoon her forehead. She looked perfectly savage. On our way to the door, she grabbed a cloak I'd left across a chair and placed it around my shoulders. It hid the fact I was pregnant.

"Much better," Sawyer said. "It's not like your condition is a secret. However, there's no reason to broadcast it to everyone, especially the gorgon. Dukat says she doesn't know about your pregnancy and it needs to stay that way, for now."

"Let's go to my new quarters and order pizza," I said. "Garak and Komash can play cards with us. I think we should stay inside tonight. I'm too nervous to be seen."

"Dukat wants me to take you to Quark's."

"Somehow that comment annoys the crap out of me. I don't want to go to Quark's bar, Sawyer. Dukat may order you about, but I'm not a soldier. We nearly were killed this morning."

"I have my orders and I'm off duty. We're going."

Komash walked out the main door with my luggage. Two guards waited outside. They followed us to the Promenade. Damar and Odo had tightened security. More Second Order soldiers had arrived on a number of ships and gathered at the bar. Under the golden lights, which added to the bar's atmosphere, I noticed a blood vessel throb in her forehead. It twitched whenever she noticed a Fifth Order Cardassian.

"The vote tonight doesn't finalize things," she whispered to me as we pushed our way through the crowd. "Central Command and the Detapa Council will cast their votes as well. Think of it like our House of Representatives and Congress. The total count will be added up and majority rules. It's a safeguard to keep the military from dominating the civilian sector."

"Makes sense," I said. "What do you think will happen?"

"Dukat always gets what he wants. His sights are on Bajor," Sawyer said.

Garak waved at us in our usual booth. He had already ordered drinks and appetizers. I sat across from Garak. Sawyer remained standing, her arms crossed, watching the crowd as if she anticipated trouble.

“Must she stand there like a statue? Doesn’t she want something to drink? A child’s beverage, at least,” Garak said.

“Milk? You think Yor wants milk?”

“I have no idea what she wants,” Garak said. “I hope you’re wearing the bracelet I gave you. Ah, I see that you are. What about the personalized transporter device I gave you? It allows you to beam in and out of your new quarters.”

I lifted my wrist. I wrote Dukat’s bel-rath and Garak’s bracelet designed to cut off the transmissions from the implant. I didn't know if it worked, but felt calmer with it on. I also wore a third bracelet with a large gem. This was my personal transporter device. I was afraid to use it, unsure I’d be sent to my new quarters or out into space.

“I’m not a complete idiot,” I said. “You know, I can plan ahead just like the living statue next to us. I have on both devices. Let’s hope they work.

“You’re calm. My bracelet is working,” Garak said miffed. “I don’t trust a Cardassian who won’t share a drink with me. I ordered you a glass of Romulan ale. Gil Yor? I am talking to you. Will you not join us?”

Sawyer ignored Garak. He gave up on trying convincing her to join us. I didn’t bother to try to change her mind. Sipping on hot tea, I gazed at the patrons. Most of the patrons gambled in the other room. It was quiet at the bar. I assumed due to the vote, the guls’ crews remained on board their ships. I turned to find Garak staring at me.

“What’s wrong now?” I asked.

“I happen to have many friends on this station, and sometimes they talk about things they should not. Niyal Gora has been seen in the Valley of Shadows. I wouldn’t mention it, but only a desperate person would go there. Gora eluded Dukat the last time he went to Bajor, as well you know.” This time Garak looked at Sawyer. “Do you want to give us the details of what Dukat is planning for Bajor, Gil Yor? Are you going to lead the Alpha Brigade into the Valley of Shadows?”

“Don’t talk about things you don’t know about, Garak,” Sawyer snapped. She looked toward the table, spotted the Romulan ale, and downed it in one gulp.

“Ah, Ren Yor speaks! Yor drinks. It’s a miracle.”

Garak fell silent after I kicked his leg under the table. He winced and reached down to rub the injury. Yor turned back to watch the gambling room. A Fifth Order officer was winning at a table. Petra sat on his lap to keep him company.

"I'm told the Alpha Brigade has been turned over to Glinn Damar," Garak whispered. "No one is going to give your friend to command and unleash her onto the Bajorans. It hasn't prevented me from making three hundred berets. I had to ask the Dabo girls to assist me since you prefer to hide from the Crocodile. I believe this is a name you call me behind my back. It's not very flattering, Helen."

"Actually, that's Yor's nickname for all Cardassians. It comes from an old Earth story about Peter Pan, a boy who never aged. The Crocodile ate Captain Hook's hand and..." I paused, "never mind. You're not interested in children's stories." I placed my hands over the growing child in my womb when I felt a hard kick. "I think I have a little croc of my own. I had to wear several layers to hide my condition."

"How are things going in that regard, my dear?" Garak asked. "I wondered because I had to let out the seams in quite a few of your dresses. You're growing quite large. I had no idea a woman could expand so quickly when pregnant."

"You're rather rude," I said.

A stir in the gambling room brought two Cardassians from the Fifth Order into the section of the bar. They harassed an elderly Bajoran who carried a bundle in his arms. The man was pushed to the floor and his bundles kicked under a table. I snapped my fingers. Sawyer glanced toward me.

"Just don't stand there. Go help that man," I begged.

"Very well. Garak, take care of Helen. I'll return in a moment."

Sawyer marched toward the two bullies. She pushed them aside and helped the Bajoran to his feet. The Bajoran grabbed his bundles and scurried off. My implant vibrated. Sawyer was angry. Her temper was on the rise. I realized she did not have a beret on her head and wondered where she had put it. I glanced at Garak in alarm. He lifted a pistol he'd hidden on his lap and returned it beneath the table.

"I'm prepared," he said. "Let's hope Yor is as well."

I caught my breath when Sawyer puffed out her chest. She placed her hands on her hips, within reach of her pistols, a longer ways from the hilts of her swords.

"I thought I recognized the stench of Klaxon trash the moment I arrived," she said loud enough for everyone to hear. "Go back to the game room and stay there."

"It's Joan of Arc," the tallest of the two men said. "We had a bet how long it would take for you to respond. You're so predictable. Kick a Bajoran and you act like it's a prelude to war. Why do you stick up for them? They're nothing but slaves." He handed a piece of latinum to his friend. "I lost the bet. I said it would take five seconds for you to respond."

"It took twenty, just like I thought," his friend said. "Funny. You fought twenty of our friends. I hear the count is now at forty. Care to add two more to the exaggerated list?"

Sawyer laughed. "Barkeep, how about to glasses of kanar for these fine brave men?" She lowered her hands and made no attempt to draw a weapon.

Both soldiers backed off, glaring at her. Quark sent Roxell over with a tray with three glasses of kanar. At her approach, the tall Cardassian knocked the tray out of her hands and grabbed hold of the terrified Dabo girl. Sawyer drew a pistol and aimed it at the tall Cardassian. With a gasp, I caught hold of Garak's arm.

"No more blood," I begged him.

"Calm down, my dear. She can handle this with ease," Garak said.

With a wave of her pistol, she convinced the Cardassian to release Roxell. He and his friend entered the gambling room. I heard raised voices, a shout, and cringed as three Dabo girls fled from the room. They joined Roxell and ran behind the bar. Two Cardassians started to brawl and knocked over a table. Sawyer put away her pistol and entered the adjoining room. While Sawyer assisted security officers, three Fifth Order Cardassians entered the bar from the Promenade entrance.

Gul Raynor, drunk and surly, led two of his officers to the bar. They ordered kanar and turned to study the patrons. Garak turned around and sunk in his seat as Raynor noticed us. The gul lifted his glass and approached our booth. I considered beaming into my room.

"How about another drink, fellas?" Quark called out. "It's on the house! In fact,

drinks for everyone!"

His announcement kept the two Klaxon officers at the bar. More Cardassians flowed in from the opposite room and I lost sight of Sawyer. Raynor pushed his way through the crowd, slurping directly from a bottle of kanar, and reached our booth.

"What a surprise to find Dukat's red haired mistress here, left unguarded!" Raynor slid into the booth beside me. "I have just left a very long and tedious meeting. It seems Madame Dukat is as worthy an opponent as her husband, as twice as deceptive, the little bitch. I had thought she would sway the vote in our favor. Those cowards voted to invade Bajor instead of the Federation."

"And this is my problem why?" I asked.

"I am the only gul to vote for war with the Federation," Raynor said, pausing to take another drink. "The only one. Ninety-nine percent voted exactly the same as Gul Dukat. Legate Mikor told every other Fifth Order gul to do the same, but not me. No, not me. Mikor left me hanging high and dry. Everyone knows Central Command and the Detapa Council will vote the same. I alone look like a fool. I suppose it was only a matter of time before my friends turned their backs on me. Why not? I have been blamed for Dukat's inability to find the Bajoran rebels. Fear of the Resistance grows stronger. One little planet's resistance swayed the vote. One planet." He took another drink.

"Again. Not my problem, Gul Raynor. Now if you don't mind, I was having a drink with my friend. I didn't invite you to join us. I believe you and your crew are to return to the Klaxon. I'm sure Gil Yor will not be pleased you are here."

Raynor laughed. "I am weary of females telling me what to do. I don't think I asked your opinion. I certainly didn't ask the tailor how he feels about my company. You know he spends most of his time sneaking about this station, scurrying after Torell. Two rats in a barrel. Agent Torell. What a coward he is." He drank more kanar. "The little rat could not vote. He could have persuaded at least the Fifth to vote with me. As you can see, my career is ruined and I am made to look the fool."

"You're doing a fine job of that on your own," I replied.

"I think you should leave," Garak said. "If you are blamed for Gora's slipperiness,

then you should go while you can, Raynor. Gil Yor is in the next room.”

Raynor wasn't listening. He tried to snap his fingers and failed. “Just like that, all my plans are over,” he said. “I had no idea the Dukat family had so many allies. It's Mikelya's father, you know. Magnus is formidable, still, at his age. Come to think of it. Mikor is the same age as her father. They all led to believe I had her favor. Mikelya, bitch she is, led me on. She is loyal to her husband, even though he flaunts you in her face.”

“I'm sorry,” I said. I didn't know what else to say to pathetic, broken gul.

His leer made his intentions quite clear. “I blame this all on you, Helen of Bajor. Such beauty wasted on a despot. Swollen like a Vesran slug, yet, you are not without charm,” he snarled. “If I was Prefect, I'd have you all in chains.”

“Go away,” Garak insisted. “You're drunk, Raynor.”

“So what! I was asked to leave after the vote was cast against me.” Raynor gulped the contents of the bottle and placed it on the table with a bang. “Nope! They didn't want me! Mikelya didn't want me. Legal Mikor will pick another gul to be in charge of the Fifth's fleet. Tagrid, Mukot, or Dorak all voted with Dukat. They betrayed me. All of them betrayed me.” He slid his hand across my shoulder. “All I want is a little comfort.”

I slapped his hand away. “Leave me alone.”

Garak attempted to remove the bottle. Raynor grabbed it from him, sloshing the sticky liquid onto the table. The shouts from the bar as patrons insisted on their free drink escalated into a near riot. Sawyer was never getting through the bodies to reach us. More soldiers filled the room, cheering as the results of the vote were announced, which made Raynor angrier by the second. His two officers worked their way to our booth.

“You'll accomplish nothing here by this emotional display, Gul Raynor,” Garak said with unbridled contempt. “Gil Yor is headed this way. Go while you still can.”

“Or at least move to another table, Gul Raynor. We don't want any trouble.”

Raynor stared at me. “Madame Dukat wanted my men to take a closer look at you,” he said. “Had I know Ren Yor was so formidable, I would not have sent them to their deaths so willingly. Let me see if it's true or not.”

I pushed his hands away as he fumbled with my cloak. Something dark and

dangerous lay thick in his eyes. Garak lifted his pistol, too late. The two officers grabbed his arms from behind. The pistol fell to the table. With all the shouting and celebration, no one realized Garak and I were under attack. I fought against Raynor as he rubbed his hands over my stomach. His breath was foul. He reached for my breasts. My screams were drowned among the excited voices.

“Don’t touch me!”

I slapped Raynor across the face. I struck hard and split his bottom lip.

“Bitch,” he hissed. He licked off the blood. “I heard Dukat has a taste for exotic women. You must satisfy him in bed or you wouldn’t have lasted this long. Have a drink.”

The gul lifted the bottle and poured the contents onto my breasts. Thick, warm, and sticky, it clung to my skin and clothes. He dabbed his fingers in the liquid between my breasts and smeared it across my face.

“That’s enough,” Garak shouted. He struggled to break free. The two officers released his arms and started to pound him in the face with their fists.

Three more of Raynor’s men arrived at our booth. They blocked the view from the gambling room as Raynor moved over me, pressing me into the corner of the booth. His lips slid across my mouth like a greasy rag. As Raynor’s eager hands pressed down on my swollen stomach, kneading the flesh, I fought like a wild cat. I clawed his face and bit his ear. His men interceded and grabbed my shoulders. Raynor ripped open the front of my gown and buried his face between my breasts.

A commotion near our table and raised voices lifted my head. Sawyer arrived with several soldiers from the Alpha Brigade who wore berets. The Klaxon crew moved away from our table and advanced on Sawyer’s men. Each Alpha drew a sidearm and fired on the Klaxon crew, dropping them to the floor, stunned. Garak collapsed on the table with a loud groan and my eyes felt compelled to lift to the balcony. Damar and Odo watched us. I wondered how long. Sawyer grabbed hold of Raynor’s hair, pulled his head back, and lifted the bottle of kanar over his head.

“And just when I was starting to like you.”

Sawyer poured the remaining contents over Raynor’s head. The gooey substance

slid over his ridges, into his eyes, and trickled over his armor. He rubbed his hands over his face as he scooted toward the edge of the booth. I pulled my cloak together and placed my hand on Garak's shoulder, trying to shake him awake.

"How dare you," Raynor bellowed.

"Crocodile," Sawyer hissed.

Raynor reached for Garak's pistol. A blade slammed onto the table, nearly cutting off the gul's fingers. He snatched his hand back and blinked at Yor. She pulled Raynor out of the booth. With a boot on his chest, she pushed him flat to the floor.

"Stay, boy," she ordered.

"Without a doubt," Raynor snarled, "you are the sword which Dukat's wields against his enemies. Move aside, Yor, and we will return to the Klaxon. I meant no offense to Gul Dukat or his mistress. I'm a little drunk, that's all."

"First, you will have a little chat with Constable Odo," Damar said as he pushed his way through the crowd. He stood beside Sawyer. "You can sleep it off in a cell. Dukat might only toss you our an airlock for touching his mistress. Well done, Yor."

Constable Odo appeared with his security guards. Raynor and his men were led away. The Alpha Brigade, though few in number, gathered at the bar. They were in far better humor than Garak or myself. Garak's left eye was swollen shut, his face covered in bruises, and a cut over his eye bled.

"This was a set up," I said. "You and Odo watched the whole time. You allowed that man to touch me, Glinn Damar. You wanted Raynor to assault me so you could arrest him. The sight of you makes me sick. Either get out of the way or I'll transport into my new slave quarters!" I lifted my wrist, about to tap the devise, but Damar grabbed my wrist. "Buddy, you're so close to dying."

"Garak knew the risk bringing you here," Damar said. "When he drew the pistol, it was the signal to make our move. Stop complaining. You survived the ordeal." He released my wrist. "As for you, tailor, you lack the skills to be a soldier. You let them easily overwhelm you and did little to resist."

"Go see the doctor," Sawyer said.

Sawyer helped Garak to his feet. Garak was in too much pain to comment. Ravon led Garak out of the bar. Sawyer assisted me and pulled me out of the booth. A young, handsome officer appeared behind Damar. He glanced at me and nervously smiled.

"I'll take Helen back to her room," Sawyer said. "It's not quite like you think, Helen. Not all of us were advised of the plan. I'm sorry your evening was ruined."

"Gil Toran of the Fourth Order will accompany Dukat's mistress to her quarters," Damar ordered, stepping aside for the young man. "Remain at her door until you are relieved."

"Yes, sir."

"You and Dukat used me as bait." I glared at Damar, wanting to take out my frustration on him. We had no real relationship. I'd pushed aside the fact we'd once slept together. A one-night-stand didn't make us friends.

"It was necessary to bring the Fifth into compliance. Gul Dukat will decide what to do with Raynor. Hopefully, he will not be seen or heard from again."

"And if not?"

"We will try again," Damar said. "Hold your head high, Helen. You are Dukat's mistress."

Damar stepped aside as I walked past. Sawyer whispered another apology, but I was too upset to talk to her. I felt small and unimportant. It something I needed to get used to, for I'd just witnessed firsthand Cardassian justice. Toran escorted me to my new quarters. I took a long hot bath, while Toran sat in the front room. I didn't want to be alone, although I wished it had been Saja. Everyone liked Gil Saja.

Young Toran had told me his father, Gul Toran of the Govatt, had taken Saja on a mission. He didn't give me the details, but I suspected it was part of Dukat's master plan. I let the water hit my face, trying to get Raynor's face out of my mind. The hot bath helped soothe my frayed nerves but not cool my anger.

Afterwards, I put on a nightgown and slipped into the bed, keeping the lights low. At some point, I dosed off. I awoke to hear someone inside my quarters. Dukat, still dressed in his formal uniform, sat on the edge of the bed. He noticed I was awake and

scouted closer to hold of my hand.

"Helen, I'm sorry you were in the middle of an unpleasant scene this evening. Forgive me for not coming to you sooner. It was not supposed to escalate to such an extent. I hope you can forgive me."

"Was Gul Raynor arrested?" I asked.

Dukat kissed my hand. "Legate Mikor asked for a favor," he said in a soft, apologetic voice. "As he helped sway the vote in my favor, I felt I had to release Raynor who has since returned to his ship. The majority of the fleet has already departed. I will be going to Bajor at the end of the week. I intend to take you with me."

"You do?"

"Of course, my dear. I'm making arrangements for us at Fort Varnok. My wife is coming with us. After she offered her support, I feel obliged to play host to her and Mikor a little while longer."

"Your wife sent Raynor's men to attack me," I said, flushed with anger. "I hardly want to come to Bajor if she's coming with you. She knows about the baby, Dukat. She deliberately asked Raynor's men to get rid of it. He said as much tonight. I'm beginning to feel like every Cardassian is my enemy. Garak knew what would happen and he didn't have the guts to tell me. Why did you make me go? Why are you so cruel?"

"Helen...." Dukat drew my name out. He pressed my hand to his cheek. "I apologize you were hurt. It's not what I intended to happen. Nor did I know my wife had anything to do with this. I will not let her harm you. You have my word."

"I don't want to be alone," I said throwing my arms around him. "You said you'd stay with me. You promised."

"Did I?" Dukat pressed his hand against my cheek. "Toran is right outside. He's with the Fourth, on loan from his father Gul Toran of the Govatt. You can trust him. I promise no one will harm you. Nor will you ever again be used as bait. Garak thought he could handle the situation. He was hurt far more than you realize."

"Where you going?"

"To make plans to capture Gora," he said. "If I can, I'll come back and join you in

bed before morning. If not, I'll make it up to you. I promise. Sleep well, dearest."

In the morning, I dressed and made my own breakfast. Dukat had not come back to check on me. The sense of loss and abandonment had me in tear. Once the tears started to fall, they wouldn't stop. I felt desperate. I wanted to go to the hydroponics chamber and spend the day among the flowers to try to forget recent events. When I opened the door, I found Toran staring at me with a look of shock on his face. I threw myself into his arms, sobbing.

"Stay calm," Toran said. "I will send for Dr. Quirin. Let me help you inside."

"It's the baby. It's coming. The baby is coming."

As Toran led me into my room, I reached around, removed his pistol from the back of his belt. I set it on stun and shot him. The young man collapsed to the floor with a surprised look on his face. I slid the pistol into the pocket of my cloak.

"I guess you don't know who you are dealing with, little boy."

Leaving Toran in my room, I entered the hallway and lifted the hood of my coat. I ran to a turbolift and existed on an upper floor, falling into step behind a Cardassian family. Father, mother, and child had the same idea. They entered the greenhouse. The child, a little girl, laughed in excitement and ran off. Her parents pursued her among the plants. I went in the opposite direction, sniffing beneath the hood, found a bench under a flowering tree. Needing to blow my nose, I started to use my sleeve when a kerchief was thrust into my face. Someone sat next to me.

"While I'm quite certain your sleeve is adequate, my dear, I should think a kerchief more appropriate. Please. Use mine," a rich, warm voice said. It reminded me of my late grandfather who I had loved deeply.

"Thank you," I said. I dabbed my tears and blew my nose.

Another huge sob escaped my lips. I started crying, hating myself for feeling so weak, and involuntarily leaned toward the stranger. The Cardassian wrapped his arm around my bod. For some reason, I laid my head upon a firm shoulder and he laughed, warm and rich.

"There, there. You remind me of my granddaughter Lila," he said. "I suppose you

might as well call me Grandpa Mir-Mir.”

“What a coincidence,” I said glancing at my companion. “I was just thinking about my grandfather.” When he smiled, I realized I was seated next to Legate Mikor. He kept his arm around me and I dabbed at my eyes, finding his company comforting, and I needed a friend. “I can’t help it. I miss my family. I miss my home.”

“Lila says I am a particularly good listener,” Mikor said. “Your people are one of the most resilient races in the galaxy. Hard working, loyal, tenacious, and under normal circumstances, quite gracious and kind. I feel I must apologize for your situation. Slavery has been abolished, but Dukat has made it clear you are his mistress.”

“You recognized me?” I asked.

“One as beautiful as you cannot go unnoticed on a small space station,” he said. “Not all Cardassians enjoy harming Bajorans. Over the years, I have done my fair share of unpleasant things. If I had my way about it, Helen, I’d have Cardassia withdraw from Bajor. It’s a beautiful planet. I suppose too beautiful to let slip through our fingers. I used to imagine retiring on Bajor and spending the rest of my life gardening. That’s what I like. Digging my hands in good, clean dirt. Planting seeds and watching them grow. I don’t know what you have heard about me, but I am botanist at heart, not a butcher.”

His arm remained around my shoulders, not threatening but tender. For a moment, I pretended I was Lila. He seemed content to do the same.

“I am quite partial to lilies,” he said. “They grow in the wild on Bajor. The interesting thing about Bajor is one side of the planet is in winter, while the other is in summer. It’s the way the planet rotates. I suppose you will go to Fort Varnok. It is fall but winter will soon come. When it snows in the southern provinces, the temperatures can drop significantly at night. It makes it hard for the lilies to survive.”

“You’re very nice,” I said with a hiccup.

“I’m a lonely old man who tires of politics and intrigue,” he said. “Sometimes it helps to speak your troubles to a stranger. Am I not doing the same with you? It’s quiet here. I feel we are tucked away, safe and snug, in this green paradise. Birds and snap-blossoms will cause no trouble. How long have you been pregnant? Hmm?”

Without hesitation, I started to ramble. Once I started to talk about my life on Terok Nor, I was unable to stop. An image of Agent Torell flashed in my mind, and as I'd told him everything, I did the same with Mikor. I blamed Dukat for being miserable, unable to refrain from doing so, and mentioned Ren Yor far too many times. He seemed sympathetic and patted my hand. When no more tears were left, I sat holding his hand, gazing at a flock of green birds with orange beaks, which had settled into a nearby tree. They were only holograms, I thought, yet beautiful.

"Here I am blubbering and you're an important man. No one care I'm the size of a whale and waddle about the station. I'm not at all beautiful."

"Waddle?" Mikor's laughter brought a smile to my face. "That's a fine way to describe how a pregnant woman moves, my dear. My daughter has given birth to five strong sons. Pregnant women are lovely, simply lovely. They glow. You have a glow, Helen. I am a father and grandfather. You are beautiful. Now, no more tears. Let's talk about something else and take our minds off our troubles, eh?"

"What troubles do you have?"

"Many. Shall we talk about the flora or the fauna? Pick."

All the time I talked, Mikor had kept his arm around me. He wore no armor and the most gorgeous red jacket with gold threads. I slid my hand across his arm. The smoothness of the material had me curious.

"This is remarkable," I said. "I love to sew my own clothes. It's my favorite thing to do. I can make all sorts of things. Garak doesn't have any material like this in his shop. Where does it come from? It's so soft. I'd love to make something with this same material for my baby. Maybe a blanket or nightshirt."

"Bajoran fabric usually is soft. There are many wonderful things about Bajor, we Cardassians simply cannot do without. It's why it's so difficult to end the occupation of Bajoran and allow them self-rule. I suppose had we done so years ago, we might have a strong ally and find ourselves dealing with rebels."

"I felt sorry for Raynor," I said. "It's strange to find myself saying that, especially to you. I've been told you are..."

"A monster?" Mikor suggested. "I too feel sorry for Raynor. Things are so complicated, Helen. I feel like I have stepped into the middle of quicksand and no matter where I place my foot, I continue to sink. I'm sure Raynor feels the same. I am not sure I should be talking with you, but I feel protective of you. I think you should tell what you have told me to Dukat, only don't let him know it was my idea."

"I suppose you are right. May I ask you something personal?"

Mikor laughed. "I already know what is on your mind," he said. "You are going to ask me about Mikelya Dukat and my relationship with her. Did I not mention quicksand?"

"There she is," Toran cried, interrupting my conversation with Mikor.

Both of us looked up, surprised as Dukat appeared with Ravon and five more soldiers. Dukat took one look at Mikor and pulled me to my feet. He led me alone down the path, making me walk fast to match his long strides. The baby sensed the tension and chose that moment to kick hard. I caught my breath. Dukat halted, took one look at my face, and put his arm around me. He placed his hands on my stomach and tapped, as if softly knocking on the door. The child stilled and I started to cry all over again.

"Helen, Helen," Dukat crooned as he gathered me in his arms. "You cannot run away from your problems. Coming here was a bad idea. Believe me when I say Mikor is not your friend."

"Are you going to get rid of me? Am I so much trouble?"

"I would never replace you. Nor do I mean to neglect you. I want to keep you safe. It's why I have decided not to take you Bajor. I cannot risk the rebels harming you or your child. Perhaps Damar could handle matters, while we wait here for your child to be born."

"You'd stay here with me?"

"I'll consider it," Dukat said. He kept his arm around me as he led me out of the greenhouse and into the corridor. We headed toward a turbolift. "You have been crying and I know it's my fault. Everything will be all right. You'll see."

My heart skipped a beat. "You really will stay at Terok Nor?"

"Of course." Dukat kissed my forehead. "But the next time you need to cry on a shoulder, make certain it is mine, Helen."

SAWYER

Chapter Twenty

At the end of my shift, I decided to visit Damar. I wanted to know the exact details for our departure for Bajor. I hit the button, waited a second, and the door slid open. Music played in the background. I heard laughter coming from his bedroom.

"That must be Petra. I'll get me more kanar too," Damar said. He stumbled into the front room. He wore a robe, opened, revealing his erection. I looked around him and spotted two naked Dabo girls on the bed. "Well, look who it is. The hero of the hour." He grabbed a bottle of kanar off the shelf, pulled off the lid, and took a drink. "Congratulations. You have one hundred volunteers for the Alpha Brigade. You've risen fast, Yor."

"You too," I said. "The Lamone twins and Petra? I'm surprised you have the stamina."

"What do you want? To gloat? Did you think I still care about you?" Damar sneered and waved the bottle. "Perhaps you want to toast to your success? You can always join me in the next room. Four girls. I can deal with those odds."

"I thought we might have dinner."

"What? You mean you wanted to be alone with me?" Damar stumbled toward me, tripping over his own feet. I caught hold of him to keep him from falling. He tried to kiss me. I turned my head. The smell of kanar on his breath was foul. He took another swig. "Well, if you are not going to join us in bed, then I see no reason for you to stay."

There was no sense being angry or jealous. Yet, I was disappointed.

"I thought you'd be pleased for me," I said. I pulled the beret off my head. "We're going to Bajor. We get to hunt down Niyal Gora and we don't have to deal with Agent Torell anymore. I thought it was cause to celebrate. I was wrong."

“Each of your achievements is a slap in the face. I have served Dukat for many years, yet it is clear he favors you above all others. He wanted you groomed to be a soldier. It is a goal achieved. Yor the Brave! Go find Dukat to celebrate. The two of you are mirror images of the other. Narcissistic, ambitious, and cruel. Now go before I say something rude.”

Damar pushed past me and returned to his bedroom. As soon as the door shut, I heard his laughter and the giggling of the twins. I left his quarter’s right as Petra arrived. She darted past me and went inside to join the party.

I decided to go to Damar’s office to find out if Saja had reached Hdrok 4. It was another thing I’d wanted to discuss with Damar. I went to Ops and used a monitor to locate the division of the Cardassian fleet. I wanted to know where each of the Orders had been sent and started with the Fifth Order. I ordered a cup of coffee from a replicator, while soldiers came and left their posts for the evening shift. I entered Damar’s office and sat at his desk. The moment I turned on the computer, I stared at the Cardassian emblem on the monitor.

The implant started to throb. I leaned toward the com-link attached to the monitor. Nothing was on my mind, yet the words tumbled out of my mouth and appeared on the screen.

“Objective Hdrok 4 - to implant a dozen field operatives with Romulan mind-sensors. The RMS’s control the operative’s senses and enhance physical responses. On command, an operative are designed to kill their intended target without question. The relayed impulse is immediate. Collecting subjects throughout the Alpha Quadrant, each operative has been released in pairs in six locations on Bajor and on Terok Nor. The two humans are responsible for effectively sabotage the station, while distracting Gul Dukat. The Circle, comprised of rebel Cardassians officers from the Fifth, as well as Bajoran leaders, intend to take control of Bajor. The Dominion will provide a fleet of Breen ships to pass through the wormhole. Joined by the Romulans, who have pledged help the Circle in exchange for half of the Demilitarized Zone, the combined fleets will seek out and destroy Gul Dukat and the Second Order.”

I fell silent and stared at the screen. Someone entered the office and cleared his throat. I turned to find Odo standing behind me.

“Yes?” I asked.

"Far be it for me to tell a Cardassian officer what to do," he said, "but it nearly dawn, Gil Yor. You have been up all night. Glinn Damar should arrive soon for his morning shift. I came to tell him the Govatt has reached Hdrok 4. Gul Toran and Gil Saja have located the remains of a colony. There is nothing left to salvage and they are returning to Terok Nor."

"I knew it was a waste of time," I said.

The Govatt was one of many Keldon class ships, a heavy cruiser. The Cardassians had no cloaking devices, and Romulans operating in the DMZ had surely noticed.

"Gul Dukat has gone through a great deal of effort to verify your story. You know as well the danger the Govatt is in. If it wasn't worth the time to send a ship into the DMZ, then why did you request it?"

"Something is wrong with my implant, Odo. It keeps providing information that I shouldn't be privy to." I turned to the monitor. I hit a button and downloaded the information onto a com-link. I handed it to Odo and the screen went blank. "Everything Dukat needs to know about Torell's plans is on this drive. Torell is part of an extremist organization called the Circle. Mikor, Raynor, and a number of high-ranking Bajorans, as well as Niyal Gora, are members. They have joined forces with the Dominion and Romulans and mean to attack and destroy the Second Order and take control of the Cardassian Union."

Odo stared at me. "How could you know this, Yor?"

"Torell put the implant in my head. I don't know if he means for me to know this information or my implant malfunctions and I'm accessing secret files," I said. "In any case, it's all there. The problem, Odo, is if I give this to Gul Dukat, he may not believe this comes from Torell. He may think I'm from Section 31."

"Then it is true. You are Sawyer from Earth. You are human."

"I have Ren Yor's memories and Dukat's DNA. I also have Torell's plans. Helen and I are operative agents working for the Circle. One push of a button and we may yet be ordered to assassinate Gul Dukat. I would rather die than do such a thing. The implants cannot be removed, Odo. I think you should arrest Helen and I and hold us in a cell."

Odo stared at me, long and hard. "If you have written a thorough report, I would be more than happy to read it over before you decide to give it to Gul Dukat. I too would like to

know what is going on, Yor," he said. "Have you ever heard of the True Way before?"

"No," I said.

"There is a religious sect on Bajor who believe in the Path of the Pah. The Pah means 'soul' in the Bajoran language. I only mention it because you brought up the wormhole and the Dominion. I come from the Gamma Quadrant, Yor. The Founders are my people and they lead the Dominion. For a long time, I have suspected the Founders mean to destroy the Prophets, lawful entities who reside in the wormhole and have means to control it. Of course, the Founders may not desire to harm the Prophets. I have no way to know whether they do or not. However, Fort Varnok is close to the Valley of Shadows. The Bajorans believe Pah-Wraiths are locked in a cave in that very valley. For some reason, it seems important."

"That's why the soldiers say the valley is cursed. That's where Niyal Gora has gone into hiding," I said. "Do you think Torell is interested in the Pah-Wraiths? Can Pah-Wraiths be controlled?"

"I do not know," Odo said.

"The Circle is dangerous, Odo. I need to find out who are members and I need your help. With this implant in my head, I'm not sure how long I'll be of use to Dukat."

"Torell had the opportunity last night to kill ever high-ranking officer in the Union. He did not do so. Are you sure about this, Yor?"

"I'm not sure of anything. I do know Mikor sided with Dukat and swayed the vote." I finished the last of my cold coffee. "There's something else, Odo. Helen and I come for Earth's past. We were born three hundred years ago and brought here by a powerful entity named Q. He claims he brought us here at the request of the Prophets. Q said all of us play a game. His game. I suppose the Prophets and Pah-Wraiths also play the game. Will you help me?"

"I will do my best, Gil Yor," Odo said.

"Thank you, Odo. I knew I could trust you."

"It seems I play Q's game as well, Yor. But I am on your side."

"I hope that makes us the good guys."

Unable to sleep, I went to the holodeck to work out my frustration. I chose the Battle of Varnog, fought on an obscure moon forty years earlier. I stood on the battlements of a

Cardassian fort Gul Raderus Yor. Eight hundred Cardassians stood at our backs. The fort reminded me of a castle. Beyond the wall, thousands of Klingons crept forward under the last rays of the setting sun. It was third day of battle. Despite heavy casualties among the Klingons, their reinforcements had arrived and soon would swarm over the fort, killing everyone inside, everyone but Gul Yor.

“They will attack one last time before nightfall,” Gul Yor said. I’d programmed the Gul to know who I was and he smiled at me. “I never thought my own daughter would fight at my side. I am pleased, Ren. It is an honor to die at your side.”

“We’re not going to die, Father. Not today.”

A savage roar filled the air as the Klingons surged forward. On ladders, they crawled over the wall like large furry spiders. The melee surged toward us. My father was injured within the first few minutes from a thrown Klingon spear. His guards dragged him off, leaving me in command of the Cardassians. We held our ground, but it was obvious we had lost the battle. Blood flowed from multiple cuts and jabs I’d suffered. I fought with two swords, resolved to defend the wall until I died.

At some point, Gul Yor’s shuttle lifted off the ground and flew into the air. I lowered my swords and took a mortal wound. The battle continued while I sat on the wall. The implant tingled and more information flowed into my head. I saw everything play out, just like a movie, while I sat and stared.

On Gul Yor’s return to Cardassia, he was stripped of his rank and banished to Hdrok 4 with his family. It didn’t matter Raderus was victor of a dozen great battles. He had lost the Battle of Varnog and left his men to die. History forgot about Raderus. Prisoners were sent to colonize the planet, only it was too hostile to grow crops, and their turned their attention to making weapons. Angry, bitter, and alone, Raderus Yor reached out to Gul Mikor, his friend from the academy. Mikor brought a young Torell to Hdrok 4. The Circle was formed, a conspiracy born. Raderus Yor reached out to the Romulan Empire, adding their weapons to his stockpile with the promise of the Circle would grant their secret allies with new territories. By the time Torell and Mikor returned to Hdrok 4, Raderus Yor had destroyed the Romulan cache of weapons. In retaliation, they killed Yor and everyone on Hdrok 4, forced to

start over and bide their time until the time was right.

“Program halt!”

Damar’s voice broke through the voices in my head. It ended the chaotic sounds of battle. Figures vanished from the battlements. My swords lay on the stones. He walked toward me, refreshed, showered, and in a clean uniform.

“What are you doing here, Yor? Are you aware Gul Dukat is looking for you?”

“Go away, Damar, before *I* say something rude.”

“I suppose I deserve that,” he said. “This is the Battle of Varnog. It cannot be won. Why do you relive Gul Yor’s hour of shame? What do you hope to prove?”

“I don’t know.”

“Had Gul Yor not deserted his post, he still would have suffered defeat,” Damar said. “This makes no sense. You are Sawyer Kincaid. Why do you bother with the pretense? You are not Ren Yor. You are not a Cardassian.”

“I am Sawyer Kincaid and Ren Yor. I remember each of their lives, Damar. You don’t understand because you lack imagination. Sawyer doesn’t need to justify anything or explain her actions. Ren Yor has a great deal to prove.”

“What do you mean?” Damar asked, searching my eyes.

“I don’t want to talk to you. Go away, slug.”

“Must I apologize for moving on with my life? You walked in on me last night,” he said. “I should not have to justify my actions. You remain involved with Dukat. As your commanding officer, I must inquire about your memories. I order you to explain yourself.”

With a sigh, I turned from him, starting at dawn on the horizon of the moon.

“It’s not what you think,” I said. “I know Gul Yor contacted Mikor, a gul then, not long after he was sent to Hdrok 4. Mikor and Torell paid him a visit. The trio formed the Circle, a secretive group, dedicated to bring about the end of the Union. They reached an agreement with the Romulans. Yor gathered weapons on Hdrok 4, but he had a change of heart. When they came to call again, he had destroyed the weapons. In retaliation, Torell and Mikor destroyed the colony and everyone in it. All these years later, the agreement reached with the Romulan Empire remains intact. The circle comes back around, only now it includes the

Dominion too, and so they make ready to strike against Dukat and the Second Order. Helen and I are Torell's agents. When Torell wants us to strike, he will make us do what he wants. It's the implants, they're Romulan."

Damar's eyes turned hard. "How do you know this?"

"Because I was there. I saw it while the battle played out. I have already made a report on Hdrok 4 and given it to Constable Odo to review. Saja found nothing because Torell only used the place to outfit his assassins with implants from the Romulans. We have all been released on Bajor on Terok Nor. I am the enemy agent you hoped to catch. So turn me in, Damar, strip me of my command, the Alpha Brigade, and arrest the guilty parties."

I slumped against the wall. Damar sat beside me.

"My implant is a direct feed into Torell's files, at least some of them. That's the only reason that explains why I know these things, Damar. I can't access this information. It comes to me in images and dreams," I said. "Odo is looking into what I put on my report, to see if there is any truth to it, and while I wait, I came here to fight a lost battle. I didn't know I'd learn more. In the end, Raderus Yor showed his loyalty to Cardassia. He make mistakes and his family paid the price."

"Do you hope to redeem Gul Yor's honor?"

"Yes and my own."

Damar reached for my hand. "I'm sorry," he said. I knew he wasn't talking about Gul Yor. He apologized with too much sincerity.

"You don't need to apologize. I should apologize to you. I know why you drink and seek comfort in the arms of other women. I've made mistakes too."

"We both have," he said.

The door opened. Damar stepped away from me.

"Well, well, well," Dukat said as he entered the holosuite. "I wondered where you went, Gil Yor. You have kept me waiting. Somehow I am not surprised you chose this particular battle. Your dedication to the Yor family and my own is admirable."

"The Govatt is returning to Terok Nor. Saja found nothing on Hdrok 4," Damar said.

"I have already spoken to Constable Odo." Dukat picked up one of my swords. "Odo

works for me, Yor. Not you. I have read your report. Garak and Odo will work together to confirm what I read. I have no intention of arresting you. No, you are to be congratulated. Without your insight, I wouldn't be ahead of the game."

"It's not a game," I said. "I don't think it ever was, Dukat."

Damar glared at Dukat. "What game are you talking about? In the last few months, you have seen fit to indulge your own desires and treat me as an expendable fixture. I think I deserve an explanation."

"Be at ease, my friend. This game we refer to is masterminded by powerful entity named Q. I'm sure I told you about him," Dukat said. "Q has brought us all together and expected us to play a game for domination and control of the Alpha Quadrant. Odo has gone so far as to suggest the game includes the Bajorans and their gods."

"It sounds fabricated. I don't believe it."

"Nevertheless, Damar, we must concentrate our efforts on finding the members of the Circle and quelling a rebellion with the Fifth Order and the Bajor Resistance. Whether they work together, I do not know. Not yet. I can't very well accuse Torell of wrongdoing until I have solid proof. Nor can Dr. Quirin remove the implants without harming Yor and Helen. Despite where Yor comes from and who she really is, as far as I'm concerned, she is a patriot and offers inspiration to the Second Order. I gave her a brigade as a reward."

"Is this part of Q's game?" Damar asked. "How do you know you make the right moves? How do you know he does not control the pair of you?"

Dukat laughed. "You play the game as well, Damar. We all do. I don't need to speak with Q. I believe Ren Yor. I think you do too. For now, she is providing to be a valuable game player and providing me with information I need to know to stay ahead of the game. If you can swallow your pride, Damar, you may find things turn around in your favor quite soon."

"The only thing winning belongs to you. One sided games are of no interest to me." Damar glanced at me and back to his commander. "Am I ungrateful? Am I bitter? You tell me. You seem to hold all the answers."

"Now, be reasonable, Damar."

Infuriated they spoke about me, as if I did not exist, I grabbed a sword and hurled it

into the courtyard of the fort. Of the hundreds of Cardassians and Klingons held in suspended animation, only Dukat and Damar turned to stared at me. "I'm not a ball to be bounced back and forth. Nor am I some fabricated creature that exists for your mutual pleasure. My heart is involved! Doesn't that matter?"

"I do not play games," Damar snarled.

"Well, don't look at me." With a flourish of his hands, Dukat pressed his fingers against his chest and took a step back. "It's hardly a fair game when one player continually bends the rules. I think we have both behaved admirably, given the circumstances and the face we Cardassian men do not like to share." He looked uncomfortable as Damar crossed his arms over his chest. "I presumed honesty is what you both wanted. Must I play moderator as well?"

"Maybe you crocodiles can work out a rotation schedule," I snarled.

Quivering with rage, I jumped off the battlements, a thirty-foot drop, and landed safely in the courtyard. I ran past figures frozen in mid-activity, not caring what either man thought about me or had to say after my departure.

The program turned partially on, the soldiers remained like statues, but I felt a breeze on my face and the warmth of the setting sun. I sought refuge on a bench and pouted over my ill fortune, until I heard someone approach. An axe landed on the ground in front of me. I lifted it onto my lap and turned to find Dukat holding one of my swords.

"Go away," I said.

"Don't act like the wounded victim, my dear," he said, placing his foot on the bench. The dropped to his side. "Isn't it better to have things out in the open? Damar thanks me from my candor and left. You can't blame me if he's found other means to entertain himself. I have given you everything you wanted."

"I've hurt him and I didn't mean to. He'll never forgive me."

"Let the victor decide the outcome. Stop sniveling and defend yourself, Ren Yor. I didn't imagine you to be a coward like Raderus Yor."

Dukat used the sword to knock the axe from my lap. I rolled off the bench, grabbed the axe and ran toward a garden. Dukat gave pursuit and caught up with me at a damaged

fountain, empty of water. We engaged in battle with a series of hard blows. I was forced to take backwards steps, tripped over a stone and landed hard. At the last second, I raised the axe to deflect a sword chop. I scrambled to my feet, pushed his blade aside and spotted one of mine lying not far from the fountain. I threw the axe at Dukat and ran for the sword. He came toward me, swinging the blade.

Sword in hand, I stabbed him in the thigh. The tip penetrated his pants and withdrew with blood on the tip. He let out a gasp of surprise.

“No safety protocols?” Dukat touched the wound. It wasn’t serious, a scratch only, but he had blood on his fingers.

“I fight on the holodeck with real swords. You have one and I have the other.”

“Yet, you also fight without safety protocols. If those soldiers start to move, we can both die in this holosuite.” Dukat lifted the sword. “It seems I have underestimated you. You share the same tenacious desire I do to win at all costs. Shall we continue?”

This time I attacked. The duel took us across a courtyard, through a gate into another garden, tangled and overgrown, left untended for years. I disengaged and ran along a path and reached a large stone structure with arched windows. I spotted Dukat stalking me through the trees and shrubs, shouting angrily.

“Stop running!”

I paused beside a wagon filled with bodies. Dukat saw me. He pulled back his sword arm and launched the weapon at me. I dove to the ground. The blade whistled past and embedded in the side of the wagon.

“Damar and I did nothing wrong. It was you who did the bouncing, Yor.” Dukat advanced toward me while I climbed to my feet. “I can take away what I have given you. Damar can give it back or decide not to. Lower your sword and we will talk.”

“Did he say something else? I have earned my rank. I uncovered Torell’s plot. I have done everything either of you asked of me.”

“Perhaps,” he said. “Perhaps you’ve done too much.”

I lowered my sword as Dukat approached. He backhanded me and sent me toppling over a marble bench. I hit the ground and lost hold of the sword.

“Sentiment will get you killed, Yor.” Dukat retrieved the blade and placed a boot on my chest. “If I was a Klingon, you would be dead. Allow me to demonstrate. They make an incision at the base of the throat and slice downward, opening the chest and abdomen, and proceed to disembowel their opponents.”

Slowly and with infinite care, he removed his foot and demonstrated with the sword. He cut through my armor and padded shirt with precision. The tip did not touch my skin and I felt the warm of the breeze against my scales.

“Somehow I doubt Klingons would enjoy this as much as you,” I said.

“Then it’s a good thing I’m not a Klingon.” Dukat tossed the sword and straddled my body. He opened my shirt and covered my breasts with his hands. My nipples stiffened beneath his palms. “Is your spat with Damar my fault? You wanted us both. You’ve had us both. That’s on you. I gave you my affection and my love. I gave you the name of Yor and a command of your own. What do you want?”

“I don’t want you. Not anymore.”

“Of course you do. You take what you want, when you want. As do I.”

Dukat leaned forward, his mouth slanting across mine and sucked me into a kiss that left me breathless. He caressed my breasts and neck ridges. He dipped his fingers into the spoon-shaped depression in the center of my chest, stroking lightly, and sending sparks of heat directly to my groin.

“Strip,” I ordered. “I want to see every inch of you.”

“An order I am most willing to obey.”

Laughing, Dukat undid his armor and tossed it aside. He removed every inch of clothing and stood above me, staring at me intently. As many times as we’d be together, I’d never seen him naked in the sunlight. I stood and removed my clothes. He made quiet as I examined the details of his body and ran my fingers along every ridge. His chest was broad and muscular, with a half dozen scars received in battle. I wanted to kiss every inch of him, for I sensed, no, I knew, this was our last time together.

“Well? Do I pass your scrutiny?”

“A Bajoran rebel no doubt gave you this one.”

I traced the longest scar marring his magnificent body. My hands followed the same path Dukat's had, over his chest, down his neck ridges, and ended between his legs. His cock emerged from the slit, long and thick. I wrapped my fingers around him.

"Easy, my little warrior. There's no need to rush."

Dukat kissed me again, passionately, his tongue curling around my own. Kissing him was one of my favorite things to do. I put everything into it, feeling his excitement growing. He grabbed my shoulders and pulled me to the ground. He rolled on top of me. My legs parted and he was inside, rocking against me. I closed my eyes. Dukat took his time to savor the moment. He gauged my response and quickened or slowed his thrusts.

"See me," he said.

I opened my eyes to find him staring at me.

"Is it any wonder that I love you?"

"What did you say?" I asked.

"I will not repeat it," Dukat replied. "The time has come for us to accept the reality of this situation. I cannot continue to hurt Sawyer Kincaid, and I have far too much respect for Ren Yor to shame her further. Your involvement with Damar and I has placed you in a position of living only a half-life, loved by each of us, yet belonging to neither. I face losing the loyalty of Damar and quite possibly the child Helen carries. I'm neglecting my duties as the enemy closes in around us. I do love you, but this affair has turned into an obsession. It can't continue."

"Don't say I love you only to tell me goodbye," I said, clinging to him.

Dukat took my face in his hand, kissing my lips, wet with tears. "I am being honest with you," he said. "It's what you wanted to hear and what I needed to tell you. We're far too much alike, you and I. It's time we considered the feelings of others. This is the last time I will come to you."

"I love you!"

"Please," he interrupted. "I am trying to do the honorable thing here, my dear. I am older than you and more experienced in these things. If we do not alter the course of our relationship, this passion may yet destroy us. You're in love with me, but you love me far too

much, and more than I can return in kind. I will not lose myself to this madness.”

The program shimmered and regained its bright details. Dukat didn’t notice, I did, and clung tighter, knowing he was right. My heart ached. Had I been able to put Dukat on hold and kept him lying beside me, forever, then that’s what I would have done.

“Victory or defeat lays before us. We must move more carefully than ever before. This has become a serious game, Ren. Do you understand what I’m saying?”

“I don’t understand why we can’t be together if we love each other.”

I again noticed the hologram shimmer, as if there was an electrical disturbance. Dukat kissed me and wiped away my tears. The shimmering continued. His own eyes were moist when he looked at me. A stray tear slid along his cheek, leaving a damp path. I captured it with a kiss. He sighed, as if it was a death sigh, and relaxed his arms.

“While rehearsing what I wanted to say, I didn’t realize the pain it would cause. I admit part of me doesn’t want to let you go,” he said. “I wonder what I have done to deserve your love. You are the lover I have always dreamed of. This fire will consume us if it is not controlled. I will not let love or passion rule me. A sacrifice must be made if I am to achieve my goals. I know it sounds ugly, placing ambition before you, and now I must consider Helen’s welfare. Damar loves you, even if he won’t admit it. Don’t you see? They offer us safe havens in a storm. We must count our blessings, Yor. I will return to Helen and you will make amends with Damar. I am confident this is the right move to make.”

I nodded. He thought I would say more and caught my chin in his hand.

“You may well be the love of my life,” Dukat said. “We were meant to be together, but not in this life.” His smile was sad. “I will regret this decision for the rest of my life, but it must be this way if we are to survive what is yet to come.”

I searched my feelings. I tried to think of something to say, only words failed me. He tapped me on the arm, stood, and pulled me to my feet. He kept hold of my hand.

“My father was ambitious and it led to his ruin,” Dukat said. “He was tried and executed for attempting to gain control of Central Command. Now Mikor and his allies attempt to do the same thing. This is why I must proceed with caution. I will not make the same mistakes.”

"Do you want my help? Am I any help at all?"

Dukat sighed. "Of course," he said. "What I need is your insight, loyalty, and sword. I need my warrior queen to fight for me against my enemies."

"And you shall have it," I replied.

The wind picked up, swirling around us as night fell.

"Come," he said. "I would lay with you one last time. I want to hold you as long as possible." It was the same thing Damar had said to me.

Our tall shadows walked beside us as we entered the castle. The shadows reflected on the stonewalls and moved ahead of us, vanishing when we entered the commander's room. A fire was lit in a stone fireplace. The windows overlooked the hills, cast in silver under the starlight. We lay on the bed on a large fur blanket and made love. I tried to memorize everything detail. In the afterglow, I studied his face as the fire crackled and sparked.

"Program on," Dukat said with a thin smile.

Outside the castle, I heard the sounds of battle. The noise moved into the corridor and reached the door. The clank of swords and the shouts of Klingons grew louder.

"We have as much time as the enemy will grant us," Dukat said. "No matter what happens in the future, I will never be far from you."

"Together, yet separate. To death do us part."

"Forgive me for not being able to give you more. I gave you all I could. Remember me kindly when we are apart and know I will do the same."

Shouts in the corridor, swordplay, along with the blasts of pistols, told us the Klingons were at the door. Dukat kissed me one last time. I dragged my lips away from his and gazed into his eyes.

"As far as I am concerned, Skrain Dukat, you are Cardassia."

The door burst open. Klingons poured into the room. Dukat halted the program at the moment and the program ended. We lay on the floor, naked, beside my swords. We drew away from each other and dressed in silence. When we left the holosuite, we went our separate ways.

I returned to my quarters, stripped, and entered the shower. I washed away his scent.

My mind was too numb to sort out my emotions. Helen had said things always had a way of working out for the best. I slid into a robe, ordered a glass of Romulan ale, and curled on the couch in the living room, listening to music Helen had downloaded from Earth. A chime at the door brought Damar into my room. He held up my beret. I'd forgotten it on the holodeck, he'd gone back for it, perhaps to look for me, and placed it on the table.

"I thought you might want this," he said.

"You were right, Damar. That particular battle cannot be won."

"The Klingons were meant to be victorious. They outnumbered the Cardassians."

Setting my glass aside, I stood and walked toward him. "That's not the battle I meant, Damar," I said. He met my eyes. I saw a glimmer of hope in their bright, blue depths. "I do not want to play games either. It's over. Do you understand? Do you want....?"

His lips jerked into a thin smile. "Tomorrow night, I will escort you to the dinner. Afterwards, we will share a drink at Quark's, if this would please you."

"A date? I'd like that, Damar."

"Until then, sleep well, Ren Yor. Dream of more pleasant things...like me."

Damar touched my cheek and left my quarters. I stared at the door and wondered how much of my life was illusion and how much of it was real. My heart ached, yet it was not broken. I had learned a great deal about myself in these many months, especially in the last few hours. I knew I wanted to be loved by a Cardassian, a man who brought out the best in me, and loved me without fear of the future. I believed I had chosen the right man.

Glinn Corat Damar.

PART TWO

THE FIFTH ORDER

HELEN

Chapter Twenty-One

A bouquet of fresh flowers from Bajor arrived in the morning, with a handwritten note from Dukat. *'Pack for Fort Varnok. We leave this day, my darling.'* The flowers and note ended my melancholy, for Dukat wanted me with him. Eager to leave Terok Nor, and set out on a new adventure, I neatly placed my wardrobe in a silver suitcase with rollers. I braided my hair, set out my traveling cloak, and sat on the couch. An hour of anticipation rolled into the afternoon. Garresh Komash and Gil Toran stood at my door.

"When are leaving? Is Dukat or Ren Yor coming for me?"

Each time I asked the same questions.

Each time the two Cardassians answered, "Soon."

Excitement turned to frustration as an hour ticked past and still no sign of Dukat. I sat at my terminal, contacted Ops, hoping to catch Sawyer on duty.

Glenn Damar's voice barked over the intercom. "We wait for Gul Vardon and Gul Toran to arrive. Our departure has been delayed. Tonight, Gul Dukat will announce the Alpha Brigade has formally been assigned to the Second Order under my command. Afterwards, there will be a reception. Do not contact me again."

Damar's rudeness set my nerves on edge. Angry, I ordered a glass of Bajoran spring wine, a light lunch, and sat on the couch. I did not wait long before a chime brought me to my feet. I ran to the door. It opened to Dukat dressed in a formal attire. With a squeal of delight, I threw myself in his arms. He laughed and backed me into the room, holding me close and paused to kiss me. Every nerve tingled as the kiss deepened. I melted against him as I imagined attending the ceremony and reception with him.

“Helen, you look lovely,” he said.

“Are you were to escort me to the reception?”

“Darling, I apologize for not contacting you sooner. As much as I would like for you to attend the dinner party, it is not possible. I see you are packed. Our escort to Bajor has just arrived. We will leave tomorrow. I have a little time. Let’s have a glass of wine and I will tell all about Bajor.”

The door remained open. Footsteps echoed down the corridor, a loud click that made us both turn around. The two guards blocked the entrance with their bodies. I spotted black hair piled in a beehive. At the angry screech of a woman, the guards were pushed aside as Mikelya Dukat entered the room. Dukat placed me behind him. His wife marched into my quarters, studying every details, for Dukat had spared no expense on the furnishings and décor. She was dressed in a gown covered in expensive jewels that made it clear she was attending the ceremony. The woman took one look at me and went into a tirade.

“Mikor was right! Your mistress does remain on this station!” Mikelya pointed her finger at me. “I remember you. I saw you when I first arrived. When Mikor said he’d met one of my husband’s mistresses in the greenhouse, I thought surely you had been sent to Bajor. Your cousin lied to me. Skrain. I trusted Ren Yor. I should have known you had no intention of taking me to Bajor City. I see her suitcase. Here I thought you and I were about to turn over a new leaf. How could you lie to me after all I have done for you?”

Dukat’s voice was low and dangerous. “Careful, my dear,” he said. “I have not told you how to live your life. I have tolerated Mikor because I had no other choice. You will not tell me what I can or cannot do. As you are returning to Cardassia, I see no reason Helen should remain here, for I intend to take up residence again in Bajor City.”

The woman pushed past Dukat and confronted me.

“You’re pregnant,” she snarled. “All other mistresses who bore you children were sent to Bajor. I suppose this one is no different. I will not allow her to live in my house in Bajor City. Return her to her parents and be done with it, Skrain.”

“How dare you?” I shouted.

Dukat stepped between us. "Why are you here, Mikelya?"

"I followed you. I had a feeling you had been hiding her from me," she said. "You place her next to your cousin and first officer. Tell me, husband. Does the whore only share your bed or does she also sleep with your officers? I only ask because Torell told me what happened when we first arrived. I'm surprised you would give him your favorite mistress. How can you be sure the child is yours and not his?"

"It is Dukat's child," I said, horrified he might believe her. I didn't care what the woman thought. She had two lovers. From what I knew about Cardassian marriages, most were arranged, and most married couples had lovers.

"No one is speaking to you," Mikelya replied. "Over the years, I have tolerated your mistresses because you had no favorites. While I know you have a dozen offspring, I chose to ignore their existence since they are hidden on Bajor. Torell claims this woman may be a human in disguise. If that is so, then I demand Dr. Quirin aborts the child."

"Get out," I snapped. "Get out of my quarters. I won't let anyone hurt my child. You already sent Gul Raynor and his men to do your dirty work. It is not my fault you are too old and ugly to have any more children."

"I am not old," Mikelya shrieked. "Are you going to stand there and allow this Bajoran whore to speak to me in this manner?"

Dukat put his hands on his hips and laughed. "Now, ladies. There is no reason to raise your voices. Nothing has changed these last few years, Mikelya. You live your life and I live mine. We agree not to interfere as long as it does not affect the lives of our children. Our four sons and daughter are far removed from all of this. In fact, your return home is long overdue. You will return to your quarters while I talk to Helen. I will come for you later and escort you to the reception. Tomorrow, you will leave with Gul Raynor and Legate Mikor and return to Cardassia. I'm afraid you will have to explain to our eldest son why I am unable to attend his graduation. Gora is within my grasp. I will not let him escape this time."

"You care more about that rebel leader than our family," she said, outraged. "If I see you on the Promenade, girl, you will be sorry you ever came here."

The woman turned on her heels and left the room. The door shut behind her. Dukat threw his hands in the air and let out an exasperated sigh.

“Must I constantly be harried at every turn by that woman? She flaunts her lovers in front of me and expects me to put you aside to appease her vanity. I have no intention of doing what she says. Mikelya will return home and will you will accompany me to Bajor, Helen. Now come here.”

With a shake of my head, I hurried into the kitchen. I glanced at his note left beside the flowers. My fingers trembled as I lifted the card off the counter and held it toward him.

“Was this even meant for me?” I asked, close to tears. “You used the term ‘my darling’ and I’ve never heard you say that to me. Was this meant for Sawyer? Are these flowers for me or her?” I threw the card aside and wiped away a tear.

“Don’t be ridiculous,” he said as he approached the counter. “The flowers are for you, Helen. It is my way of an apology for neglecting you these last few weeks. Gul Vardon and Gul Toran took longer than expected to arrive. I intend to iron out the details of our departure during the reception. Everything will be all right. You’ll see.”

“In the meantime, I suppose I’m confined to quarters.”

“Only for a few more days,” Dukat said as he walked toward me. He pulled me into his arms. “Darling, I know you are upset. You’re too beautiful to wear a frown. Shall I take you into the backroom and put a smile on your face?”

“You heard what she said,” I cried. “She wants to kill my baby. Raynor’s crew has already tried to harm me several times. Now she makes threats.”

“Stop worrying about my wife. I have already told you she will be not be coming with us. I assure you, Helen. We will start a new life together on Bajor. There is no one else in my life, only you. I thought this would please you.”

“What do you mean?”

Dukat quirked an eye ridge. “Precisely what I said. I am not involved with anyone else. Yor and Damar are together. Now you and I will be able to enjoy each other.”

“So, you admit you were sleeping with Sawyer? I knew it. Everyone in this station must be laughing behind my back. Did you end it or did she?”

“Does it matter?”

“I suppose not,” I said, fighting to control my anger and jealousy. “If it’s really over, then I want to know what your plans are for me. Am coming to Fort Varnok? How long will I remain your mistress before you send me away?”

“Fort Varnok is not a suitable place to raise a child,” Dukat said. He moved away from me and ordered a glass of kanar from the replicator. “We will be there long enough to capture Niyal Gora and then will move into my home in Bajor City. There, I intend for you to set up house and assume the duties of a Prefect’s mistress. You will want for nothing.”

“I’m your mistress by default. You’d rather be with Sawyer. Admit it!”

With a shake of his head, Dukat downed the contents of his glass. “I realize there is a great deal I have not confided in you, Helen,” he said. “I could say the same about you. For months I have asked you to trust me. Instead, you confide in Garak and Mikor. If Yor was not forthcoming with the details of Agent Torell’s plans, things would be considerable worse. Torell is a member a group of extremists called the Circle. Mikor and Raynor may be members of this group and it’s believed they work with the Bajoran Resistance. Garak and Odo are looking into the matter. Did you know about this?”

I lowered my gaze and nodded.

“You realize I must proceed with caution where you and Torell are concerned,” he said. “While you have the implant, you remain a threat to me and everyone on this station. If it could be removed, I would have Dr. Quirin do so. You must realize Torell is desperate to find a way to destroy my reputation. If cannot do this, then he will try to kill me. I have no choice but to keep my eye on you. It was careless of you to confide in Mikor.

“At the time, he was the only person who seemed to give a damn about, me,” I said. I stepped into his embrace. His lips glided across my neck. “The child is growing at a fast rate. I have visited Dr. Quirin, but the implant makes it impossible to scan the child. What is something is wrong with the child?”

“Darling, there is nothing wrong with the child,” Dukat said.

“Maybe I should just go home,” I said. “I have been nothing but trouble since I arrived. I don’t want Torell to use me to hurt you. Sawyer says if we go home that we

won't remember any of this. I still can't help wondering if I will be pregnant if we return. And if I stay and have the child, only to decide to leave later, you will be forced to abandon the child. If I stay to be with you and raise our child, I run the risk of exposure by Torell. Stop kissing me. I can't think when you kiss me. I must know the truth, Dukat. Do you care about me and this child? Do I really come first or am I a temporary distraction?"

Dukat gazed at me as his arms tight bands around my middle. A tear slid down my cheek, which he brushed away with a thumb. "Have I not kept you away from Torell? Have I not protected you instead of turning you in as a spy?" he asked. "Of course I care about you. Why else would I bother to protect you? As lovely as you are in and out of bed, it's more than a causal relationship. I gave you a bel-rath to prove my commitment to you, Helen. I have every intention of continuing to take care of you. Do you want my love? Are you content being my mistress?"

"God help me. I think I love you, but I'm not sure." I pressed my cheek against his chest. "How can I be sure how I feel with his implant? I want to believe you chose me over Sawyer. I'd like to know why you ended things with her. You know she's in love with you and would do anything for you. She risked her life to save yours. I don't know if I can love anyone that much to sacrifice my life to save them."

"You're wrong," he said. "You love your unborn child that much."

"Yes," I whispered.

His large hands framed my face as he kissed me. It had been a long time since he showed me any tenderness. I wrapped my arms around his lean waist.

"I want to love you, Helen. Can you love me?"

"All I know is when you're gone I miss you. Those few weeks we were together before you went to Bajor were the happiest I've ever been. I used to watch you in the morning hours while you slept. I pretended you were mind. I loved you then. I'm not sure how I feel now."

"Fair enough," he said.

"Is it?" I asked. "If you're only interested in me because of the child, then maybe it would be better if you left me here. Garak said I can work in his shop. I'm not interested in

honor and glory like Sawyer. I don't want to be a soldier and fight for Cardassia. Nor can I be sure I remain here because I want this or because she wants me to stay. Most of the time I'm scared you intend to ship me off to God knows where. Don't you get it? I'm not a Bajoran who is grateful for any little crumb thrown her way. I'm human."

"Only moments ago, I defended you in front of my wife," he said. "One word from her to her father and I could lose my rank, Bajor, and the Second Order. Yet, for some reason, I need you. If that does not mean anything, Helen, then I do not know what else I can say or do to make you happy. What I won't do is allow you to use this child as a means to control me. If you love me, you will be content with what I offer."

"I'm confused and scared. I don't know how I'm supposed to feel."

"Then let me show you, my dear," he replied.

In one swift motion, Dukat scooped me into his arms and carried me to the bedroom. I swooned under his passionate kisses, knowing he meant to make love me. Within seconds, he repositioned me on the bed and slid his hand beneath my skirt. He caressed me until I trembled, well aware he had control over my body, eager as I for closer intimacy. He stood, nimbly unfastened his pants and positioned me on all fours. His hands slid under my belly, pulling my backside tight against him. The moment he penetrated me, I let out a loud gasp, clasped at the bed quilt and moved to meet each thrust.

Gasps turned into tiny screams of pleasure and my legs started to quiver. I wanted him to hear me scream and made no attempt to be silent. I wanted Dukat to know how much I loved being with him, for it was the one time I didn't have to think, only respond. Wave after wave of intense pleasure swept over me. His steady thump came with groans, the sounds he made more animal than man, and I turned my head to try to see his face.

"You may not love me, but you love what I do to your body," Dukat groaned. He came with a shudder and remained inside me until he grew limp. All the while he caressed my stomach and breasts, while I slumped on the bed, spent, exhausted, and satisfied.

"Admit you want me, Helen. Tell me you love how I make you feel."

"I love you," I groaned, for in that moment, I did.

"Of course you do," Dukat said as he pulled out of me. "As much as I would like to

stay, I have a reception to attend. I will come to you later tonight.”

After Dukat departed, I lay on the bed, reliving the experience. With a smile on my face, I rose, smoothed out my dress and made the bed. I returned to the living room, unsure how to spend my evening, only to have another visitor. Garak arrived and ordered wine for us. We sat at a table near the window and gazed at the stars. After a moment, he leaned back, studying my face, and smiled.

“It seems you and Dukat have resolved your differences,” Garak said, glancing at the flowers. He also noticed my suitcase. “You still intend to go with him to Bajor?”

“Yes,” I said. “I’m so happy, Garak. I love him. I do.”

“I am not surprised to hear you admit this, though I am troubled at the timing.”

“But he ended things with Sawyer. He wants us to be together.”

Garak sipped his wine. “While your heads are in the clouds, our enemies move against us,” he replied. “According to Ren Yor, Torell has acquired twelve more assassins, outfitted with implants. I am doing my best to locate them, Helen. Let’s hope I can, for if Dukat decides you and your friend are no longer worth the trouble, you know what it means. I could not get too comfortable in his bed. He may yet hand you and Sawyer over to the OO. Don’t think he won’t to save his own hide.”

“That’s an ugly thing to say.”

“Dukat is a cautious man. When it comes to you, he does not act in a cautious manner. I had assumed wrong that he would pick Ren Yor over you. He has given her back to Damar and now turns his attention on Bajor. Have you ever considered why he wants this child, Helen? Why you and the baby are so important to him?”

“I thought perhaps he cared about me,” I said, not liking where the conversation was going. “Why must you ruin things, Garak?”

“Because I am worried.”

Garak laid out the conspiracy theory provided by Sawyer. He discussed the Fifth Order, the Circle, a religious sect called the True War, and the Prophets. I listened to everything he said and realized Torell needed to do something or he’d lose the momentum in the game.

“How does Sawyer know all this?” I asked. “She hasn’t told me a thing. She didn’t even tell me it was over between her and Dukat.”

“Images come to her. She sees things about the past. I admit I find it highly unusual. Torell wants her to know these things. It’s possible the implant provides this insight, yet, I seem far more than this to me. You have both resisted Torell, so far, but he is desperate. Now that Cardassia is focused on Bajor and not the Federation, Torell will attempt to manipulate the Fifth into doing his dirty work. He wants civil war, of this I’m certain, and it’s only a matter of time before the Fifth turns on the Second.”

“And now Mikelya knows I am pregnant. What is Torell using this, exposing us as humans, and trying to destroy Dukat before we leave?”

“If you are exposed, Dukat’s reputation will be destroyed. He will be forced to turn you both over to the OO. At that point, I cannot say what Torell will do. My sources confirm Torell is no longer working for the OO. He stopped sending reports weeks ago. I must now consider the Circle is real and use every contact to find their members.”

“Mikor seemed sympathetic. I think he wants to help us and to Dukat,” I said.

“If Mikor has changed his allegiance, Torell will never let the legate leave Terok Nor. Torell did arrange for Niyal Gora to destroy Outpost 9, you may expect another attack the moment you arrive at Fort Varnok. If you are going, I am going.”

“What do we do? What can I do to help?”

“Resist if and when Torell contacts you next.”

Garak stood and walked behind me. He placed his fingers on the implant. I felt it pulsate at his touch. “This is Romulan technology,” he said. “Dr. Quirin doesn’t know how to remove it. Nor do I. As soon as I can figure this out, it can be removed. Until then, I think it best you remain in your room. Do you remember anything else that could help us? Did Torell tell you anything about the True Way?”

“I don’t know,” I said. “He said he and his friends want to end the Occupation and help the Bajorans. He called this the True Way, but mention it was a religious sect, Garak. Nor did he mention the Circle.”

“Do you think Q can be contacted?”

"I tried before. He didn't answer me."

"Again, Sawyer is are only source," Garak said. "Odo believes her. I do as well."

"So do I," I said. I caught hold of Garak's hand. "If Torell is desperate and we don't do what he says, he might change his mind and try kill me and Sawyer. I'm scared, Garak. If we are leaving for Bajor in the next two days, then Torell must act now."

Garak gave a nod. "Do you think you can trust me, Helen? If I ask you to accompany me to Quark's tonight would you do so? I'm afraid it will put you in a great deal of danger."

"Why?"

"If Torell intends to activate your implant, it will be tonight. I want to be with you when it happens," Garak said. "I have a sedative. I will use it the moment you attempt to do anything. But I can catch him in the act, Dukat can arrest him."

"Then I'll come with you," I said.

SAWYER

Chapter Twenty-Two

Dinner was overseen by Quark, dressed in a white coat, and served by Dabo girls in long gown. The table was covered with a white cloth and set with elegant plates and cutlery from Dukat's private collection. I sat beside Damar and Glinn Gahn, Gul Raynor's new first officer. The second officer, Glinn Kieryl eyed Damar from where she sat directly across from him. She was an attractive young officer and sat next to Gul Raynor. Legate Mikor, Gul Toran, Gul Vardon, and five more guls from the Second Order were among the guests. Dukat sat on one end and his wife on the other side. Agent Torell sat at the corner, whispering in Madame Dukat's ear, while he monitored the conversation of the guls as they discussed the details of landings troops on Bajor.

I avoided eating the Cardassian dishes, finding the smell and color of the food unpleasant, especially a fish filet covered in yellow yamok sauce. I settled for a salad and fruit. While I paused to take a sip of wine, I felt a bar toes brushed over my knee. I glanced at Kieryl who stared at Damar. I caught her attention and mouthed the words, "Next knee over." The woman hid a snicker behind her napkin.

Damar's hand pressed over my thigh. "We have a date afterwards," he whispered. "Don't drink too much."

Dessert was served, a cake covered in thick white icing, which I found delicious. Coffee was served, though most of the officers continued to drink wine. Mikor was tipsy and continued to talk over everyone else. I noticed Mikelya looked embarrassed.

"It was kind of you to delay leaving for one evening, Dukat," Mikor said. "The food and company is admirable. The Fifth are anxious to join the Second on Bajor. Not only have I provided Gul Vardon and ten thousand soldiers, nearly every Order has provided a ship and troops for your use. You must be anxious to set up residence in Bajor City. Will you

send Glinn Damar in your place to Fort Varnok?"

"Oh, we're going to Fort Varnok," I said out of turn.

Dukat laughed. "You heard my cousin, Mikor. I intend to go to Fort Varnok for the simple reason that this is where we will find Niyal Gora. Gul Raynor, will you be joining us? I see you have chosen a new first officer. Nor have I met your second officer. She's very attractive."

"Glenn Gahn's father is a council member," Raynor said with pride. "Glenn Kieryl is my communication's officer. I hope you don't mind they joined us tonight." He turned to a handsome older man seated to his left. "Gul Toran, I'm sure you wanted your son to join us. I hear your son has joined the Second Order."

"My son is anxious to go to Bajor," Gul Toran said. "As a member of my crew, it's been difficult for him to shine. I believe he will advance far in the Second Order. I believe Gul Vardon is considering joining the Second Order as well."

Vardon was by far the best-looking Cardassian in the room. He had an air of sophistication that set him apart from even Dukat and Damar. If Cardassian had nobility, Vardon would have certainly been a duke. I was impressed the moment I laid eyes on him. Toran and the other guls were gruff, hard veterans who had many years of service in the Cardassian military. They were knowledgeable of war, but lacked refinement like Vardon. I imagined Helen would have liked Vardon had she been present for dinner.

"I heard you saved Gul Dukat's life," Kieryl said with a sly smile. "Now that the Alpha Brigade has been given to Glenn Damar to command, I suppose will have to follow orders instead of doing whatever want. Glenn Gorsh was a friend of mine."

"And mine," Gahn added.

"Now, now," Mikor said. "I promoted Yor myself because she is an exceptional officer. No doubt she will be promoted again by Gul Dukat. If anyone can catch the infamous rebel leader it is Gil Yor. I'd bet money on it."

"This remains to be seen," Torell said with a smile. "Stepping into the line of fire to protect Gul Dukat does not make Gil Yor exceptional smart. I'd say it was a foolish thing to do, for she was seriously injured in the process. I hear she suffers from amnesia. I'm sure

she did not forget killing Glinn Gorsh. Any other officer would have been arrested for such outlandish conduct, but not Ren Yor. No, Dukat and Mikor seem to favor her."

Mikelya dropped her fork and knife on the table. "Why was I not told Yor saved your life?" She glared across the table at Dukat. "I suppose I should be used to hearing from other people about important events in your life. Torell told me Yor's parents died in an accident twenty years ago, which is why you have taken her under your wing. It seems a bit late to try to groom her, Skrain"

"I thought Raderus' daughter died in the same accident," Raynor added.

"It is obvious my husband wishes to restore the sullied honor of the House of Yor. In my opinion, she has no business leading a brigade. Wisely, my husband gave command of the brigade to Glinn Damar command. Rest assured, Gul Raynor. Your former first officer will not be forgotten. My father was quite upset to hear about the incident."

"Now, Mikelya," Dukat and Mikor said at the same time.

I picked up my wine glass, amused how Madame Dukat loved drama. As I sipped on the Bajoran spring wine, I noticed everyone stared at me. Setting my glass down, I looked at Mikelya and smiled.

"Fortunately, you are related to me by marriage," I said. Legate Mikor chuckled, the only one to do so. "Do try the dessert. A few extra calories won't make a difference."

"I had no idea you were going to Bajor," Mikelya said. "From what I hear, husband, your cousin is little more than a savage. I see no reason to take her with you."

"My dear, I know what is best for the Second Order," Dukat said, trying to sound soothing. "Legate Mikor, will you be returning to Cardassia with my wife in the morning? I'm sure Gul Raynor will get you there without incident."

"Yes," Mikor said. "I have no desire to see Bajor again. I'm anxious to return to Cardassia. I will be attending your son's graduation on your behalf."

"Thank you," Dukat growled.

"I admit I am relieved we will not engage the Federation," Mikor continued. "Fighting a two front war is never wise. As I told Gul Raynor and Agent Torell, we could not let the Bajoran Resistance harass our forts, while we turned our attention on the

Federation. No, I am pleased with the outcome of the vote. Central Command and the Detapa Council are as well. Now that you are full reinstated as Prefect, Dukat, my work here is done. I have decided to retire. It is not a matter of selecting one of the Fifth Order guls to replace me. Gul Vardon and Gul Mukot are both fine officers. Mukot, of course, could not attend this reception, as he is dealing with Klingons who continue to trouble our borders."

"Let's talk about something else," Dukat said. He glanced at Vardon. "How was the journey here, Gul Vardon? Without incident?"

"Yes," Vardon said chuckling. "I left my wife on Cardassia Prime."

Everyone laughed and the tension in the room eased. Several guls, including Toran, excused themselves and left. Mikelya acted offended and stood to leave. I watched as Mikor and Raynor stood at the same time. Raynor returned to his seat, while Mikor approached Mikelya and pulled back her chair. The legate made excuses and led Dukat's wife from the room.

"When were you last on Cardassia?" Torell asked me. He pointed at his wine glass. A Dabo girl served him wine and returned to stand at the wall.

"I haven't been to Cardassia Prime in some time. I barely remember Batal City. I was a child when my father was sent to the colony on Hdrok 4."

"Yor," Damar grumbled. "Be silent."

Vardon leaned forward, interested. "The colony I understood was wiped out by a plague. Is that the accident Madame Dukat mentioned? It's not an accident when a plague kills the inhabitants of an entire colony. It's negligence. Yet, you survived. How is it we have not heard a thing about you until recently?"

"You will hear a great many things about her in the future," Dukat said.

"I suppose you attended the Cardassian Military Academy, Gil Yor?" Torell asked. "I wonder how it is possible you graduated with Glinn Damar's class when you are several years younger than him. Or am I wrong about these details?"

"If you already know, then I see no reason to explain," Dukat replied. "Damar, I believe you and Yor have duties to attend to. You are both dismissed."

I stood and lifted my wine glass. "I would like to offer a toast to Gul Dukat. It is an honor to serve him and Cardassia."

The remaining offers toasted Dukat, while Torell placed his glass on the table. Gahn and Kieryl chose that moment to leave. I watched them go and felt Damar tap my arm. As I pushed back my chair, I noticed Agent Torell staring at me.

"You are fortunate to have such a loyal officer, Dukat," the agent said. "Would that I could join you and watch to see what she does next. I am certain Niyal Gora will be shivering in his boots when he learns the Alpha Brigade is coming to Bajor."

"Now why would Gora do that, unless there is a spy here to inform him?" Dukat asked in a hostile tone. "I have been meaning to ask you about that very thing, Torell. Someone told Gora I was coming to Bajor the last time I was there." He glanced at me and Damar and motioned for us to leave.

"Come," Damar said.

The moment we entered the corridor, Damar caught hold of my hand and lead me around the corner. No one was in the hallway. He pulled me into his arms and kissed me. His lips veered off and traveled the length of my neck. As his hand slid over my breast, someone behind us cleared his throat. We broke apart.

"Am I interrupting?" Torell asked. His black eyes smoldered as he gazed at me.

Damar stepped in front of me. "Seeing that you've gone to the trouble of tracking us down, why don't you tell us what you want, Torell?"

"Such conduct in public is frowned upon, Glinn Damar and Gil Yor. I'm sure Gul Dukat would not approve."

"You interrupt at an inconvenient time, Torell. I look forward to your leaving Terok Nor," Damar said. He reached behind and caught hold of my hand. "When can we expect such a joyous occasion? Tomorrow?"

"Oh, I will leave when I see fit," Torell said. "If you don't mind, Glinn Damar, I want to have a word with Gil Yor. I saw Glinn Kieryl leave the party. She seemed quite taken with you, Damar. Perhaps you can still catch her."

"If you feel you must talk to Yor, then do so," Damar snarled. He stepped away

from me. "I'll see you on the Promenade."

I started to comment, not wanting to be left alone with Torell, but Damar vanished from sight. Torell's eyes conveyed his pleasure we were alone. I wasn't sure if Damar expected me to get information from Torell or wring his scrawny neck. The agent opened the door to an unused boardroom and motioned for me to enter. I proceeded him into the room and turned as the door closed to find him standing close behind me.

"I had no idea Damar would leave in such haste," he said. "Perhaps Damar is more interested in Kieryl than you realize. Are you jealous?"

"What do you want, Agent Torell?" I asked.

"I am looking for Sawyer Kincaid," he said. "I believe I have found her. When I first met you, you were not a Cardassian. Surely you don't think you really are Ren Yor. She died in on Hdrok 4 twenty odd years ago, yet you have somehow managed to learn information you should not know. How do you know about Hdrok 4? Has Garak been talking to you?"

"I am Ren Yor," I said. I was determined to deny my human heritage to the bitter end. "I have no idea what you're talking about, Agent Torell."

"Dukat gave you those ridges and scales. You are human. You can't seriously think I am fooled. I'm the one who killed Gul Yor and his family. I never thought you were Ren Yor, and if you, then you are in for another surprise. It is time you to do your job." Torell smiled wide and said, "*Pah-Wraith.*"

The implant twitched. The agent repeated the name of the dark gods of Bajor, this time with more urgency. I stared at him. He looked angry. He said it again. I knew this was the code word he believed would activate the Romulan implant, only nothing happened. I had not worn my beret and felt as confused as he did why it didn't work. Not wanting him to suspect the implant had malfunctioned, I blinked and stiffened my spine.

"Yes?" I asked.

"It is time you remembered your secret mission."

"And what is that?" I asked.

"As feared, you have gone rogue."

Torell reached into his robe, pulled out a small cylinder-shaped object, which he used to spray a chemical into my face. It burned my eyes. It filled my nostrils with an tart scent. A second later, I felt intoxicated and I slammed into the wall, sinking to my haunches.

“Ren Yor is not your name,” he hissed. “You are not Dukat’s cousin. You are nothing more than a woman plucked off Earth, chosen to assassinate Gul Dukat, and you will follow orders. You will kill Dukat tonight.”

“Kill,” I repeated.

Torell turned to leave. I stood and followed behind him. He spun around, surprised to find me looming behind him. I grabbed hold of his neck. His sudden cry of pain ignited my desire to kill. I wanted to kill Torell. As my hands tightened around his throat, he fell to his knees, gasping for air. His color turned like a chameleon from pale gray to a bright purple.

“I am loyal to Gul Dukat,” I snarled. “I serve the Second Order, not you. I know all about you, Agent Torell. I know about the Circle and the True Way. You will not leave Terok Nor alive. It is time for you to die, you snake.”

The door opened and Garak rushed into the room. He took one look at me and removed a hypo from his coat. In an instant, he slammed it into my neck. I felt my knees buckled and released Torell as I slumped against the wall. The agent collapsed to the floor, attempting to crawl away from me, gasping for air.

“Why did you stop me, Garak?” I asked, rubbing at my temples to clear the cobwebs. “He just ordered me to kill Dukat. There is your proof. He is a traitor!”

“You don’t want to kill Torell. Trust me,” Garak said. He knelt beside the agent. “Why don’t you leave, Gil Yor? I need to repair the damage you’ve done. You needn’t bother returning to the banquet. Damar is heading to the Promenade.”

“Tell the reptile on the floor I don’t work for him. Tell him to leave me and Helen alone. If he doesn’t get off this station, I will find him and kill him.”

“You will pay for this, human,” Torell said, in a hoarse voice.

“Leave while you still can, Yor.” Garak pointed toward the door. “I suggest you find

Gul Dukat and ask him to come here. Now, Yor. Hurry.”

Entering the hallway, I spotted Gul Dukat and Gul Raynor leaving the reception. I stumbled after the men. Whatever Torell had dosed with me effected my vision and slowed my response. I caught them on the turbolift, but it was already starting to rise.

“Dukat? Sir? I must talk to you.”

“I am busy,” Dukat said before the turbolift disappeared overhead.

With my hand on the wall, I headed toward the Promenade, intending to find Damar. My eyes burned. A throb in my head fed a desire for violence. I considered going to sickbay, but found myself at Quark’s bar. It was crowded with crewmen from the ships docked at the station. I made my way to the bar and onto a stool. Quark appeared behind the bar. He gave me a concerned look and offered me a clean towel. I wiped it across my eyes, removing the sting in my eyes, and lowered it, blinking back tears.

“There,” he said. “That’s much better. I don’t like to see women cry. I’m sure a glass of Romulan ale will help. Business is especially lucrative tonight. This one is the house.”

“Have you seen Damar?”

Quark shrugged. “Drink your ale and remain calm, Yor. I don’t want any trouble.”

I reached for a slender glass filed with blue ale set before me. I took a large sip. Quark walked around the bar and stood beside me. He looked concerned. He placed his hand against my neck and then touched my forehead. The towel was removed on the bar as he wiped the rest of the chemical off my face and neck. My mood altered and I felt a strange sense of arousal, unable to control it, and slid my fingers around his ear.

“Oh, this is quite unexpected,” he purred.

“Make it a double, Quark,” I said.

“I’ll make you a casserole if you do again,” Quark said. He returned behind the bar and refilled my glass. “If you are looking for Glinn Damar, he’s with a very attractive woman in a booth. She asked for a Cardassian blood berry in her drink. It’s considered an aphrodisiac.”

“I should break her face,” I said. I downed the second glass of ale.

“Should I send for Constable Odo?” Quark asked. “You don’t seem yourself.”

“Yes. Bring him here. I..I don’t feel right, Quark. Torell sprayed something in my face. He told me do something, but I don’t remember. I’m close to panic. I feel like doing such terrible things. Hurry.”

As Quark darted off to do my bidding, I noticed Helen seated at a table with Gil Toran and Garresh Komash. Garak entered the club and joined them. I heard laughter and turned to find Glinn Gahn seated on a stool. He motioned me over. I slid my arms around his neck, unable to control the impulse, and leaned toward him.

“Come with me, you big idiot. Tonight is your lucky night.”

“Whatever you want, Gil Yor,” Gahn said, amused.

Gahn led me through the crowd. We reached the booth where Damar and Kieryl sat cuddling on the same side. I pushed Gahn into the booth and sat beside him, glaring at Damar with murder on my mind.

“I hope you don’t mind. Yor insisted,” Gahn said.

I glared at Damar who sat with his arm around Kieryl. Both were drunk or at least they acted way. I put my arm around Gahn, aware his face had turned fuzzy, and the implant thumped as if someone banged on a drum inside my head. Damar and Kieryl pressed together and kissed. Gahn’s hand slid up my thigh. I ignored the man and kicked Damar in the leg. He released the woman and rubbed his kneecap.

“Why waste your time on Damar. You have my full attention.” Gahn grabbed my hand and placed it between his legs. “See what I mean?”

“I waited long enough for you,” Damar said, in a gruff voice. “I decided to join Kieryl for a drink. You have no cause to object.”

“I do object. This is supposed to be our night,” I said. I glanced at Glinn Kieryl and imagined a dozen ways to kill her. Gahn tried to kiss me. I pushed him away to avoid his bad breath.

“Go away, Yor. I have your first mate right where I want him.” Kieryl turned Damar’s face to hers and kissed him. “Anything else you need to see?”

“Nope.”

I slid out of the booth and walked off, without looking back. I heard Helen call my

name. I spotted Quark and Odo. I pushed through the crowd and arrived at a turbolift, which seemed to be malfunctioning. Kneeling, I spotted the legs of a dead Cardassian sticking out from beneath the turbolift. A pool of blood covered the floor. I grabbed a leg and tugged, causing further injury to the body as I yanked it free and stared at the lifeless face of Legate Mikor. He had been stabbed countless times in the chest, his ribs crushed by the turbolift. I sensed someone standing behind me and turned. A young Bajoran girl, her eyes wide, stared at me.

“Did you see who did this?” I asked.

The girl opened her mouth and screamed. I stared at her in shock, unable to say a word, listening to her awful high-pitched wails and wished the pounding in my head would stop. There was a lot of shouting and pushing before Odo stood beside me. The Alpha Brigade encircled me. Saja, Dunatar, Ikarus and Ravon gathered close to me and led me along the upper balcony toward security. People gathered on the Promenade to watch. The body of Legate Mikor, covered by a sheet, was carried on a stretcher by Odo’s security team. I lowered my head, the pain unbearable, and sagged against Saja. He lifted me into his arms, while the War Dogs cleared a path..

“Gil Yor has not been accused,” Odo said. “This is not an arrest! I repeat. It is not an arrest. She is merely to be questioned.” He moved closer to me. “You’ve placed yourself in a serious situation, Yor. Had you stopped to talk to me, I could have presented this.”

“I didn’t do it. You know I didn’t.”

“Yor didn’t do it,” Saja growled.

Odo put his hand on my arm. “Don’t say anything else. Cardassian law as you know does not give you the opportunity for a defense,” he said. “You are guilty once the handcuffs go on and could be executed. I will do what I can, Yor. Of course. Someone obviously wanted it to appear you killed Legate Mikor. You said there was a girl present? Do you know who it was? I saw no girl. Only you, Gil Yor.”

“She was there. I saw her. You must have heard her screaming.”

“A girl witnessed this?” Saja asked. “Dunatar, you and Ikarus go and find her. Ravon and I will stay with Yor.”

More War Dogs joined us and helped keep Fifth Order Cardassians from getting a hold of me. Soldiers angrily shook their fists and cursed as Saja carried me to security. I lifted my head as we entered. Odo had Saja carry me into a cell. I was placed on a cot and my friends backed out of the cell. Saja and Ravon led the War Dogs out of the cellblock, I presumed to guard the main doors to keep back the angry mob. I collapsed against the wall and hear a commotion outside the cell. Gul Dukat and a detachment of soldiers from the Second Order appeared. Dukat motioned his men to remain at the door. He joined Odo at in front of the force field that kept me locked inside the cell.

“Tell me you didn’t murder Legate Mikor,” Dukat said. “Tell me this can all be explained and you were there by happen chance, Yor. Tell me something so I can save you.”

I glanced at Odo. He shook his head at me. I said nothing in my defense.

“I’ll need a little more than that,” Dukat said, snappish. “Are you guilty of this crime, Yor? Tell me the truth! Did Mikor threaten me? Is this why you killed him?”

“Gul Dukat, your cousin was found at the scene of the crime,” Odo said. “I do not believe she had time to murder the legate. I am told a Bajoran girl witnessed the murder. Gil Saja sent men to look for her.”

“She didn’t kill the Legate? You’re sure?” Dukat asked.

“I was at the bar with Helen and Quark when Yor walked past us,” the constable explained. “It was only a few minutes before we heard the screams of the child. In that amount of time, it would have been impossible for Yor to stab the legate repeatedly and stuff his body into the turbolift. Nor was the murder weapon in sight.”

“Where is the body now?” Dukat asked.

“Dr. Quirin is performing an autopsy,” Odo said.

Dukat stared at me. “Who killed Mikor?”

I shook my head.

“Dukat, I will find out who killed the legate,” Odo said. “In the meantime, you and your men must quell the rioters. I don’t have enough men.”

A loud crash outside the security office. Raised voices from the alerted Alpha

Brigade let me know a riot had erupted in the Promenade. I couldn't see what was going on. Dukat removed a com-link and contacted Damar. I heard him ask Damar to bring the Alpha Brigade. Dukat turned back to me and placed the device in a pouch on his belt. He sent his squad to the front doors of the security office..

"There's something you should know, Gul Dukat," Odo said. "Quark told me Yor was sprayed in the eyes with an unknown chemical by Agent Torell. The pair must have met before she came to the bar. Quark used a towel to wipe it off and residue will remain on it. I'd like to have Dr. Quirin examine the towel and Yor as soon as possible."

"I cannot bring charges against Agent Torell, unless you can prove he killed Legate Mikor," Dukat said, pacing the floor. "Get Torell in here and question him. If you can't find me the real murderer, Yor will be blamed. She will be tried and executed, guilty or not. I must meet with the commanders and explain what happened. Sort this out, Constable Odo, or my own family will come under a great deal of scrutiny."

"I'll need the Alpha Brigade to help to round up suspects," Odo replied. "Glenn Damar was at Quark's. Perhaps he can be of help."

"I'll send for him, Constable. We don't have a lot of time," Dukat said, gazing out through the glass walls at the chaos waiting for him. "Bring in everyone with a motive. If Torell accuses Yor of murder, I won't be able to save her. I can't jeopardize my career or my family to protect her. Torell knows this, Odo. I am putting my trust in you."

"I will not let either of you down," Odo said.

I slumped onto the bench as Dukat left. My life was in the hands of Constable Odo. I prayed he was smart enough to find the real killer in time.

HELEN

Chapter Twenty-Three

“Did you hear? Glinn Yor has been arrested for the murder of Legate Mikor!”

Excited voices shouted the same thing. Garak helped me to my feet. Gil Toran and Komash returned to our boot as a riot broke out in the bar. The two soldiers led us out of Quark’s and escorted us to Garak’s shop. They remained outside the door, weapons drawn, while Garak led me into the backroom. I collapsed in a chair, my hands pressed on my stomach, able to feel the child kick my ribs, as restless as I felt.

“Sawyer didn’t kill Mikor,” I said. “You know she didn’t, Garak.”

“I’m not sure who is responsible, Helen.”

“Where were you at the time Mikor was murdered? You left me in the bar with Komash and Toran. You went somewhere. I want to know where.”

Garak gave me a sad little smile. “Torell was at the reception tonight,” he said. “When he didn’t appear at the bar, I grew worried. I went to look for Sawyer and found her in a small conference room strangling Agent Torell. I sent her to find Dukat and took Torell to his room. I convinced the agent it is in his best interest not to attempt to pin this on Yor. He seemed quite upset to learn I know about the Circle, especially when I lied and said Mikor provided the names of every member.”

“Did Mikor do that?” I asked, hoping he done so.

“Torell believes he did and I imagine that is why Mikor was killed. I had a feeling tonight Torell would make his move. Be glad you were in the company of your guards. You have an alibi, but poor Sawyer will be blamed. For now, she is safely locked away in detention. I will try to find out who did this.”

“Trust me. Sawyer is innocent, at least of Mikor’s murder.” I watched the scaled face

of my friend, hoping to see some kind of brilliant plan hatching in his devious skull. "Why didn't you let her kill Torell?"

"I want to know who are members of the Circle. I will get this information from Torell, for I intend to accuse him of killing Mikor. He will have to prove he is innocent and Dukat is anxious for any reason to have him arrested."

"Well?"

"Well, what?"

"What are we going to do to convince Odo my friend is innocent?"

Garak laughed. "You don't have much faith in either the constable or our justice system, do you? We don't prove she's innocent. We find the real killer."

I didn't respond and merely shot Garak a withering glare.

"Very well. Let me think." Garak started pacing around the shop, probably to work off the tension starting to permeate the room. "The murder weapon was a dagger. It was more than likely thrown out an airlock. If I could find it, fingerprints could be taken and I'm sure it would prove Yor is not the killer. Every member on board the Klaxon wants her dead. Mikor angered Raynor when he convinced the Fifth to vote with Dukat. Those same Fifth Order guls will now want to find Mikor's killer. I'm sure Raynor is worried he is a suspect."

"Will Dukat blame this on Raynor?"

"It's possible," Garak said. "Raynor had motive. However, Sawyer needs an alibi. I saw her leave the bar alone. Many people did. Yet, she had only a few minutes to kill Mikor, not enough time to get the job done. Odo would have found Sawyer beside Mikor's body. If there are no witnesses, Yor will be accused of murder and found guilty."

"Can you provide her an alibi? You were late to join me," I said. "You had time to kill Mikor, Garak. Dukat may point a finger at you, so I suggest you come up with a plan."

"This is all Damar's fault. He should not have been with Kieryl."

"I saw them," I said. "I don't know why Damar wanted to make her jealous, but I suppose he had his reasons. Bad reasons, but I think I understand why. Dukat told me that he ended things with Sawyer. I suppose Damar wanted to punish her."

"I have an idea," Garak said. He smiled as he started unfastening his tunic. "I will claim to have been with Sawyer. I'm sure Odo told Sawyer to remain silent. She's been known to sneak off into dark corners with Dukat. I do not say this to upset you, my dear. It is simply a fact. While I don't enjoy sticking my neck out for anyone, I will say Yor met with me after the reception and we spent an hour in my room. You will have to collaborate the story."

"You were gone a long time," I said. "But why would anyone believe you?"

"Because I'll have the marks to prove it." Garak finished removing his tunic and stood there, waiting patiently. "Now comes your part in this deception, my dear."

The light went off in my head. "You mean...?"

"Exactly. Your nails, my skin, evidence of a passionate encounter. We shared an embrace and then noticed the body. I left her with Mikor to find Constable Odo, and well...it is my word against anyone else who says otherwise. If I saw Mikor at the same time as Yor, then no one can blame her for his death. Hopefully, they won't blame us both."

Silently, I moved to him and rested my fingertips lightly on his neck ridges and ripped some serious skin. He let out a horrible scream. I kept scratching.

* * *

SAWYER

Cardassian law is nothing like Earth's and while Odo questioned everyone implicated in the murder of Mikor, I sat in my cell, watching and listening to everything on a monitor. Every time seemed ready to leave for Bajor, something else put the game on hold; now it was murder.

"Madame Dukat?" Odo asked, making a log of each interview. "For the record, tell me what happened after you left the banquet?"

"Mikor walked me to my quarters. He wanted to talk to Torell and left. While I'm remiss to admit anything might harm my husband's career, perhaps I should explain my relationship with Mikor. I was involved with Mikor before I married Skrain. I didn't see

Mikor for several years, but eventually we began seeing each other again. My husband has always known. When Mikor asked me to come to Terok Nor, I pretended to be interested in Gul Raynor to avoid gossip. Raynor is single. Mikor is married. I was never interested in Gul Raynor and he was angry when he learned I had used him. I know what you're thinking, Constable. I loved Mikor. Had he not been married, we would have wed all those years ago. If anyone had a reason to kill him, it was Gul Raynor. He wanted me. He wanted to command the Fifth Order."

"Are you certain of this?" Odo asked.

"You've pried into my private affairs. You then know why my husband has cause to hate Legate Mikor. My husband cares too much about his career to take matters into his own hands. However, Yor could have done it. She attacked Raynor's crew on more than one occasion and killed quite a few of them. She would do anything to protect Dukat."

"Why would you say this, Madame Dukat?" Odo asked.

"My husband can make women do anything he wants. Agent Torell suggested Yor was trying to advance quickly through the ranks. If my husband felt threatened by Mikor, it's possible Yor could have killed Mikor. However, I suspect it was Gul Raynor. If that is all, I would like to return to my room. The man I love is dead and I cannot mourn in public. I will mourn in private."

"I'm sorry," Odo said. "Thank you, Madame Dukat. You are dismissed."

Odo led in the next individual he wanted to question. Guards remained outside his office, in number, with Saja in command, while I sat in my cell, eagerly hoping the culprit would be found. Only Odo and whoever he questioned was in his office. The Second Order and Alpha Brigade were outside his office. However, Dukat was ensconced with the commander officers of the fleet in a large meeting room. They were not allowed to watch the interviews, I was, only I wasn't allowed to speak.

"Why am I here?" Gul Raynor sat in a chair across from Odo. "Am I under arrest? I didn't do it! I left the reception with Gul Dukat. We parted company and I went to find the rest of my crew. Mikor was a guest on board my ship for over a month. He was my friend."

"I am told Legate Mikor was romantically involved with Mikelya Dukat. You were interested in her. She said you were upset when you learned she used you as a cover story. Is this correct?"

"Yes, it is. It does not change the fact Legate Mikor was my commander. I was angry they lied to me, but I did not kill him. It was my hope he would select me to lead the Fifth. Why would I kill him when I was so close to obtaining command?"

"Mikor voted with Dukat and not with you. You caused a scene in Quark's and witnesses claim you spoke ill about your commander. Is this true?"

"Yes, but I was drunk. I was upset the Fifth Order did not back me," Raynor said. "We had planned this before we arrived at Terok Nor, but Mikor did what Mikelya wanted and convinced the other guls to vote with Dukat. We had planned to go to war with the Federation. I admit Mikor and Mikelya conspired against me, but that doesn't mean I would kill him. I love her even if she does not love me. I would not want to be the cause of her unhappiness, Constable Odo. I did not do it."

"Let's discuss Dukat's wife a bit more," Odo said. "Isn't it true your men twice attacked Yor, not once, but twice. Why did they do this? Be careful what you say, Gul Raynor. I happen to know the truth."

"Because she wanted to know if Dukat's mistress was pregnant."

"And?"

"If the Bajoran girl was pregnant, we were to cause an accident that would force her to lose the child," Raynor said. "Yor intervened and you know the rest. I came here tonight with my first and second officer. Glinn Gahn and Glinn Kieryl. Both respected Legate Mikor. Both will also testify Yor was angry Glinn Damar was with Glinn Kieryl. Ren Yor was furious when she left the bar. If anyone killed Mikor, it was lunatic Yor. Yor should be executed at once."

"Speculation," Odo said. "You were not present, so you do not know what happened or what your officers will testify to, not unless you briefed them earlier. I am told by Ren Yor that your officers meant to rape Dukat's mistress. She prevented it and your crew died in the fight. Do you really want to accuse Ren Yor of murder, Gul Raynor?"

"I told you what I know, Constable." Raynor stood. "Is that all?"

Odo walked toward him. "One more thing," he said. "I have the testimony of Glinn Gahn and Glinn Kieryl, taken by one of my security officers. They both said the screams were heard a few minutes after Gil Yor left Quarks. I also have the autopsy report. Legate Mikor was murdered an hour before Gil Yor was found beside his body. She did not have time to kill the legate, while Gul Dukat left your company an hour before the incident."

Raynor bristled. "I have nothing else to say on the matter."

"Would you know where Agent Torell was during this time period?"

"No, I have no idea."

"Very well. You may go."

A few minutes later, Agent Torell glided into Odo's office. He stared at the monitors, as if he knew I watched, and sat in the chair.

"Do you know why you are here, Agent Torell?" Odo asked. He remained on his feet, his arms crossed, staring down at the agent.

"Let's not mince words, Constable," Torell said. "We both know the killer is Gil Yor. I met with her after the reception, which Glinn Damar can attest to. He left me alone to talk to her and went to meet Glinn Kieryl on the Promenade. Gil Yor was angry he intended to meet another woman. When she became hostile, she laid hands on me, something Garak can attest to as well. Had Garak not stopped her, Gil Yor would have killed me. She left and went to Quark's where she quarreled with Glinn Damar and Glinn Kieryl. Both can testify she was incensed they were together. She left Quark's and was found by you beside the body of Legate Mikor."

"But you did not see her actually kill the legate?"

"I don't have to," Torell said. "I happen to know Ren Yor is human, Constable Odo. Run a diagnostic check on her DNA and you'll see she is only Cardassian skin deep. The OO believes she and Dukat's mistress are Federation agents. I was sent to Terok Nor to confirm this and intend to make a full report to my superiors."

"Gil Yor states you sprayed her in the face with a chemical that caused her to be confused," Odo said. "What did you use?"

"A mild sedative to attempt to calm her. She intended to kill me. I had no other choice but protect myself. It was self-defense. If you need a confession from Gil Yor, allow me to question her. I am sure I will get the answers you want."

"That will not be necessary," Odo said.

"What else do you need to convince you Gil Yor is a spy? She killed a number of Gul Raynor's crewmembers, including his first officer Glinn Gorsh. Either you find Gil Yor guilty of murder of Legate Mikor or I will report you, Gul Dukat and Glinn Damar have hindered my efforts to uncover the identities of these two women."

"Dr. Quirin has already come and gone. I have his report right here. Gil Yor is a Cardassian. Helen is Bajoran. Are you accusing the doctor of lying?"

"I insist I be allowed to examine the two women."

"And if Garak testifies he was not with you and Gil Yor?"

Torell sighed. "Now why would Garak lie? He is with the Obsidian Order."

"Without his collaboration, Agent Toller, I'm afraid you remain a top suspect," Odo said. "You have been accused by a number of witnesses for placing implants in both Gil Yor and Helen. These implants are Romulan in design. Garak and I are investigating this matter. Have you anything to say on this matter?"

"A changeling is the last person the Obsidian Order would believe. If you try to pin this on me, I'll have you arrested for conspiracy against the Cardassian Union. I happen to know Yor gave you a padd that possibly contains classified information. Never mind how I know. I want to see it. I believe it will prove she is works for Section 31."

Odo reached into his desk and handed Torell a padd. The agent seized it, turned it on, and smiled to hear my voice.

"Day 1: I'm supposed to keep a log. I really have nothing to say. Day 2: I trained on the holodeck. I ate something at dinner, which didn't agree with me. Day 3: Same old routine." Torell sped through the recordings and paused. *"Day 22: I'm starting to develop muscles in places I didn't know I had muscles. Damn. I look good."* He threw the padd across the room. It struck the wall and broke into pieces.

"Not what you wanted to hear, Agent Torell?" Odo asked.

"This is not at all what I expected. What do I care about this nonsense?"

"Why, indeed." Odo gazed at the agent. "I am told you by a witness that you were angry Legate Mikor changed his vote and convinced others in the Fifth Order to do the same. Further, you belong to a secret organization called the Circle and work with members of the True Way, a religious sect that is closely connected to the Bajoran Resistance. It is believed the Circle intends to eliminate Gul Dukat and incite a civil war."

"All speculation," Torell snapped. "I am not on trial here. If no one saw me kill Legate Mikor, then we have nothing further to talk about. I intend to send my report to the OO. They will decide what should be done about Gil Yor. However, if your final report states Gil Yor is the murderer, I will not accuse Gul Dukat of attempting to hide two Federation agents on this station. He will remove his mistress and send her to Bajor. I care not where she goes, as long as it is not a military installation. If he fails to agree to my terms, I will send my report to the OO this day and asked for his arrest for conspiring with the Federation."

Torell stood and walked to the door.

"There is a witness to the murder," Odo stated.

"A witness? I would like to know what this witness saw. Who is it?"

"I'd rather not say at this time."

"You have one hour, Constable Odo. See that Gul Dukat hears my terms. I will expect your answer or I will send that report!" Torell stormed out of security.

Odo used his com-link to contact Gul Dukat and advised him of the situation. The next individual came in. Garak slid into the seat in front of Odo's desk.

"I'm sure I can clear this matter up as to Gil Yor's involvement in the murder of Legate Mikor, Constable Odo," Garak said, rubbing his chest. "You already know Gul Raynor created an incident the other evening at Quark's bar. He told Helen and I he was angry with Legate Mikor for not voting with him. Gul Raynor had motive and opportunity. He is your killer."

"Are you injured, Garak? You keep placing your hand on your chest."

"I assure you. It has nothing to do with Legate Mikor."

“Then explain. You seem to be in pain,” Odo said.

“After the reception, I briefly spoke with Gil Yor and Agent Torell. They had quarreled after he sprayed her in the face with a mild sedative. Torell told Yor that Damar left the reception to find Kieryl. Yor was angry and he sedated her. I insisted Yor accompany me to my quarters. She remained with me for at least an hour. I have the marks to prove it.”

“What do you mean?” Odo asked.

“Precisely what you think. I was with Ren Yor after the reception and later joined you and Helen at the bar. Yor arrived at the bar minutes after I did.” Garak sighed. “I really don’t want Dukat or Damar to know I slept with Yor. I guess it can’t be helped now.”

“Slept? Do you mean you had sex with Gil Yor?” Odo was shocked.

“Is this so surprising to hear? Everyone knows Your has a healthy sexual appetite. The sedative enhanced her desire to copulate.” Garak smiled wide. “Helen, of course, noticed my exhaustion. You may ask her if you don’t believe me.”

Odo stood. “You would swear to this, Garak?” He glanced toward the camera. “Yor failed to mention this to me. I wonder why? She’s always been honest with me.”

“If you had been the lover of Gul Dukat and Glinn Damar and then slept with a mere tailor, I doubt you would tell anyone either, Constable Odo.”

“No, of course I wouldn’t. Nor would I have slept with either man,” Odo said. “Is there a reason you keep touching your chest? Did Yor harm you?”

Garak unfastened the front of his jacket. He opened it wide. Odo gasped. Garak turned. I stared at deep scratches across his chest.

“Yor did this to you?” Odo asked in disbelief.

“Even with a sedative, she was able to overpower me and took what she wanted,” he said. “Frankly, I haven’t enjoyed myself this much in years. It’s no wonder Dukat and Damar are both required to satisfy her needs.”

“There’s no need to paint me a picture, Garak. Let’s discuss the sedative. Dr. Quirin found Agent Torell used pheromones and not a sedative. This particular chemical is used to arouse the temper among gladiators or gamesters who fight to the death in illegal

fighting clubs. Even a small dose can make a fighter stay on their feet long after they've been mortally wounded. On a woman, it can create a strong sexual response."

"Exactly," Garak said.

Odo clasped his hands behind his back and paced in front of Garak as he closed his tunic. "Did you know a Bajoran girl witnessed the murder? Yor identified her earlier. Gil Torgan and Garresh Dunatar found the child hiding in a storage room. Unfortunately, the child was so traumatized she remains in a coma. Dr. Quirin will notify me the moment she regains consciousness."

"Be that as it may, Gil Yor was in my bed when the murder occurred. Being in the wrong place at the wrong time does not make her a killer."

"Agent Torell has threatened to send a report to the Obsidian Order which stated Gil Yor and Helen are humans and Federation spies. He intends to accuse us, Gul Dukat, and Glinn Damar of conspiring to hide this information. He has given Gul Dukat one hour to agree to blame Gil Yor for the murder of the legate and remove Helen from the station."

"Perhaps I should check on Agent Torell," Garak said.

"Perhaps you should," Odo replied.

Helen arrived within a few minutes. Komash and Toran accompanied her. She wore a hooded cloak and took a seat, while the Constable paced the floor.

"I can confirm Garak and Yor were together last night. He told me what happened and arrived about the same time she did at Quark's."

"Very well," Odo said. "What can you tell me about the implants Agent Torell placed in your head, as well as Ren Yor's?"

"Agent Torell told me he did this to make Yor and I kill Gul Dukat on command."

Odo stared at her. "Torell actually told you this?"

"Yes," Helen said. "I have told Garak and Gul Dukat. I also confided in Legate Mikor. I suspect Agent Torell knew I spoke with the legate. Everyone knows Agent Torell and Gul Raynor were angry Legate Mikor changed his vote against going to war with the Federation. Agent Torell also told me he is working with the Bajoran Resistance. He is the one who put the implants in our head and intends to use us to kill Gul Dukat."

“And Dukat knows about these implants? You have both confided in him?”

“Yes,” she said. “Gul Dukat wanted proof Agent Torell is conspiring against the Cardassian Union. Gil Yor and I are not with Section 31. We never were. We were abducted by Agent Torell and outfitted with these implants. Neither of us have attempted to harm Gul Dukat and I believe the implants may have malfunctioned.”

“Do you believe Agent Torell ordered Gil Yor to murder Legate Mikor?”

“No, I don’t. I don’t believe she did it. I believe he killed the legate in order to cover this tracks. Garak says Torell is desperate and will do anything to cover his tracks.”

“Very well,” Odo said. “What has been said here, will remain here, Helen. You may return to your quarters. Please rest. I’m sure I will not need to question you again.”

After Helen was dismissed, Quark was brought in. The Ferengi sat across from Odo, nervous, not at all happy to be there.

“What did Gil Yor tell you when she arrived at your bar earlier this evening?”

“Yor told me Agent Torell sprayed her in the face with a chemical. She didn’t feel right and asked me to fetch you,” Quark said. “I was worried when Yor found Damar with another woman. She and Glinn Gahn joined them. Damar and Yor often come to my bar and quarrel. It is well known Cardassians who are romantically involved argue as part of their courting ritual. Yor was no more upset than normal. I admit I was surprised Damar was with Kieryl. After Yor stormed off, Damar remained at the bar with his companion.” He leaned forward in his chair. “Between you and me, Odo, did Yor do it?”

“I do not believe so,” Odo said. “An eye witness was found on the scene.”

“Who?” Quark asked.

“I can’t say.”

“Gul Raynor and Agent Torell seem capable of murder.” The Ferengi smiled wide. “I saw the pair hovering over my bar, staring at Yor and Damar from the balcony like a couple of carrion birds before the legate’s body was discovered.”

“Thank you, Quark.”

“Well, aren’t you even going to tell me who killed the legate?”

“No, Quark. I am not. You may go.”

“Some gratitude,” Quark said. “I should have placed a price on my time. The next time you drag me in here, I’ll demand two bars of latinum to make it worth my while. The truth doesn’t come cheap.”

“I haven’t time to haggle with you, Ferengi! Now go,” Odo demanded.

After Quark left, Odo pressed a button on a console. Glinn Damar came in. He acted as though he carried the world on his shoulders. He sat with his legs spread apart, his arms hung at his sides, and he spoke without waiting to be questioned.

“After the reception, Agent Torell found me with Yor. The agent wanted to talk to her in private. I left them alone together. I met Glinn Kieryl to the bar in order to question her about Gul Raynor’s involvement with Mikor and Torell. I thought Yor understood what was expected of her. She was to confirm Agent Torell is member of a secret group of extremists called the Circle. I am told Torell dosed her with pheromones and when she confronted me at the bar, she was angry. We quarreled and she left. A few minutes later, she was found beside Mikor’s body. There was no time for Yor to kill the legate. I swear on my honor Yor did not commit this crime. She had no reason to kill Mikor. He promoted her, after all.”

“And if I told you Yor has an air tight alibi?” Odo asked.

“Then I would like to know what it is. Nothing would give me greater relief than to know Yor is cleared of this crime. What have you learned?”

Gul Dukat arrived with perfect timing.

“I have posted guards outside Agent Torell’s quarters,” Dukat said. “As if I would agree to his terms to accuse Yor of murder and cast aside Helen. Torell threatens to turn us all in for protecting two Federation spies. I think we have all the evidence we need to report to Central Command his involvement with the Bajoran Resistance and attempt to instigate civil war between the Fifth and Second Order. Did you confirm Torell killed Mikor?”

Odo sighed. “It is a matter if Yor is to be believed about the Circle and Torell’s involvement. Helen has confirmed what Yor stated. Rest assured. Your cousin is innocent. Gil Yor she did not have time to commit the murder. In fact, a witness has come forward to

say she was otherwise occupied during the time of the murder.”

“Yes?” Dukat said and Damar in unison.

“Ren Yor was in the company of Garak at the time of the murder,” Odo announced. “Dr. Quirin advised the legate was killed an hour before Yor found his body. A murder weapon has yet to be found. Gil Yor is not the killer. However, what will you do about Agent Torell? He means to send a report to the OO.”

“Garak?” Damar sat upright, his mouth dropping open. “She was with Garak? She actually slept with him? You can’t be serious?”

Dukat waved him silent. “Who killed Mikor?”

“By eliminating who it is not, Gul Dukat, I am closer to exposing the person who did the deed. I think we all know who is responsible. It appears Gul Raynor had the time and motive to kill Legate Mikor. Raynor claims he is innocent. His own actions at the bar suggest otherwise. If you are going to stop Agent Torell from sending his report, I believe you should arrest him and Gul Raynor for killing Legate Torell.”

Dukat spread his arms wide. “We have exactly what we need to arrest Torell and Raynor. Well done, Odo,” he said. He slapped Damar on the back. “I never would have thought Yor would turn to Garak for comfort. Release Gil Yor and arrest Gul Raynor and Agent Torell. I will advise Central Command what happened.”

“I remind you, sir, that you asked me to speak with Glinn Kieryl,” Damar said rising to his feet. “Had you allowed me to accompany Gil Yor after the reception, as we had planned, none of this would have happened.

“Why are you upset? We have caught two snakes.”

“There’s one more thing, Gul Dukat. The girl who witnessed the murder is traumatized and unable to testify,” Odo said. “Unless Dr. Quirin is able to help her, then we may never hear her testimony.”

“Have Saja and Ravon guard the Bajoran child,” Dukat ordered. “Arrest the guilty parties, Odo.”

Odo walked over to his desk and leaned over his computer. My monitor shut off and vanished into the wall. Overwhelmed with relief, I sat on the cot, thankful Odo and

Garak had helped me. I owed them both my gratitude. I heard footsteps and knew at once who it was coming toward my cell. The confinement beam lowered. Damar and Dukat entered the room and approached my cell as I stood.

“Yor. You are well?” Damar asked.

“Never been better,” I said. I approached the two men. “I know I was not born a Cardassian, but I am loyal to both of you. You should know Agent Torell ordered me to kill you, Dukat. I refused to do what he asked and that’s when he sprayed me in the face. What happened afterwards is a bit fuzzy.”

“You don’t remember going to Garak’s room?” Dukat asked. “No, don’t answer, Yor. An alibi has been provided you and you are free to assume your duties. I want you both at my side when we arrest Gul Raynor and Agent Torell for the murder of Legate Mikor. Yor, you will see firsthand what Cardassian justice means.” He handed my beret to me. “You’ve become invaluable to me. I again find in your debt.”

“I only want to make you both proud of me.”

“I already am,” Dukat said. “From this day forth, consider yourself every bit the daughter of Cardassian you want to be. Join me in my office in ten minutes.”

Dukat went out the door, chuckling under his breath. Damar opened his arms. I hugged him tight.

“I don’t believe you were with Garak. You lack the equipment to satisfy him.”

“Nor do I think you are interested in Kieryl,” I said.

He kissed me until I was breathless and then we left for Dukat’s office.

SAWYER

Chapter Twenty-Four

The lights in Dukat's office were set on dim, casting a gloomy parlor over the officers. Dukat sat behind his desk, toying with a slender Klingon dagger, which I suspected was the weapon used to murder Legate Mikor. Watching him slide his finger along the side of the wide blade, I wondered if he was thinking about Mikor, stabbed more than thirty times, or considering doing the same thing to Gul Raynor.

Raynor stood in front of his desk. His head bowed, hands clasped behind his back, Raynor presented the very image of a defeated foe. He'd been brought to Dukat's office by Odo and his security officers. Agent Torell remained in his quarters under guard. I stood beside Damar, Saja, Ravon and Torgan. Glinns' Gahn and Kieryl had been asked to join us.

From my vantage point, I was able to see the sweat roll down Raynor's neck and vanish beneath the top of his armor. Raynor licked his lips and took a deep breath. I sensed he wanted to say something and watched Dukat incline his head.

"Yes, Raynor?" Dukat said. "Do you have something else to offer in your defense?"

"I admit the Klingon dagger is mine, taken in battle. It went missing several weeks ago," Raynor said. "Legate Mikor, your wife, and Agent Torell were guests on board the Klaxon when it went missing. However, anyone could have stolen the dagger."

"But it is your dagger?" Dukat asked.

"Yes, only I didn't kill Legate Mikor."

"You've said this already, more than once. So did your two officers. Constable Odo says otherwise and so do the witnesses who testified against you, Gul Raynor. You had the means, the opportunity, and a motive. I'm a reasonable man. I no more want to cause

unrest and resentment between the Fifth and Second Order, than I want to punish you, but my hands are tied. The crime was committed on my station. Here, I am judge, jury and executioner. I have listened to the testimony offered at the inquiry, not only by you and your officers, but from my own staff, whose opinion I prize very highly. Your behavior and of your crew's while at Terok Nor has been taken into consideration. I have no other recourse but to find you guilty of the murder of Legate Mikor."

Glinn Kieryl let out a soft sob. She was not as tough as I thought. I was embarrassed, for it was a sign of weakness among Cardassians.

"I swear, Gul Dukat," Raynor said. "I had no part in the murder of Legate Mikor. I had nothing but the greatest respect for him. The Klaxon was chosen to be his flagship. Why would I want to kill Legate Mikor, when he honored me above all other commanders? I had no reason to kill him. I did not commit this crime, Gul Dukat."

"My wife tells a different story. She spurned your advances and you blamed Mikor for coming between you. You also blamed him for siding against you in the vote. You were seen quarreling with the legate. You attempted to rape my mistress. You ordered your crew to attack my cousin, not once, but twice. Do you regret your actions?"

"Yes, of course, Gul Dukat," Raynor said. "I admit I was angry when I learned your wife was having an affair with Legate Mikor. I thought she and I had an understanding."

Dukat stood from the desk, holding the Klingon dagger. "Agent Torell is under house arrest," He said. "Tell me why Torell sent assassins with Romulan implants to kill me. Tell me why you joined an underground political faction known as the Circle. I also want to know why you went to Hdrok 4. Answer these questions, truthfully, and I give you my solemn word that I will not kill you."

"I can't talk about the Circle," Raynor said. He glanced around the room as if he was watched by someone more intimidating than Gul Dukat. I felt no pity for him.

"Tell me what you can."

"Legate Mikor and Agent Torell were planning something. I don't know what. All they asked of me was to cause trouble for your cousin and mistress. Agent Torell was not convinced Ren Yor came from Batal City or was Cardassian. Nor did he think Helen was

Bajoran. I believe Torell wanted Gil Yor to kill Legate Mikor. I don't know why Mikor changed his mind about the vote, but Torell was as furious as I was that he turned against us. Perhaps your wife said something to Mikor."

"Leave my wife out of this," Dukat said. "You went to Hdrok 4. Why?"

"Which time?" Raynor asked. He gulped when Dukat pointed the dagger at him. It had two prongs at the end, reminding me of a meat skewer. "I mean, yes, I went there three times. Once to speak to Gul Raderus Yor. This occurred twenty-five years ago when I was a mere garresh. Gul Yor agreed to collect weapons at the request of Gul Mikor and Agent Torell. I did not see the weapons. When we returned a few months later, Gul Yor advised he had destroyed the cache of weapons and refused to help further. Agent Torell ordered Gul Mikor to destroy the colony from space. Nothing was said until eight months ago. We returned to Hdrok 4 and me with a Romulan agent. Implants were provided to Agent Torell to be control a selected group of people he meant to use as spies."

"For what purpose?" Dukat asked.

"For twenty-five years, Agent Torell waited for the Romulans to provide what he wanted. He used the implants on handpicked individuals who were to sabotage the Second Order on Bajor, and to destroy your reputation, if that failed, they were meant to kill you. In exchange, Torell gave the Romulans information about our defenses."

"Tell me about these spies," Dukat said, twirling the dagger.

"Fourteen cryogenic chambers were on the Klaxon," Raynor said. "Each contained a subject Agent Torell and Legate Mikor intended to use as spies. I do not believe any of the subjects were Cardassians. Agent Torell and Legate Mikor did not allow me or my crew to see who was inside. I took the chambers to Hdrok 4. There the subjects were outfitted with the implants. I later took them to Bajor and beamed two on board this station."

"You mean Ren Yor and Helen," Dukat said.

"Yes, sir."

"Then you are a member of the Circle," Damar snarled.

"I have served Legate Mikor all my life. He told me Cardassia was rotten from within and needed to be cured. He said certain officers conspired to obtain power and

glory for themselves, mainly in the Second Order, and needed to be eliminated. I followed orders, Gul Dukat. Legate Mikor told me that Agent Torell wanted the same things we did, a better, stronger, Cardassia.”

“So, you sent assassins here to kill me. When they failed to obey, you had me go to Bajor to be ambushed by your rebel friends, but Gil Yor saved me. You then attempted to incite a war between Cardassia and the Federation, forcing me to call in favors avoid such a war. This was your attempt to weaken my reputation and turn Central Command against me. Fortunately, my wife convinced her father to help me. War with the Federation was averted and you and Torell then turned on Mikor for siding against you. Why did Legate Mikor decide to turn against the Circle as Gul Yor did?”

“Both men believed the Circle was corrupt. Neither wanted to work with the Bajoran Resistance or the Romulans,” Raynor said. “Torell told me Mikor must die. If Gil Yor did not kill Legate Mikor, then I believe Agent Torell did so. If you want answers, I suggest you talk to Agent Torell. I now regret having joined the Circle. I should have backed Legate Mikor, but I was jealous and his relationship with your wife.”

“Why turn against me?”

“As a true son of Cardassia, I felt it my duty to rid Cardassia of a willful tyrant ready to sign a treaty with the Federation.”

“You are Torell are traitors,” Dukat said. “Who else joined the Circle? Is the entire Fifth Order corrupt or only a few officers?” He moved closer to Raynor and slid the pronged dagger across his chest. “Your story has holes in it. Tell me what I want to know.”

“I do not know who else is in the Circle. Mikor, Torell and I are members. They are the ones who destroyed your father, and now they want to do the same to you. I am ashamed I did not come forward and tell you of their plans, Gul Dukat. I never should have listened to them.”

Dukat laughed. “It’s a little late to change sides now, Gul Raynor.” He smiled side and I knew Raynor would not leave the office alive. “Who are the Bajoran members of the Circle?”

“The rebel leader Niyal Gora,” Raynor said, eager to betray his former allies. “Gora

was at the meeting on Hdrok 4. He and several more Bajoran rebels met with the Romulan agent. I never saw the Romulan agent again.”

“Is Gora your main contact on Bajor?” Dukat asked.

“No. There is someone else called the Ghost. I have never met him.”

“I appreciate your disclosure, Raynor. I wish I could ask you to come back to Bajor and help me catch Niyal Gora. Nothing would please me more than to have you kill every member of the Circle.”

“It would be my honor to serve you, Gul Dukat. You have but to ask.”

Dukat turned his back on Raynor and walked toward a window. Eight large windows revealed the blackness of space and a dozen Cardassian ships. I was spellbound by Dukat’s commanding presence. I’d never admired or feared him more. Dukat tapped the blade on the palm of his hand. His eyes were narrowed when he turned to face Raynor.

“Give me the honor to redeem my family honor, Gul Dukat,” Raynor said. “I cannot return to Cardassia and face a board of inquiry. It would destroy my family.”

“As a loyal officer of the Fifth Order,” Dukat said. “I expect nothing less than your obedience, Raynor. Your honor will be preserved and your family left unharmed.” For a moment, Raynor relaxed, thinking his life was to be spared. Dukat ended his hopes by handing him the dagger. “I’ll keep to this agreement if you to take your own life, Gul Raynor, Romulan style. Central Command has already been notified you killed Legate Mikor. They will spare your family. This blade, I might add, was used to kill Legate Mikor. Sacrifice your life for the good of Cardassia and die with honor.”

“My family will be spared?” Raynor asked, his voice barely above a whisper.

“Of course,” Dukat said. “I give you my word of honor.”

The Gul of the Klaxon lifted the dagger high. “For Cardassia!” He plunged the knife deep into his chest and crumbled to the floor. Neither his first or second officers made a move toward him. The slightest sob came from Glinn Kieryl. I noticed Damar shift the weight from one foot to the other. His hand twitched at his side. He felt something for the glinn, compassion, perhaps a little pity. I felt a strange sense of triumph Kieryl had lost her smugness. This was Cardassian justice.

“Why do you cry?” Dukat asked.

Kieryl wiped away a tear. “Gul Raynor was my uncle, sir. Unlike Yor, sir, I did not want anyone to know I had a relative in such high standing,” she said. “I wanted to earn my rank without the aid of my family. If I must die, then I will take my own life as my uncle did. I will not disgrace my family.”

“Grieve in private, Gil Kieryl. You are demoted for failing to mention sooner Raynor was your uncle,” Dukat said. “I don’t like secrets and I do not tolerate traitors.”

Jerking the knife out of Raynor’s death grasp, Dukat wiped blood on the dead man’s tunic. He approached the Klaxon officers. Fearless and proud, Glinn Gahn looked directly into Dukat’s eyes. Kieryl lowered her gaze, doing her best to withhold her tears.

“What have you to say for yourself, Glinn Gahn?” Dukat asked. “As first mate of the Klaxon, you are responsible for the actions of your commander. Gul Raynor was a traitor, but in the end he served Cardassia well. What are you prepared to give Cardassia?”

“I swear to give you my loyalty and of my crew. Allow me to present you with the Klaxon, sir. Use her as your own flagship. I place myself in the service of the Second Order. Do with me what you will,” Gahn said offering a salute. “For Cardassia!”

Another sob came from Kieryl. I started to think it was an act. Dukat gave her a sharp look. Kieryl wiped the tears from her cheeks.

“I’m sorry, sir. I cannot help it,” she said. “If my word of loyalty means anything, I swear to serve Cardassia and the Second Order faithfully.”

Dukat lowered the dagger. “We’ll see how loyal you both are, for if either of you step out of line, I will use this same dagger to take your lives.” He threw the weapon onto his desk. “Gahn, you will be promoted to Gul and given command of the Klaxon. You will be at my disposal, whenever, and wherever I deem it necessary.”

A look of shock on Gahn’s face was mirrored by Damar. I knew Damar was in line for a promotion.

“You may appoint your own first officer,” Dukat continued. “Anyone with the exception of Gil Kieryl. Now return to your ship. Both of you. I’ll board with the Alpha Brigade and the rest of my soldiers within the hour. You are dismissed.”

"Yes, sir." Gul Gahn bowed low. He left the office with Kieryl.

The War Dogs entered and carried out Gul Raynor's body.

"Gil Saja, gather the troops in the transporter room," Dukat said, pacing his hands behind his back. "Glinn Damar, be so good as to bring Agent Torell here. He will be coming to Fort Varnok with us. I intend to let him point out the Circle members. I find it best to keep my enemies close, and I intend to keep Torell under my foot."

The moment Damar and Saja left the office, I stared at Dukat, marveling as how masterfully he'd taken control of the situation. He returned to his desk and noticed I remained. Spreading his hands wide, he offered a sly smile.

"You may, of course, congratulate me, cousin."

"Congratulation's, sir."

"Do you think I am so helpless I depend solely upon you and Damar to fight my battles? I always have a plan. Always. For instance, if I thought for one minute you'd slept with Garak, I might ask you to plunge this knife between your breasts."

I snorted. "Then you knew it was a lie?"

"No sane woman would jump from my bed into Garak's bed." Dukat crossed his arms, quite pleased with himself. "Remember, I can squash my enemies in the blink of an eye. You look surprised. Is it because Raynor chose honor over humiliation and took his own life? Did you really expect anything less? He's a Cardassian. I provided him the means of sparing his family and saving his honor. I don't care if he wooed my wife any more than I care she was Mikor's lover for years. However, I do care Mikor fathered three of my sons. I have sent them to live with their grandparents. Their last name will be changed to Mikor, for I want nothing further to do with them."

"You killed the legate," I whispered.

"Surely you know I will not let anyone stand in my way to obtain what I want. My father failed to realize Mikor and Torell were his enemies. Garak helped expose my father's plans to take over Central Command. I now wonder if Garak is part of the Circle. You will not mention what I have said to anyone, Yor. Not even to Damar. We go to Bajor and I intend to find the Torell's assassins and the members of the Circle. You will help me."

"You can count on me," I said.

"I know, Yor. Go see Helen. Make certain she's ready to leave. If you have nothing further to say or praises to bestow on me, then you are dismissed, cousin."

"Sir?" I pointed at the Klingon blade. "May I have the dagger?"

"Why? It's evidence."

"It will remind me Cardassian justice is swift."

"Take it and leave," Dukat said with a sigh.

I grabbed the dagger and stuffed it under my belt, wondering at my own motivation for wanting to lay claim on such a horrible item. My thoughts turned to Agent Torell as I approached Helen's quarters. The dagger wanted his blood as well. As I rounded the corner, I slowed my step, seeing two dead guards outside her door. To my relief, it was not Komash or Toran. I used the com panel to contact Damar and advised him of the situation.

"I'll be right there," Damar said. "Wait for me."

I had no intention of waiting for Damar or security. I drew a pistol and entered Helen's quarters. The furniture was overturned and a number of items broken. I checked every room and found no sign of Helen. Returning to the front room, I used my com-link to contact Dukat, wanting to notify him personally of the abduction.

"*What is it, Yor?*" Dukat asked.

"Sir, I believe Helen was abducted by Torell. Two guards are dead. I suspect Torell left on the Klaxon. I have already told Glinn Damar."

"*I have already heard from Damar. Agent Torell has left the station, however, the Klaxon remains here. Go to the transporter room and wait for me,*" Dukat said.

"I'm sorry I didn't get here sooner, sir."

"*I don't blame you, Yor. Now do as I say.*"

Entering my quarters, I grabbed my duffle bag and ran to the transporter room. Damar, Dukat and Saja waited for me. The Alpha Brigade took turns to be beamed onto the Klaxon. Ravon, Torgan, Zolon, Dunatar, Ikarus, Korvinus, Komash and Jenrak went together. I also noticed young Gil Toran, the gul's son, among the soldiers. With my duffle bag slung over my shoulder, I approached Damar.

“Garak and Dukat’s wife are also missing,” Damar said. “His shop was torn apart and blood was found. I’d like to think he did not go willingly. I cannot say the same for Mikelya, but I hope she is not involved with the Circle.”

“Do we know what ship they left on?” I asked.

“A small scout ship was detected moving away from the fleet a few minutes ago before vanishing,” Dukat said. “We suspect a Romulan cloaking devise was used. Thanks to the information you provided to Odo, we were able to locate Helen on the scout ship. The Romulan implant leaves a neuron field that can be tracked. You have what you need? We will not return for some time, if at all.”

“I’m ready, sir.”

With Damar at my side, I went to the transporter room and beamed onto the Klaxon. Gul Gahn and a new first officer, a man I’d never seen, waited for us. I didn’t trust Gahn. I avoided looking at him as we were taken to the bridge. I’d never been on the bridge of any starship and the Cardassian cruiser was precisely as I’d imagined. Red and black were the dominant colors. The crew sat quietly at their assigned posts. Gul Gahn gestured for Dukat to assume the commander’s seat.

“Appreciated,” Dukat said. He sat down. “While Gul Vardon and the rest of the fleet guards the wormhole, we will go to Bajor at full speed. It may well be the rebel, Niyal Gora, will provide sanctuary for Agent Torell. No one takes what is mine.”

I stared out the view screen, sick about what happened to Helen. Mikor’s murder had thrown us off Torell’s plans long enough for him to send for a scout ship. The agent knew Odo’s questioning would take all morning, while Torell plotted and schemed. No one mentioned Helen’s personal transporter devise, yet I had a feeling Torell had one of his own and had easily gone from room to room, abducting Helen, Garak and Dukat’s wife. I glanced at Damar and caught him staring at me. If he could read my mind, then he would know I had every intention of finding my best friend and the other two Cardassians, and then I was going to kill Torell, Niyal Gora, and this mysterious Ghost.

HELEN

Chapter Twenty-Five

Awakening on a bed, my hands tied behind my back, I tried to make sense of what had happened. One minute I'd been in my room, waiting for Dukat, and then Torell had burst into my room. I remembered him aiming a phaser at me, a bright light, followed by extreme pain. I don't know how long I'd been unconscious. The cell was small, only a bed and a bucket provided, I felt the rumble of engines, assuming I was on board a Fifth Order ship. A woman screamed from a cell across the hall. It sounded like Mikelya Dukat. Voices coming muttered outside my door. It was metal and had a small window with tinted glass. Another door opened. I sat up as a lusty female scream reached my ears, followed whimpers. The voice belonged to Mikelya, a prisoner like me, I thought.

My door opened with a bang. Agent Torell and two men I felt certain were operatives entered. They were Cardassians in Bajoran garments and held phasers of Federation design.

"What have you done with Mikelya?" I asked.

"Shouldn't you be more concerned with why I intend to do with you?"

The OO agent glided forward, his arms folded across his chest. His black eyes were solid inkblots on either side of his sharp-ridged nose. His fingers wiggling out of the end of a long billowing sleeve and he touched my stomach. I felt the child kick within.

"Dukat's unborn child has caused considerable interest among my colleagues. They believe Dukat would do anything to have you returned safe and sound. Provided it is his child and not mine, I should think we might be able to arrange a trade of some kind?"

Torell slapped me with his open palm across my cheek. I fell against the wall, unable to protect myself. I pulled at the ropes, they were tight. He laughed.

"It's quite possible the child is mine, Helen," Torell said. "It was a delightful

encounter and one I shall always cherish. Of course, I knew you were human then, my dear. There are certain things about the human female's anatomy differ from Bajorans. I noticed it at once. I wondered why Dukat had not altered everything, then, I know why he likes the difference. You don't have any idea what I'm talking about, do you? You were smooth inside. No ridges like Bajorans. I imagine you were surprised when you saw how Cardassians are equipped in comparison to human males. It's such a marvel three different species can procreate together. The offspring of such pairings are quite unusual. Don't you agree? Of course you do."

"What are you planning to do with my child, you son-of-a-bitch?" I was ready for him to hit me. When he did, I gritted my teeth and took it. He slapped harder than before. I tasted blood in my mouth.

"Don't be difficult, Helen. I alone am in control here. Displease me and I'll cut your child out of your womb. I didn't come here to threaten your child. I came with the intention of congratulating you on a job well done. Not even I could have killed Mikor like the Valerian pig he was. It's a shame your friend left you to her job. Slipping away from the party, going to the bar so everyone could see you, you exceeded my wildest expectation how you slaughtered Mikor. The Klingon dagger was found. I had hoped you had sense enough to get rid of it. Not it matters. Your friend will be blamed and killed."

"You're lying."

"I assure you. I am telling you the truth," Torell said. "Sedate the prisoner and remove the ropes. She is not going to cause any trouble."

The two Cardassians approached me. One held me down, while placed a hypospray against my neck. I felt a tingle spread through my body. My muscles relaxed below my chin to the point I was unable to move and lay helpless on the bed.

The two men backed away.

"Not even I thought you had the strength to kill Mikor. You stabbed him thirty-two times and then stuffed his body into the turbolift, returning to the bar where Garak waited. He had no idea what you'd done. No one did. Your friend was arrested and as far as I know, she will be found guilty and executed for murdering Legate Mikor."

"I didn't kill Legate Mikor. Odo will figure out you're behind it. Garak provided an alibi. Dukat will release her and find the real killer."

"you are the real killer, Helen," Torell said. "Garak is the one you should blame, not me. I asked him to help me remove Mikor who had proven to be a liability, he refused. I'm quite certain Garak figured you killed Mikor. Do you imagine he'll really send anyone looking for you when he does? You're an assassin, Helen. My assassin."

"I liked the old man. He was kind to me. I never left the bar. I have no idea what you're talking about. You're lying. You're the one who killed Mikor."

"Do try not to get upset. I am only telling you what you did because you don't seem able to remember. I supposed it's the implant. Romulan technology is superior in many ways, it's not perfect. Several people chosen to be agents died on the operating table. Despite Dukat sedating you and Garak's little bracelet I've taken from you, you resisted when I whispered the code word in your ear. I tried it on Sawyer next, only to learn you actually followed orders and carried out the deed. You did quite well, Helen. I'm impressed."

An image of me stabbing Mikor in the chest with a Klingon blade appeared in my mind. I tried to block it from my thoughts, it was impossible. I had killed Mikor. I'd done everything Torell said I had. Sickened, I closed my eyes, refusing to look at me as he sat beside me, placing his hand on my thigh.

"Dukat will come after me. I will make a bargain with him. For the life of his wife, I will demand he withdraw his troops from Bajor. For of his child, he will renounce his title as Prefect of Bajor. If he wants you as well, he will have to meet me at an appointment place of my choosing. When he comes for you and his wife, my two friends here will kill him."

My eyes flickered open. A surge of hatred activated my impulse to kill the agent. I lunged at Torell, digging my fingernails into his eyes. He managed to knock one hand away; I felt a sticky softness as my fingers punctured his eyeball. He screamed, falling to the floor, crawling away from me. His companions grabbed his arms and led him out of my cell.

“Dukat will find you and kill you,” I shouted. “If he doesn’t, I will!”

The door slammed shut.

After what seemed like hours, Mikelya Dukat was brought to my cell. She was thrown inside and the door closed. Her hair was untidy. Her clothes hung in tatters. Limping over to the bed, she sat next to me. I straightened my posture and smoothed my gown over my legs. She’d lost her cool reserve and haughty smugness. I felt sorry for her.

“Do you think my husband will come for us?” Madame Dukat picked at the rag left of her evening gown. She’d apparently put up a fight before they’d taken her.

“Yes, I do.”

“Why would he bother when I’ve been nothing difficult? I flaunted my relationship with Mikor for years, and then seduced Raynor out of spite. The only reason Torell killed Mikor was because I refused to be a part of his scheme. I loved Mikor more than my husband. Dukat won’t come for me. I underestimated Torell’s vindictiveness.”

“We’re both in the same boat,” I said.

“Not really my dear. You’re merely my husband’s current mistress. You think Dukat hasn’t had others like you over the years. You’re one in a line of many, my dear. You’re nothing special,” Mikelya said. Her superior attitude set my blood boiling. “Has Dukat told you how important you are to him? Has he told you he loves you? When he makes love to you, does he whisper words of tenderness? Of course he does. I’m sure he gave you bracelet, like he does all the girls, and promised to love you forever. My husband has done the same with every mistress he ever. I suppose it’s my fault. I was with Mikor before and after my marriage. Dukat is a proud man. I hurt him and he wanted to hurt me. He never keeps a mistress longer than a few months. His bastards are sent to an orphanage on Bajor. While you are a pretty thing, he’ll lose interest and move onto the next.”

“Then you don’t think he cares enough about either of us to make a trade?”

“Why would he? Dukat threatened me with divorce,” she said. “This is the easiest way to get rid of me. In your pregnant condition, I’m sure he wants to sweep you under the rug and move onto someone new. Perhaps his cousin, insipid Ren Yor, who fawns over him like he’s some kind of king. She offends me more than you do.”

"I don't care what you say. He'll come for me. I know he will. He loves me."

"he's my husband, my dear. I assure you. Dukat loves only Dukat."

Madame Dukat whirled on me, lifting up her hand, and striking me across the face. It was the last slap I was taking day. I balled my hand up into a fist and hit her right in the face. She flew off the bed and fell to the floor. I lay back on the bed, able to hear Torell in my head, ordering me to kill her. With my hands over my ears, I screamed as loud as possible. I kept on screaming until I heard the door open. The woman was led away by guards. I was surprised when Garak was thrown into my cell. He'd been tortured. He crawled over to me once the door was shut. One eye was swollen shut. He offered a pathetic smile.

"Don't lose hope, Helen. Dukat is tracking us right now," Garak whispered.

"How do you know?" I asked pressing against him for warmth.

"Because Sawyer provided valuable information about your implants. We can now trace the frequency emitted by your implants. I'm sure we'll all be home before supper."

"Was Sawyer blamed for Mikor's death? Was she executed?" I asked, not sure I was ready to hear him answer my questions. I held my breath, waiting.

"No, my dear. Gul Raynor was blamed. He was forced to take his own life. Your friend is alive and well. I have no doubt she is as eager as Dukat to find us."

"Thank God," I said. Sawyer was alive and well. My concern changed its course fast. "Dukat's wife said he won't come for us. She said he doesn't care about what happens to us." I wiped away a tear, my head on Garak's shoulder. He smoothed my hair, comforting me, though he was the one injured.

"In his own way, I'm sure he loves you. I know because I know what it feels like to be hated by Dukat. And he hates me," Garak said. "It's a long story. Try not to fret. You know your friend is pushing Dukat to find you. Sawyer is loyal. She does love you."

I felt the implant start to throb and sagged against him. "Torell said I killed Mikor. What if I did to it, Garak?" I asked. "I've thrown a few punches at Dukat. I shot two Cardassians. When I lose my temper, I lose control, Garak. When I close my eyes, I can see myself stabbing Mikor dozens of times. I think I really did kill him."

“Those images could easily have been placed in your head by Torell,” Garak said. “I really don’t think you killed Mikor. I thought Yor did it to protect Dukat. I provided an alibi to protect her because you asked me to. Do you really think it was you, Helen?”

“Yes, I do. Will you turn me in?”

“Of course not,” he said. “Legate Mikor was conspiring against the Union. He deserved what happened to him. I am worried about you. Being locked in here with you could prove to be fatal. You must try to control your temper and any suggestions from Torell.”

“They put Mikelya in with me. I wanted to kill her. The voices in my head are growing stronger. I may not be able to resist the next time I’m told to kill someone.”

“Resist, resist,” Garak said, rising to his feet. He limped over to the door. “I don’t want to mention this, I happen to enjoy being alive. I think you do too, so what I suggest is you lie down and try to block out those voices.” He raised his eyes to the corner of the room. “Torell is watching us. I know he expects you to kill me. You must resist his voice.”

Pressing my hands to my head, I groaned for the pain was getting worse. I must have blacked out, for when I came too, Garak was being led out by the guards. Torell stood in the entrance, laughing at me. He wore an eye patch over his mutilated eye. Three scratches marred the other side of his face he’d not yet repaired with a med-kit.

“You’re far stronger than I gave you credit for, Helen. You nearly killed Garak; I stopped you just in time. He has promised to assist me in recruiting others who desire to remove Gul Dukat from power. Dukat may have voted against going to war with the Federation, he’ll get around to it, eventually. What he wants is complete control of the Alpha Quadrant. First, he’ll bend Bajor to his will, and then he’ll defeat the Klingons, the Romulans, and when no one else is left, he’ll turn his focus on the Federation.”

“I don’t believe anything you say.”

“You should,” Torell said. “I told you we were on the same side, my dear. I want Cardassia to join the Federation, and you can be a part of that, if you continue to do as ordered. You will help me eliminate Dukat’s allies, one by one.”

I lowered my gaze to find my hands covered in blood. I had a horrible feeling I’d

done more than talk to Garak. Blood even covered my gown.

“What did I do?” I asked. “Is Garak all right?”

“You never cease to amaze me, my dear. Your empathy for others is quite remarkable. His injuries are not permanent. Unlike my own for the time being. When we reach headquarters, there will be more than one surgery conducted. I hope for your sake I don’t change my mind and decide to take your child.”

“Stop threatening my child, you sick fuck!”

“Obey me or suffer the consequences, Helen.”

A phaser appeared in his hand. Torell aimed it at me and fired. Stunned, I lost consciousness again and awoke much later. Thirsty, hungry, and still suffering from a migraine the size of Texas, I lifted one arm and found the sedative had worn off. I lay on a cot in what appeared to be a cavern. Torches provided light. Across from me huddled on the floor sat Garak. His hands and legs were tied.

Both eyes were swollen shut. He’d suffered a horribly beating. I feared I’d been the one to hurt him. Madame Dukat was not with us. The cave was filled with crates and enough supplies it appeared Torell was planning a siege. A dozen Bajorans and several Cardassians were huddled around a campfire produced no smoke. They ate dinner, talking in soft voices, now and then glancing in my direction.

“Are you feeling better?” Garak asked. He’d managed to open one eye.

“A little,” I said. “Where are we?”

My hands and legs were untied. I felt like Torell didn’t think I was a threat to his guards or he’d have tied me up. He apparently believed I’d do only what he wanted me to. Gazing back at the Bajorans, I licked my lips, finding whatever they ate smelled good.

“This is Niyal Gora’s camp. He is leader of the Bajoran Resistance, at least what’s left of it. This must be continent of Bha’gh, which is the largest land mass on Bajor. Gora operates in the Southwest and Southeast Quadrants. Dukat has thirty forts on Bha’gh. I can’t say which province we’re in. I don’t know which fort we’re near, if any.”

“Where is Madame Dukat?” I asked.

“Gora left with her an hour ago. I can only imagine what he is doing to her. These

rebels are not friendly, so don't ask them for charity. We won't get any."

"You're so pessimistic," I said. "I'd hate to hear what you sound like when you've given up all hope. Because I'm not there yet, Garak. If there is a fort nearby, means a gul might be searching for us right now."

"And mostly likely a Fifth Order gul, my dear. The Fifth and Fourth are posted in the south. I'd say our situation here could be far worse if we've captured by a gul who is predisposed to hate Dukat. Best we stay right here."

"I say we make a run for it. They're not looking at us. We'll just walk right out of here."

Standing, I walked over to Garak and knelt. The Bajorans were too busy eating to both with us. I untied his hands and feet. He needed me to help stand. I kept my arm around him as we walked behind a stack of crates, unnoticed by the Bajoran rebels.

"Follow the cool freeze on our faces," Garak whispered. He leaned on me for support.

"What about Madame Dukat?" I asked.

"Either we save ourselves or die trying to save her. Let's go while we can."

Able to smell fresh air, I led Garak through a corridor made out of crates. At the end, we felt a cool breeze coming from a tunnel. We heard no cries of alarm. The confidence it gave me helped me keep Garak on the move. Another thirty yards, we reached the end of the tunnel. The starry night sky afforded a view of a drop of fifty feet beneath us and wide, rocky gorge with clumps of trees. Five moons, each a different size and color, appeared overhead.

"I see an outpost," Garak said, pointing to the left.

From our vantage point I was able to see several lights above the tree line, which I hoped came from a watchtower. It was several miles from us. Scaling without ropes was impossible. I returned to the tunnel, about to give up hope when I found a small wooden chest. It had no lock, opening easily, revealed three flares, and ten rolls of nylon cord. The only problem was I could find nothing to tie the ropes to and returned to Garak, disheartened. I handed him a rope, watching as he unraveled it and then give me a

questioning look.

“Someone apparently needs to remain here. I can’t hold you, Garak. I can climb down if you hold the rope,” I said, knowing what I asked him. He’d have to stay behind.

“Tie the rope tight and keep it tucked under your arms,” he said. “I’ll hold the rope for you. Go to outpost and pray it’s a friendly gul. Tell them where to find us.”

“Thank you.”

“Don’t thank me until you’re at the bottom. I may drop you.”

With the rope secured around me, I sat on the edge, turned, and eased my body over the side. Garak held tight, giving me enough rope I lowered at what felt like a fast pace. I held onto the rope, remaining on my feet until I slipped, leaving him holding dead weight. A fast drop of teen feet, I felt the rope tighten, slowing my descent and then I stopped, dangling five feet in the air. The rope above me loosened. I dropped to the ground along with the rope. Lifting my face upwards, I no longer saw Garak. I’d kept the torches, tucked into my bra, planning to use them when I reached the outpost.

Whatever happened to Garak was something remained a mystery. It wasn’t safe to call out to him, nor wait for him to appear. I headed the north. Following a dried riverbed bordered by tall green trees, I found it easier to travel without my shoes. I carried them as I moved on, listening to the distant screeches of strange animals in the woods. I lost sight of the lights from the tower, having only hope to guide me, after several miles, I knew I was lost. What made it worse is something followed me. When I stopped, it stopped. The moment I moved forward, I heard the same soft footfalls and the snap of a twig.

“Garak?”

I didn’t shout. I kept my voice soft, whatever stalked me, stopped moving. No one answered me. Proceeding through the trees with a predator close by was a stupid idea. I found a long branch and returned to the riverbed. Starlight allowed me to see where I was going. If the beast wanted to attack, it would have to come out into the open. I kept moving. My feet bled from numerous cuts, leaving a trail on the stones, something I couldn’t afford to do. With my branch beside me, I sat on the ground and commencing ripping off the lower half of my dress. I used the material to wrap around my feet. It would

have to do.

Keeping to the riverbed, it curled to my right. The rocks grew too large to walk on, forcing me to walk along the edge on dirt and pine needles. Whatever followed made no attempt to remain undiscovered. At the cracking of twigs and a loud rustling, I sought cover behind a fallen log, afraid Torell and the Bajoran rebels had found me. Something flew over me, landed a distance away, kicking up dirt, and vanished. I flattened to the ground as two more large shapes leapt over me. Three deer dashed into the trees. The predator pursued them appeared on top of the log. A pair of dirty feet met my eyes. A Cardassian boy stared down at me. He wore a cloak made from a deer hide, ragged trousers and carried a crudely made club and a spear. From his appearance and smell, I knew he'd been living in the wild for some time.

"Don't hurt me," I said, gathering my legs under me.

The boy jumped off the log, crouching beside me. Right away I noticed he was as feral as I first thought. Concern filled his brown eyes. He extended his dirty hand and gave a quick nod in the direction I'd been going.

"You want me to come with you, right?"

The boy nodded and helped me stand. He gave me his spear to lean upon. Again, he motioned me to follow, as urgently as before. I was about to question him when I heard a horrible roar coming from the direction the deer had so swiftly departed. I needed no further coaxing. I ran after the deer. The boy kept at my side, showing me how to leap over fallen logs and using his club to brush aside tall blades of sharp-edged grass. The beast followed had our scent and the roars grew louder.

"What is it? Do I want to know?"

My new friend shook his head. I stayed close to the boy, aware the creature pursued us. We ran for a mile before we reached a cliff looked over a waterfall. The fall into a large pool of water was no more than forty feet, it was still frightening.

"You expect me to jump?" I asked wishing he'd answer me.

At the roar of the beast and something crashing through the underbrush, the Cardassian boy looked toward the noises and then at me. He smiled. His teeth were dirty.

Something large and scaled appeared behind us. The boy grabbed my arm and together we jumped over the cliff. He laughed on the way down, while I screamed. We hit the water, sinking fast and deep. I came up shooting out of the water, looking about for my savior, did not see him on the surface.

Diving under, I opened my eyes and spotted the boy at the bottom of the pool. Though he released bubbles from his mouth, he was not moving. I swam toward him, a cramp in my belly begging me to rest, kept going until I had him by the arms. With a push off the bottom of the pool, I went up to the surface with the boy. Swimming to the side of the pool, I laid the boy on his stomach and began to pat him on the back. He coughed out a mouthful of water and flipped over onto his stomach, gazing up at me with wide, fearless eyes. Far off we both heard the frustrated roar of whatever had been hunting us. The boy sat at once, noticing I'd lost the spear, and gave me a dirty look.

"You were drowning. What else could I do? I had to save you."

He grunted at me.

"I'll take as a thank you. My friend Sawyer mentioned a fort when she came to Bajor. It was in the south. What was the name? Verick. Varnic. No. Varnok. Fort Varnok. That's it. That's where my friend will be waiting for me. Is it close by?"

He again grunted.

Standing, the strange boy motioned for me to follow. I appreciated his help, for he took pity on me and pulled me to my feet. He offered his shoulder while we walked into the forest. We never discovered what had pursued us. The roars faded in the distance. I wasn't sure where the boy was taking me. I didn't think it was the fort. We made it several miles before I needed to sit and rest. Something was in the air, a foul odor, coming to us on a breeze. I thought certain my guide led us in the wrong direction. I tried to stand to take a better look. He squatted beside me and pushed me onto the fallen log I used as a bench.

"Okay, I'll rest. I get it. What is ungodly odor?"

The Cardassian boy sniffed the air. He took his small hand and slid a finger across his neck. He then started lifting his fingers, as if counting, going on until I lost track and found my eyes starting to fall close. I don't know how long I rested. It seemed a short time

before the boy was prodding me awake. I awoke feeling stiff and nauseated. I knew we had to keep going, wherever we were going, it had to be close. I leaned on him as we continued toward the horrible stench, until an opening cleared before us, the grass all scorched and black, and we came upon the ruins of the Cardassian outpost.

It had been wiped out in a battle a while ago. The remaining buildings had been gutted by laser fire. A scene of horror awaited us inside. The bodies of the dead Cardassians had been left where they died. Predators had been eaten on the remains. There was nothing left to salvage, no one living to help, and by the time we walked through the deserted fort, I was about to give up hope. The boy made me sit on rock while he darted off. He entered a dark building. I was aware creatures lurked in the shadows. Furry, lithely built creatures reminded me of foxes appeared. They returned to feed upon the dead. The boy appeared beside me. He threw rocks at the beasts, chasing them off, and then he ran back inside and came out moments later with a large bundle. He tossed a pile of clothes and boots at my feet. He pointed at them, then at me and grunted.

“What happened? Were you at the fort when the Bajorans attacked? It looks like you’ve been on your own far longer than that. Don’t you have a family or anyone to go home to?”

The boy shook his head. Whatever had happened to the boy, he was only willing to communicate with his hands and his little animals grunts. He’d survived on instinct and cunning. He had to be smart or he wouldn’t have lasted so long. He was brave and showed signs of anxiety at my delay and I started to dress. I put on a Cardassian uniform and boots were slightly too large. I didn’t mind wearing them. When I was ready, my young friend took me by the hand and led me away from the outpost. He seemed eager to leave. We walked another few miles into the hills, following a narrow path and then into the trees. He led me to a nearby cave hidden among boulders where he’d apparently been living for some time.

I sat on a bed of pine needles, allowed to rest, though I wondered if he might let me sleep for a bit. The boy offered me a canteen of water and sat beside me. He motioned for me to lie down, closing his eyes, making soft snoring sounds.

"I guess we're staying here for the rest of the night," I said. "Fine by me. I'm exhausted. My name is Helen. I was on Terok Nor. A man named Torell captured me. He's friends with Niyal Gora, a Bajoran rebel, I escaped from their camp. Thank you for helping me."

He nodded and placed a dirty blanket over me. I held out an edge. He stared at me, thinking about the warmth I offered and shook his head. I tucked the blanket around me, grateful to have it, while he sat on the ground, facing the opening of the cave, his weapons at his side.

Exhaustion finally took its toll on me. I closed my eyes to sleep. When I awoke, it was light out and my friend had left a bowl filled with berries for me. I ate a handful, finding them overly sweet it eased the ache in my stomach. The boy soon returned and motioned for me to follow him. I folded the blanket, set it aside, trudging beside the boy.

"Have you heard of Gul Dukat? He's my friend. I know not every commander likes him here. Not the Fifth. Do you know a commander who might help us? Is there another fort nearby? I need to contact. You see, I'm...I'm pregnant with his child."

"Uh," the boy said.

"I'll take to mean you're going to someone who can help us. Gul Dukat."

The boy winced as if I'd struck him. He gave a shake of his head, increased his speed, making me run to keep up with him. We'd covered the length of the valley, regaining our strength from a strange root, orange in color tasty he found. After a few bites, the root eased my headache and nausea. I kept more of the root on hand, knowing its value as I surged on. The boy put his hand on mine, signaling he wanted me to keep pace with him. We ran through the forest and came to a clearing overlooked another valley. In the distance was a town. I started to head toward a well-worn path, the boy stopped me, motioning for me to hide behind thorny bushes. I did as he requested while he peered out. I heard voices. Unable to resist, I joined him, able to see a line of Cardassian soldiers, two abreast, marching past with a string of Bajoran prisoners. I gazed at the boy. He pressed his finger to his lips and scooted behind the bushes, drawing me back so we'd not be seen.

"Who is it?" I asked.

The boy held up five fingers. Five meant the Fifth Order. He didn't want us to be discovered and I completely agreed, for they were not Dukat's soldiers. The soldiers headed away from the town, disappearing on the road. We waited a few more minutes. The boy led us through hills stretched on for miles, sparse trees grew on the hilltops, and I couldn't tell where the soldiers had taken their prisoners. I moved slower than he wanted to, wanting to talk, he bristled each time I spoke. In this fashion we walked on until it was dark.

The boy made a camp in a small ravine, gathering tree branches for a bed. We used leaves to cover our bodies for warmth since we didn't dare make a fire. We ate raw fish he caught in a nearby stream. Afterwards, I washed up at the stream, returning to our camp to lie on the makeshift bed, wishing I'd brought the filthy blanket with us. This time, he lay next to me and fell asleep before I did. I placed my arm around the boy, holding him tight as I dreamed about Dukat.

Dukat lay in a bed, tossing and turning in his sleep. I stood beside the bed, staring at an open window. A shadow appeared, its shape humanoid, tapping at the pane. Enveloped in fear, I tried to move my feet, wanting to shut the window only I was unable to move. The shadow easily gained entrance, moving fast across the floor toward Dukat. I screamed.

Violent shaking awoke me. I stared at the boy.

"I'm sorry. I had a nightmare," I said.

He gave a nod, curling against me as I rested my head on his shoulder. The moons were half hidden behind clouds. Far off I heard something roaring in the night, the boy didn't seem bothered, so I laid beside him, still thinking about Dukat and hoping he'd find us in the morning.

SAWYER

Chapter Twenty-Six

Arriving at Fort Varnok at dawn by shuttle, Fifth Order soldiers stood in formation in a large courtyard to greet. Dukat and Damar proceeded me out of the shuttle. Ravon and my War Dogs kept close beside me. We entered a large building with four stories, build with reflecting steel almost looked like windows. Large cannons were mounted on the roof. There were four towers manned to soldiers and a line of high-tech tanks, each manned by a squad.

“Gul Dukat,” a large Cardassian said stepping forward. “I am Gul Tyчек. As you ordered, I’ve sent patrols into the surrounding hills, looking for your wife and her servant. We haven’t found anyone yet. I’m sorry.”

“And why not?” Dukat asked.

“The minerals in these hills frequently disrupt scanners. I’m sure you’re well aware of this. We lost contact with the Romulan signal last night,” Tyчек said. “If you’ll come into the conference room, we can discuss this more thoroughly.”

Damar motioned for me to remain behind when we entered a large lobby led into three corridors. Saja, Ravon and Torgan remained with me. The rest of the Second Order brought with from Terok Nor walked to the barracks. Damar and Dukat accompanied Tyчек to a turbolift. High-ranking officers joined them. A bar for the officers’ was on the first floor, along with several shops and a restaurant.

“Let’s have a drink,” Saja said.

Leading the way into the bar, it had seating for at least fifty soldiers, long bar and large beams overhead rose into a tent-like shape. No one stood behind the bar. The lights flickered on as we entered, the colors, red, purple, and green. Saja walked behind the bar, while Ravon,

Torgan, and I sat on stools in front of the bar.

"It's well stocked," Saja said. "How about some kanar for you boys? Yor, don't say a thing. I know you like Romulan ale. They don't have any. You're going to have to settle on whatever I pour you and you'll like it."

"Fine," I said. "I'm not picky, Saja. Where the hell do you think everyone is? Gul Tychek says he has patrols looking for Helen and Garak, he left a brigade standing outside like freaking statues. It looks to me like he's just putting on a show for Dukat."

"Tychek is a brute," Ravon said. "He has one of the worst reputations for abusing the nearby Bajoran towns than any Fifth Order gul posted in the southern quadrants."

Saja set drinks in front of us. I was given a glass of kanar.

"I admit Dukat has been gone too long. He needs to make quite a few changes," said Saja. "Fort Varnok took three years to build. It suffered some damage from Resistance fighters over the last year. Tychek usually rounds them up and shoots them. I heard there was recent fighting to the south at Outpost Nine."

"I heard the same thing," Torgan said sipping on his kanar. "The Fifth Order was stationed at Outpost Nine. Gul Parnal was in command. His entire post was wiped out by the Bajorans. I also heard Tychek didn't even bother to send reinforcements."

Ravon slurped down the thick liquid in his glass. "That's because the Fifth are notorious for constant infighting, every commander climbing on top of each other for power. They hate the Second Order because Central Command sent them here since Dukat is the only one who can control them."

"Is that what he did with Raynor? Controlled him?" Torgan asked.

"Well, he did fall on a dagger," Ravon said, winking at me.

Footsteps brought my eyes toward the entrance to the bar. I nudged Saja as a young soldier appeared, nursing my kanar, until the last second.

"Drink up, lads," Saja said. He dropped his hand to his pistol out of instinct. "We've got company. A green-eared garresh who is just dying to get Yor's attention."

"Glinn Yor?" The voice was youthful, nervous, and I turned around to face the newcomer. "I've been sent by Prefect Dukat to advise you your quarters are ready."

Third floor. Room 13. You three wait here. We're still figuring out where to put you. I'll be back for the rest of you in a few minutes."

I patted Saja on the back and followed the soldier out of the bar. His stride was brisk. He led me to a turbolift. The guards on duty watched us. The garresh stood straight, his eyes straight ahead as we ascended to the third floor. A wide hall with many doors looked similar to Terok Nor in its design. A study on my right had a balcony looked out over the courtyard, providing a view of the southern hills and the bright glow of morning. We past double doors on our left, a larger suite, which I assumed belonged to Gul Tycek.

"That is Gul Dukat's room," the garresh said pointing out Room 8. "Glinn Damar is right across the hall for you. You're to remain here until Prefect Dukat summons you. You address Dukat as Prefect on Bajor, as Gul when in space."

"I know that," I said annoyed.

With a contemptuous sneer, the garresh left me standing outside the door with no key or code to enter. I'd forgotten my backpack in my haste. I stared at the door, willing to open, when I heard someone approaching me. Saja arrived carrying my bag as well as his own.

"You forgot something, Yor," Saja said.

"Thanks. garresh wasn't very friendly," I replied.

"Don't expect to be welcomed. Gul Mukot is in charge of the Fifth, he's more interested in his fleet than ground troops. I have your key."

Saja opened the door for me. Without breaking his stride, he entered the room ahead of me and tossed my bag on a bed. It was a stark, tidy room with an adjoining bathroom. I saw a desk with a monitor and an extra com-link. The bed was narrow. I sat on it, finding the mattress too soft, which I didn't like. I'd have a backache for sure. I preferred a firm mattress.

"Not bad. I'm sure my bed will be smaller," Saja said laughing. He placed his backpack on the floor, pausing to close a large window overlooked the courtyard. "It gets cold here at night. A few more months and it will be winter. We'll be up to our asses in

snow. Damar's room is right across the hall. Seems Dukat has ordered Tychek to change rooms with him. I'm sure went over well."

"It's not quite what I expected."

Saja grinned as he came over to sit next to me. "No, not at all," he said. "You'll have to be careful visiting Damar at night. It wouldn't look good to Central Command if you two bunked together as you did on Terok Nor. Of course you had your own room there. I just happen to know what I know."

"That's a bit personal, Saja. Forget you know anything." I gave him a push. "Why aren't you married? I see you flirt with the Dabo girls. You never take one home."

"Now who is getting personal. Here you'll be expected to rise at 0600, join the soldiers in the mess hall at 0630, and fall in at the main courtyard in full armor by 0700. Since we're stationed with the Fifth Order, whatever you do, make no mention of the late Gul Raynor.

Things are bad enough the way they are. You might lose Klingon dagger." I laughed. "Now how am I going to make things worse?"

"Pry. Eavesdrop. And you have an annoying habit of annoying soldiers from the Fifth Order," he said, chuckling. "Dukat has not allowed any of the Klaxon crew to beam down to the fort, gossip spreads fast. It's a small world."

I reached into my boot and drew out the Klingon dagger. It was a handsome weapon and one I might have picked up at a store for myself. Saja stared at it as if blood still covered the blade.

"I like to keep it on me to remind myself of Cardassian justice," I said, placing the knife on my lap. "You know it's odd there are no female officers in the Second Order, none I've seen, anyway. I haven't seen any here either. It might be nice to make a friend of my own sex in the military. I try to fit in, Saja. I want nothing more than to be like you, you know who I really am and where I really come from."

"You're more Cardassian than most I've met. Anyone meeting you for the first time would never suspect you're a Terran, Yor. I don't even think about it anymore."

"That am I a good soldier?" I asked.

Saja smiled. "You're an officer, sir. I'm a soldier."

“Yes, am I good enough to serve Damar and Dukat? Am I the type of aide Damar needs? Because I don’t think I am.” I placed the tip of the knife at my chest. “Will I make a mistake and be asked to kill myself one day for Cardassia?”

The knife was removed from my hand and tossed onto the bed. Saja put his hand on my shoulder. I sat straight and paid attention. The older Cardassian seldom gave me advice, I knew he’d come to my room to just that. He was tougher than Damar and stricter than Dukat. I liked Saja. I trusted him more than any of the other War Dogs, which is why I’d picked him to be my second officer in the Alpha Brigade.

“To be Cardassian means you must obey orders. If Gul Dukat orders your death, I would expect you to take knife and fall upon it as Gul Raynor did without question. I do not understand why you wanted dagger. You say it’s a reminder of Cardassian justice. It’s not like you to be so morbid, Ren Yor. Perhaps you need to be reminded what can befall a traitor to Cardassia. I do not think will not be your fate.”

“Honestly, Saja, I intend to use dagger on Torell.”

“Then explains why you wanted it,” he said. “Let me be honest with you as well. The truth is you’ve inspired the Second Order, Yor. You’ve restored the meaning of honor and honesty. You treat everyone with fairness and kindness. The Alpha Brigade was born because you wanted an elite platoon represents the very thing you are, Yor. You ask if you are good enough. It is the rest of us who want to be as good and loyal as you are. You’ve restored our pride. is what you have done for the Second Order. Not only do your soldiers love you, so do your commanders.”

“Saja, I don’t think I like what you know.”

“If I was twenty years younger, I would have pushed Damar and Dukat off the balcony and asked you to my quarters for dinner. I happened to have been quite handsome. The ladies were quite fond of me,” the old veteran said laughing.

“You’re such a dick,” I said. I punched him in the arm.

“Ah, there it is! strange manner of speech humans’ use. Be careful of speaking like at Fort Varnok. I am your friend, Ren Yor. I’ve always liked you. Follow orders, do what is expected of you and all will go well for you.” He stood and walked to the door.

“I never meant to hurt Damar. I love him, Saja. I also love Dukat.”

Saja turned around, his arms crossed and leaned his massive bulk against the door. I'd said more than I intended to and felt embarrassed. Maybe I wanted a little advice. Maybe I wasn't him to realize I didn't feel like someone who inspired troops. Under his steady gaze, I removed my weapons, pistols, swords, placing them on the bed and started to remove my armor. I removed my beret and tossed it aside. Without it, I had no device to keep me sane. I had only my own will power to rely on.

“I'm sorry I said anything.”

“Let's have another drink and we'll talk,” Saja said. He walked over to the replicator and ordered one kanar and one red leaf tea. “The drink is for me. I need it. The tea is for you. You need to stay sober.” He handed me the cup. It was steaming. “That should keep you still until it cools. You don't want to burn yourself, Yor.”

I blew at the surface of the tea. “Do I not seem calm to you?”

“Your best friend has been kidnapped by a malicious, cunning snake. You're a Terran posing as a Cardassian. You're in love with two men who just happen to be your commanders. Not only are you in charge of the newly formed Alpha Brigade, I heard you've been doing a little spying for Garak. All in all, I'd say you're handling the stress reasonably well.”

Saja took a seat at my monitor. He sipped on his kanar.

“As your friend and first officer, let me point out there is not a soldier in the Alpha Brigade who would not give his life for you. As I said, you've won our respect and admiration for your loyal service to Cardassia.”

“Thank you.” A tear slid down my cheek. I let it go. I didn't want to draw attention to the fact his comment had caused a physical response.

“Dukat commands the Second Order and is the Prefect of Bajor. Your admiration for him is shared by the rest of us. You speak of loving him, Yor. I don't doubt you, you both have a dark side to your personalities. You're both ambitious. You can both be intolerant, impatient, and boastful. On the bright side, neither of you will surrender, no matter the cost. It is these similarities attract you to one another. It's not common knowledge you and your

cousin had an affair. It's not my place to pass judgment. Damar is my best friend. He has been hurt by what transpired between you and Dukat. Damar is old-fashioned. He's not a charmer like Dukat. His greatest fault is he hides his feelings at the bottom of a glass of kanar. Don't think I haven't told him so on numerous occasions. It seems to me you have chosen Damar over Dukat. Personally, whether Helen is found or not, Yor, Dukat will always stray. That's his way. Damar will remain faithful if you are faithful to him."

"Have you and Damar talked about me?" I asked. The tea sloshed, burning my fingers. I placed the cup on the floor. I wanted a drink, didn't order one. "Of course he's confided in you. I'm going to find Helen. It's over between Dukat and I and has been for a while. I just want clear, Saja."

"That's for you to decide, Yor. Don't give up Dukat because of Helen or Damar. If you want him, then be with him. If it's Damar you want, you'll have to do a little more than bat your lashes and throw him a kiss. I'm talking about trust, Ren. Dukat trusts you. much is obvious because you do whatever he asks. As for Damar, he doesn't trust easily and you've broken trust." Saja lifted up his hand when I started to speak. "Dabo girls are nice. Dabo girls aren't the type of girls a Cardassian officer commits to. Period."

"Both men are married, Saja. I'm not. I know I royally screwed things up and have to earn Damar's trust again. I also know you feel protective of Damar. You say you don't judge me, you do. I can't explain it, what I feel for Dukat is different than what I feel for Damar. Dukat chose me to be his cousin and an officer. If I stay in those boundaries, I can always be with him. It's easier to love Damar. He's far less complicated, most of the time."

"I understand, Yor. I really do."

"I've made up my mind," I said. "I want to be with Damar. I do love him, Saja. Not it's any of your business, I was with Damar first. I picked him over Dukat the night I first arrived on Terok Nor. Will you tell him for me? Will you explain how I feel to him?"

Saja finished his drink and set it aside. "Not only will I tell him, Yor, I will send Damar to your room as soon as he's out of his meeting," he said. "I'm to join Dukat this evening. He's needs the company of a gruff old soldier. means there will be much drinking and retold war stories, until one of us passes out."

“Someone from the Alpha Brigade should guard his door tonight,” I said, in afterthought. “I’ll ask Korvinus or Dunatar to stand watch.”

“Why bother one of the lads tonight? I’ll be with Dukat. I’ll guard his door. Consider yourself off-duty tonight. I doubt you’ll be needed for anything. Just let Damar rough off a piece. means you surrender, Yor. You don’t always have to be on top, do you?”

“Get out, you old busybody!” I laughed as I threw a pillow at Saja. “I’m going to take a shower and freshen up. Now go find Glinn Damar. That’s an order. I’ll see you in the morning.”

Saja grinned and left my room.

I moved about in frenzy. I dimmed the lights, turned back the bed, and then jumped into the shower, startled to find it was real water, not ion particles. The delay to enjoy hot water kept me in the shower longer than I planned, when I jumped out, clean, and refreshed, I dried my black hair with the towel refused to comb it straight.

The door open and someone entered my bedroom. Wrapping the towel around me, I peered around the corner, sighing to see it was Damar. I felt my nipples harden as he removed his armor and dumped it onto the floor with a loud clank. He stretched his arms wide, moving over to the replicator to order a glass of kanar, while I waited quietly. The steam from the shower rolled into the room, he had to notice, for he spun around, startled to see me.

“This is my room, Glinn Damar. You must have gotten it wrong.” I tried not to laugh.

“Saja said you wanted to see me.”

“I’d rather you see me.” I let the towel fall to the floor.

Damar finished his kanar and set the glass aside. He looked nervous, unable to hold my eyes long, as I waited for him to make the first move. Pursing his lips together, he walked over, took one look at my body, and wrapped his arms around me. His lips parted when they pressed against my own, his tongue flickering in a teasing fashion to gain entrance. I remained limp against him, keeping my arms straight at my side, letting him do whatever he wanted. His reaction was to jerk his head away when he felt no response in my kiss. Eyes narrowing with anger and passion, he grabbed holds of my arms.

“Get on the bed.”

Trying not to grin, for I liked his domineering manner, I slid across the bed, rolling over and assuming an alluring position. One leg bent and one held flat against the mattress. I raised one arm to fold beneath my head, while I caressed my own breast and let my fingers glide across my stomach. He stripped off his clothes, his eyes never leaving mine, until every article along with his boots ended up in the corner. Sitting on the edge of the bed, he kissed my knee, continuing along my inner thigh and buried his head between my legs.

I groaned as his tongue lapped hungrily, causing me to thrash on the bed. When I could no longer take the intensity of his oral maneuvers, I caught hold of his head and gave a pulled. With a chuckle, he lay on top of me, receiving the kiss he'd wanted. I had a way with kissing and the more effort I put into it, the more excited he became. He was a bit rough when he parted my legs, he took his time as he slid his thick cock inside me. Supporting his upper body with his arms, he thrust into me, holding my gaze.

My hands slid down his muscular back, gripping his firm buttocks as I thrust against him. I linked my legs around his own, my arms wrapped about his shoulders, groaning as he took his sweet time in torturing me with his almost lazy thrusts. No matter how I groaned or tried to increase his speed, he refused to alter his steady thump, forcing me to follow his lead. Inch by inch, his arms folded, lowering his full weight onto my body. His lips moved over mine and I took pleasure raking his back with my nails.

I nearly screamed when he started to pound away, giving me what I wanted. We both came at the same time, our mouths locked together. With a shudder, he collapsed on top of me, while I wrapped my arms and legs around him, holding him tight. Not until we both caught our breaths did I release him. He slid to the side, pulled the blanket over our sweaty bodies, and gathered me into his arms. We lay facing one another, side by side, sharing the pillow. I thought his eyes had never looked so blue. Taking my thumb, I brushed it over his lips, swollen from my kisses.

“I love you,” I said.

“Get some sleep. Tomorrow will be a busy day. I'll stay for a while and then go to my own room.”

It wasn't what I'd expected to hear, I refused to react like a typical female and cry. I wondered if Damar had any idea his silence affected me. The bed was too narrow to turn my back on him. I closed my eyes, aware several tears seeped through my eyelashes.

"Sawyer," he said, using my Earth name. "I want to say what you want to hear. I have to be sure it is more than just words. I have to believe you love me. I want to believe you do. I'll say how I feel when the time is right. I'm glad you told me."

Damar kept his arm around me, pressed up close and hot against my body. I sighed as he kissed my shoulder and relaxed against me, falling asleep within minutes while I was left wide-awake, unable to turn my mind off. I could not sleep. Damar never left my room and I didn't ask him to, enjoying his soft snores and tight embrace.

I must have dozed off at some point, but awoke in alarm. Damar remained asleep. Something felt off, so I put on my armor, belted on my weapons, and slipped out of the room. The corridor was quiet. I past several doors until I came to Gul Dukat's office. Saja was not standing outside his door. I assumed Saja had drunk too much kanar and slept it off in another room. That's not what troubled me. The door to Dukat's room was slightly ajar. Fearing the worst, I entered the room, drawing the Klingon dagger and came to a short wall blocked the view of the room beyond.

I slid around it, moving quietly, not wanting to arouse Dukat if was asleep and hoping to catch an intruder. Two windows were in the room, one closed with steel shutters, the other left open to a cool breeze came in from the south, smelling of flowers and dew. Tiptoeing to the window, I slid my fingers along the sill. A layer of dirt on the dew smudged my fingers. It was far too thick to have arrived on a gust of breeze and more dirt made a grating sound beneath the heel of my boot. There was no rope visible, I imagined a dozen ways an assassin might scaled a steel way and glancing toward the bed, I saw a large form covered by a blanket. The scent in the air belonged to Dukat, the spicy aroma, there was something else caught my attention. The odor of an unwashed body, along with the musty smell of fall leaves with irritated my sinuses and I let out a loud sneeze.

On the dark side of the room, I spotted something move, startled by the noise I'd made. It came toward Dukat's bed like a descending dark shadow. Afraid to fire the phaser

the moment Dukat sat in bed, striking him instead, I chose to draw the Klingon dagger and charge toward the intruder. I had no time to spare, for the shadowy form leaned over Dukat. Screaming like a mad woman, I dove across the bed, slamming into a hard form. The pistol fell from my grasp, I jabbed the knife into soft flesh and in return felt the sting of a blade in my shoulder. I made no sound, the injured man let out a loud scream, awakening Dukat.

“What is going on?” Dukat shouted.

The overhead lights flickered on. I lay on top of a Bajoran I’d never seen before, still holding onto the hilt of the dagger shoved into his chest. A smaller dagger stuck out of my right shoulder. I’d killed my opponent. His eyes remained wide open. Behind me Dukat rose from the bed. He appeared beside me, unclad, holding a spear in his hand..

“Is he dead, Yor?”

“Quite dead, sir.”

Dukat nudged the body with the tip. Before he alerted the guards or started asking questions, I turned the corpse onto its stomach. I stabbed the tip of the dagger into the base of the man’s skull, digging for an implant. A rush of blood poured onto the floor, covering my hands, my barbaric surgery paid off. I’d found what I wanted and handed the small device to Dukat, remaining seated on the floor in a pool of blood.

“There were twelve of us. Twelve assassins. Now they’re eleven,” I said. “Maybe finally a doctor can figure out how to remove one of those without killing the patient. The poor jerk probably didn’t know what he was doing. He somehow made it to the third floor, slipped in through the window and meant to slice your throat. When those things activate, you can’t resist and that’s how I know Helen killed Legate Mikor. Not you.”

Dukat squatted beside me like a caveman. His feet were covered with blood from the fresh kill. I noticed his cock remained tucked within the slit between his legs. With his buttocks close to the floor, if he had been a Terran male, he’d be low enough to dangle his scrotum in the pool of blood. He tossed the spear onto the bed and took the implant out of my hand, rolling it between his fingers.

“This is exactly what we needed. If we can decipher how this implant functions, not

only can we remove it without killing you, we may be able to send a message to Helen and direct her back to the fort. How did you know someone was in my room?"

"I couldn't sleep and decided to rise early. No one was standing guard. I saw the door lay open. Another minute, Dukat, and this would be your blood on the floor."

Dukat grabbed a fistful of my hair and yanked me across the dead body to kiss me. To remain balanced, I had to place my hands on the back of the corpse, while his knees submerged in the pool of blood. It was a savage kiss, two predators in the night, crouched over their prey. At the sound of someone clearing his throat, we turned to gaze over the bed at Damar who stood in the entrance, holding a phaser. Dukat released me and stood. He was covered in blood. I looked no better as I rose, the bloody dagger held tight in my hand.

"What is going on?" Damar asked. He walked over, peering around the bed and took a look at the corpse. "Are you dissecting or what? Move away. Put something on, Dukat. If anyone saw the pair of you, you'd give them a fright."

"Yor saved my life," Dukat said. He held out the implant. "Now we can find out how these damnable things work, Damar. Don't you know what this means? Can't you understand the importance of having one of these in our possession?"

"I said get dressed, Gul Dukat." Damar lifted his upper lip in disgust. "Security notified me two Romulan signals we're located close to this outpost. The implants are easier to track than we'd hoped. The signals are in this region, miles apart. Gul Tychek left to investigate, we've not heard from him since he left with a full platoon."

"One of those signals could be Helen's. We should be looking for her not Gul Tychek. Saja and I can take out half the Alpha Brigade to find her. Do I have your permission to do so, Gul Dukat?"

"What?" Dukat stared at me. "What did you say?"

"I said Damar can find Gul Tychek. Saja and I will find Helen."

"Summon the Alpha Brigade and we'll go together. However, there is one other matter must be dealt with, Glinn Damar," Dukat said. He wrapped the sheet around his middle as walked out from behind the bed. "It came as much as a surprise to me to find Yor in my chambers along with an assassin. I want an explanation as to why there was no guard posted

at my door. Someone will be punished. You know what must be done."

"Who was posted at the Gul's door last night?" Damar asked, his eyes on me.

"Gil Saja spent the evening drinking with Dukat. He said he'd stand guard." When Damar lowered his eyes, I glanced at Dukat. "What's wrong? It's obvious you both drank too much and passed out. Maybe Saja is in his room. I'll go get him."

"Stay here," Dukat said.

Damar swore softly and left in haste. Dukat threw his hands into the air and sat on the bed. With a cry of pain, he jumped up and knocked into me. I removed the spear from the bed and placed it on the wall, leaving behind bloody handprints.

"What's wrong? Is Saja in trouble?" I stepped over the body, slipping in the blood and righted myself by grabbing hold of Dukat's arm. He placed his hand over mine. "Why won't you say anything? You were with Saja. You know he drank too much last night."

"And is the problem, Yor. There can be no exceptions. Saja volunteered and he was expected to stand guard, drunk or sober," Dukat said, a strange look on his face I could not fathom. He released my hand. "Go see to Glinn Damar. This will be hard on him."

"What do you mean?"

Dukat didn't answer me. He wouldn't even look at me. Fearing what he meant, I wiped the blade clean on the Bajoran. I slipped outside Dukat's room as guards entered to remove the body. I stuffed the dagger into my boot and hurried outside to find Damar with Dorric, his second-in-command, standing at attention in the courtyard. The Alpha Brigade were forming ranks as I fell in beside Damar and Dorric. At the sound of a drumbeat, two guards led Saja forward. It was a sight I had never expected to see, for Saja looked as drunk as he must have been the night before. Glancing at Damar for an explanation, he kept his eyes straight ahead, a frown on his lips. Dorric stepped forward.

"For sleeping at your post, Gil Saja, the punishment is death."

"No," I muttered.

Saja glanced at me. It seemed I saw his whole life in his eyes before he was dragged over to a wall where a line of five men stood. I stepped forward, about to run to Saja, Damar grabbed me around the middle, holding me tight. At Gil Dorric's orders, the five soldiers

fired. Saja hit the ground, dead.

“So this is Cardassian justice,” I said. I pushed away from Damar, leaving blood on his uniform and collapsed to my knees. He dragged me to my feet, anger in his eyes.

“Stand at attention, Glinn Yor,” Damar ordered.

Collecting my wits, I stood straight as an arrow, watching my first officer’s body carried off the parade ground. The front gate opened. A detachment from the Fifth Order marched in with a string of Bajoran prisoners and pulling a cart. In back lay the body of a dead officer. I assumed it was Gul Tychek, wasn’t certain. The prisoners were sorted, women and children into one group, and the men and boys in another. I stood beside Damar and Dorric watching in horror as a squad from the Fifth Order led the male prisoners to the wall. Their glinn, a large man with a cruel face, walked over to the prisoners. At his leisure, he shot two male Bajorans. The soldiers from the Fifth Order cheered.

“Stop this, Glinn Damar, or I will,” I said. “These people aren’t rebels.”

“The Fifth met resistance last night. One of their officers is dead and Gul Tychek did not return with his soldiers,” Dorric said, stepping forward. “Allow me to take care of this, Glinn Damar. It’s obvious the platoon was out all night. Their glinn isn’t aware the Fifth has been replaced by the Second. I shall enlighten him.”

“Do so at once, Gil Dorric,” Damar replied.

Dorric motioned for a squad from the Alpha Brigade to follow. He walked over to the glinn as the man was about to fire on another prisoner. Without hesitation, Dorric knocked the pistol out of the officer’s hand. When the glinn started to protest, Dorric slapped the man in the face and pointed at Damar. The glinn glared at Damar, holstered his weapon, and walked off with a handful of his young officers. The Fifth Order soldiers were dismissed by Gil Dorric, grumbling amongst each other as they left the courtyard. The custody of Bajoran prisoners went to the Alpha Brigade. Gil Ravon and Gil Torgan in their berets stood before Damar.

“Take the Bajorans to holding cells,” Damar said. “I’ll question them later.”

“I’ll handle it, sir,” Torgan said. “We’ll have to leave guards from the Second to watch the prisoners. We can’t trust Gul Tychek’s men. The Fifth are a bunch of savages when it

comes to Bajorans. We can use the prisoners to flush out the rebels, placing them at the front of the line."

"Remind Gil Dorric not to anger the Fifth," Damar snarled. "Tycek was a loyal Cardassian. Take care of the prisoner, Gil Torgan. Gil Ravon, assemble every platoon stationed here, including those sulking Fifth Order bastards. We are making a sweep of this entire province this morning."

Torgan and Ravon saluted Damar and hurried off. Damar turned to me. He reached over and yanked the dagger out of my shoulder, staring at me as if I'd lost my mind. I'd forgotten it was there in all the excitement. Even after he pulled it out, I felt no pain. He stepped forward, yanking a kerchief out of his pocket and placed it over the wound.

"I'm so sorry about Saja. It's my fault. I should have stood guard."

"The fault was Saja's. You saved Gul Dukat. I didn't realize the assassin had stabbed you. The blade could have been poisoned. Go see the doctor, Yor. We'll be leaving soon." Damar expected me to leave, I merely stared at him, still in shock. "I just watched my best friend die. I could not stand and watch the Bajorans shot any more than you could. Are you glad you're a soldier now? How much bloodshed can you stomach, Yor?"

"Saja was my first officer. And he was my friend, too."

"Yes, Glinn Yor. Saja was our friend and now he is dead." Damar turned away from me. "I saw Dukat kiss you. I saw, Yor! You leave me no other choice. It's over between us. Now go."

"If you'd saved Dukat's life, he probably would have kissed you. It meant nothing."

"Of course it does. Neither of you can help feeling what you feel," Damar said, barely able to restrain his emotions. "Go see the doctor, Yor. I want to take the time to say farewell to my friend." He took a few steps away from me. "Saja and Dukat drank three bottles of kanar last night. I found Saja sleeping ten feet away from the door. I swear I'll never drink another drop again."

"Is it over between us? Did you mean what you said?"

"I don't know what I mean! My friend is dead!"

Watching Damar walk away from me, I headed toward the infirmary. I sat along in the

lobby waiting for the doctor. A sob burst from my lips, refusing to be suppressed. Dr. Xeron appeared in the doorway, I ignored him, unable to withhold my tears. My hands, crusted with blood covered my face and I cried for Saja and my shattered dreams of glory.

HELEN

Chapter Twenty-Seven

With the morning sun in our faces, the Cardassian boy hiked ahead of me along a path through the mountains. A beautiful valley cradled by tall a type of tall pine trees on our right seemed the perfect place for a fort or a Bajoran village. He seemed to know where he was going, veering off the path to lead me into the valley. At the sound of running water, I eagerly moved ahead of him, pushing through purple grass to reach a stream. My silent companion dropped to his knees, leaning down to lap at the water like a dog. No more graceful than my friend, I sank to my haunches, splashing water on my face. Cupping my hands, I drank as much of the cool, fresh water as I dared to and then stuck my aching feet into the water.

“It’s cold this morning,” I said, withdrawing my feet. I put on my boots, knowing I shouldn’t complain, for he had no shoes. He had to be freezing.

The boy pointed his finger at me. I figured he meant for me to stay like a good dog. He jumped across the stream and vanished into the grass. Making myself comfortable, I lay on my back, holding my hands to my stomach, hoping to see a shuttle fly past. My eyelids felt heavy and I dozed off, dreaming of Terok Nor and a large crowd gathered at Quark’s. I sat at the bar, dressed in a black gown, holding a com-link in my hand. Music played softly and as I raised the com-link, preparing to sing a country ballad to a large crowd.

The sound of splashing awoke me.

The boy spotted something in the water and moved fast, seizing hold of a large green fish by the tail. The fish landed beside me, trying its best to wiggle into the stream. I slammed my hand over it, feeling prickly scales beneath my palm. A fish was captured for our breakfast. He returned and sank beside me, using his fingers to tear into the sides of the fish and removed the guts. I assumed he’d toss the disgusting intestines aside, only he indicated I was to put it in my mouth. He demonstrated by eating an inch of red guts and placed the rest

against my lips. Reluctantly, I ate what he offered.

“Not bad,” I said.

The meat of the fish was torn into shreds. He divided the portions, placing my half on a large leaf. I ate the fish raw, it eased the rumbling in my stomach. Our meal also included a dark brown root it’s cleaned in the water. I shared this with the young Cardassian boy. He encouraged me to eat my portion. It was sweet, the texture reminding me of wood bark, only upon swallowing I felt a surge of energy.

“So much for protein bars.”

He grunted at me and lifted his head, sniffing the air.

“What is it? Do you smell something?”

The boy nodded. He grabbed his spear and club. Motioning for me to join him, he led the way to our former path. The ascent was made with no effort. I felt good. Whatever the root contained gave me enough strength to keep pace with the boy. As we trudged along the path, he handed me the spear. Apparently he expected to encounter danger. Keeping close to the wild boy, we jogged through the trees along a twisted path had once seen much foot traffic. I studied the path, able to see footprints in the dried mud and felt hopeful we were headed to a fort. A broken com-link and the remains of a Cardassian rifle lay off to the side. We walked only a hundred yards or less before the tree line ended, leaving us standing on a ridge overlooked another valley flanked by barren hills led into the north.

In the center of the valley stood a Cardassian fort. It was several miles from where we stood and the front gate. The white streak of shuttle past overhead and headed toward the fort. He pointed at the fort and turned to leave.

“Is that Fort Varnok? You have to come with me. I’m afraid to go by myself,” I said, grabbing his skinny arm. “You saw how the Fifth treated those Bajorans. If Dukat isn’t there, I may need you.”

A look of extreme thought came over the boy’s face. He glanced at the fort, squeezing my hand and finally nodded. I wasn’t surprised when he took the lead, he had all along. The path to the road was treacherous, vanishing midway behind boulders required us to watch where we walked on shifting gravel. I lost sight of the boy, my gaze diverted by the flash of

metal. Among the rocks, tucked into a crevice lay the body of a dead Cardassian. More bodies on my immediate left looked fresh, for they'd collected a swarm of black flies and the stench was overpowering. I tried not to gag, relieved when the boy pulled on my arm, guiding me away from the bodies, it didn't prevent me from throwing up my breakfast.

"Those were soldiers from the Fifth Order," I said.

He nodded.

"Tell me we're close to Fort Varnok. I'm right, aren't I?"

The boy nodded and lifted his club over his shoulder, scowling, making it clear he felt no sympathy for the dead soldiers. Whatever they'd done to him in the past, he remained silent and gave a toss of his head. His tangled black hair swept in front of his face. He swept it away and continued along the path, while I walked behind, grateful when the boulders opened ahead of us. The rest of the path to the road was in the open. A long cavalcade of tanks and vehicles rumbled along the road, headed in two separate directions. Soldiers mounted on horses climbed a trail a half mile from our position, headed into the trees, I could see the dark purple berets on their heads and grabbed his arm, holding him back.

"It's the Alpha Brigade. Sawyer must be with them. Let's go to them."

The boy broke free. He lifted his club in a threatening fashion.

"Those are Gul Dukat's soldiers. Don't be afraid. They won't hurt you. I promise."

A shout from a rider brought the mounted squad riding in our direction. My friend seemed close to panic. I dropped the spear and grabbed hold of his arm with both hands, keeping him from bolting. The lead rider kicked his horse, riding at a gallop along the narrow path, leaving me doubt we'd been seen. I didn't dare wave or the boy would leave.

"They're my friends. Friends!"

"Helen!"

Sawyer's familiar voice brought a relieved smile to my face. As she approached, the boy stomped on my foot and pushed me backwards. He took off in the opposite direction. Sawyer swept past me to pursuit the boy, while the rest of the squad surrounded me. A rider dismounted and hurried toward me. It was Ravon, the young Cardassian who tried so hard to impress Dukat at Terok Nor by punishing Bajorans, at moment I was glad to see him.

“Mistress Helen,” Ravon said, catching hold of my arm. “Please. Allow me to help you onto my horse. Gul Dukat has sent several search parties after you. You will return with your friend, have no doubt of that, I should take you Gul Dukat straight away.”

“Thank you, Ravon,” I said. He led me to his horse. The animal was a bit skittish, I was from Texas and had no trouble controlling the horse or climbing into the saddle. I offered my hand to Ravon and helped pull him onto the horse behind me.

“You are an experienced rider.”

“I am. Just don’t fall off,” I said laughing.

Tapping my heels to the horse’s flanks, I rode through the squad, taking the path they’d come from and led the way to the road. Ten tanks remained on the road. Most of the soldiers stood beside the vehicles wore purple berets, defining them as the Alpha Brigade which Sawyer commander. Ravon spoke the entire time, telling me about a recent skirmish in the hills, which explained the dead bodies. I didn’t listen further, for in the middle tank sat Dukat and Damar. My hand raised to wave as I galloped across a field. Ravon’s hands gripped my waist as the horse jumped over a fallen log, bringing a smile to my face. Heedless of the ditch ahead of us, I kicked the horse in the sides, making another jump brought us onto the road. As the horse careened toward the tank, I pulled on the reins, bringing the animal onto its hind legs and felt Ravon slide off the rump to land on the ground on his backside. The horse landed hard and I swept my arm wide as I caught Dukat’s gaze, showing off my skill in the saddle.

“Helen,” Dukat shouted.

Ravon stood, dusting off his backside and took hold of the reins. I slid out of the saddle and ran to meet Dukat as he climbed out of the tank. He opened his arms and I slammed into his hard, muscular body, laughing and crying at the same time. At the feel of his embrace, I sank against him, feeling safe and relieved I’d finally found my way back to him.

“Helen. My dear Helen. I thought I’d lost you forever.”

“I’m fine. I’m with you now,” I said, happier than I’d ever been in my life.

“How did you get here? Where did you come from?” he asked.

“Torell brought Garak, your wife and I to a cave. It was far to the south of what’s left of

an outpost. The boy found me. He brought me here. We have to find him.”

“Yor will handle it. Stay put. I’m not letting you go again,” he said.

Soft lips brushed across my forehead. I lifted my head and found Dukat staring intently at me. He looked tired, a trace of sorrow embedded in his blue eyes hadn’t lifted even though he’d found me. Kisses rained onto my cheeks as he enfolded me in his arms for a fierce hug. Soft voices surrounded me. Damar joined Ravon and stood with the mounted riders. A mere glance of acknowledgment was all Damar offered, for a loud cheer rose from the Alpha Brigade and he turned toward the hill.

“Ah, Ren Yor returns,” Dukat said turning me around.

Riding fast across the field, Sawyer bent low over the neck of her horse. The boy lay across her lap, struggling to get free, she had no intention of releasing him. She jumped the same log I had, slowing the animal before she arrived at the ditch and gingerly made her way across the road toward the tanks.

“Who is the boy?” Dukat asked.

“I suspect he’s an orphan. Yesterday, he took me past an outpost in valley, no more than ten miles to the west. All the soldiers were dead. I think that’s where he lived. He must have been living in the wild for a few weeks. I can’t be sure. The bodies were in advanced state of decay. There were no survivors.”

“Outpost 9,” Dukat said. “Yor should have let the boy go. Orphans our cast out when their parents die. The best we can do for him is place him in the Tozhat Resettlement Center. They’ll care for him, though it would have been better if the boy had not survived.”

“Don’t say that,” I replied. “Surely someone will adopt him. He’s not trash to be thrown out.”

“You’re far too soft and kind for this world.”

Dukat opened the side door of the four-seated tank and helped me inside. Once seated, Dukat placed a blanket over my lap, moving into my line of vision as he sat beside me. I turned, trying to see Sawyer and found her still in the saddle, wrestling with the boy. Damar stood beside her, his pistol in hand which he slowly raised.

“What’s he doing? Dukat? Don’t let Damar kill the boy.”

Leaning forward, Dukat lifted his hand, about to speak fell silent. A thin smile spread across his face. Sawyer managed to wrangle the boy. He sat facing her, his legs and arms wrapped around her body like a monkey, while she'd turned, presenting her back to Damar. The pistol was lowered. She gave Damar a look of pure fury, making me proud.

"No one is going to harm Parnal," Sawyer said.

I was a bit shocked the boy had spoken to her. There was no other way she could have known his name; she wasn't a mind reader.

"What? You mean this is Gul Parnal's son?" Damar asked. He put away his weapon and glared at the boy. "His father was killed a few months ago in an attack led by the Bajoran Resistance. It is the Cardassian way to abandon orphans. You know that. Gul Parnal had no other family. His wife was also killed in the attack. The boy has been on his own since then. Leave him."

Ravon and the mounted squad gathered around Sawyer. A soldier reached for the boy. Keeping one arm around the boy, Sawyer took the club and knocked the soldier's arm away, lifting it to shake at Damar.

"I don't give a damn about your stupid traditions. I'm keeping the boy. When I say keep, I mean I'm going to adopt Parnal as my son." Sawyer ignored the grumbles responses from the soldiers, including Damar. The boy lifted his head, staring at her with adoration. "Parnal, I am Glinn Ren Yor, cousin of Gul Dukat of the Second Order, and from this day forth you are mine and am yours."

Damar grabbed hold of the reins of her horse. "This is not our way. You cannot change what has been our way for centuries," he said. "You cannot adopt every orphan on Bajor and there are many. I suppose you'd have done the same for me when I was a boy."

"Well, maybe not you, Glinn Damar," she said. Her eyes flashed in my direction. "We've been worried sick about you, Helen. This mere boy brought you home. I can do no less than provide him a future. I know you approve."

"I most certainly do. Dukat? Don't you agree?"

"It's Yor's decision," he said. "It obviously pleases you, Helen. Stand down, Glinn Damar. Gil Yor has made her choice. She has chosen the boy to be her son. Let's return to the

fort and prepare for an assault on Torell's hideout. Move out."

Sawyer rode past me with the boy in front of her. Her squad followed her back to the fort. Dukat kept his arm around me as the tank rolled forward, cutting out of the line to head toward the fort. As the tank approached the fort, he gave me a passionate kiss left me light-headed. I groaned when his hand slipped under the blanket to touch my swollen stomach.

"I'm all right and so is the child."

"You never fail to amaze me, Helen. You're far stronger than I realized."

Glowing from the compliment and his attention, I took hold of his hand as we drove through the gates. The tank pulled up to a tall four-story building with windows reflected the landscape and a network of balconies and staircases. I suspected the windows had to be bulletproof or why bother. Dukat kept his arm around me, guiding me inside the main building and onto a turbolift stopped on the third floor. I sagged against him, grinning when he lifted me into his arms and carried me to his spacious quarters.

"How about a hot bath?" he asked, setting me on the bed. I noticed a splatter of dried blood on the wall. "Not to worry. Another thwarted assassination attempt. I don't need to tell you who saved me. Yor has become one of my finest officers. I feel I've let her and Damar down. Saja was to have guarded my door last night. We drank too much kanar and he was found asleep in the hallway. Had Yor not checked on me, I'd be dead too."

"You mean Saja is dead?" I was horrified. "How? Did the assassin kill him?"

Dukat stared at me. "Gil Saja was executed this morning for sleeping at his post. It's regrettable, he an example had to be made. It's one offense can't be taken lightly,

Helen," he said, sighing. "Saja was Damar's best friend. If I had bent the rules for one soldier, I'd have to do it for all. He will be missed. He was my friend too."

"Don't tell me anymore. It's just too heartbreaking."

While Dukat entered a bathroom, turning on water, I thought about how Sawyer had latched onto the boy and protected him from Damar and the Cardassian soldiers. She'd lost Saja, her second-in-command, surely assuming the responsibility of his death. I knew her well enough to know she'd defend Parnal with her life. This was a permanent attachment and no one was going to break them apart, not even Damar. I was shocked to know it was Damar

who ordered Saja to be shot and felt an immeasurable amount of sorrow for him and the Alpha Brigade who had loved the older Cardassian.

Dukat helped me disrobe, tossing away my smelly boots and eased me into a large tub filled with soapy bubbled. The water was hot and the tub large enough for several people. I thought about inviting him to join me, for once I wanted to be selfish. The bath felt wonderful. He remained with me, taking a seat on the toilet, watching me scrub my body with a sponge and a fragrant clear liquid soap.

"Do not leave the windows open," Dukat said. "It was how my assailant entered my room last night. Gul Tychek failed to return from his patrol last night."

"I saw the bodies on the ridge where you found me."

"His men, not his patrol. He went north, not south." Dukat's blue eyes shifted, the emotion altering from anger to concern. "I'll do my best to secure this fort before I leave, there's always a way for an assassin to get inside."

"One already is. I'm here."

"A fact I'm well aware of. Yor is able to resist the implant."

"That's because she wears the beret. Garak...oh Garak. We have to find him and your wife. Garak knows how to negate the effects of the implant. He had us both wearing a magnetic device, hers is in the beret, and mine is on this bracelet." I held out my arm. I still wore both bracelets given to me by Garak and Dukat. "I thought as long as I wear this I'd be safe to be around." I removed it and placed it aside. "It doesn't work as well we know."

"As long as you wear mine, I know you love me."

I softened and reached for him. He took hold of my hand. The warning his wife had given played over in my mind as his lips pressed over my own. He left me alone to bathe, waiting on the bed, seated beside a red nightgown when I entered the room. I tossed aside the towel, forgetting the nightgown and straddled his lap, hungry for his touch and love. He was limited in his movements because of his armor. I could see he contemplated removing it as I kissed his cheek, he gave a weary sigh, patting my thigh.

"As much as I want to stay here with you and make love to you, I must concentrate my efforts on capturing the rebels. There will be much blood shed before this is over. I will not

rest until the members of the Circle and their allies are caught and executed. Perhaps I should return you to Terok Nor and place you in Dr. Quirin's care?"

"After being abducted from the station, I'd rather stay here with you."

"There's one other thing I should tell you. Gul Raynor was blamed for the murder of Legate Mikor. I ordered him to take his own life," Dukat said. "Let us hope the incident is permanently closed. Constable Odo issued a formal report to Central Command. My only concern is the Obsidian Order is satisfied or they will return to make their own investigation."

"Then it's best I'm here with you," I said. I wondered if he knew I'd killed Mikor. If he did, he didn't mention it and for I was grateful.

Lifting me into his arms, Dukat placed me on the bed as if I was a child and covered me with blankets. It was a large bed and felt good to be bundled in its softness and warmth. I reached for him, wanting another kiss, he remained standing, his arms folded across his chest.

"I fear things will only get worse, Helen. Remain in this room with the door locked.

There is a pistol beneath the pillow. I'll leave a soldier from the Alpha Brigade outside your door. He'll bring you whatever you need. I will not return until I find my wife. It is a matter of honor and responsibility. I hope you can understand."

"And when you bring her back, what will happen to me?"

Dukat swore softly. "How would I know what will happen? I do not even know she is still alive." He walked toward the arched entrance to the room, pondering over something. When he turned toward me, he wore a tender expression. "I do not love Mikelya. I stopped loving her long ago. I love you, but she is my wife and I must use every possible means to find her. It is expected of me."

I stared at him.

"Did hear what I said, Helen?"

"I love you, too. I love you more than anything."

Dukat kissed me. "Get some rest," he said. "Everything will be fine."

SAWYER

Chapter Twenty-Eight

Dressed in my armor, my swords on my back, I came out of the bathroom and found Parnal sitting on the floor with a blanket pulled over his head. I gathered the boy in my arms and placed him in bed, uncovered his head and properly tucked him in.

"You are safe here, Parnal. This is my room. No one will harm you. Everyone is afraid of me or didn't you know that?" I asked. He threw his arms around me. "I will be back before you know it, honey. I swear it. I must go with Gul Dukat, Glinn Damar, and the Alpha Brigade to hunt rebels. Get some rest. Helen is right down the hallway, if you need her."

"I should go with you, Yor."

"You've already done more than your fair share of fighting. You're safe here. Trust me. Get some rest. I'll be home in the morning."

"I want to be helpful," the boy said. "I can use the computer and bring up a map of the area. I'll show you exactly where to find the people who abducted Helen."

"You clever little monkey. Show me."

Parnal slid out of bed and sat at my desk. He wasn't a savage at all, highly intelligent and his nimble fingers flew across the keyboard. I stood behind him, staring at a 3D map appeared on the monitor of the entire province. He indicated certain locations by marking them with X's.

"What are these marks?" I asked.

"Traps set by the Fifth Order. That's how they catch Bajorans."

"Gul Tychek set those traps?"

"My father and every guls here uses them."

"Download map onto my com-padd." I handed him the device. It took him only a few seconds to download the information. "It's funny how I feel like we belong together. I just met you and I already love you," I said, ruffling his hair. "Get mop cut while I'm gone. Let

Helen do it for you. She's in the commander's room. I seem to have Room 13 again. It's the same room number I had on Terok Nor. Helen thinks it's a bad number, I don't. Take care of her, Parnal. You saved her life so makes you responsible for her. It's what we Yor's' do. We help people."

Parnal gave a nod. "I'll download this map onto Gul Dukat's computer terminal. Shall I do the same for Glinn Damar?" He waited until I nodded. "My father showed me how to do many things, he didn't know just how smart I am. I've also provided you a list of transmission codes. If any of his soldiers are still alive, they may use the provided channels. You should find them and bring them here."

"You are far too smart for your own good."

Reaching over him, I opened the desk drawer. A pistol was inside. He slid his fingers over the weapon, withdrawing it, and set it on the desk.

"Keep door locked. If anyone comes in here and tries to harm you, kill them," I said. "Then find Helen. Take her someplace safe, Parnal. If you don't know the layout of this fort, then read up on it. The blue prints are available."

"I can take care of myself. And I can take care of Helen. I know what to do."

"That's why I'm putting you in charge, Young Yor."

My smile was sincere as the boy walked me to the door. I slipped the com-link into a small pouch attached to my gun belt. He stared at the swords strapped at my back and then noticed the Klingon dagger in my boot. A smile of his own appeared, one was cunning. I headed to the lobby. Dukat and his officers waited for me. The Second Order was assembled outside, using the tanks from the Fifth Order. The Alpha Brigade stood in formation with Ravon and Torgan standing in front.

"Ah, Yor," Dukat said. "I appreciate the map you sent. We'll see about formalizing the adoption of the boy later. An interesting new development. Gul Tychek has arrived. I need to speak with him before we leave. The Alpha Brigade is waiting for you, Glinn Yor. Yes, I've promoted you. Give me ten minutes and I'll join you in the courtyard. We'll find these rebels, together."

Walking outside, I found Ravon and Torgan standing with the full brigade. The horses

needed rest and ten battle tanks were available. The brigade numbered one hundred soldiers. At my approach, the officers saluted first and then the soldiers. I returned the salute and ordered the soldiers to board the tanks. Each tank had two laser cannons mounted at the front and rear, with a driver and two gunners.

The 1st Battalion, A Company, Second Order had joined us, which meant one thousand additional soldiers, plus the Alpha Brigade, and five hundred soldiers from the 13th Brigade, C Company, Fifth Order. The 13th would act as scouts, I intended to keep my eye on them, finding the coincidence far too important to ignore. I chose the third tank, in a superstition frame of mind, and waited for Dukat, seated in back beneath a blanket. The nip in the air meant an early winter, so I'd been told, though it would be another two months before it was official on the Bajoran calendar.

It wasn't long before Dukat arrived. He tossed the driver, Icarus, his rifle before vaulting into the backseat like a teenager with a convertible. His rifle was handed to him. Dunatar was the front gunner. Korvinus mounted the cannon in back. I'd chosen this vehicle because my friends were assigned this tank, and while I hadn't said anything about Saja, they had to be thinking about him. We'd miss Saja on this mission.

"How is your shoulder?" Dukat asked. When I didn't answer, he produced a hypospray from his kit and slammed it into my leg. I closed my eyes the painkiller mixed with an energy-boost created an odd sensation of being wired and chill at the same time.

"I'm fine," I said.

"Gul Tychek claims Bajoran rebels attacked his platoon in the north. That's the same location where you first landed on Bajor. The boy's map indicates we need to be headed to Outpost 9. Interesting, don't you think, Tychek wants us to go north."

"Sir, should I stay here and keep my eye on Tychek?" I asked.

"I've left enough soldiers from the Second Order here. Two of your own men are posted outside Helen's and the boy's rooms," Dukat said. He patted Icarus on the shoulder. "Take us to Outpost 9. It will take a few hours, we'll get there before night. Just sit back and relax, Yor. You'll see action soon enough. You'll lead the Alpha Brigade on the assault on Torell's hideout when we locate it. Damar is already headed in direction. He'll lead a second

team once we're in position."

As the tank rolled out the front gates, Dukat tossed me a helmet with an attached telescopic lens on the side. He put on a helmet as well. Our crew also wore helmets. With the face shield lowered, I was able to see small multiple screens of the road, in every direction seen from the tank, and an overhead view of the entire convoy. There was no chatter over the speakers, which remained open, I could alter the connection with a tap to the helmet and merely thinking about who I wanted to contact; was nifty. Dukat reached beneath the seat and removed a larger version of the Cardassian rifle included a grenade launcher. He placed it on my lap, his voice flowing into my helmet.

"Gul Tychek was one of Raynor's closest friends and did not receive the news of his death well. Don't worry. He's been watched quite closely. I expect this may be the beginning of the end of the Fifth Order's sworn obedience to the Union," Dukat said.

"Civil war, sir?"

"Yes," he said. "This is the opportunity I've been waiting for and I fully intend to capitalize on the error made by our enemies. I've come to Bajor. They never should have let me return. This time, I intend to stay, Glinn Yor. This is the end of my waiting period on Terok Nor and the beginning of my own rise to power, and from the ashes shall rise a new Cardassia and you're part of it, my warrior queen."

* * *

HELEN

Trapped in Dukat's room all day, I sorted through the items in the drawers, finding the belongings of the fort commander Gul Tychek of the Fifth Order, which I backed in a bag to be transferred to his new accommodations. In the last drawer I found a collection of women's undergarments and beneath the panties he had com-padd. I started listening to his daily logs, learning how long he'd been in command of Fort Varnok, his dislike of Gul Parnal at Outpost 9, and his hatred for Prefect Dukat who he blamed for a number of things, including the Bajoran Resistance. It sounded like treason to me. Knowing Dukat needed to hear what I had, I searched the room for a place to hide the com-padd, finding a nice spot behind the bed

within a control panel.

Parnal arrived in my room morning for breakfast, remaining as my companion for the remainder of the day. I trimmed his hair, used the replicator to make him a pair of boots fit to perfection and then made lunch. The sky was overcast, too chilly for a walk outside. We decided to read a manual on the Cardassia military, settled onto the couch and right as he opened it to the first page, the door slid open without the usual chime. A tall, barrel-chested man with a full beard entered. I'd never seen a Cardassian with facial hair. It gave him a frightening appearance. I assumed this was Gul Tychek, the code used a private one only he used, and noting as well how quickly Parnal closed the book left it on his lap.

"Hello," I said.

The gul made no introductions, ignoring me as he went to the cabinet in the bedroom, which I had emptied earlier. Noticing his belongings in a bag, he rifled through the items, muttering to himself and returned empty-handed, glaring at me.

"Tidying up, are we? You people like to take things don't belong to you. Where have you put my com-padd?"

"Gul Tychek, is it? I don't believe you're supposed to be here. In fact, how did you get past the guard at the door?"

"This is my room!" Tychek stormed toward the couch, his fist raised. "You'll tell me what I want to know, you Bajoran whore, or I'll beat it out of you! Where is my com-padd?"

I pointed toward the bedroom. "Take the bag and leave, Gul Tychek."

"Didn't you hear me? Or are you deaf as well as stupid?"

"Guards!" I reached for the pistol Dukat, placed beneath a pillow, pointing it at Tychek. "I suggest you leave. The boy and I don't want any trouble. I won't hesitate to pull the trigger if you try to hurt us."

Parnal pressed against me. "Be careful, Aunt Helen. He's a bad man," he said.

"You have no idea what I am," Tychek said. "I have relieved the guards of duty. All of the Second Order intruders, including the Alpha Brigade, left with Dukat last night. I am in control of this fort." He drew his own pistol. "Hand over the com-padd, Mistress Helen, or I'll kill you and then the boy. I don't need any witnesses."

His eyes were beady and spread too far apart. He was uglier than most Cardassians. Standing with our pistols aimed at one another seemed stupid. While he imagined I was a weak human, too frightened to shoot a Cardassian, he didn't know I'd spent most of my childhood hunting deer with my father and brother. I had no problem shooting the man.

"You're a member of the Circle," I said.

"Well, you're certainly the clever one. I don't think you'll shoot me. You haven't the guts to pull the trigger."

A loud blast echoed in my ears as a red beam struck Tychek. Parnal stood, holding a pistol in his hands as Tychek hit the ground. He didn't move. Parnal stuck the pistol under his belt, drew a knife and ran over to the gul.

"Is he dead?" I asked.

"No, I should kill him. He killed my mother. I saw him do it," Parnal said. "I'm not a killer. Don't look, Aunt Helen. I'm going to give him something to remember me by."

The boy slid the tip of the knife along the length of Tychek's cheek. Blood poured from the gash. He made another mark on the opposite side. I was already on the move, grabbing two coats for us and running toward the door.

"We have to get out of this fort, Parnal. Let's go."

Parnal sprinted toward me, wiping his knife on the new suit I'd made for him. He took the coat from me, one of my own, slid into it and led the way into the corridor. There were no guards posted. The boy changed the code, locking the door, we no sooner made it to the stairwell when an alarm went off. As we ducked into the stairwell, several Fifth Order guards hurried past on the way to Tychek's old room.

Running to the lower level, we opened the door to peer into the lobby. Out the windows I was able to see the massive gates were closed. Hundreds of soldiers stood in the courtyard and more guards were headed toward the lobby. Parnal grabbed my arm and we through a hallway to an exit door. He pushed it open. Across from us was the walled garden. The iron gate stood open. With a nod, Parnal led me across a walkway, a wide stretch of hard turf and through the gate. We hid behind a fountain as a squad ran past the gate.

"They must be looking for us," I said. "Any idea how we can get out of the fort

unseen?"

"Yes. Come with me."

The boy led me along the winding path through tall trees, bushes and dried flowerbeds. We came out the back gate near a small courtyard faced another building. Every soldier was headed toward the main courtyard. We waited until the coast was clear and ran toward the three-story building. Large doors opened, revealing tanks, Parnal veered around the corner. I followed, breathing hard, able to see the northeast guard tower. A hatch appeared ahead of us on the sidewalk. He knelt, typing in a code on the control bow and it slid open. With a nod, he vanished down the staircase. I kept close behind him and shut the hatch behind us. Soft golden lights flickered on. We'd entered an access tunnel, which I assumed, led to every building in the fort. At the bottom of the stairs, the tunnel opened wide, large enough for a tank to drive through.

"This maintenance tunnel is the way out. I read a great deal more than you, Aunt Helen," Parnal said. "I know everything about this fort. Come on."

A loud humming from the machinery echoed through the tunnel. Parnal took my hand and picked a direction. He took me north. Parnal picked up speed, making me run. I hoped he was sure he knew where he was going, for I heard shouts behind us. After a few twists and turns, the tunnel narrowed and went on with minimal light to see for a hundred yards. It was damp in this part of the tunnel. Cardassian engineering was not all they claimed it to be. There was a major leak in the plumbing, which had flooded several tunnels. To continue in the direction Parnal wanted to take didn't seem prudent, for the lights ahead flickered, making afraid we'd run into loose wiring and die a violent death from electrocution.

"We can't go this way," I said. "What do we do?"

"Follow me," Parnal said. "I know where to go, Helen. I like to study the info-structure of all forts on Bajor. It's a hobby of mine. They're still rebuilding sections of the fort and we're now on the northeast side. Look for a ladder. I think we've gone far enough. We should be outside the wall which they're still working on in part of the fort."

"You're far too smart for a boy your age."

"Planning ahead is the best way to stay alive. Since we arrived, I've familiarized

myself with the layout of this fort. I know the way out. Trust me.”

I spotted a ladder across a ten-foot trench filled with water. Parnal kept hold of my hand while he lowered himself into the water. It rose to his chest. I had to kneel down to keep hold of his hand. I went in next. The current was stronger than either of us expected. I don’t think Parnal knew we’d stepped into a large drain, by some miracle we reached the opposite side of the trench. Parnal climbed out and reached back to help me. With some effort, he managed to pull me out of the water. We lay on the floor, wet, smelly, alive.

“I lost my pistol,” Parnal said. “I’m not a good soldier.”

“Don’t worry about it. I have mine.”

Parnal reached into his pocket. He held a com-link in his hand. “Don’t use it in here,” he said. “They might be able to trace the call. When we are above ground, I’ll contact Glinn Yor and give her our position.”

I grabbed him and kissed his cheek. Parnal slipped away from me, pocketing the com-link and climbed the ladder. He opened the hatchway, letting in sunlight and crawled out. He returned a second later, waving me on.

Needing no further convincing, wanting to get out of the waterway as soon as possible, I tucked the pistol inside my shirt and climbed to the top. We stood in a glade, the walls of the fort no more than twenty yards from our position. Parnal closed the hatch and led me through the trees. The ground sloped. We climbed a hill, using the rocks to hide behind, trying to avoid being spotted by the guards in the towers. In this pattern we moved over the hill and entered a barren valley with high rock walls and a number of caves. There was no choice to run through the gorge, hoping we wouldn’t be seen for there was no cover, none at all. It seemed pure luck the gorge curved, revealing a narrow river and a bluff covered with trees. This is where Parnal wanted to go. It required scaling the rocks, a difficult climb, at the top we were able to see Fort Varnok. We’d ran a great deal further than I anticipated. The fort was three miles behind us and active. They were looking for us.

“Will Tychek pick up the transmission if you use the com-link now?” I asked.

Parnal removed the item from his pocket. He gave it a shake, nothing happened. He shook it and met my gaze. He looked far calmer than I felt.

"It's wet," he said.

"Keep trying."

The boy fiddled with a dial. I heard static. "I think I have it. Yor? Glinn Yor?" he asked, in a firm voice. Someone replied.

"Come in.. can't read you."

"Yor, it's Parnal. We need immediate assistance."

For a moment there was only static, then I heard a male voice. *"Stay put. We're coming to get you."* The connection turned into fuzzy static. He put away the com-link.

"That didn't sound like Sawyer," I said. I'd already told Parnal where Sawyer and I really came from since I had felt like it was the right thing to do. Knowing we were space orphans like him had brought us closer together. I trust him completely. "If you know of someplace where we can hide, then let's find it. Don't use the com-link again."

"That was Yor!"

"No, it wasn't. Trust me. Let's get going, honey. We don't have a lot of time."

Standing, I followed Parnal through the trees and soon realized he had no idea where we were going. We were far to the east of Fort Varnok. He'd grown up at Outpost 9, which lay more than fifteen miles to the west. His confidence seeped out of his little body like air rushing out from a pricked balloon.

"When a rabbit hides from a coyote, they go to ground," I said. "What we need is a hole to hide in, Parnal. A very deep hole."

I knew he wanted me to confirm Sawyer had responded, I feared it wasn't our friend coming to save us. I wasn't lucky and he was desperate, and didn't make a winning combination.

"Then let's find a hole," the boy said.

SAWYER

Chapter Twenty-Nine

Arriving at Outpost 9, the Alpha Brigade fanned out at my order, securing the area and set up headquarters in the only standing building. A partial section of the wall remained, the rebels had done a fine job destroying the outpost. Our tanks were hidden out of sight and camouflage nets tossed over them. Guards were posted. Scout patrols sent out. I hoped I knew what the hell I was doing, since I was now giving orders, while Dukat waited at the makeshift headquarters. I caught sight of Ravon who I'd promoted to my first officer. Torgan was now my second officer. Both were good men, I already missed Saja.

An officer I didn't know fell into step behind me. I didn't know all of the men from the Second Order, I should have known the officers. We entered the building together. Dukat was bent over a table, gazing at a map, surrounded by a full squad of soldiers wearing purple berets. Dunatar, Korvinus, Jenrak, Zolon and Ikarus and a stalwart fellow named Komash were my best soldiers. I had nicknamed them the War Dogs. I didn't know the wormy gil who kept on my heels, practically breathing down my neck, he certainly had no problem speaking right up.

"Sir, I am informed by Gul Tychek there has been another assassination attempt on his life," the officer said. "I appropriated a com-link from one of the Fifth Order scouts. The gul thought I was one of his men. He claims your mistress attacked him. She and the boy have fled the fort. Tychek stated he is going to find them."

"Give me that," I said taking the com-link from him. My index finger thrust into his chest. "Dukat, who is this officer? Why don't I know him?"

"Just a moment, Yor," Dukat grumbled.

I felt something thrust against my chest in retaliation and stared at a pistol held in

the hand of the gil. My implant throbbed. It was another assassin, it had to be, and no one noticed I was held at gunpoint. I remained in front of the gil, prepared to take the shot, while Dukat contacted the Klaxon. Dukat held two com-links in his hand and held one to his mouth.

"Gul Gahn?" Dukat said, in rumbling voice.

"Awaiting your orders, sir," Gahn replied.

"I want you to get a fix on Gul Tychek at Fort Varnok. Beam him onto your ship and hold him in the brig. Place guards on him." Dukat lifted his second com-link to his mouth and spoke. "Gul Tychek, this is Gul Dukat. Make no attempt to capture the woman or the boy. I'm returning to the fort to take charge."

"I'm in command, Dukat," Tychek said. *"I suggest you return to Terok Nor. Central Command has placed me in charge of the fort. I resent you're coming here and superseding me. I don't care if you are the Prefect of Bajor. I too have powerful friends and I mean to contact them and put an end to your usurpation."*

Dukat turned and smiled thinly at me. It was a signal. I grabbed the gil's head and snapped his neck. The pistol dropped to the ground. The soldiers looked surprised as they gathered around me, Dukat gave a nod. He'd known all the time the gil was an imposter. I retrieved the pistol and handed it to Ikarus who stood closet. Drawing the Klingon dagger, I turned the body over and cut out the implant. I handed it to Dunatar and stood, wiping my blood hands on the wall, while Dukat spoke into the second com-link.

"Now, Tychek, there's no reason to be unpleasant."

A loud cry of alarm came from Tychek. His side of the communication ended. Dukat laughed and spoke into his other com-link.

"Do you have Tychek custody, Gul Gahn?"

"In custody and on his way to the brig, sir. Anything else?"

"It seems I have stumbled upon a viper's nest down here. A number of Fifth Order officers have turned traitor. I will need reinforcements to rendezvous with me at this location. Send the entire Second Order and all you can spare crewmen, Gul Gahn."

"I'll send them with Glinn Kieryl, sir."

"Your new first officer? You went against my orders and promoted her? We'll talk about this later. Send more soldiers. Immediately." Dukat put away the com-links. "Glinn Yor, you can start your assault on the caves. Take what men you need and leave me the rest. It seems I have a small civil war to put down at Fort Varnok."

Dukat glared at me while I tried my own com-link, failing to reach Parnal. He walked over and took it from me. He didn't need mind, I didn't protest.

"I'll keep this in case the boy tries to reach you later," Dukat said. "I have no intention of losing Helen, Parnal, or this war. I'll find them. Now go find my wife. is your first and foremost concern. I don't care if you find Garak or not. Glinn Damar is already in position."

"Yes, sir."

"And Yor," Dukat said with a sigh, "bring back Torell alive, if you can. Kill Niyal Gora, but leave Torell to me. One more thing. I want you to know I regret Gil Saja's execution. He was a fine officer and a good friend." He turned back to the map. "Hadran, you will remain with me. The rest of you accompany Glinn Yor."

I turned to the dead body and kicked it hard.

"That's for Saja," I snarled. I kicked it again. "And that's for trying to kill me."

"I don't think he's going to cause any further problems," Dunatar said. He patted me on the shoulder. "Lead the way, commander."

Saluting Dukat, I walked outside with the squad to find the more troops materializing inside the ruins of the outpost. Glinn Kieryl was among those who beamed down. She hurried over to me.

"Why are you here?" I asked.

"I'd like to go with you, if I may, Gil Yor."

"It's Glinn Yor now."

"Congratulations. I still want to be there when you capture the rebels."

Kieryl had brought her fellow crewmen. I counted thirty in all. Ravon walked over, pressing his lips to my ears.

"Glinn Damar is making his descent on the northern ridge, five miles west of this

location. There is a large cave in the next valley where he believes he'd picked up readings on quite a few life forms," he said. "We need to get moving. Are you taking the Klaxon crew with us? I suggest you leave half here under guard. I don't trust them. Leave Torgan in command."

"Very well," I said. "Kieryl, I'll take ten of your crew. The rest will remain here under Gil Torgan's command. Torgan?" I spotted the young officer. "Set up a perimeter and secure this area. I want every cave in this valley searched. Ravon, I'll take my best squad and two more. Pick them out."

Slinging the big rifle over my shoulder, I turned to Kieryl. We were the only two women at Outpost 9. It was a shame I hated her guts.

"Well, you volunteered for this assault. Try to keep up. Move out," I ordered.

At a trot, we moved through the rubble, headed west following the cliff stood more than one hundred feet, shadowing the entire canyon. Kieryl ran at my side. Ravon was right behind me. This was my first real command and I had no intention of making a mistake. Using Parnal's map, the five-mile hike required us to scale a hill covered in trees to enter the next valley. We avoided several traps set by Gul Tychek, pits covered with branches, more appeared ahead of us. A deviation required us to abandon the easiest route, a straight line to the next valley, keeping us on the upper trails and ate up sunlight.

I had made no contact with Damar, relying on Ravon to keep me posted of his own assault. The boy's map showed the location where Helen had scaled down from the cave to safety. An hour slid past before we reached the exact cliff. Damar had made it descent to enter a large cave more than seventy feet above us. He should have waited for us.

It was silent apart from the wind rustling the tree limbs. Five moons appeared at twilight. Damar had not left his robes behind for us to use. It would have been helpful, for climbing the cliff proved to be tedious and treacherous. I made the ascent in the middle of the soldiers, relying on hand and footholds used by others to make my way to the gaping mouth of a cave. One by one, we took position inside a tunnel, until every soldier was inside.

"I've a fix the Romulan signal. There's more than one," Ravon said. He pointed

forward. "Only one main tunnel leads into a cavern. This is it. Damar must be waiting inside for us."

"Try to reach him again on your com-link, Ravon."

As we made our way toward the back of the cave, the tunnel started to twist and turn, requiring us to walk in a single file. Without Saja to take the lead, I moved in front, holding the large rifle at my side, not wanting to lose another soldier. We arrived at a large chamber filled with stalactites, requiring us to close the visors on our helmets, using infrared to be able to see. Glinn Kieryl and the ten Klaxon crewmen had failed to bring the appropriate equipment and had to rely on my squads to find their way in the gloom. While Ravon scanned the area with a tricorder, the soldiers fanned out, taking positions behind the rock formations.

"The signal is right ahead of us," Ravon said. He pointed toward another tunnel. "It's in this direction, Glinn Yor. I'm unable to reach Glinn Damar though. He may be further in. Shall I take the lead?"

"Do so," I said. "Ikarus, go with him."

Moving forward, I fell in behind Ravon and Ikarus, aware goose bumps appeared on my arms. As we approached the next tunnel, a loud explosion thundered through the cave, setting rocks tumbling above us and shifting the floor beneath our feet. Ravon pushed me against the wall, protecting me from falling rocks, while Ikarus ran back into the cave. Only Kieryl and six Klaxon crewmen managed to join us in the chaos. A heavy rock slid sealed the tunnel behind us, cutting off the rest of my soldiers. Flares were lit and tossed about the chamber, while the dust and debris settled. I reached for my com-link, remembered Dukat had taken it from me.

"There's mineral deposits in the cave walls," Ravon said. "I think that's why I can't contact Damar. Nor can we contact Dukat. Damar must have set off explosion, trapping Torell and the rebels, as well as us. We need to be careful."

"You're assuming Damar is alive," Kieryl said, appearing behind me. "Digging our way out is a waste of time. We wait until the dust settles and proceed. There's another tunnel. I can just see it. I suspect it leads into another cavern. If Torell is here, that's where

we'll find him."

"This was a trap. Torell knew we were coming. I suspect he's already captured Damar," I said, lifting the visor of my helmet. I could see well enough with the flairs. "Dunatar is behind us. He'll try to dig us out of here. In the meantime, let's see who lies in wait for us. Glinn Kieryl, since you seem to be so sure of what lies ahead of us, go take a look."

"Afraid, Glinn Yor?" she asked.

"No. I won't be upset if you're shot by Torell's men."

Lowering the visor, I scanned the area as Kieryl walked ahead of us. She emerged in a smaller chamber and motioned for us to follow. I pulled Ravon behind me, motioning the Klaxon crew forward, remaining in the tunnel as they used the stalactites for cover and advanced into the chamber. Kieryl appeared as a red-outline crouched behind a rock. Not liking the situation we found ourselves in, I lifted the heavy rifle to my shoulder and entered the cavern. Through the lens, I spotted a figure standing on a ledge above us. The moment I took aim, laser fire erupted all around us, coming from above.

"Take cover," Ravon shouted.

Returning to the tunnel, I crouched beside Ravon, while the Klaxon crew returned enemy fire. I found the same figure hiding thirty feet above our position. The trigger moved with ease and the resulting explosion killed the rebel and sent rocks tumbling from the ceiling. Red lasers fired across the chamber, slamming into the walls, none of the Klaxon crew were hit. Another loud explosion brought a large rock slamming into the ground in front of me. The tunnel started to collapse.

"Move it," I shouted.

I grabbed Ravon and dragged him into the chamber, avoiding laser fire as we ducked behind the same boulder, showered by dust and smaller rocks. He collapsed at my side, the side of his helmet dented. The visor had shattered. His eyes were closed and he bled from a cut across his forehead. I placed my fingertips at his neck, felt a pulse and gave him a shake. Hearing his groan, I signaled Kieryl to stop firing, aware the enemy had stopped shooting. I lifted the rifle to my shoulder to scan the ledges.

“Why don’t you just surrender, Yor?” the voice of Agent Torell called out. “No one is coming for you. The rest of your soldiers are trapped on the other side of the tunnel. Your first officer is injured and Damar is now my guest. I have you outnumbered. Toss your weapons aside and raise your hands over your head. Do it now or I’ll kill the lot of you.”

Kieryl stepped into view, raising her hands above her head. The Klaxon crew tossed aside their weapons far too quickly and stood. Through the telescope, I counted eight Bajoran rebels standing on a ledge, I didn’t see Torell. More rebels lit flares and tossed them into the chamber. I had no other choice to surrender. I tossed my rifle aside and lifted my hands.

“And your swords. Remove all of yours weapons, Yor,” Torell said. “Have the Klaxon crew do the same. Hurry, Yor. This chamber could collapse at any moment.”

Cursing softly, I stripped off my weapons. I knelt beside Ravon and unarmed him. With Kieryl’s help, we stood him on his feet. Ravon was unconscious, requiring us both to hold onto his arms to keep him upright. I heard scuffling behind me. Kieryl released Ravon and he sank to the ground. Rough hands grabbed me from behind. My helmet was removed and my arms were tied behind my back. Two Bajorans dragged Ravon out of the chamber by his legs through an opening in the rocks. I was pushed forward along with Kieryl and the six crewmen. The moment we entered the new tunnel, behind us, I heard the chamber collapse.

“Get moving,” a Bajoran said.

I felt the barrel of a laser pistol in my back. I moved forward, keeping my eyes on Ravon who had started to stir. The rebels continued to drag him by his legs until we arrived in yet another chamber, far larger than those we left behind, supported by metal beams and lit with torches. A number of crates and supplies filled this chamber. I was able to smell fresh air. Dozens of Bajoran rebels surrounded my small group. I watched helplessly as Ravon was dragged to the side of a dark pit and tossed over the side.

“That’s my first officer,” I snarled.

I bolted forward, knocking down a Bajoran, was struck from behind. I fell near the

edge of the pit, almost toppling over the side until a hand pulled me back. Jerking forward, I tried to get a look at Ravon before I was dragged away from the hole. Several more Cardassians were in the pit with him. It had to be Damar's assault team. Someone kicked me in the side and I rolled onto my back. Several Klaxon crewmen stood over me, aiming their weapons at my chest and I heard Glinn Kieryl laughing.

"Nice to see you again, Yor," Torell said.

The OO agent appeared in front of me wearing an eye patch on his face. Fresh scars covered his cheek. I hoped it hurt. At this side stood a dark-haired Bajoran with intense black eyes reminded me of Torell. Kieryl grew silent. The crewmen stepped back, allowing two Bajoran guards to pulled me to my feet.

"Allow me to introduce Niyal Gora, leader of the Bajoran Resistance," Torell said. "This, Niyal, is my rogue assassin. Yor is human underneath those ridges. I didn't expect you to make it this far, my dear. You were late. Damar's squad has been captured. You don't think he's clever, do you? No, he's here as well, in pit I dumped your first officer, waiting for execution. You of will die. Any last words?"

"Go to hell, Torell."

"Temper, temper, Yor."

"I say kill her and the rest of the prisoners," Niyal Gora said. "We have nothing to gain by keeping them. Tyчек, the fool, has already been exposed and is currently under attack by the Second Order. I told you Tyчек was unreliable. He allowed Dukat's mistress to escape. We can hardly expect our terms for surrender to be accepted by Dukat. He'll wipe out Tyчек's men in no time at all and then come for us."

"Calm yourself, Gora. We have captured everyone Dukat cares about with one exception," Torell said. "It doesn't matter if Tyчек is on board the Klaxon. Gahn is loyal to me, not Dukat. Just as soon as Dukat heads out to find his beloved, and he will, with one click of a button, Helen will go on a killing rampage."

"Dukat won't surrender," I said, feeling the implant throb.

Torell glared at me. "Dukat will do what I say or all of you will die," he shouted. "The Second Order will withdraw from Bajor and the Fifth Order will be installed at every

fort on this planet. I don't care which Fifth Order gul takes command. Our allies are in position, just waiting to seize control of the planet from Dukat. A new Prefect will be placed in charge by Central Command who will blame the Second Order on inciting a rebellion, and that, my dear, will be me."

"Your mad," I said. "No one would make you the Prefect and you know it. Dukat will exterminate you like the insect you are. We don't negotiate with terrorists. You'll die in these caves along with the rest of us. is certain, Torell."

The agent walked over and hit me in the stomach. He struck me again and again, while the Bajoran rebels kept me on my feet. When I hung limp, my head about to explode with pain, they dragged me across the cavern and tossed into a small chamber used as cell. A crate was pushed in front of the entrance, cutting off the light, leaving me in darkness.

HELEN

Chapter Twenty-Nine

Parnal and I remained on the ridge, hiding in a small hole between a two large boulders, covered by the night sky. I lay on my stomach, I was able to see through a crevice. To the west Fort Varnok burned. Dark clouds of smoke filled the sky. Flamed lapped at the walls. Laserfire and explosions continued for several hours into the night. Most of the laser fire came from space, from one of Dukat's ships, pounding the fort and Tychek's Fifth Order troops.

"I wonder what is going on. Is Dukat winning or is Tychek?"

The boy wiggled into a tiny space beside me. He handed me his com-link.

"Like I'll have better luck than you. You're the genius."

"My father and Tychek fought like this for weeks before the outpost fell. All our messages sent to Terok Nor and Central Command was intercepted. We were cut off and unable to call for reinforcements. When Tychek came for us, it was at night, like it is now. My father fought back. He wasn't the drunk like they say he was. He did not deserve to be killed. Nor did my mother. Tychek will pay for this."

"Tychek? I thought the Bajorans attacked your father," I said.

"No, it was Tychek. I know I should have said something, I thought Dukat trusted Tychek. I didn't realize they were enemies."

"If I know Dukat, he knew this would happen. He withdrew his forces to make the Fifth Order believe they had a chance to hold the fort. The only problem is he left you and I behind as bait. That's the only explanation for leaving us behind. Thank you, Parnal. If you hadn't come into my life, I'd probably now be dead."

"Yor told me to protect you, so I did," he said.

I noticed Parnal pointing at my hand. I'd forgotten the com-link. I turned it on and held it to my mouth. "This is Helen. Is anyone out there?" I asked.

Parnal abruptly pulled away from me. He scuttled along the rocks, motioning for me to follow. I put away the com-link and climbed out of our hole. Five figures materialized in front of us. I recognized Gul Gahn, in full body armor, accompanied by his crewmen. Their pistols were pointed at us. I didn't blame the boy for coaxing me out of the hole.

"You won't get away with this," I said.

At his signal, the crewmen took us captive. The boy was disarmed and subdued with a hypo. He crumbled to the ground, left where he lay. Gahn and his crew gathered around me. He smiled at me.

"Six to beam on board."

We materialized in the transporter room of the Klaxon. There were a dozen more guards waiting for us, including Gul Tyчек. He walked toward me and lifted his hand to strike. Gul Gahn stepped forward, catching his arm. The younger gul laughed when Tyчек jerked his arm away. For a moment, I hoped Gahn was on Dukat's side, and meant mine. I sensed the Klaxon crew wavered in their loyalty as the guls' faced each other.

"I don't want her harmed," Gahn snarled. "If anyone harms her, it will be me. You've only just met her, Tyчек. This one has been taunting me for weeks. Besides, she's no good to us dead. I need her healthy if Dukat is going to want her back."

"She let Parnal's brat cut me," Tyчек said. The wound on his cheek still required surgery. It was crusted over with blood. "She's a Federation spy. I've told you from the start, Torell thought he could make use of her. Lock her up."

Gahn laughed without humor. "And Torell did," he said. "Helen killed Legate Mikor. I saved us from doing it. As I told you, Mikor was merely biding his time to turn against us. He was Madame Dukat's lover and he was therefore loyal to the Dukat family."

I didn't say a word, I thought Mikor had a funny way of showing his loyalty by sleeping with Dukat's wife for more than twenty years. What I hadn't considered was the Circle knew I had killed Mikor. They also knew I was a human. Nor did they care I was pregnant or a small innocent boy had been left behind.

"This is my ship, Tyчек, not Raynor's," Gahn continued. "I'm in command. Raynor

made a fatal mistake. He killed himself upon Dukat's order. I would have killed Dukat instead. Now, if you'd return to the bridge and monitor the battle, I intend to use our arsenal to destroy the rest of Dukat's troops stationed at Fort Varnok and Outpost 9. You don't object?"

Tychek visibly looked shaken. "My men are still there. Who gave you the order to attack Dukat?" he asked. "You're going to bring the entire Cardassian fleet down on us. Dozens of ships surround this planet. Don't be a fool."

"The Fifth are here as well. The Klaxon isn't the only ship loyal to the Circle. I have orders from Torell. We are to beam him up with his captives within the hour. It seems Dukat's Sword has launched an attack against his camp. I mean Yor, of course."

"Leave them all. We have what we want. A war. We don't need Torell or the Bajoran rebels," Tychek said. He walked over to me and grabbed a fistful of my hair. Spinning me around, he revealed the back of my neck and fingered the implant. "We should remove this device. Torell controls his assassins with these. I wouldn't want this human to kill us too."

"How did you know?" I asked.

"you're human? We've always know your identity and of Sawyer Kincaid," Tychek said. "Do you think your cosmetic surgery and phony back stories would fool us? I was a glinn when Gul Yor was killed. I was there. I'm the one who killed his daughter, the real Ren Yor, so you see, I've never been fooled by Dukat's tricks."

"Leave her alone, Tychek. Return to the bridge," Gahn said. He pushed Tychek aside and stood over me. "I'm warning you for the last time. The prisoner is not to be touched. I'll have her taken to surgery and have the implant removed."

"Very well."

Tychek headed toward the door, followed by Gahn and several crewmen. I was taken by a dozen guards to surgery. Three doctors in surgical masks waited. I was stripped, sedated with a hypo, and laid on my side on a cold metal table. A hypospray hit my arm. I felt nothing from the head down. My thoughts grew foggy. I closed my eyes while an instrument removed the implant, plucking it out like a wart, ending the headache I'd felt for months.

“Helen,” a voice said. It sounded far away. “Helen Monroe.”

Everything around me started to glow bright gold. I found myself standing in a place with no walls stretched on forever. Damar, Dukat, Garak, Madame Dukat and Q stood before me, I knew these beings were the wormhole aliens. The wormhole was called the Celestial Temple where the Prophets lived. I’d been there before. I was dressed in a violet robe shimmered and as I approached, it felt like I’d entered a dream.

“Am I dead?” I asked.

“A question is worth asking,” the alien Dukat said.

“No. You are not dead,” Damar's duplicate said.

“We have brought you to our dimension within the wormhole,” another Prophet said who resembled Garak. “We took these forms so you would not be afraid. In order for you to communicate more easily with us, we speak your language.”

Madame Dukat smiled at me. It was the first time she looked friendly. “When Q brought you here from Earth, we intercepted you and Sawyer,” she said “We hoped to send you to Bajor where you would be safe, a passing Cardassian ship locked onto you and beamed you aboard. Until now, we have been unable to contact you.”

“Torell leads the Circle. They desire to bring death and destruction to the entire quadrant,” said the alien Dukat. “He misled you into believing he wants the best for Bajor. He misled the Bajorans as well. Know we are the leaders of the True Way. The Bajorans call it the Path of the Prophets, for is who we are. Torell desires to release the Pah-Wraiths and they want to destroy us, this cannot be allowed to happen, Helen of Earth.”

“What can I do about it? I’m only human.”

“You play Q’s game as we are forced to do as well,” Mikelya said. “You and Sawyer are needed to help defeat Torell and the Circle. You are needed on Bajor. There is much to be done.”

Their request shocked me. They seemed to think Sawyer and I might actually be able to change events were in play, hardly something I was prepared to do. Sawyer might pretend to be a soldier, she wasn’t equipped to take on the Circle or the Pah-Wraiths. The Prophets seemed to read my thoughts. They whispered together.

“You may return to Earth exactly where Q found you. The plane may not crash,” Dukat said. “Nothing is decided. If you chose to leave, you will have no memory of what happened. Everything will be as it was before.”

“I mean no disrespect. What can we possibly do to help you?” “Sawyer is the savior. You are Sawyer’s savior,” they said in unison.

“You’re asking us to jump out of the frying pan and into the fire? I don’t know what you think Sawyer can do to save Bajor. Or what you think I can do to help Sawyer. Unless you can be more specific, then I think it would be best if we returned home.”

Another figure appeared, pushing through the group who looked exactly like Sawyer. She wore Cardassian armor, not a shimmering violet gown like my own, and appeared dirty and battle weary. She took hold of my hand. She felt solid. It took a moment before I realized this was indeed the real Sawyer Kincaid and she looked as confused as I felt.

“What am I doing here? Where is the boy?” she asked.

“Where are going home,” I said, my mind made up. “The Prophets are involved in this ridiculous game of Q’s, Sawyer. They ask too much of us. Let’s leave while we can.”

Sawyer shook her head. “I’m not about to leave Parnal alone in a hostile world to fend for himself. He needs a mother. I’m not going back to Earth, Helen. What do the Prophets want us to do? Tell me.”

The Prophets continued to whisper to each other. Sawyer caught hold of my arm.

“They want us to help stop Torell and the Circle,” I said. “They seem to think you’re some kind of savior and I’m supposed to save you. They won’t say what they want. I didn’t come here to die for people I don’t even know. This isn’t our fight. Let’s go home.”

“If I’m here, then means my body is still inside the cave. Torell is removing my implant. I’ll be able to help Dukat and Damar. I think that’s reason enough to stay,” she said, not looking at the Prophets for confirmation. Their whispering grew louder, only I didn’t understand what they said to Sawyer. She gave a nod. “Helen, the Prophets say Torell intercepted us on our way to Bajor, just like I thought he did. He took us to Hdrok 4 and gave us these implants. It happened exactly like I told you. The Prophets think we can

make a difference. My mind is made up. I'm going back."

"To Earth?"

"To Bajor."

I let out a heavy sigh. "If you're staying, then I'm staying."

"Where is your body right now?" she asked.

"I'm on the Klaxon. I'm a prisoner of Tychek and Gahn. Both are members of the Circle. They plan on using me to force Dukat to surrender. You know Dukat won't give an inch and I'll be killed. The Circle intends to destroy the forts and outposts. There are other Cardassian ships approaching Bajor."

"Be brave," Sawyer said. She turned toward the aliens. "You want something from us, you won't tell us what it is. means we need to stay here and figure it out. We'll help you, we can't do it alone. You need to guide us, show us what you need us to do, and if we can, we'll put an end to this war and Bajor's occupation by the Cardassians."

The Prophets looked pleased at her decision. I thought Sawyer had lost her mind. I grabbed her arm. My heart was beating fast. I was scared.

"What if I change my mind?" I asked. "If the Klaxon is destroyed, I don't want to die."

"There are no guarantees," Dukat said. "it may be possible to send you home seconds before the Klaxon is destroyed, if is its fate. We can tell you the cave where Sawyer is held prisoner is rigged with explosives. She has only minutes to escape. As for you, Helen, you still have time to break free and send word to Dukat about what has happened."

I kept hold of Sawyer's arm. "We can solve the mystery of the Prophets later," I said. "Get out of cave and warn Dukat. I'll try to do the same."

"This is no longer a game, Helen," Sawyer said.

I laughed. "Oh, that's exactly what it is."

The Prophets gathered together, turning into a single golden light so intense I had to shut my eyes. When I opened them, I lay on the surgery table, covered with a blanket. One guard stood nearby. I imagined Sawyer awaking in the cave in a similar state of confusion,

we both had a job to do. I had to get off the Klaxon.

The guard was not looking at me, I wouldn't have cared if he had. Pressed for time as I was, I needed to move fast. I slid off the table, crawling on the floor to a monitor. I knew a simple distress signal Dukat had shown me. I keyed it into the controls and hit the transmission button, sending it to every Cardassian ship in the area.

"What are you doing?" The guard drew his pistol.

Jumping to my feet, I threw a chair at him, knocking him off his feet and retrieved his pistol from the floor. I set it on heavy stun and shot him in the chest. A nearby mirror drew my attention. I stared at my reflection. I was no longer Bajoran, human. I slid my fingers over my nose, no longer feeling ridges and then reached behind my neck. I felt a soft spot where the implant had been removed.

Loud voices outside the door to sickbay shocked me out of my reverie. Firing at the lock, I fried the circuits. A robe tossed over a chair provided all the clothing I needed. I returned to the monitor. Like a light going on in my head, I remembered a transmission code to Terok No. If I reached Constable Odo, he'd might be able to send a message to one of Dukat's ship commanders. Someone might be able to transport me off the ship. I had to try. Able to see the edges of the door glowing red, I tapped on the monitor, waiting for a response while he phaser did its job. It was only matter of time before the Klaxon crew gained entrance into sickbay.

They were coming for me.

SAWYER

Chapter Thirty

I awoke on a table with a masked surgeon leaning over me. For a moment, I thought it was the very moment I'd first arrived at Terok Nor. As my vision started to clear, I focused on my body, aware my skin tingled. I lifted my head and stared at my nude body. There were no longer ridges on my body. My skin appeared pale and very human. Behind the surgeon stood Torell and Niyal Gora. I wanted to scream, my voice stuck in my throat.

"If you want to know what has happened," Torell said, "let me enlighten you. I couldn't let you die thinking you are Dukat's cousin, when you're a mere human. I'm tempted to throw you into the pit with Damar to let him view your ugliness. Oh, yes, he's alive. Injured, I'm afraid, soon both of you will have nothing to worry about."

"The implant. Did you....?"

"Remove it?" Torell stood beside my bed and covered me with a blanket. "We removed the implant and every inch of your skin, my dear. All the ridges are gone. I admit you're uglier this way, then, I never did like you. It's a shame no one will ever find your body after this cave crumbles upon you, Damar and Garak. I'm taking Kieryl with me. She's an assassin or didn't you know this?"

"Then why bother with the surgery?" I asked.

"Because I'm a stickler for details. My friends will soon beam me out of this cave. If your body is found, no one will recognize you."

"Tycek and Gahn have betrayed you," I said. "They're not coming back."

Torell grabbed my shoulders. "How do you know this? How could you possibly know what they're doing?" He motioned for the surgeon to leave. Gora remained at his side.

"The Prophets spoke to me," I said. "Your friends made the error of engaging Dukat's ships in battle. They have no choice to run. They're outnumbered and you're out of time."

Torell's cheeks turned bright red. "You lie!"

"Then how do I know this entire cave system is rigged with explosives?"

Lifting his fist, Torell punched me in the face. I blacked out. When I awoke, I lay in a cell beside Garak, beaten beyond near recognition. Madame Dukat sat across from us. A few bruises marred her face.

"How long have I been out?" I asked.

"Not long," Garak said. He scrutinized me. "You have had surgery, Yor. You have lost your ridges. I'm sure I look no better to you than you do."

I touched my face, sickened to find I was human. "Where is Damar?" I asked. I needed to stay focused. I couldn't worry about what I looked like. I needed to find my lover and get everyone out of the cave.

Garak shook his head. "I have no idea, my dear."

"Who is this? A Federation spy?" Madame Dukat asked.

"I'm the one who is going to get us out of here." Rising to my feet, I staggered toward the crate blocked the entrance. "Damar is here. He's in the same pit as Ravon and the rest of his assault team. I have to save them, we don't have much time. Torell intends to blow up this cave. Get up, Garak. The three of us might be able to push this crate aside."

"I'm afraid I don't share your enthusiasm, Yor. We're going to die here," he said.

"That's Ren Yor? Surely you jest, Garak?" Mikelya looked shocked.

"Unfortunately, not this time," Garak replied. "This is in fact Ren Yor. We can talk about the surgery later. Yor, did Helen tell you where to find us? Is she all right?"

I walked over and pulled Garak off the ground. Keeping my arm around him, I brought him over to the crate and together we attempted to push it away from the entrance. Dukat's wife did not lift a finger to help.

"There are a number of traitors in our midst," I said. "Gul Tychek and Gul Gahn are two of them. They have Helen on board the Klaxon, have left Torell behind. He'll have to figure out another way off Bajor. Right now the Fifth Order is fighting Dukat in a full-scale

battle. If you want to live, Mikelya, come help us.”

“How do you know all this?” Garak asked.

I took a deep breath. “Because the Prophets told me,” I said. “They must have brought Helen and I into the wormhole. I was returned here, and she was sent back to the Klaxon. You’ll have to trust me on this, Helen and I do have a plan.”

Mikelya stared at me as if I’d lost my mind. “You’re not Cardassian. She is human, Garak,” she said. “Why did my husband lie to me? Why did he tell me this was Ren Yor? To hide her from me? Is she yet another of his mistresses?”

Garak shook his head. “We don’t have time for this.”

“Dukat sent me to save you, I think I’ll leave you behind,” I said wanting to thump her. “Whether I’m human or Cardassian shouldn’t matter. My heart is Cardassian.”

“What can you do? A mere human?” she asked.

“You’re right. I can’t do anything for you.” I leaned against the crate, pushing with all my might, while Garak expended the last of his energy to move it an inch. “Don’t give up. If we can move it a few a bit more, I can slip through, release my men and come back for you.”

“You can do nothing to save us,” Madame Dukat snarled.

“Don’t speak to her, Yor. She is a poisonous snake. I fear her bites worse than Torell’s,” Garak said. Through brute strength, he pushed the crate a few more inches, revealing a small opening. It would be tight, I could do it. “You will come back for me? I don’t mind very much begging at this point. I feel a bit desperate.”

“I give you my word of honor. I will return for you,” I said.

“What do humans know about honor?” Madame Dukat asked.

“I didn’t say I’d return for you, cousin.”

The crate moved an entire foot, before I could slid through the opening, four Bajorans pushed it aside. I staggered against Garak, while Dukat’s wife ran forward. The Bajorans lifted their rifles. Niyal Gora parted through the center and smiled at me.

“Torell went outside to contact the Klaxon,” Gora said. We’ll soon be joining the other members of the Circle and taken to Dominion ship waiting on the other side of the wormhole.”

“You’re a fool,” I said. “Torell has betrayed you. He’s not returning.”

Gora hit me with his rifle butt in the shoulder. It was Garak’s quick response and strong arms kept me from collapsing. Mikelya started to sob. She stepped forward, wringing her hands, unaware the rifles turned on her. They were going to shoot her. I broke free from Garak and stepped in front of the woman. Goya lifted his hand. The rifles lowered.

“Torell and his allies find all Bajorans expendable. You always were, Gora. So are we. He rigged this caves with explosives. It’s a death trap. Get your rebels out of here while you still have the chance. Live to fight another day.”

“Why would I believe you, human?” he asked.

“Because she speaks the truth,” Torell said. He appeared on a ledge overhead, with a half dozen bounty hunters. They were the same motley crew I’d seen on Terok Nor, in fact, I’d given Dukat money to pay for their services. “Meet the rest of my assassins. Clever how I got them on and off Terok Nor without Dukat ever knowing. I don’t know how you communed with the Prophets, Yor, it doesn’t matter. I don’t need the Prophets. To be honest, Niyal Gora, you’ve become something of a bore.”

Torell lifted his pistol. A red laser blasted Niyal Gora in the back. The Bajoran rebel leader dropped to the ground. Pulling Garak behind the crate, I watched Mikelya standing in the open, screaming while the rest of the Bajorans were shot. She was in a state of shock and not able to move. I ran toward her, tackling her to the ground, scrambling over her, able to grab her arm and drag her behind a line of water barrels. The Bajoran rebels who still remained returned fire on the bounty hunters, they were outnumbered. Kieryl and the Klaxon crew were nowhere to be seen, leaving me to assume they’d already left the cave.

Leaving the woman crouched behind the barrels, I retrieved a rifle off a dead Bajoran, joining the remaining rebels to return fire on Torell. He didn’t waste time on killing the rest of us. He turned and fled with his bounty hunters.

“Get out of here,” I shouted. “This place is rigged to blow.”

As the Bajorans started to flee from the cave, I spotted Garak helping Madame Duat toward the main tunnel. I ran toward a tunnel, hoping it led to the next chamber where Damar, his men, and Ravon were kept. Several Bajorans pushed me aside, paying me no

attention in their haste to leave the cave. Three tunnels were in sight. I wasn't sure which the right one was, slowing to a halt as I started to panic. A sharp whistle and a great deal of shouting brought me running over to a large crate pushed against the cave wall.

"Ravon? Where are you? Are you with Damar?" I shouted.

"We're here. They have us trussed up like pigs. Help us, Yor."

Aiming the rifle at the crate, it vanished in a bright red light. Ravon and four Cardassian soldiers sat on the floor, their arms tied behind their backs. Beside them lay Damar. His head was wrapped with a blood bandage. My Klingon knife and sword were gone. I had nothing the rifle and my hands to free the soldiers. Choosing Ravon to help first, I untied the ropes, freeing him first. He untied the rest of the soldiers and grabbed the rifle, standing at the entrance, while I grabbed Damar's arm. He was heavy, in my excited condition, I jerked him over my left shoulder, carrying him like a fireman. Ravon led the way toward the main tunnel, passing a number of dead Bajorans. I was able to smell fresh air and hurried to keep up with the rest of the soldiers.

Twinkling starlight greeted us at the end of the tunnel, along with the distance sounds of battle. Garak and Madame Dukat were not in sight. Ravon and the soldiers found ropes already tied off to stakes in the ground. With Ravon's help, we tied a rope around Damar, lowering him fifty feet to the ground. I heard Garak shout and knew he had Damar. Ravon and I were the last to repel down the side of the cliff, he was a better climber, while I simply clung to the rope and slid the length, hitting the ground as a thunderous explosion echoed through the valley.

Rocks showered us, while the soldiers, Garak and Mikelya ran for cover, Ravon remained to help me carry Damar to safety. We continued moving, not pausing to look back while the side of the cliff collapsed, sending a great cloud of smoke into the air. I stumbled and fell over Damar, choking on dirt. Garak returned, helping me to my feet, while the soldiers carried Damar along the path.

"Stay here with Damar," I said. "Ravon, come with me. We're going after Torell and the bounty hunters. If we don't return in the next thirty minutes, get Damar to Outpost 9. Dunatar and the rest of my team might have escaped. See if you can find them."

Leaving Damar with the group, Ravon and I ran in the opposite direction, finding a dead Bajoran on the path. Another rebel lay in a mangled heap not far from the first. Torell had left a trail to follow. Ravon retrieved a rifle for me. We followed the bodies along a path, able to see well enough in the moonlight. We had no my map to identify traps, only the dead to point the way. Following the ravine, we arrived at a clump of trees and spotted three bounty hunters standing in a clearing, twenty yards from us, their backs turned to us. They seemed to be waiting for someone. Lifting our rifles, we shot them in the back.

“Do we stay here and search for Torell or return to Damar?” Ravon asked.

“Give me a second to decide,” I said.

Creeping toward the dead bodies, I turned each man onto his stomach, feeling for implants. All three had bumps at the tops of their spines. It’s all I needed to know. I had no intention of digging out the implants. Returning to Ravon, I decided the wisest course of action was to return to Damar and the others. The rockslide had stopped, now and then rocks and dirt slid along the left bank where the cliff lay open in a wide trench. At our approach, Garak and the soldiers started firing at us. Ravon tackled me to the ground, covering my body with his own, while the gunfire continued. Someone had followed us. From both directions lasers past over us. Ravon started crawling on his stomach, his destination a fallen log covered by brush. I followed after him. As soon as we had cover, we turned toward the direction we’d come from and joined the battle.

Glinn Kieryl and the Klaxon crew had joined the bounty hunters. They weren’t the only ones attracted to the skirmish. From the number of lasers being fired from my own team, I knew Dunatar, Ikarus and the rest of the assault team had arrived. Ravon and I lay off to the side, remained in the center position, close enough to see Kieryl crouched behind a large rock. I lifted the rifle, taking my time to aim at her head and fired. Another crewman dove in front of the laser, taking the hit meant for her. She glanced toward me and ran with the rest of her crew in the opposite direction.

“Kill them,” Dunatar shouted. He led the charge forward, pursuing the enemy through the rubble. I counted at least twenty Alpha soldiers pass our position. Ravon stood, joining the surge and disappeared in the night.

Pushing myself to my feet, I ran toward Garak's position, finding him, Mikelya and Korvinus hiding within the trees. The rest of my team had gone with Dunatar. I handed my rifle to Korvinus, a gray haired Cardassian I'd always found to be dependable and crouched beside Damar, checking his pulse. His face felt warm to the touch.

"The wound is serious," Garak said.

"Damar is going to die if I don't get him help," I said. "It's five miles to Outpost 9. We're going to have to carry Damar. Can we lash a few tree limbs together and carry him? Korvinus? Can you help?" He nodded and started to collect wood.

"I suggest we contact Dukat," Garak said.

I have a com-link," Madame Dukat said. "I picked it up outside of the cave."

"Give to Garak. He knows the right channel to use," I said.

Garak took the device from Mikelya. "This is Garak. Gul Dukat, do we have you?" He smiled at me, a face of raw mash. "His private channel is 007."

It was no time to laugh, I appreciated the irony.

"This is Dukat. I read you, Garak. What is your position?"

"I have your wife with me. We are five miles west of your position. It's not a particularly safe place to be in, a shuttle might be able to land nearby and pick us up. Glinn Damar is seriously injured, Yor is with us. We're coming to you."

I grabbed the com-link from Garak. "Dukat, this is Yor. Helen is on board the Klaxon. Tychek and Gahn have betrayed you," I said. "And Torell has escaped. The boy was left on a ridge to the east of the fort. We need to find him."

Garak spoke up. "Was Helen rescued?" he asked.

"I don't know. The Klaxon has already left Bajoran space," Dukat said. "The Fifth's infantry is retreating to Varnok. We're in hot pursuit. Gul Vardon may be able to offer assistance. Garak, contact his ship. He must find Helen. I'll see you back at the fort. Over and out."

I tossed the com-link to Garak, no longer hearing gunfire in the ravine. Korvinus gave a nod and walked around a tree, vanishing to check it out. Garak met my gaze as I caressed Damar's cheek with my thumb, afraid to lift his head or move him further. The bandage was damp with blood. Mikelya surprised me by ripping off the sleeve of her dress. She tossed it to

me. I swaddled Damar's head as best I could, without a doctor, I felt certain he would die from his injury.

"Gul Vardon, this is Agent Garak of the Obsidian Order. I'm with Gul Dukat's wife and an injured officer. We request immediate evacuation from Bajor. Are you in any position to lend assistance?" He waited a minute and tried again. "Vardon, Dukat is under attack by the Fifth Order. His mistress is on board the Klaxon. She is human. I suggest you beam her onto your ship and provide Gul Dukat with immediate reinforcements. Acknowledge?"

"This is Gul Vardon of the Kobrak. Five ships are in pursuit of the Klaxon. I remain in orbit, Agent Garak. Hold your position and keep this channel open so we can get a fix on you. Are there only three in your party?"

"Yes," Garak said after I nodded. "Myself, Dukat's wife and Glinn Damar. We're reading when you are."

Taking the rifle from Garak, I stood away from the trio, knowing I had to remain with my troops, though I desperately wanted to go with them.

"You'll be interested to know Gul Vardon shares command of the Cardassian Fleet with Gul Toran," Garak said. "Of course Dukat maintains absolutely control over both. Like any Cardassian, Vardon is ambitious, though ambition does not mean he's a member Circle. Vardon's record is spotless. His only fault was to be with the Fifth. He has always been a practical officer, though he neglects his wife and family on Cardassian."

"Vardon is a lovely man and quite rich," Mikelya said. "He has an estate on Bajor called Milea. It's a vineyard and I am told he keeps a mistress there."

"I don't care about Vardon. Just take care of Damar, Garak," I insisted. "When he wakes up, tell him...tell him I love him. Tell him we're going to spend the rest of our lives together."

"Stupid human," Mikelya said. "You believe in miracles."

"Right now, madam. is precisely what we need," Garak replied..

I heard a loud hum and watched Garak, Damar and Dukat's wife vanish from sight. Korvinus returned a minute later with Ravon, Dunatar, Ikarus, Jenrak, Zolon and Komash. Ten more soldiers from my brigade gathered around me. The rest had not returned. I'd lost

thirteen men on the assault. Damar's entire team were dead and he was in critical condition.

"Did you find Torell?" I asked, slinging the rifle over my shoulder.

"No, we killed three more bounty hunter, the Klaxon's landing party, Glinn Kieryl escaped with Agent Torell," Dunatar said. "What are your orders, Yor?"

"We're heading back to Outpost 9," I said. "Dukat is moving toward Fort Varnok, there's a town between him and the fort. means the Fifth will be spread out. We're bound to run into quite a few of them. Dunatar, take point. Let's see if we can beat Dukat to the fort."

Lowering my rifle, I motioned for the men to move out.

* * *

HELEN

Standing on the bridge beside Gul Vardon, a blanket wrapped around my shoulders, I watched five Cardassian Galor class ships pursue the Klaxon and three more ships on the view screen. The Kobrak remained orbiting Bajor. I'd heard Garak talking to Vardon and waited anxiously for a report. A glinn seated to the left turned toward us.

"Sir, we've beamed aboard three individuals on board. Dr. Zephyr greeted them, as you ordered. All available soldiers have joined Gul Dukat."

"Contact me the moment you hear from Gul Toran. He'll catch the Klaxon," Vardon said. "We have injured people to tend to. Helen, if you will accompany me, I'll take you to sickbay to see your friends. Please. Come with me."

Taking my hand, Vardon led me to the turbolift. I sagged against him as soon as the door closed. He slid his arms around me, holding me steady as we descended at a rapid rate.

"If anything happens to Damar, Yor will be heart sick," I said.

"Dr. Zephyr is highly qualified. Damar will be fine. It's you who I'm worried about. You're in a fragile condition. You need bed rest after what you've been through. We're still looking for the boy. We'll find him. Don't worry."

The door opened. Vardon motioned for me to follow him. He was in a rush as he said, "Go straight down the hall. Sickbay is on your left. You can't miss it. I'll join you as soon as you can. I need to contact Central Command and advise them on the situation." He left me alone in a daze. I made it down the hall, must have past sickbay for I found no door marked

with any medical design and eventually paused at an intersection, prepared to retrace my steps and knock at every door.

A female officer past me in the corridor. She took pity on me and took hold of my arm, guiding me toward sickbay and left me in the care of a doctor. I was placed on a table and covered with a sheet, while a doctor checked my vital signs. The baby kicked hard in my stomach, two sharp kicks at impossible angles and I feared I might pass out. A hypo was produced. Placed against my shoulder, I felt immediate relief and more than a little groggy.

“What you need is rest. You and the twins. I’m Dr. Zephyr. I’ll return and check on your later. I want to check on Glinn Damar. He’s very fortunate to be alive. I’ve taken care of his injuries, I’d like to sit with him a while.”

“Wait. What do you mean twins?”

“Precisely what I said, my dear. A male and female. I am surprised you didn’t know. Is the father Bajoran or Cardassian?”

“Cardassian,” I said, finding it impossible to stay awake.

I’m not sure how long it was before Garak shook me awake. His face was bruised, otherwise he looked all right, which I considered fortunate after what he’d been through. I’d expected to be in sickbay. I lay in private quarters in a soft bed, covered with a thick blanket. Garak pulled a chair toward the bed and sat, holding my hand.

“It appears the Klaxon was joined by several Romulan birds of prey,” Garak said. “Gul Toran of the Govatt send word an hour ago. More ships from the Fourth, Sixth, and Ninth Orders have joined Gul Toran. I’m sure Gul Vardon wishes he had gone with them. Fortunately, Gul Dukat is alive, at least the last time Vardon spoke to him and has been informed we’re on board the Kobrak.”

“And Saw...?” He cut me off before I finished.

“Glenn Yor is with the Alpha Brigade. That’s all I know. As for Glenn Damar, he is cantankerous and unappreciative of the fact he nearly died. I believe Dr. Zephyr Damar said required a sedative to remain calm after he heard Glenn Yor, yes, she’s been promoted, saved his life allowed Agent Torell to escape. That’s not quite accurate. I believe you spoke to your friend as well as the Prophets. She might have mentioned it. Torell didn’t want to believe her,

at first. I'm sure he was beamed onto the Klaxon. We won't be hearing from him again."

"You don't really believe that. He might have escaped, he'll be back."

Garak patted my hand. He released it and walked over to a replicator, ordering two red leaf teas and a bowl of broth. Pushing the pillows behind my back, I sat, holding my hands over my stomach, wondering if I should mention to Garak I was having twins. I still wasn't sure I'd heard correctly. Dr. Quirin had never mentioned twins, it certainly explained the size of my stomach and the random kicks both kids felt inclined to give me, reminding me they no more liked the last few days of excitement any more than I did.

"If it would make you feel any better, Madame Dukat suffered a broken collar bone. I'm afraid I leaned too hard upon her in our rush to exist the cave before it exploded. She's been taken to more sumptuous quarters. I believe Vardon wants to make a good impression. He's so thoughtful it makes me a little sick. You're room isn't much to look at I don't even have a room assigned to me. At least Damar has a bed."

"You can stay here. I'm sure there is a couch," I said. He carried a tray over and placed it beside me. The soup smelled good. I sipped on the tea, found it too hot and set it aside, waiting for both to cool to room temperature. "Garak, do you think Dukat will win the battle?"

"Battle? This is war, my dear. It will take more than one day to sort this matter out. The entire Cardassian fleet must deal with the Fifth Order. The Fifth Order alone has more than forty ships and a half million troops. Well, they did up until the Klaxon opened fire on the Kornak.

Both Gul Gahn and Gul Tychek might have been a bit hasty in their rebellion. Had the Romulans not sent three ships to intervene, the Klaxon might not have escaped. As it is, Gul Dukat has ordered the Kobrak to join the pursuit.""

"You mean we're giving chase? Right now?"

"Yes, right now. Warp 8 may not seem like we're moving fast enough, I assure you, and we'll soon feel a few rattles. The Klaxon and her allies won't give up without a fight."

"Can we watch?" I asked.

"Well, since you don't seem to like soup or tea, you might as well dress. We can join

Gul Vardon on the bridge. He suggested I join him. I see no reason you cannot accompany me.”

A lovely gown had been laid out for me. Garak helped me dress and styled my hair. He escorted me to the bridge. Gul Vardon was in his command chair. Another visitor was on the bridge. Mikelya Dukat. She looked resplendent in a new outfit, having taken the time to put on makeup and arrange her hair. I was happy to see she had a black eye. She nodded at Garak, said not a word.

On the view screen appeared a Romulan bird of prey. It uncloaked long enough to fire on the Kobrak. The shields held the entire ship shuddered. Two direct hits from two more Cardassian ships loomed into view struck the Romulan ship simultaneously. Though the ship vanished from sight, the explosions were visible. A second Romulan ship appeared, listing on its port side, in flames. It was surrounded by five Cardassian vessels. Vardon seemed impatient, shouting orders as the Kobrak turned to face the Klaxon, showing damage to its mid- section. Shuttles departed from the Klaxon as the Kobrak fired its weapons. The hit ignited a fire ran the length of the Klaxon. I heard Vardon laugh and gripped Garak’s arm, feeling slightly light-headed and overwhelmed by the ferocious battle.

“We’re being hailed by the Klaxon, sir,” an officer said.

“On screen, Bavaron,” Vardon replied. He clasped his hands behind his head as Gul Gahn appeared, his bridge smoldering around him. Most of his bridge crew was dead. “Surrender, Gul Gahn or die. I’ll not ask a second time.”

“I’ll never surrender,” Gahn said. He held his hands to his bloody chest.

“Your problem is you weren’t intelligent enough to be promoted. Gul Dukat needed someone to command the Klaxon after Gul Raynor took his own life and there you were.” Vardon glanced toward another officer. “Destroy the Romulan last ship. I don’t want to see it again.” He sighed when two of the Cardassian vessels blasted the broken Romulan out of existence. “Is Gul Tyчек with you or is he dead? Do answer in a timely fashion, Gahn. I give you to the count of three. Shall I count?”

“Gul Tyчек escaped on a shuttle. The Klaxon is yours, Gul Vardon. I doubt you can salvage her. As her commander and out of respect to Gul Raynor, I can do no less by him. I

am loyal to Cardassia. Not a traitor.”

Gahn drew his pistol and shot himself in the head. His body dropped. I was horrified. It was a coward’s way to die. A young male officer appeared on screen.

“I am Glinn Falgar. I surrender the Klaxon and her crew to you, Gul Vardon.”

“Thank you, Glinn Falgar. I know you’re family. I expect no less than for you to surrender with honor. We’ll beam you onto the Kobrak.”

The Klaxon exploded without warning. I gasped out loud. I doubted Vardon had time to beam the last of the crew on board.

Garak patted my shoulder. “The ship was far too damaged, my dear. Falgar at least died a gallant death,” he said.

Vardon made a hand motion and the view switched to Fort Varnok. The fort was ablaze. Soldiers fought hand-to-hand in the main courtyard. I was unable to determine which side was winning. Dukat came into view. His forehead bled, soot covered his face. He held a bloody sword and a com-link, which he raised to his lips. Five soldiers in dark purple berets surrounded him, protecting him while he answered Vardon’s hail.

“Well, you can see how it goes. Have you accomplished your mission, Vardon?” Dukat asked.

“I have your wife and mistress on board. Both are on the bridge,” Vardon said. “I also have Garak. The newly promoted Gul Damar remains in sickbay. No else from his team survived. I am told Glinn Yor and two squads are attempting to join you at the fort. Yor killed the Bajoran rebels, Torell and five assassins escaped, including Glinn Kieryl. The Klaxon, six Fifth Order cruisers and three Romulans bird of preys have been destroyed. We’re headed your way now.”

“What about Gul Tychek? Is he dead?”

“Presumably returning to Bajor on a shuttle. We’ve not been able to confirm or deny this report, Gul Gahn is quite dead. Would you like to speak with your wife?”

Dukat shook his head. *“Continue to monitor for Romulan ships in this solar system,”* he said. *“Send what troops you and the other guls can spare. I need them here. Before you go, Vardon, set up a line of pulsar fire to the north of the fort. That’s where the Fifth Order is gathering for another counteroffensive. We have the advantage in the dark, remain outnumbered. I need more feet on the*

ground, Vardon. Now."

"Beaming troops directly to you, Gul Dukat. I have six war ships and crews at your full disposal, including those from the Govatt. The Sixth and Ninth fleets will arrive within the hour.

You'll have all the troops you need, sir."

"This is civil war, Vardon. I want every last soldier of the Fifth caught and strung up by their heels before dawn. Get it done. Dukat out."

With the end of the transmission, Dukat's absence on the bridge, despite having been an image, left me feeling strange and more than a little confused. His own desperate struggle to defeat his enemy instilled a sense of Cardassian patriotism inside. I might live among the Cardassians and carried one in my womb, I'd never before cared about what happened to the Union, and on my part, and this seemed a huge oversight.

The image on screen turned into a wide view of the entire battlefield. I'd never before seen visceral carnage. Blood flowed on both sides. Nothing in my past had prepared me for the gut wrenching images of war, the fury displayed on the victor's faces or agony and pain on those left withering or dead on the ground. This wasn't like watching TV, though I'd seen my fair share of war movies, preferring the battle of The Alamo, worshiping Davie Crockett and Jim Bowie like gods. I was a Texan, born and bred, and independence meant everything to us. I was in shock. The reality of war was a gross perversion of irrational hatred, prejudice and ideologies born out of fear. The Romulans had their reasons for sending three ships to their doom. I didn't mourn the Romulans.

Whatever caused such bitter hatred among the Cardassians made it impossible not to think about my world's Civil War. The struggle between the North and the South had broken apart families and friend, fighting for so many different reasons, personal and some political, it was hard to name just one thing. If I had to pick one thing, at least in America it had been about freeing the slaves and it played out again millions of miles and hundreds of years from Earth. Both sides fought for whatever freedom meant to them and somewhere in the mix of all this mayhem, death and destruction fought my best friend Sawyer Kincaid. I felt some sense of irony, a weird thought, for I'd always wanted to fight for the South, while she was

true blue and adored Ulysses S. Grant and the Union.

This made me think of the True Way, the Prophets, and Bajor, for this battle was fought on their land, which absorbed the blood of the Cardassians. I didn't feel this was poetic justice had to do with something far bigger. Somewhere in a dark corner in space, I imagined the fiendish creature named Q gloated. I had no doubt he took delight in death and suffering. Yet, he didn't need to manipulate people into fighting a war I heard Mikelya crying. Her grief touched me. I hadn't thought such a proud Cardassian woman would cry and turned toward her, thinking it time for us both to leave. Warriors' didn't need to hear the lamentations of women in the heat of battle. It was distracting to say the least.

"Dukat didn't even ask about me. He doesn't even care I'm alive. This is your fault." Madame Dukat glared at me. "How dare you allow this human to set foot on your bridge, Gul Vardon. I'm so humiliated! Take me to my room!"

Crocodile tears, I thought, hating her for being so selfish. She didn't care thousands of Cardassians were dying by the droves, only about herself. It was always about her.

"Remove non-essential personnel from my bridge," Vardon shouted, not bothering to look toward us. "Garak, see to it. I don't have time for female drama. Have you lost your senses as well, old man? Get them out of here before I order my men to remove them."

Hurrying toward the turbolift, I held onto Garak's arm for support. A guard led Madame Dukat behind us. The guard took the woman to another room, while Garak and I were kept together. The moment the door closed, Garak held me close, while I tried not to imagine the two people I loved most dying in battle. There was nothing I was able to do for them, except pray they lived through the night.

SAWYER

Chapter Thirty-One

Appearing on a ridge overlooked Fort Varnok, thick smoke and a pungent odor of death filled my nostrils, and the heavy pulse of cannon fire and screams echoed in my head. My men flanked me, panting hard from running a great distance to reach the fort in time. Had I not taken an energy-boost before the battle, they'd have left me on the trail, I had no doubt.

A skirmish in the trees between the Second Order and Fifth Order drew our attention. At my order, half the men knelt and the rest stood behind them, firing at soldiers in Fifth Order uniforms as they ascended the hill. Volley after volley leveled the enemy soldiers dropped to the ground. Hadran led a platoon past us, pursuing the enemy scattered, disappearing into the trees. Ordering my two squads to join the chase, I paused to check on my rifle, for it had jammed. Left alone, I ran toward a dead soldier to retrieve a rifle and pistol, still able to see the backs of Icarus, Dunatar and Korvinus before they vanished into the trees. I slung the rifle and lifted the pistol, quickening my past to rejoin my men.

Coming around a bolder, I ran into a squad of Fifth Order soldiers. Ten soldiers aimed their pistols at me. My soldiers were too far away to call back. I could do nothing else drop my weapons and lift my arms in the air.

"What do we have here?" a soldier asked with a chuckle.

There were no officers in the squad. Desperate and frightened, they paused long enough to study my appearance they wouldn't tarry long. I didn't wear armor, only my uniform had no insignia, and I appeared Terran. No questions were asked. A knife

appeared in the hand of one of the soldier's which he pressed against my throat. Any second he'd slice me open and my blood would spill.

"Cardassia forever," I said. I was about to die. I wanted it to mean something.

As his hand started to move across my throat, two loud blasts dropped two soldiers to the ground. I went into action, grabbing the man's hand and twisted his wrist, shoving the knife under his chin, deep into his skull. His body protected me from being shot by friendly fire. Second Order soldiers ran toward me, firing at the deserters. Using the dead soldier as a shield, I fell to the ground, aware dozens of soldiers ran past me. I remained hidden, not able to see if I was the Alpha Brigade or Tychek's soldiers while the battle raged.

Someone stopped beside me. The body was kicked aside by a tall, lean soldier in a battle helmet. His chest was covered in blood, hiding his insignia and rank. Holding his rifle aside, he reached down to grab my arm, pulling me to his feet. The visor opened. I started in shock at Gul Dukat and he no less look stunned to find me in the midst of the battle.

"Yor? What are you doing here?" Dukat's angry voice was music to my ears. He yanked me against his chest. "Where is your brigade?"

"They joined Hadran to pursue Fifth Order deserters. I was coming to find you."

"Reinforcements have arrived. We're making a sweep of the entire area. Human or not, you're still Glinn Yor." Dukat released me to retrieve a rifle off the ground. He handed it to me. "Stay close to me."

Soldiers from the Second, Ninth and Fourth Order gathered around us, along with Cardassian Space Force crewmen. There were hundreds of soldiers. Someone handed me a cuirass. I slid into it, surprised Dukat handed his gun to a man, buckling it onto me. He stuck his helmet on my head and closed the visor. His weapon was returned to him. In the distance a loud explosion in the hills created a rippling effort among the soldiers. They were impatient to move on. Dukat pointed at the crewmen.

"Not only must we deal with the Fifth Order, I want you to contact Gul Vardon and have him look for a stray a Cardassia boy to the east of the fort. It is the son of Gul Parnal.

He's eight years old and quite clever. Find him. The rest of you come with me."

The crewmen stepped aside, vanishing from sight as they beamed above their ship. I hadn't counted on Dukat to think about the boy when I had forgotten. He issued orders with swift proficiency. Squads headed in different directions. The majority remained with Dukat. He took the lead, his laser rifle pressed to his shoulder. The soldiers followed us through the terrain. Soldiers flanked us, never out of sight. Random shots fired by our soldiers cleared out several nests of enemy soldiers hid among the trees.

"Glinn Yor, take a squad and make certain no deserters are hiding in the brush," ordered Dukat. He waved me forward.

Advancing with ten soldiers, I moved around the trees, able to see five different tiny screens displayed on the face shield, enabling me to see the entire area. Enemy soldiers were to the right, hiding behind a boulder. I motioned for the soldiers to head in direction, walking behind them, paying more attention to the display than what happened in front of me. The sound of gunfire and screams of men brought me to a halt. Two figures were on my right moving away from us in the thick woods.

"This way," I shouted.

The soldiers fell in beside me as we entered a wooded area. Figures darted away from us and my men ran after them, firing their guns. The two forms on the screen had been moving away from me stopped. I proceeded toward them, holding the rifle to my shoulder, careful where I stepped for broken limbs covered the path. I lifted my visor to get a clearer look and gasped as Gul Tychek stepped out from around a tree. He held Parnal with one arm, pressing a knife against the boy's throat. Tychek's dagger pricked the boy's flesh. Seeing a drop of blood, I winced and lowered my rifle.

"Take me hostage instead of the boy," I said. The gul gave me a strange look. "I'm one of Torell's assassins. The one didn't want to obey. I am Sawyer Kincaid, also known as Ren Yor. Torell would consider it a favor if you took me to him. Let the boy go and I'll come with you."

"I care not about Torell. He betrayed the Fifth. We were so close to victory. I have no intention of letting this brat go. I want him to bleed. You're next, Terran."

The boy looked at me. He was not afraid, he did look surprised I no longer looked Cardassian. I had never been more proud or felt as terrified for another person. As Tychek's dagger moved, I drew a pistol like a gunslinger and shot the gul in the face. He lurched backwards with a gurgled scream and released the boy. His body smashed into the thick vegetation. Parnal ran toward me. He jumped into my arms. The impact sent me tumbling backwards. I hit the ground hard with the boy on top, clinging to me.

"I'll never leave you again, Parnal. I'm so sorry," I said with tears in my eyes.

"You found me. I knew you would," the boy whispered.

The Alpha Brigade found me. Ravon lifted Parnal out of my arms, while Dunatar helped me to my feet. The boy was returned to me. Ikarus and Jenrak retrieved Gul Tychek's body, dragging it out of the brush by his legs. With my own men surrounding us, we returned to the clearing to find Dukat. The soldiers parted for us and we gathered around Dukat as he lowered a com-link he'd been, staring at the body of Gul Tychek and then me.

"You've killed Tychek and found the boy," Dukat said. "You never cease to amaze me, cousin. I am honored Cardassia means this much to you."

He tossed his rifle to Korvinus and enfolded Parnal and I into his strong embrace. I felt slightly embarrassed being hugged in front of the soldiers, yet also proud, for the Gul had established quite decidedly by his display of affection we were family. When he set me back, he gazed at me with great pride.

"You've the battle! There is no greater commander than you, Gul Dukat," I said.

The soldiers let out a loud cheer.

"Considering what we achieved tonight, Yor, I am pleased. On top of this mountain, under these stars and moons, in front of all these loyal Cardassian soldiers, I admit I could not have achieved victory without your help."

Dukat saluted me. The lines in his face were deep from exhaustion, he'd never looked more magnificent. I would have followed him anywhere. Parnal had hero worship written on his face. At his hand signal, the soldiers started down the hill. I remained at his side, holding Parnal, as we returned to the fort. The gates stood wide open and fire crews

attempted to put out the flames which extinguishers produced white power snuffed out the flames on impact. Hundreds of bodies littered the ground from both sides. The Fifth were tossed into a large pile while the rest were placed in a line on the ground to be bagged and tagged.

While Dukat paused to speak with officers from the Fourth, Sixth, and Ninth Orders, I turned to the Alpha Brigade. The boy stood beside me, his hand clutching the edge of my armor, as if he never wanted to be separated from me. There was a great deal of work to be done. My brigade was weary so was everyone else.

“Take charge of the brigade,” I said to Ravon. “I want to know who is dead and alive. I also want to know if anyone from Damar’s assault team survived. Give me a full report. It will be dawn in an hour. I want to speak with Gul Dukat. I’ll join you later.”

“Yes, sir.” Ravon saluted me and left with the brigade.

Leading Parnal toward Dukat, I waited until he finished addressing the officers before stepping forward. He came right over and placed his hand on my shoulder. In his hand was a canteen of water. He took a sip and then handed it to the boy. Parnal drank only a few sips and handed it to me. The water felt good on my parched throat. I returned it to the boy.

“The Klaxon was destroyed, along with ten Fifth Order vessels and three Romulan ships. Helen, Damar, Garak and my wife are safely on board the Kobrak, under the care of Gul Vardon,” Dukat said. “The Fifth Order on Bajor has all wiped out. The rest of the traitors will soon be caught. We still have to find and kill Torell and his remaining assassins.”

“I want their scalps,” I said wondering why I said such a thing.

“That’s the warrior spirit I so admire, Yor. We’ll have to do something to improve your appearance later.” Dukat ruffled the boy’s wild hair. “Let’s see if you can instill this same spirit in this scrap of a boy. Never fear, young Parnal. I have great plans for you, provided Yor approves. We’ll discuss later. We need to rebuild the fort and outpost in order to secure this area. Both of you will remain at my side until I say otherwise. I may be able to find you something to eat and a place to rest.”

Parnal and I fell into step beside Dukat as he approached the pile of dead Fifth Order soldiers. At his nod, a torch was tossed on the pile. The bodies burned rapidly.

“Perhaps it is time we considered our treatment of the Bajorans. Torell led many of them astray. He killed Niyal Gora and the Bajoran rebels,” I said. “People are the same wherever you go, Dukat. Some are good. Some are bad. We don’t need to occupy Bajor. Make her part of the Cardassian Union, give her equal rights, commerce, trade, and give her back her dignity and we won’t see any more Niyal Gora’s in the future. If we treat the Bajoran people as our friends and allies, we can turn Bajor into a colony. Peace not war is how to win the game.”

“Don’t start making speeches, Yor. You sound like me,” Dukat said, sniffing at the burning bodies. “As always, I appreciate your insightful comments. I will take them under consideration. Together, we’ve achieved a great victory. Enjoy this moment.”

Staring at the fire, I hardly enjoyed what I witnessed. I pulled Parnal against me, wondering how any child might heal from the scars of wars. I was to be his mother, Dukat had become our protector. I’d never felt more devoted to him than in moment. He seemed to share my feelings, for he placed his arm around me and together we watched the funeral pyre burn.

HELEN

Chapter Thirty-Two

I lay resting on my bed when the door slid open without chiming. Alarmed, I lifted my head from my pillow. A loud clank hit the floor. I caught Dukat's scent, along with smoke and a myriad of unpleasant odors. He appeared in the doorframe, unwashed, haggard held out his arms to me. With a sob caught in my throat, I hurried toward him. My round tummy was recipient of his hands as he kissed me.

"I didn't think I'd see you on the Kobrak," I said with a little sob. I placed my arms around his neck, wanting to tell him we were going to have twins, it didn't seem the appropriate time. "You're alive. You're safe."

"And victorious," he added. "Let me wash up, Helen. I intend to lay in your arms a while before I must return to the fort."

Entering the bathroom, I waited on the bed, anxious to hear about Sawyer and the battle. He didn't take long, returning with a towel wrapped around his waist, using another to dry his hair. I stood and pulled back the covers. He tossed aside both towels and pulled me into his arms, offering a tender kiss. We climbed into bed together. I snuggled against him, the moment his head hit the pillow, he fell asleep.

"I love you," I whispered.

At the sound of his snores, I smiled and caressed his chest, able to feel several new battle scars. I never thought it possible to love anyone so much. Yet, his arrival had altered the atmosphere in the room rather drastically. The sense of calm I'd felt while I slept had faded. I felt afraid, though it seemed foolish, for Dukat was with me. As the lights dimmed, I noticed a shadow on the wall, its form humanoid. It pointed toward a shelf across the room. Trembling, I looked at what the shadow pointed at, for on a shelf stood a small clay figure of a black god with four arms and four swords, about three inches high, placed

amongst an assortment of colored bottles. It struck me as a religious totem, though try as I might, I didn't recall reading or hearing about any religious sect of Cardassians praying to such an evil-looking god. I considered it might be Bajoran, I didn't know their history as well as I would have liked. The shadow faded and I dismissed it from my mind. I held Dukat tighter and soon fell asleep in his arms.

In the morning, I found no sign of Dukat, other than his scent left behind on the pillow. I showered and dressed in a gown Garak sent to my quarters along with a message. The Fifth Order on Bajor had been defeated, ships from the Third, Sixth, and Seventh Orders had joined the renegade fleet near the Demilitarized Zone. The only good thing I could find in the situation was now the Union was gripped in civil war, the invasion of Bajor was no longer a priority. I waited in my quarters for Garak. He'd promised to pay visit, at the sound of a chime, I was surprised to see Gul Vardon.

"May I have a moment?" Vardon asked.

At my nod, he entered the room and went to replicator, ordering two cups of Cardassian java. He placed a cup on the desk, which I was seated behind, wanting to send Constable Odo a message to thank him for his assistance. Odo had responded to my plea sent to Terok Nor. It was Odo who had arranged for me to be beamed on board the Kobrak and without his help I doubted I'd be enjoying a cup of coffee morning. Vardon sat in a chair across from me. His green eyes held mine.

"While I am sure seeing Gul Dukat last night brought you great sense of relief, I wanted to personally tell you he intends to take you back to Terok Nor. The situation on Bajor will require Gul Damar to remain behind, of course. He will be taking over the repairs to the fort and continuing the search for traitors. It's all a little unsettling, as I was formally with the Fifth Order, I believe I've proven my loyalty. At least we can now rest a little easier knowing the Bajoran uprising is also at an end. With the death of Niyal Gora and the continued military presence of Cardassia, I'm quite certain Bajoran will parley for peace."

"The Bajorans see the light at the end of the tunnel," I said. "Do you really think there can be peace on Bajor? They resent Cardassia. I'm sure the hope you'll leave."

Permanently.”

“That will never happen. Dukat is prefect and he has no intention of giving Bajor their freedom. The Cardassian combined fleet is spread throughout the Alpha Quadrant. The Fifth

Order Rebellion is not over. Not by any means. I thought you should know why it’s happened, my dear. Not everyone in Central Command is pleased with Dukat. He managed to convince every gul Raynor to forgo a war against the Federation to secure Bajor for his own gain. He is seen as an ambitious and dangerous man. I don’t share this view, the guls from the other Orders who have joined the Fifth certainly do.”

Taking a sip of coffee, I asked the most pressing question on my mind. “Will Dukat be held responsible for this civil war? Will he be called to Cardassia to make a formal report?”

“I have no idea if he’ll return to Cardassia any time soon. For the moment, we will remain in orbit. I have been asked to see to your comfort. Is there anything you need? Anything my crew and I can provide, you have to ask.”

“Company, mainly,” I said. “News from Bajor. I hoped to see Garak this morning. His injuries were rather extensive as were Gul Damar’s.”

“Garak wants to know everything and try as I might, I cannot seem to keep him off of my bridge.” Vardon laughed as I did. “Damar has already left the ship. I also wanted to tell you Glinn Yor is credited with killing Gul Tychek as well as Niyal Gora and quite a few of Agent Torell’s assassins. She successfully led an assault against Torell’s hideout, sadly he has escaped. Garak is hoping to locate Torell, the agent is crafty and sly. He’s slipped through our fingers before. I’m sure he will be difficult to find.”

“And Dukat’s wife? Will she be returning to Cardassia?” I had to ask. Her presence on the Kobrak kept me relatively confined to my quarters. I was weary of being a prisoner among my Cardassian hosts. I wanted to return to Terok Nor not with her.

“Ah,” Vardon said, smiling. He had perfectly even, white teeth. “Yes, about Madame Dukat. She intends to return to Terok Nor as well. I’ve been asked by Gul Dukat to do my best to act as mediator. I will keep her from visiting you. I do not like the idea of

keeping you locked in your room day and night.”

I again laughed. “You read my mind, Gul Vardon.”

“While we remain here, I will draw a battle line through my ship neither of you may cross. You have this entire deck to enjoy. I’ve assigned an officer to escort you. I will try to convince Garak to leave me alone and pay you a visit. His suite is right across from yours. He insisted. However, I do have a surprise for you, Helen. A small package arrived this morning I’ve been asked to place into your custody.”

The door opened. Parnal ran into the room. He was dressed in black, his hair trimmed and smoothed. I opened my arms. The boy ran to me, throwing his arms around my neck, laughing when I smothered his face with kisses. Vardon stood, his hands on his hips, giving the boy a rather envious look. I hadn’t even realized Vardon found me interesting.

“Glinn Yor asked for you to personally take care for the boy while she remains at the fort. As commander of the Alpha Brigade, she can hardly leave,” Vardon said. “It’s my understanding from Gul Dukat her adoption of the boy is being finalized. He is now to be called Eben Yor. I must say I am impressed Yor has managed to restore honor to her formally besmirched family name. I’ll leave you two to discuss things. I must return to the bridge. With your permission, I’d like to call on you again, Mistress Helen.”

“So it’s a title now.”

“A title made for you by Gul Dukat. It comes with certain Cardassian rights and personal funds. I’m sure Dukat will discuss this with you, when he has time,” Vardon said. “Until I see you again, be well.”

After Vardon left, I missed his company. He’d saved my life. He’d saved the lives of Garak, Damar and Dukat’s wife. This was a loyal Cardassian. He was kind and warm, and I liked to think we were friends. Only we didn’t leave as I’d hoped. Days past as we lingered at Bajor. Reports filtered in about battles fought between the Second and Fifth as far away as Chin’toka and Pentath. Closer star systems in Gorlais, Kelvas Loyal, Orias and Unefra were effected as well by the civil war.

Dukat remained Bajor. He’d turned the planet into Central Command’s battlefield

headquarters, coordinating and directing every offensive launched against the Circle. Sawyer sent frequent messages to me and to Eben, kept them short. Nor did she visit the Kobrak. When Dukat managed to call on me, he seemed reserved, almost guarded. He avoided my questions to the point I grew paranoid we were being monitored, not by Central Command, by the Circle.

“How is Sawyer?”

It was the same question I asked each night he visited. His response never differed. “Let’s not worry about her. You have the child to consider.”

I didn’t tell Dukat I was to have twins. The ship doctor must have assumed I had, for Dr. Zephyr never once met Dukat in private to tell him the news. I didn’t know why I refrained from telling him the good news. Maybe I felt it added to the pressure he was under and felt it best to maintain my secret for as long as possible. Two more months, that’s what I’d been told, which would bring the pregnancy to a normal human term of nine months. I looked so swollen I might have been giving birth to a quartet. Clothes only hid the fact I was the size of a blimp by so much, though I supposed I exaggerated to an extent.

“You’re beautiful just the way you are,” Dukat said.

For some reason he didn’t ask me to alter my appearance to look Bajoran. Nor did he tell me if Sawyer was Cardassian once more. It seemed strange we were both human at the same time, especially when I felt so certain we were being watched.

The days were spent with Eben and Garak. I enjoyed my level of the ship and the respect of the Kobrak’s crew who guarded us. Madame Dukat was maintained on another level of the ship and the only time I saw the woman was at dinner with Gul Vardon and his officers. Each night we sat at a sumptuous meal. I had a dozen beautiful gowns to wear. Vardon treated both myself and Madame Dukat with the utmost respect and kindness as did his officers.

I learned Vardon’s family was powerful and rich. His influence kept Dukat’s wife from saying anything mean to me at dinner, though I had no doubt she gossiped behind my back, aware her husband visited me at night. She never spoke to Eben Yor, it more than

a little annoyed me, not the boy cared. He didn't like Madame Dukat, he thrived in my company.

Eben spent a few hours each day with either Garak, studying like any good schoolboy, or with Gul Vardon on the bridge. I think the boy was happy and wanted to think I played a part in that, I knew he missed Sawyer as much as I did, if not more.

On the tenth evening on board the Kobrak, Gul Vardon insisted we again join him for dinner. He seated me after Mikelya, keeping us separated by the length of the table, as he always did. He took the time to scoot my chair into the table, it required Cardassian strength to move me, and his attitude seemed sympathetic toward my condition. I was grateful for his kindness.

Wanting to avoid any possible conflicts with Madame Dukat, I avoided conversation and paid attention to Eben. He had invented a toy produced a small hologram. It was the perfect replica of a snake he allowed to slither under the table to wrap about her leg, it took an eternity for her to notice. When she finally did, her screams echoed in the chamber, bringing a smile to Vardon's face while the rest of us laughed.

"I see no reason to mock me," Mikelya said to Dukat. "You're just like your father, you little monster. He was known for playing pranks on me when we were children. Oh, I knew Gul Parnal quite well. You're a savage just like him."

Eben put away the small device in his pocket, sulking until Sawyer and Damar arrived. Both were in uniform and didn't act as warm and affectionate as I'd hoped. Damar went over to speak privately with Vardon, while Sawyer slid into a vacant chair near me.

"You had surgery," I said keeping my voice low.

"Shoulders up." Sawyer opened her arms as Eben climbed onto her lap. "I thought it about time I paid a call. I spend too much time on patrols. I've missed you both. I brought you a gift, son." She placed a box into his hand. "It's an assortment of power crystals you've been asking about. They're not dilithium, the dealer assured me they could power a tank. What are you working on?"

"It's a secret."

"How is everything at the fort? Are you and Damar happy together?" I pushed my

glass of wine toward her. She took a large gulp and set it aside. "bad?"

"Everything is fine. Don't worry. The construction of Fort Varnok is taking longer than expected," she said. "I didn't see Damar much. He is in charge of rebuilding the fort. He doesn't rest. He's not eating well. I've assigned Ravon to assist him. My cousin told me to convey is affection."

"Are you speaking of my husband?" Mikelya asked. "Speak louder so we may all here, cousin." She said the last word like it was an insult. To her, I suppose, it was.

"Dukat is well and extends his apology he was unable to attend dinner this evening." Sawyer glanced at Vardon. "You've been quite exemplary in your hospitality, Gul Vardon. My son is looking quite well. He's put on weight." She glanced at me. "So have you."

"It's a pleasure to have Young Yor on my ship," Vardon said. "I believe your son is interested in commanding his own ship one day. He's become a permanent fixture on the bridge, along with Garak. With your permission, I'd like to have one of my officer's provide tutoring. Your son is intelligent. You should consider sending him to the Cardassian Military Academy when he is older. I certainly would give him a referral."

"Disgusting," Mikelya muttered. "Poor relations make poor officers."

"Oh, I shouldn't worry too much about the Yor family's purse strings, cousin. I'm paid every time I drag in a traitor from the Fifth," Sawyer said. For some reason, she stared at Vardon when she said it. "The Alpha Brigade has grown to five hundred strong. As far as I know, Gul Damar and Gul Dukat are pleased with my performance."

"Yes, you've done quite well," Damar said. He sounded harsh, I finally noticed a spark in his eye and felt a great sense of relief. Sawyer flashed a dazzling smile made by far the prettiest women in the room.

"I find hard to believe," Mikelya said. "I suppose I should be grateful she rescued me. You didn't seem able to, Gul Damar. I'm surprised my husband bothered to promote you after Agent Torell so easily took you captive. How is your head?"

"Still on my shoulders," he replied.

Damar and Vardon stood in the corner of the room. While Vardon looked

embarrassed at the stinging comment, Damar laughed. The five officers along with Vardon laughed as well, I noted Mikelya's lips tightened, giving her a pinched like a dried prune.

"As for Glinn Yor, she excels at whatever she puts her mind to and does it well," Damar said. He lifted his glass of water, drinking neither kanar nor wine to toast Sawyer. I realized his abstinence had to do with the execution of Saja and no further explanation was needed.

Every officer including Garak lifted their glass and took a drink.

"In the old days of the Union," Vardon said, offering Damar his chair, "commissions were bought and paid for by the wealthiest families. The competitive nature of the officers proved to be a problem and this was stopped. Now officers are promoted for their loyalty, honesty and bravery, often in the line of duty. Glinn Yor, for instance was promoted for saving Dukat's life on more than several occasion. Five I believe is the current tally. Surely a record and one to be commended, yet all I have to offer as a reward is pudding."

Damar assumed the chair, while Vardon sat on the edge of the table Sawyer laughed. I did as well. Vardon was delightful and he'd easily quieted Mikelya Dukat without raising his voice or causing any shame or embarrassment at his table. His humor was short lived as an officer arrived with a message handed to him on a tray. The old-fashioned nature of the exchange struck me as charming as well.

"Ah, Dukat has returned to the Kobrak," Vardon said. "Our dinner is to be turned into a briefing. Ladies, if you will please excuse us, I am to clear the room of all nonmilitary personnel at once. Garak. Young Yor. Please escort Mistress Helen to her quarters. Glinn Kurcel, you have won the honor tonight of escorting Madame Dukat to her room."

A handsome young officer stood. He pulled her chair back from the table, she resisted, as if her feet were firmly planted into the floor.

"I'd rather stay and see my husband," Mikelya said.

"Yes, we all are in line to see him. It will be your turn soon enough. This is business," Vardon said. He stood and personally escorted Dukat's wife to the door, turning her over to Glinn Kurcel, smiled when I walked past with Garak and Eben.

I sent the boy with Garak, hoping Dukat would visit me after the meeting. The hour

grew late and I decided to go to bed. Removing my clothes and slipping into a sleeping gown, I climbed into bed and rubbed the sides of my swollen stomach, speaking softly to my unborn children. Dukat arrived a few minutes later, already unfastening his cuirass and dropped it onto the floor. He hurried toward me and knelt beside the bed, placing his cheek on my stomach.

“You are well tonight, my love? Vardon said you look particularly lovely this evening. I’m sorry I wasn’t able to see your gown.” Dukat’s hand cupped my cheek and he craned his long neck to kiss my cheek. “Tears? Why? I am here, am I not? Surely you don’t think I came to see my wife. I came straight here after the meeting.”

“I miss you. I heard you might be sent to Cardassia to accept the appointment as a legate. I’m sure that’s why your wife lingers, waiting for you to take her home.”

Dukat grinned. “Very true. I’m doing my best to save the Union. Whether she remains a leech on this ship or not, I have no intention of forgiving her,” he said. “I need not go into the details with you and spoil the moment. I showered on Bajor.”

I don’t know what I was expecting, stories of battles or flowery speech on how much he’d missed me. He removed his clothes, leaving them on the floor and climbed into bed. Heat radiated from his scaled body. His lips consumed my own and I wrapped my arms around his shoulders, thankful he was alive and with me.

“Do nothing. I’ll do everything,” he said.

Leaving over my body, he unfastened my gown and let his hands slide across my swollen breasts. His tongue slid along my neck, making me arch my back. A hand pressed upon my stomach, lowering until it nestled between my legs, his fingers easing the throbbing I felt as he manipulated my flesh. His lips covered a nipple as he continued to stroke me. It had been so long I thrust my hips against the movement of his hand and fingers without realizing it.

“Patience,” he growled.

His tongue slid between my breasts, along my stomach and lower. His hands parted my thighs and he bent his body around so he could press his head between my legs. A few kisses to my inner thighs, his hands working together to widen my moist lips, and I felt his

tongue enter me. His deep tongue thrusts were maddening and I clung to his shoulders, biting my lower lip to keep from screaming.

When he finally turned me onto my side, he moved in behind me, sliding deep within and then turned my head so he could kiss me. It had never been like this, so gentle and yet urgent, his passion for me, and me alone. His first thrust was slow and deep, causing me to groan, he gradually moved faster, not rushed, a steady pressure brought me to orgasm countless times before I finally felt him shudder against me. He grew still, remaining inside, letting himself grow soft within as he pulled me tight against him.

“I have missed you, Helen.”

“If this is how you’re going to behave, then I must make certain you miss me more often. I have more certainly missed you. How much longer must we be apart?”

“I’m here with you now. Let be enough.”

SAWYER

Chapter Thirty-Three

"I can do no more repairs, Glinn Yor. I don't dare to," said Dr. Lazlo. "The surgery performed by Agent Torell's butchers' caused extensive damage. The top layer of skin was literally burned away. I realize you dislike appearing human from the shoulders down, I took a risk restoring what I could at this time. You must wait."

"How long?" I asked.

"A month. Maybe longer."

"That's not good enough."

"Dr. Quirin at Terok Nor is far more qualified to perform such an extensive surgery," he said, handing me my jacket. "Unless you intend to visit the space station, you'll have to make do with my own limited abilities. I don't like admitting I'm not qualified to perform the necessary changes. I've given you my professional opinion. You might at least thank me for closing the wound in your side. Another inch over and your opponent's dagger would have pierced your stomach. Must you get so personal with the Fifth Order soldiers you seem bound and determined to kill? I'm told you've killed more than thirty soldiers. You starting to get quite a reputation as a butcher yourself."

"I'm doing my job, Dr. Lazlo," I said.

"you take scalps. It's not only disgusting, it's barbaric. The entire Alpha Brigade do the same thing. You lead by example, Glinn Yor."

"Well, Doc, you'll just have to get used to it. As you said, I lead by example. There are more than five hundred Fifth Order soldiers still held unaccountable on this planet. I want them to be afraid of the Alpha Brigade. Fear breaks the spirit of our enemy and I won't them broken."

Dr. Lazlo snorted. "You sound just like your cousin."

Putting on the jacket, I stood in front of the mirror, gazing at my face. For the most part I thought I looked as I had before, the ridges around my eyes were not as pronounced and the spoon-shaped ridges on my forehead appeared dark blue. I'd started to wear war paint on the eye ridges so the color of the spoon didn't look so drastic. Before I left his office, I removed a small jar of makeup from my pocket and applied the color to my eye ridges ran beneath my eyes and extended across my forehead to my hairline. I heard Dr. Lazlo muttering as he left his office. I buckled on my gun belt and slid in my sword harness and left.

There wasn't a cloud in the sky as I crossed the courtyard. I'd sent Ravon and Torgan on two separate patrols to comb through the valleys to the north and south of the fort. To the west, Outpost 9 was under construction, I needed to start focusing on the eastern hills of Tragur. I'd intend to send Hadran with a patrol, I'd been relying too much on my favorite officers and needed to let them rest. Dunatar, Jenrak, Zolon, Ikarus and Korvinus went on patrol with me every day. They had the day off. I'd taken one day to rest as well.

The destruction to the fort had been minimal to Building 1 where Dukat's headquarters, conference rooms and the officer's quarters were located. I'd been told Dukat had beamed onto the Kobrak earlier morning and had left the Bajoran star system, finally able to see action against the Fifth Order fleet diminished daily. He'd be gone for several days, which meant I wasn't able to visit Eben or Helen. Damar was left in charge. Dorric and five soldiers from his team had assaulted Torell's camp had returned days ago. He'd picked Dorric to be his new aide, since I had the Alpha Brigade, I missed seeing him on a regular basis. Hoping to find him available afternoon, I entered the main building, checked on a monitor where he was located and found him in a conference room with Dorric and several officers. Since the conference rooms were on the first floor, I didn't have far to walk. I arrived as the meeting ended and the officers filed past me. Damar was the last to leave.

"I didn't expect to see you today," he said, glancing in either direction. With eagerness, he caught hold of my arms, backing me against the wall and he kissed me.

“Have I thanked you today for saving my life? With the care you showed to keep me at alive, you have been remiss giving me your full attention. How can I undress you if you’re harnessed like a horse?”

“Making love in the hallway is against the rules, Gul Damar.”

“We have an hour. I have every intention of using it well,” he said.

Hurrying to his room, we headed toward the bedroom, stripping off our gear and uniforms. His quarters were far larger than mine as well as his bed. My room had sustained fire damage and had not been repaired, which was one reason I’d sent Eben to the Kobrak. Damar pulled me into his arms, already fully erect. His calloused hands glided across my ribs, touching the new scar, said not a word. He kissed me as he grasped my buttocks, his lips trailing to my neck to linger on one particular spot under my left ear where I was particularly sensitive. With my arms wrapped around his neck, we swayed together while he thrust his tongue into my mouth, kissing me hungrily before throwing me onto the bed.

“I have not told I love you. I should have days ago,” he said, crawling over me. “I love every inch of you, including our new war trophy.” He dipped low to kiss the scar, his tongue gliding across my stomach, while I watched him at work. “To think I ever thought about ending our relationship brings me shame. You’ve accepted my apology, I want you to know I, Corat Damar, claim you as my woman.”

“Is that so?” I asked grabbing a fistful of his hair.

He lifted his head, kissing my wrist and with a growl pulled my legs around his shoulders. Kisses landed on my inner thigh. His tongue replaced his lips. He buried his head between my legs, licking me almost frantically, wetting me thoroughly before he pushed my legs against my chest. His hips thrust forward as he slid his cock inside. Another kiss landed on the side of my right knee and then my left. He thrust against me, his eyes locked on mine. Each thrust brought him laying further on top of me. With a growl, he repositioned my legs around his waist, showing off his muscular arms as he held himself above me, thrusting harder.

“I love you, Ren Yor.”

“And I...love...you...Corat.”

Damar relentlessly hammered against me, generation a great deal of heat pooled in sweat between our bodies. Able to maintain his steady pace, I lost track of time, exerting every ounce of energy to match each thrust. My legs started quivering. Countless butterfly orgasms brought my teeth sinking into his shoulder. He let out a grunt of pain mixed with pleasure and withdrew, roughly turning me around to lift me upwards, penetrating me once more. Bent over, presenting him a firmer target, he continued his assault while I chewed on the edge of the pillow, groaning with each thrust. I felt his teeth bite my neck ridge as he started to tremble and with a final hard thrust, he collapsed on top of me, flattening me to the mattress under his weight. He moved to my side, pulling me to face him, as rough as he had been before and I smiled, delighted, when he kissed me, again holding my gaze.

“No one will come between us again. I swear it,” he said.

I smiled. “You’re so serious, my love.”

His arms tightened around me. “Because I must ask you to venture in the Valley of Shadows to search for traitors,” he replied. “It brings me no pleasure to mention the necessity of sending you onto another patrol. A priest sent word one of the Pah-Wraith temples in this area was molested. He claims only Cardassians would dare desecrate one of their shadow dwellings. valley is cursed. It is why no one ever ventures there.”

“And into this place you would send me so late in the afternoon?”

“Torgan requested your assistance. He found a trail leads into valley, we Cardassians fear to go there. I tell you because you are....” Damar paused. His hand cupped my chin. “Because you are human, I know you are not afraid of the superstitions in this place. You’ve not been on Bajor long enough to know about their legends and prophesies. This place is considered by all as evil. Sensors have trouble picking up life signs, they always have, and the reason cannot be explained. I understand if you want to wait until morning.”

“After spending an hour fucking my legs off, I can hardly refuse, Gul Damar. I don’t want you to think I’m a coward.”

“You are Yor the Brave. No one would accuse you of being a coward.”

“Who is this priest? Is he coming with us?”

“I do not know his name, he comes from Lillihaven. It is the nearby settlement where the Bajoran prisoners were taken a week ago. is where Tychek found them. I suppose because their lives were spared this priest feels he owes us an obligation. He is highly respected among his own kind, no Bajoran will serve as a guide. They never venture into the Valley of Shadows. The shepherd went after a stray lamp. He returned to Lillihaven with a strange story. He claimed to have found a dead Cardassian soldier in the valley. Torgan doesn't have the courage to investigate himself. I don't want to ask you do it.”

“That you already have.”

“It's too narrow to land a shuttle there. And too great a distance to walk, so you must take horses into the valley. Dunatar already knows. He is waiting for you. I assumed you'd want to take your favorites with you.”

Pushing him away, I crawled out of bed. He'd spoiled the afterglow of sex. I started to dress, not bothering to shower, not caring I smelled like him. I used his shirt to wipe between my legs, removing his essence and threw it in his face. He grunted and tossed the shirt aside, worry furrowing his brow. I sat on the bed to put on my boots.

“You're angry with me.”

“Just a bit,” I said. “I wanted to spend the evening with you. The way you and your boss sneak around, keeping secrets of your every move is starting to wear thin. He leaves on the Kobrak to chase after ghost ships after hearing a few suspicious reports about from Vardon, and now you send me into a place where no Cardassian or Bajoran wants to go. Its more than a twenty mile ride into valley. I've read a bit about it. Don't expect to see me until sometime tomorrow. I'll contact you once we arrive.”

“There are no Cardassian ships in orbit or I'd have asked a gul to transport you into the valley,” Damar said. He swung his legs off the bed, deliberately puffing out his chest to look more muscular as he stood and advanced toward me. He was extremely handsome and knew it, which made him quite conceited. “Don't leave angry. I'm no more happy

about this than you are, I have come to depend on you. No one else can handle this you.”

“We make love and then you ask me to go on a mission no one else wants to go on? I’m not sure if I should be insulted or not,” I said. Buckling my second boot, I walked into the living room to get my weapons. “When I come back with a stray lamb, I’m going to make it a pet and name it after you.”

Damar retrieved my hostler off the floor and slipped it around my waist, looking rather amused when he buckled it on. He hooked my harness across my chest, gave a tug on my cuirass and stood back. Here I was armed to the teeth and he was still naked. My eyes traveled the length of his body, resting on the slit as his cock emerged and stood erect. I moved closer to him, placed my hand on his muscular chest and smiled.

“I’ll see you later, Gul Damar,” I said giving his cock a hard squeeze. He lifted onto his toes. “Don’t worry. I’m going to debunk all this supernatural crap and put an end to your night terrors. What the hell is supposed to be in this valley, anyway?”

“It’s best I don’t tell you. You’re grip is fierce.”

Releasing him, I slid my beret onto my head and then reached around to pat him on the backside. He looked utterly dumbstruck. A thin smile appeared on my face as I left him standing in the middle of the living room, buck naked, unsure whether he’d done the right thing or not. He probably hadn’t, I was going all the same.

Twenty soldiers rode behind me. We brought one spare horse for Gil Torgan, finding him waiting along with a patrol at Valley EK-1, not a good name, it was directly north to the fort and pitted with caves and tall trees had started to lose their leaves. The sun had started to set and the temperature had dropped. Torgan mounted the horse and I sent the request of his squad back to the fort. I’d already glanced at a map, wanting nothing to do with EK-1, which I supposed the Bajorans called something more lyrical and took a path led through the hills, winding through rough terrain over the next few miles. The vegetation grew sparser, the path rockier and as the five moons failed to provide light, hiding behind clouds, we used spotlights attached to our battle helmets so the horses could see as well as us.

“I know this is the last place you wanted to search,” Torgan said, riding up beside

me. "In another mile, we'll come to a Shadow Temple, we won't stop there. It's mostly in ruins, does have chambers beneath the ground. I've already taken a reading on it and there were no life forms."

"Do ghosts appear on a tricorder as life form?" I asked.

"This is not a situation I want to be in either, Glinn Yor," Torgan said. "No one willingly enters the Valley of Shadows. I told Gul Damar the body found by the shepherd probably belongs to a Fifth Order deserter. I'd have preferred the Kobrak to search for deserters with their scanners."

"Dukat says it's the minerals in the valley make scanners malfunction. The only way to be sure is to go in there on horseback. Forget about the local legends of this place. It's just another valley, Torgan. Be worried about the living and not the dead."

The hour was late when we arrived on a ridge overlooked the infamous valley, spread like a bowl between high, barren mountains. There was only one route into the valley, requiring us to dismount and walk the horses to reach lower ground. At a snort from my horse, I noticed a few of the soldiers having trouble trying to control their mounts. The animals' didn't want to enter the canyon any more than the soldiers.

"All right," I said. "Dunatar, tell Torgan to find me the footprints in the dirt. Let's see if this shepherd was telling the truth or not. We'll make camp here. Tether the horses and post guards."

"We should wait until morning, Yor. It's not safe in valley at night. Not with one squad. Not with a full brigade." Dunatar removed his helmet to run his hand through his hair. "You smile, there are more than ghosts in cursed place."

"Saja taught us not to be afraid of anything. We're going in there."

"Yes, sir."

Handing the reins of my horse to Komash, along with my helmet, I removed my rifle from the back of the saddle. Torgan led us into the mouth of the valley, turning his head so the light from his helmet showed footprints in the dirt. He didn't seem to want to go further. I was tempted to ask about the ghost stories, it wouldn't have helped the confidence of my men who clearly believed whatever local legends existed. I sent Torgan

back to camp, leaving him in command. My five brave soldiers' hadn't worn their helmets either. Unless in battle, they were more problematic than helpful and I wanted to rely on my own hearing as much as eyesight. I took the lead, using the light on my rifle to follow the footsteps.

"Pah-Wraiths live in valley. They are demons," Ikarus said, catching up with me. "The Bajorans say they were imprisoned in the Fire Caves thousands of years ago, the locals say they see strange lights at night and hear things can't be explained."

"Which makes it the perfect hiding place for the Fifth Order," I said. "I know you're afraid, Ikarus. So are the men. I have my own faith to guide me. We'll be fine."

The entrance into the cave was narrow, boxed by two cliffs, it opened further in and for miles was nothing sand, rocks and giant scorpions. Ikarus used a tricorder, searching for the dead body reported by shepherd. I'm sure I wasn't the only one who sensed a creepy presence as we moved forward, able to see hoof prints beside those made from a Cardassian boot. A splatter of dried blood on the rocks led to the corpse. The tiny hooves had circled around the body so many times it appeared as if someone had led the lamp to make such a deep indentation. All Ikarus turned their backs from me, guns raised, staring into the dark as if they expected an ambush. In the distance something screeched. I thought it might be an owl, Jenrak let out a soft gasp. They were afraid. I knelt in the sand beside the body. It faced downwards. Lying my rifle in the sand, I grabbed an arm and rolled the stiff body onto its side. A large yellow scorpion ran from Ikarus's light. He stomped on it.

"Look at his face," I said.

The light was turned onto the dead man. There wasn't a face left, only a bit of flesh on bone. The insignia was Fifth Order he'd been there for at least a week. I didn't care enough about who he had been, until I found the Klingon knife taken from me by Torell stuck in his belt. We were on the right trail. I slid the knife into my boot and searched the body, finding a com-link, which I handed to Ikarus and a pistol was still in working order.

"All right," I said, standing. "This is one of Torell's men. Someone helped us do our job. He was shot. The chances are they've already left this valley. The body has been here at least six days. Ikarus, use your tricorder, see if you pick up any life forms. I want to know

why they'd bother to come here."

"There's quite a few caves here," Ikarus said. "I'm not picking up thousands of life forms. That's impossible. The tricorder isn't working properly."

"Nor is mine," Jenrak said, putting away his tricorder. He'd brought his helmet and put it on, and then shook his head. "The battle helm isn't working either."

"Stop looking for the living. What about bodies?" I asked. "Can you get me a reading on any dead Cardassians? Torell killed Niyal Gora and the Bajorans. Someone killed the Cardassian. He was with Torell. I found my knife on him. If you didn't want anyone to know your plans or talk under torture, I'd bring them to the one place everyone fears to enter. I'd bring them here and kill them."

"Ren Yor, don't be morbid," Korvinus said, in a stern voice.

"Agent Torell had twelve assassins to start with and another spy had a codename. He is called the Ghost. I'd almost forgotten about him. I do know we killed six agents back at Torell's hideout. Four remain unaccounted for. Gul Raynor provided most of our information and I don't like relying on a traitor for information. He probably lied. And you now Torell has a track record of killing people he no longer finds useful."

Dunatar turned toward me. "How do you know this, Yor?"

"To catch a madman, you must think like one."

I moved forward and stopped, feeling a chill slid along my spine. Something moved ahead of us. I lifted my rifle, shining the light on a cave entrance, catching a shadowy figure step inside. Flipping off the light, I motioned for my men to follow and tried to pick my way quietly across the rocky terrain. I didn't want to make sound. I didn't want lights. In the dark we proceeded forward with only the tiny blue lights on the two tricorders visible.

"I've got something," Ikarus whispered, pointing.

Something told me not to enter the cave, a voice in the back of my head, directing me away from the entrance. Whatever was inside was not a living thing. I didn't believe in ghosts and had no intention to going inside. Backing up, we followed Ikarus twenty yards and found a rifle. Korvinus picked I up. Another twenty yards produced a dead Bajoran,

one of the rebels, which I recognized from Torell's camp. I was surprised to find a Bajoran, the next body belonged to a Cardassian. So did the next two hundred and thirty-three bodies we found beneath a rocky ledge. They'd been there for a week or more, lying in the sun, rotting and the fumes from the swollen bodies left most of us gagging. We collected as many rifles as we could carry. While I was certain we'd have found more bodies if we continued another mile further, I kept glancing toward the ridge, feeling as if we were watched.

"Let's get out of here. We'll call this in when we reach the others. I'm not staying the night here. We'll ride back," I said, pausing to stare at a young man. His chest had been cut open. Something had been feeding on him. "I can't tell if they're Tychek or Parnal's men, they appear to have been shot. Most of them at least."

A howl raised, followed by more, offered by a pack of wild dogs. It wasn't possible to run lugging as many rifled as we'd gathered. I ordered the squad to drop the weapons in a pile, though I kept two and assumed the men did as well. Shadowy forms swept across the killing ground. Predators, I thought, hearing the distinct growls.

"Just shoot them and be done with it," Zolon said, always eager to kill something. Before I could stop him, he fired in the direction of the growls.

The yelp was shrill. He'd shot something.

Korvinus started running. The rest of us followed, pursued by the pack of wild beasts on our heels, neither turning to fire or look how close they were. At the narrow pass led into the cave, Torgan and the soldiers waited for us. They opened fire in a display of discipline and raw courage. I lined turned, dropped two rifles, keeping mine. Standing with the soldiers, I fired at what appeared to be the tail end of wild dogs vanished into the gloom of the valley. Their snarls and yelps faded, the impact they made was felt by all.

"Get on the horses. We're leaving," I shouted.

"I loaded the dead soldier on the back of yours," Torgan said. "We must take him home for proper burial."

Home was a funny way to think of the fort, I thought, he was right about returning the body. Someone would be missing the dead man.

Grabbing the reins of my horse, I didn't think about the rifles I'd left behind until I was in the saddle. As soon as they men were mounted, we rode away from the valley, heading due south. It was impossible at night to return the way we'd come, so we remained on a direct path led us into the EK-1, far greener and less terrifying. This valley like every other over a twenty-mile radius was filled with cliffs and caves, only I didn't feel the same threatening vibes as there had been in the Valley of Shadow. No wild dogs pursued us. I assumed they fed only on the dead, not the living.

We took only one break to take a piss and water the horses. Everyone was tired, I didn't want to stop any longer than we had to and readings taken in EK-1 didn't pick up any life forms other than a few rabbits and deer. The helmets started working five miles south of the killing ground. I contacted Damar and made my report.

"You're all right?" His voice crackled on the com-link.

"Scared shiftless otherwise fine. I'll make my report when we arrive. We'll be back by the time the sun rises."

Another two horses of hard riding and the morning sun greeted us, rising over the eastern hills, beckoning me to visit another day. The walls of the fort had fallen at the north end, allowing us to ride through, greeted by two squads. One two of the guard towers had fallen. The damage didn't seem as bad as I'd thought before we left, I noticed the scorched earth where we'd burned the Fifth Order and imagined I'd have to return to the valley to do the same for the Cardassian dead. Leaving my horse with a guard, I ordered my men to the barracks, a large tent set up on the west side of the fort and hurried toward the main building, finding Ravon standing outside, smoking a cigar. I was afraid I'd taught the men a bad habit.

"Did you find anything, Glinn Yor?" Ravon asked.

"Far more than we bargained for, I said. " Be glad you didn't go with us, Ravon. I don't want anyone patrolling area again. Not at night. When you've had your breakfast, continue searching in the eastern hills. I need to get some sleep."

He caught hold of my arm. *"Did you...did you find ghosts or demons?"*

"Hundreds of dead Cardassians. I'd say the place is haunted, Ravon, at least it is"

now. We have to find Torell. He's the one killing our people. I think he's the one who has gone rogue. We have to stop him before things escalate."

"Yor the Brave. Nothing scares you," Ravon said as he spouted smoke into the air. "I'll contact you later and let you know if we find anything. I prefer day patrols. I don't like the night. Don't tell anyone I said or they'll think I'm a coward."

I patted him on the shoulder, barely able to walk or keep my eyes open. Ravon took pity on me and slid his arm around my waist, walking me into the lobby where Damar waited. Ravon handed me over to Damar who lifted me into his arms, impressing me with his brawn. He carried me into the turbolift, not setting me on my feet and down the corridor on the third floor. The door opened as pink sunlight appeared at the windows, chasing away the night shadows and placed me on his feet. He kept his arms around me, holding me firmly against his chest, spoiling his uniform with the odor I'd brought with me.

"I don't know you got there and back again in record time," Damar said impressed. "Ravon said it would be closer to noon. Did you find anything?"

"Shadows and dead soldiers."

I collapsed in his arms, too tired to talk further, and far too exhausted to see to my own needs. Damar removed my gear, clothes and boots. I'm sure he saw the Klingon knife. How he got me into the shower, wash and dry me off would have amazed even Hercules, for I was by no means a small or petite sized woman. In a haze, I tasted warm tea held to my lip, dribbled most of it and ended up in bed. Covered with a blanket, my head hit the soft pillow and I dozed off, still able to hear howling wild dogs.

Damar sat beside me. I felt droplets of water as he leaned over me, his wet hair striking my face and then his lips planted firmly on my mouth. A groan escaped me. His fingers brushed against my cheek. I sighed, opening one eye, watching as he slid beneath the blanket. He pulled me against his chest, spooning me and pressed his lips to my ear.

"Have I told you today I love you?" he asked.

"Just did," I muttered before I fell asleep.

HELEN

Chapter Thirty-Four

“I probably should have mentioned conditions here remain more primitive than you are accustomed to, my dear,” Dukat said. “Gul Vardon has spoiled you. I can offer humble accommodations, fair weather, my company and a picnic.”

“Though you are powerful, you had nothing to do with the weather,” I said laughing.

Seated at his side in the replanted garden at Fort Varnok, I drank a glass of Bajoran spring wine, enjoying the feel of freshly planted grass beneath my backside. I wore a hooded cloak lined with fur to protect me from a chill in the fall air. The sun was high overhead. I’d been told before we beamed into the fort in lay in ruins, yet I was looking at brand new structures and a new high wall. Three prefabricated buildings had been brought to Bajor by large freighters, transported directly inside the fort, along with new barracks, a mess hall and reinforcements. Overhead two large arches crossed each other in the middle like the bones of a giant beast. The fort was hardly primitive by any stretch of the imagination.

“Damar has done his best in a short amount of time to rebuild the fort. I’m glad to be back,” he said kissing my hand. “I rather think Vardon was glad to have us off this ship. He’ll have a better time hunting without me standing over his shoulder.”

“Garak and Eben were the problem, not you,” I said. “They never left the bridge or left Vardon alone, pestering him with countless questions during the two weeks on board.”

The boy ran through the garden, chasing after a hologram of a dog. He’d upgraded his new toy since the snake pestered Dukat’s wife at the dinner party. Sawyer seated beside Damar beneath a tree had dressed in a skirt and thick sweater. She fed Damar grapes,

while Garak refilled their glasses with wine. Garak had brought a sketchpad, spending the afternoon drawing our portraits, while a feast was laid out on a picnic blanket. For once it felt like we were normal people enjoying an afternoon in a park.

“Damar has secured the area within a twenty mile radius,” Dukat said, stretching out his long legs. “You have nothing to worry about.” He kissed my hand. “Later, I’ll treat you to a hot bath and a massage.”

“I want one of those holograms, Eben,” called out Sawyer. The boy and dog ran past her. He was full of energy and showing off for his mother. “If there was another me, I could provide two targets for the Fifth Order. Gul Kenmar now leads the rebel forces on Bajor, Helen. Most skirmishes occur at night. Don’t worry. We haven’t seen any real fighting in days.”

“Gul Kenmar’s army is gathering for a major push toward us,” Damar said. “Larger battles are being fought all over the Union. The Fifth Order is as strong as ever.”

“No talk of work today. That’s an order,” Dukat said.

From our position on the blanket, I was able to see soldiers in the two of the guard towers and a platoon drilling in the courtyard. I tried to ignore them. I felt stuffed shared a piece of pie with Dukat, holding it for him to take a bite. He stuffed the entire piece into his mouth like a greedy pig, chewed only sparingly, swallowed and sucked on my index finger bringing a blush to my cheeks.

“Garak, a question.” Dukat’s voice rumbled in his chest. “I read the medical reports after your brief stay with Agent Torell. How is it you came to be so much more severely injured than anyone else? A dislocated shoulder, fifteen hairline fractures, three broken ribs and a detached retina. Did you say something upset Torell?”

“You said no talk about work,” I replied.

“It was more what I wouldn’t say, Dukat. Torell wanted the names of my Order contacts and when I refused, he used an iron bar in the hopes he might pry it out of me. As well you know, Order agents are trained to resist all forms of torture and interrogation.”

Willing to make an excuse for me, I wouldn’t hear of it. I leaned against Dukat, turning his head to face me and told him the truth.

“Torell activated my implant. I’m afraid I hurt Garak.”

“I recall you blinded Torell in one eye. I got off easy,” Garak said. He seemed able to hear even the softest words I whispered to Dukat. It was rather annoying.

Sawyer slipped away from Damar, coming over for a slice of pie. “Torell was wearing an eyepatch when I saw him,” she said. I served her a large piece of pie on a plate and handed it to her. “When I find him, I’ll take his other eye as a momentum for you.”

“Don’t be disgusting,” I said. Seeing a smile appear on Dukat’s face, I nudged him in the side. “I’m perfectly able to take care of myself. I am a little tired. You may need to carry me to your quarters, Gul Dukat. That’s a hint.”

“Come.” Dukat stood and pulled me to my feet. “Perhaps a short walk first. I’m gorged,” he said. “Garak, see everything is put away. As you know, I’m awaiting word from Central Command about my appointment to Legate. It should be any day now.”

Leaving our friends in the garden, Dukat kept his arm around me as we made our way to his spacious quarters. His promise of a hot bath was waived for a massage with oil. He rubbed every inch of my body, careful when he rubbed my stomach, I’d yet to tell him about the twins. Surely he had to notice I was too large for a single child. He didn’t ask questions and I offered no explanation. I wasn’t to surprise him when it came time.

Over the new few days, I spent most of my time with Eben and Garak, while Sawyer was away on patrols. Dukat and Damar were busy day and night. I didn’t ask many questions about the war. Nor had I asked about a large number of graves beyond the walls of the fort. Some things were best left unsaid. I framed the portraits of Dukat and me, placing them in the living room, adding curtains and pillows, things to make his quarter’s feel like *our home*. I supposed it was foolish to play house with Gul Dukat, I did it anyway.

I’d settled down for the evening with a book on Bajoran wines when Sawyer paid a visit. She wore her uniform had washed off her war paint. I noticed a few alterations in her cosmetic surgery. It was good only her ridges were not as pronounced. She ordered a glass of wine and sat next to me on the couch, placing her boots on the table. A little gasp from me and she lowered them to the floor.

“Eben is a good student. I think Garak likes playing the role of teacher more than I

do," I said. "When do you stop going out on patrol? I heard about the Valley of Shadows. I don't want you go back there. And I know Eben misses you. I wish you could spend more time with him, Sawyer."

"Only you call me name. Sometimes Eben does, not often."

"You'll always be Sawyer to me."

She smiled. "Now you're permanently in Dukat's life, you should consider having surgery to appear Cardassian. Sometimes I think you like being different. It places a hardship on Dukat that's not necessary. You probably the only Terran on the planet."

"You're Terran." I took a sip of wine. "Don't make face. It's obvious I've spent too much time away from you. Now and then you needed to be reminded you're a farm girl and not General Patton. Eben wants to be an engineer when he grows up. The life of a soldier is too grueling and dangerous. From one mother to another, take my advice and keep your son out of the military. Ever wish Damar would marry you?"

"Cardassians prefer not to divorce. I'm not sure I want to get married. He might want to have children. You really should chat with the doctor, Helen. Not about surgery. I'm told the heartbeat of your child is stronger than normal. Either the baby has a huge heart or you're carrying a litter of lizards."

"Is that supposed to be funny?"

"We left Earth five months ago, Helen. It feel like you've been pregnant the entire time," she said. "I don't need to be married to be happy. If Mikelya ends up divorcing Dukat, and it's highly possible, he'll be free to marry you. He can't if you're Terran. He'd be demoted. I'm not sure he'll be made a legate anytime soon. I know he think he will be. A divorce will be frowned upon."

"Has he mentioned marrying me?" I asked. It was something I'd thought about many times. I wanted to marry Skrain Dukat. Living at the fort was out of the question. I wasn't fond of military life. Terok Nor seemed suitable, Dukat didn't want to return to the station.

"He's mentioned divorce, don't get your hopes up. I don't want you getting hurt. The truth is there's no advantage marrying you, not politically, and certainly not

financially. I haven't Damar asked to divorce his wife for the same reasons."

"Things can change. You never know," I said.

Sawyer gave me a hug. She hadn't spent much time with me. I knew she wanted a few hours with Eben and Damar. After she left, I realized the hopelessness of our mutual situations, loving married me who couldn't divorce their wives and wouldn't marry Terrans. It was a wonder we were in love, then people always wanted what they couldn't have. My life at the fort was an illusion and Sawyer made me realize it wasn't going to last forever. I was in tears when Dukat returned later night.

"All things pass in time, Helen. The war won't last forever. Don't cry. It spoils your pretty face," he said, pulling me against his chest. "Damar thinks we'll have an early snow. I didn't tell him in this region it only snows on the mountains."

Several days later, Sawyer returned from a mission. Dukat and I took a stroll through the garden. He showed me far more affection on Bajor than he ever had on Terok Nor. I was sure it partly had to do with his wife being absent. We returned to Building 1 for dinner when I heard the shouts of soldiers. Sawyer came riding through the gate with a large group of mounted soldiers in purple berets. Ten of the horses were draped with dead soldiers. They weren't from the Fifth Order. She slid off her horse, handed the reins to a soldier and limped toward us. I opened my mouth to remark on her injury, noticed Damar coming from the opposite direction. He didn't look pleased.

Dukat sighed, his warm breath stirring the curls of hair at my temple. "Yor must have run into trouble. It's not like her to be caught by surprise," he said. "I'm afraid Damar may remove her from command. She's been wounded far too many times. I'm sure she has failed to tell you the number. Nor will I. Suffice to say Damar is considering giving command to Ravon or Torgan and restricting her to the fort. I think he's in love."

"And that's how he shows it? She's the darling of the Alpha Brigade. She's accomplished more than any of your other officers. I think she's proven what she can do. You can't let him give command of brigade to someone else. She'll never forgive him."

"I've explained it to you, Helen. It's very rare for a woman to rise to the rank of gul or higher, not among ground troops. If she wanted to command a ship would be different.

Women in command take too many risks. They're considered equal to men, there you have it. Men are less inclined to rush into danger."

"Is this a factual statement or are you talking about Sawyer?"

"I never generalize," Dukat said. "Not do I compare all female commanders to Yor. She's one of a kind. And if she's not careful, she'll get herself killed."

Damar stood close to Sawyer. I was unable to hear what they said, from his reaction, he was far angrier than I'd realized. The ten bodies were removed from the horses and carried to the infirmary also served as a morgue. The stables were on the west side of the fort. The soldiers rode in direction taking the riderless horses with them. I caught my breath when Sawyer started to sag to the ground. Damar grabbed her arms to keep her on her feet, didn't seem concerned enough to take her to the infirmary and continued talking.

"Let's go inside," Dukat said, pulling on me. "Don't worry about your friend. Damar will do what he thinks is right. You must admit she's obsessed with finding Torell. We'll find him, Helen, I think it might be better if she remains at the fort, at least for now. Perhaps you can talk to her later and calm her down."

"That should go over like a ton of bricks," I replied.

A flurry of movement caught my eye as a squad of soldiers returned. I motioned for Dukat to be silent. Ravon led the entire Alpha Brigade into the courtyard. As the soldiers formed lines and stood at attention, Torgan carried something to Damar wrapped in a light blue cloth. Damar held onto Sawyer's arm, she waved him off, standing tall. The cloth was removed by Torgan. He held a long sword. Damar slid the blade out of the scabbard, placed it over his arm and offered the hilt to Sawyer. I noticed Dukat stood at attention.

"Glinn Ren Yor, as a token of my respect and esteem, as well as of the Alpha Brigade, we would present you with this sword," Damar said in a loud voice.

I'd thought he'd been arguing with Sawyer. Apparently I couldn't read Cardassians very well. Sawyer took hold of the hilt and lifted the sword, saluting the soldiers. A loud cheer went up and the soldiers flocked around her. For a moment she vanished from view. Dunatar, one of her closet friend's, had the good sense to take the sword from her, while Ikarus and Jenrak carried their commander to the infirmary. Damar dismissed the brigade.

As they broke rank and drifted toward the barracks, he turned and walked toward us.

“Where is Mother?” Eben asked, appearing at my side. He held a bouquet of wild flowers. Noticing where Sawyer was taken, he handed me the flowers and walked over to Damar. “You should have taken Mother to see the doctor. It’s no wonder she never comes home.” He ran off after the soldiers.

Damar stood open-mouthed for a moment. He looked embarrassed. He swept past us and headed toward the main building. Dukat spun me around to follow after him, chuckling under his breath. I felt like a waddling duck. Taking the turbolift to the third floor, Dukat noticed Damar standing on the balcony off a large study with a view of the countryside. He kept my arm tucked through his as led me onto the balcony. Damar briefly glanced at us and then watched the sun set, a serious look on his face.

“I had hope she’d be pleased with the presentation of the sword,” Damar said. “Perhaps we should have waited for another day. Ravon insisted. He taken a fancy to her. Ever since Saja died, she’s taken the loss of each soldier personally. Perhaps I shouldn’t have sent her to the Valley of Shadows. Most of the dead were from my assault team. I wonder why Torell took the time to leave them in dreadful place and why he killed his own men.”

“What’s this? Sawyer said the valley was haunted, nothing else,” I said, pulling out of Dukat’s embrace. “I don’t need to be shielded from the truth. I can handle it.”

“We do not like to speak of the dead,” Dukat said. “you have asked, so allow me to enlighten you, Helen. Damar was captured by Agent Torell along with most of his assault team. The bodies of more than two hundred Cardassians, including Damar’s men, were discovered by Yor in the Valley of Shadows. Torell killed them. The extent of the decay made it impossible to remove them, so we sent the Bajorans from Lillihaven to bury them. It was an unpleasant experience for both sides.”

“They were forced at gun point,” Damar said, crossing his arms. “These Bajorans have no idea how hard we’ve tried to protect them from the Fifth. Garak spends his time trying to identify their leaders, compiling a list, I’ve not seen it. It’s obvious who is in the Circle. Any commander who attacks is obviously a member. Each time Yor takes out a

patrol she sees action. It makes me think we have a spy in our midst."

"Other than Garak?" I asked.

"Dorric and five more of my men returned. They felt certain we'd been betrayed at Torell's hideout," Damar said. "Yor was an hour late. I didn't think her twenty men would be of use, so I proceeded without her. Torell knew we were coming."

Dukat nodded. "It's possible, Damar. If there is a traitor in this fort, Garak will flush him out," he said. "There's no need for you to worry, Helen. This is a military matter."

"I want to know more about the Valley of Shadows," I said.

"It's mentioned in the book I've been reading to you," Dukat said. "The Bajorans have many legends about this particular valley. It's said to be haunted by ghosts. No one ventures there. Torell found the perfect place to get rid of men he found to be of no use. More bodies were found when the Bajoran workers were sent to bury them. It's been a killing ground for some time."

"I sent Yor because she's human and not afraid of ghosts," Damar said.

Both men had no idea who they were dealing. They didn't know Sawyer like I did. She had a vivid and wild imagination. I had no doubt she'd return to investigate. I wanted to clarify to Damar Sawyer believed in many things he didn't seem to know about. It made me wonder what they actually spent time talking about off duty. Dukat must have known the wheels were spinning in my head for he pulled me into his arms, chuckling, while Damar sneered.

"Yor is far more complicated than you, my dear. She says yes when she means no. She shouts when she should be gracious," Dukat said. "And she never allows Damar to have the upper hand. Wait a minute. is how Terran females behave and why I find you both so enchanting."

The look on Damar's face was priceless.

"Ignore him, Damar. Dukat has no idea how to treat a woman. He's full of himself and if he's not careful what he says, he'll be sleeping on the couch tonight." I pushed Dukat aside, he caught me around the middle, holding me close. "Damar, there is nothing wrong with the presentation of a sword. She loves swords, it came from the brigade. You give

your lover something they'd never buy for themselves. Eben brought her flowers."

"I can hardly present her flowers in front of her brigade," Damar said.

"Lord save me from stubborn Cardassians." I shot Dukat a quelling look, one he paid attention to for once. "Damar, find her something unique. Something speaks to you about her. I'm assume this is what's troubling you. She's sentimental and she loves you," I said. "Make a romantic gesture and give her something from the heart. I'm sure if she knew how much you care she'd listen when you ask her to remain at the fort and do as you ask. Ordering her to remain behind isn't the way to handle it. Approach her as your lover."

"She'll do what she wants regardless of what I say. If she wasn't my lover, I'd have demoted her long ago and sent her to another fort."

With an effort I kept from rolling my eyes. "Neither one of you appreciate how hard she tries to be of service to Cardassia," I said. "I know how often she returns wounded. I've talked to the doctor. Maybe you should send someone else to scour the countryside for rebels and renegades. I'm merely suggesting how to handle her. I know her better than either of you."

Damar looked over my head at Dukat. "Does this woman speak to you in such a fashion? It's confusing and perplexing to deal with these humans," he grumbled. "At least your woman tells you precisely what she wants. There will be an argument the moment I suggest she remain at the fort and giving her flowers will only make her sneeze."

"Oh, don't think Helen is easy to live with," Dukat said. "I have found it useful to listen to her. Her advice is generally quite sound. And Sawyer, as Helen insists to call your rogue glinn, is her best friend. If I must step in and address this matter with her, I'll be more than happy to do so, Damar. Put your foot down and be firm."

Without another word, Damar walked off. Dukat led me back to our quarters, quite pleased with himself and I didn't feel like reeducating him about my friend. His tone had sounded possessive, something I didn't like and I was quite certain was why Damar had left before saying something out of anger. Dukat didn't realize Damar was jealous of him. Nor did Dukat seem to care his romantic history with my friend still upset me. Once inside our quarters, his mood turned tender, as if he suspected I harbored ill will and he spent his

time making me. He sat me on the couch, covered me with a blanket and went to the replicator to prepare us something for dinner. I didn't have to do a thing.

"I think Damar forgets Sawyer wanted to be treated like a woman when she's not in uniform. As far as I know, he's never taken her on any romantic strolls like you do with me and has never given her a gift. The sword doesn't count. You know very well the moment he puts his foot down, she'd going to go behind his back and do whatever she wants."

"No doubt what she wants is another bloody promotion," he said. "Yor is a true warrior, Helen. Despite what you may think, she is the perfect match for Damar. He'll trip over her a few more times before he figures out how to handle her. Her influence on him as been valuable. He has become an excellent officer and she's improved his outlook on life. You must admit he is a bit...serious."

"And you're impossible. You have no idea what she wants."

"I do know what you want, Helen."

Dukat walked over to the couch and knelt in front of me. Desire swept through me as he placed his hands on my knees. Without a word, Dukat reached his hand under my skirt, his eyes on the entrance to the sitting room. His fingers met with bare skin.

"No underclothing?"

I tried to find my voice. "I didn't think anyone would notice."

"I noticed and I had better be the only one whoever does." Dukat smiled as he lifted my skirt and disappeared beneath, making me forget about everything else him.

For the next few days' things settled down at the fort. Damar went with Sawyer on patrols, his grand romantic gesture, while Eben, Garak and I continued our daily routine. Studies came first, lunch, a walk in the garden, and then a nap for me. They worked on inventions in Sawyer's recently refurnished quarters well into the evenings. I'd left them working on a wristband Eben had designed to create a larger hologram and went to be.

Settled down for the night in bed, Dukat sat beside me, still dressed, reading to me from a book of Bajoran legends and fables. I was about to drift off to sleep when an alarm sounded. Dukat tossed the book aside and leapt out of bed, nearly sending me tumbling from bed. He raced to the door and opened it, his arms braced on either side of the

entrance.

"What is going on?" Dukat asked.

"Gul Kenmar's renegade troops have been spotted advancing in force on a small Bajoran settlement ten miles away, sir. It's Lillihaven," Jenrak said. "Gul Damar believes they're attempting to draw us out of the fort. He requests you join him in the courtyard, sir. We're moving out to meet them."

"I'm coming with you. Dal Dracalus has command of the fort," Dukat said.

My ears had perked up the first time I'd heard the name of the officer. Dracalus held the rank of commander, a particularly tall, then officer with an eyepatch made him look sinister. Dukat had selected him for his staff, plucking him from Cardassia where he'd spend the last ten years training cadets at the military academy. His war record was distinguished, a dozen metals of valor, along with credentials were nearly as impressed as Dukat's. We were in good hands.

"Yor isn't coming with us this time," Dukat said.

"Why not? This is what she lives for," I replied.

"Garak needed her help on a project. He didn't tell me the particulars. If you should need anything, they should be readily available or ask for Dracalus."

"The blood sucking vampire from Transylvania?" I asked grinning.

"I've no idea what you mean, he is a good commander. If Kenmar attacks the fort, go the lower level with the boy and stay here until I return."

The moment Dukat left, I slid on a robe and went to Sawyer's room to find Eben standing on the balcony watching the troops form in the courtyard. Thousands of soldiers proceeded to march out the front gates. Tanks drove past. Dukat and Damar rode in separate tanks, I didn't see Sawyer among them. Eben took hold of my hand.

"I'm glad Mother didn't go with them tonight," Eben said. "I haven't told her, Aunt Helen, I have a bad dream last night. Mother died in battle. It's not the first time either. I often have bad dreams."

"Me too," I said, pulling Eben against me. He wrapped his arms around my large stomach. I started to withdraw from the balcony. Garak and Sawyer were dressed in black

and vanished from sight when they ran across the courtyard. They were up to something. I'm sure I'd hear about it later. "Are you hungry? I am."

"I'm always hungry," Eben said.

With nothing to do wait, I led Eben into the kitchen. We had a replicator, since the command's quarters came with a kitchen, Dukat kept us stocked in fresh food. He liked to cook as much as I did. Eben set on the counter and I pulled ingredients out of the cabinets. I was deep in preparations, making pancakes and coffee when the sound of a transporter whined behind us. I grabbed a butcher knife and turned to meet whoever was beaming into the kitchen.

Gul Vardon appeared behind us in a twinkle of lights. He glanced at the boy and saluted. Eben saluted the gul and removed the knife from my hand to set it on the counter. I had never dreamed anyone would dare beam directly into Dukat's quarters and I was more than a little anxious finding Vardon in the kitchen. He seemed as surprised to find me in a robe.

"My apologies. I came personally to warn Gul Dukat we picked up a large force of rebel forces moving toward Fort Varnok," Vardon said. "He didn't answer my hails. I was afraid something was wrong. He's survived more than his share of assassination attempts. A man can only tempt fate so many times."

"A fact I'm very well aware of Gul Vardon. Dukat left with Damar. They are headed to meet Kenmar. Since you're here, you might as well have something to eat."

I stepped forward to greet him. The gul held me at arm's length when I went to hug him. Puzzled, I looked at the front of my gown and laughed. I was rather liberally spotted with flour.

"Sorry. I was cooking."

"Helen, you look..." Vardon paused, looking pointedly at my extremely protruding belly. "Don't say it." I wagged my finger in his face and laughed. "I know what I look like, thank you very much. A few more weeks. That's all. How goes the war in space?"

"Yes, tell us," Eben said. He took a sip of milk.

"Not well," he said "I've brought additional reinforcements for Dukat. Glinn Venna

commands a small brigade from the Fifth Order that's thrown in on our side."

"From the Fifth?" I was shocked. "I thought they were all traitors?"

"Well, most yes, Glinn Venna is an exception, as I am," Vardon said. "She and a few others broke off from Gul Kenmar months ago, taking refuge further up north after Outpost 9 fell. I assure you, Mistress Helen. Venna and her soldiers have sworn their loyalty to Gul Dukat. You have no need to be afraid. Glinn Venna has proven herself to be a loyal daughter of Cardassia and I have every faith in her."

"I hope you are right, Vardon. From what I've seen of the Fifth Order, they are nothing more than ruthless murderers."

Vardon smiled. "As much as I'd like to stay and share a meal with you," he said, "Glinn Venna is here. I must join her in the courtyard. If you put on something more suitable, I'll take you and the boy and introduce you. Since Dukat has already left, I need to find an officer to arrange for quarters for us. Who is in command?"

"Dracalus," Eben said, jumping off the counter. "Hurry, Helen. Put on some clothes and let's go meet the new officer. Mother will be so delighted. She wanted a few female officers to join her. She says it's annoying to be surrounded by nothing male officers and have no one to talk to."

"She can talk to me," I said, slightly offended. "It's not the same thing. You're not an officer."

Entering the bedroom, I closed the doors for the first time. They had windowpanes and I'd hung drapes. I quickly dressed and rejoined Eben and Vardon. We rode the turbolift to the ground floor and entered the lobby. Glinn Venna had entered, left the soldiers outside. I noted several officers from Dukat's staff had joined them. Curious at seeing meeting a female officer, I indulged myself and looked her over thoroughly. The woman was taller by several inches, with a marvelous figure. I noticed she was muscular and yet wore her hair in ringlets. She reminded me of Madame Dukat.

"Ah, Glinn Venna," Vardon said. "Allow me to introduce Mistress Helen. She is Dukat's companion. This young man is Eben Yor. His mother is Glinn Yor, Dukat's cousin. I'd hoped for you to meet Glinn Yor tonight. Perhaps tomorrow."

"I've heard about her," Venna said. She didn't sound impressed.

"It's a pleasure to meet you." I extended my hand to her in greeting, forgetting it was an Earth custom and not Cardassian. Venna stared at my hand. She had no intention of addressing me and turned to Vardon. I lowered it, embarrassed. Eben moved closer to me. He had the same impression of the new officer. He didn't like her either.

"I should go make certain the rest of the reinforcements have arrived, sir."

Venna marched off. I wondered how many soldiers they'd brought, finding it odd sense Dukat hadn't mentioned it. I was sure Dal Dracalus had matters well in hand. The gul walked over to ruffle Eben's hair.

"Allow me to apologize on behalf of Glinn Venna. She's never met a human before." Vardon placed his hand over his chest. "You have no reason not to trust her. I wouldn't have brought her here if she were anything less than loyal to Dukat. Now, I believe you mentioned something about food. Shall we return to your quarters? I am a bit hungry."

"Well, if you're hungry, I'll feed you."

We returned to my quarters. Eben set the table, while I prepared pancakes. Vardon watched, curious as to what I was making and laughed when I lifted the pan to flip a large pancake. The gul applauded and I had to laugh.

"What is this?" Vardon asked.

"Pancakes. Earth food fit for Cardassians," Eben said, brushing past us. He carried two cups of coffee to the table. "You pour lots and lots of sugary gravy over it and add plenty of butter. I want to flip the next one, Aunt Helen."

"You do that," I said, laughing. I motioned for Vardon to sit at the table. "What's the news on Cardassia Prime? Have they seen much fighting?"

"I'm afraid I have bad news for Gul Damar. His wife is dead." I stared at Vardon, letting the pancake burn.

SAWYER

Chapter Thirty-Five

Climbing the access stairs in one of the four arches hung above Fort Varnok, followed Garak's backside, I wondered why the damn things were necessary. Someone might have invited an elevator to round the curve or turn into in a type of roller coaster ride. It had far more stairs than the Statue of Liberty on Stanton Island, which I'd been made to climb by my parents. A strip of windows allowed a view of the ground. Within the courtyard materialized two more platoons. Fresh troops arrived every day, transported from ships in our fleet. I assumed Glinn Dracalus, being a hardened veteran and a stickler for details, had matters under control.

"What are we doing here?" I asked.

Garak looked back at me. "I believe you wanted to be a spy for the Order. I've been asked to compile a list of conspirators who are in the Order. You could call it a death list," he said. "If I have been given the wrong impression and you prefer to remain at the fort twiddle your thumbs, you may do so. However, seeing how effective you were in entering the Valley of Shadows and returning alive, I couldn't think of a better Cardassian to assist me."

"Flattery will get you nowhere."

"Really? You are accompanying me on a mission. I'd say it worked."

Arriving at the center of the arches, we climbed up a latter, opened a hatch and crawled onto a large platform. This was my first time to visit the new landing padd. Shuttles were able to land on the circular platform, large enough to accommodate six shuttles, only one was present. A large crate was pushed off to the side. With the wind in

our faces, we approached the crate. Garak drew his pistol and fired on the crate. It vanished from sight left behind a curious looking flying contraption reminded me of a motorcycle with wings.

“This is a Glider,” Garak said. “The Order was kind enough to send me one. It’s the latest invention of the Breen. I’ve never had the chance to ride one. You did say you used to ride a...a Harley. I assume you can fly this.”

“Pal, that’s a motorcycle. It has wheels. Not wings. You can fly down the highway. This isn’t quite the same. Where are the instructions? You can explain what we’re doing while I take a look at the manual.”

The seat was leather and slender, built for two riders. The driver sat behind a windshield. There were handlebars and the controls looked familiar enough. Triangular-shaped wings fit beneath the body, painted black, and it floated one foot off the platform. Garak handed a helmet to me. I didn’t want to wear it. The windshield was curved and provided enough protection from the wind.

“You wanted to read the instructions. Put on the helmet. The glider will react to your thoughts, so do try to maintain control of your enthusiasm,” Garak said. “Where you look, the glider will turn, as long as you wear the helmet. When you pull back on the handlebars, it raises or lowers the glider. Your foot pedals control the speed or stop the vehicle. Put forward with your toes for speed, push back with your heels to stop. Got it?”

“Sounds easy enough.”

As he settled in behind me, I pushed the helmet over my head. It was a similar to battle helmet, when I flipped a switch on the side, lighting up the screen inside the face shield, the glider’s engine started. The engine made no noise, I could feel it rumbling beneath me and placed my feet in groves on the side built for this purpose. I’d have liked to take a test drive first and offering a prayer, I pushed the throttle forward.

We flew into the air and sped past a guard tower. Garak was seated in the opposite direction, manning a mounted laser rifle. I hit the throttle, speeding up and over the wall before an alarm sounded. It was exhilarating and terrifying at the same time. Our direction took us west. The terrain was mostly hills, bluffs opened into wide ravines, and wooded

glades I'd visited more than once. I knew my way around the entire province of Kursh, which was one of the largest on the main continent. The audio was flawless inside the helmet, Garak talked when I needed to concentrate on flying.

"The Obsidian Order was remiss for the poor relations of Gul Dukat to become my prodigy. I assured them you are most resourceful. Provided you help me collect information will help lead to the arrest and capture of the Circle, you and Helen will remain out of harm's way. It seemed a fair trade. Don't you agree?"

"I don't seem to have another choice. Where are we landing?"

"Not in Lillihaven. I don't want to be shot out of the sky," Garak said. "So what are we really doing out here?"

"We need information, my dear. A ship has been bringing enemy troops here for some time. I can't say which gul from the Second Order who has betrayed Dukat, Kenmar will know. I want to take him alive, if possible. I'll tap you on the back when I want you to land."

Cutting through the hills, we flew toward the Bajoran settlement, able to see flames and smoke in the sky. It took far less time for us to reach the battle zone than Dukat and his troops. I spotted our troops about three miles from us, nearing the settlement. The Alpha Brigade in the pale light of the Bajoran moons filled me with pride. I should have been with them, not taking Garak on a secret mission.

"Land here," Garak said, tapping me on the back.

I slowed the vehicle and landed on top of a hill. The moment I removed the helmet, the glider's engine shut off. We left both helmets behind a bush and covered the air-bike. The camouflage hid it well enough. Armed with rifles, I led Garak along a path in the hills toward the settlement. I was sure he'd been working on his Death List for some time, had the impression Dukat didn't know it. Garak didn't trust anyone. I was surprised he'd asked me to come with him since he knew I was loyal to Dukat, first and foremost.

Coming out on our own was risky and foolish, I supposed was the life of an OO agent. I was able to smell smoke and hear screams from the settlement. We stopped at a ridge, lying across a flat rock and shared Garak's binoculars. Enemy troops had set the

entire settlement on fire and bodies covered the ground. Infantry and taken position behind the fire. They were supported by a row of tanks, reminding me of panzers. General Rommel would have been impressed. Dukat was headed right for a trap. I wanted to call it in, Garak removed the com-link from my and tossed it into a bush.

“That’s a stupid thing to do. It’s an ambush. I have to warn Dukat.”

“You’ll do know such thing.” Garak lifted the binoculars to his eyes. “If we’re captured, say nothing, Glinn Yor. Not even if we’re tortured.”

“I’m not worried about being captured. I’m worried about disobeying my commander. I don’t want to be shot when we return to the fort.”

Garak wasn’t interested in my personal concerns. “The Circle is not as demoralized as you imagine, Yor. They know Dukat is here to stay. Dukat means to dig in and get mean. That’s why it’s been so easy for the Circle to recruit guls from other military Orders,” he said. “This civil war is being fought because Dukat used his influence to prevent Cardassian from going to war against the Federation. The Bajoran Resistance are involved because they believe the Circle is here to help restore their independence. Of course it’s a lie.”

“The Circle are murdering Bajorans and Cardassians.”

“As the Klingons say, ‘tomorrow we die.’ Now do be quiet. The battle is about to commence,” he said, lifting his binoculars to his eyes.

Dukat’s forces arrived. The tanks rolled into the town. Kenmar’s tanks didn’t wait and commenced bombing the ground troops. Soldiers retreated behind the Second Order’s tanks, which returned fire. Across the sky projectiles flew in either direction like hundreds of flaming arrows, only far larger and more effective. The enemy had flanked Dukat. Soldiers ran forward to engage the Alpha Brigade and ten more platoons. It looked like a melee with no organization and no battle lines as the two armies merged together in a flame-engulfed landscape.

“Let me see, Garak.”

Grabbing the binoculars out of his hand, I lifted them to my eyes. The lenses adjusted to my eyesight. On the trail coming toward us were refugees from Lillihaven.

Scores of Bajoran men, women, and children had fled into the hills. I waited until they were close enough and then stood, waving them on. Garak grabbed my legs, trying to pull me down, I kicked him aside and jumped off the rock. A man in a humble brown robe motioned for the Bajorans to keep moving. I figured it was the same priest who had warned us about the Cardassian dead in the Valley of Shadows. He approached me, staring at my rifle. I lowered it to the ground.

“I’m Glinn Yor. I’ve a feeling you’re the prylar who assisted in burying our dead. Why didn’t you warn us about Kenmar’s ambush?”

“Anyone leaving the settlement was shot. We were not able to escape until Gul Kenmar set the town on fire. I’ve lost many of my flock this night,” said the priest.

“Take your people and go to Fort Varnok. They’ll protect you, Father. I’ll make certain you’re never put on grave detail again. Not for my people. I give you my word of honor.”

“We’ve been guests of Gul Dukat before, Glinn Yor.”

“And you were released because I insisted, Father.”

People stared at me as they walked past. They didn’t trust me. I doubted the priest did either, at my comment he bowed his head. Some of the folk were injured and limped along. If they took refuge in the wilderness, their chances of survival seemed slim. They needed a doctor and the fort doctor was as good as any.

“I’m Gul Dukat’s cousin. Dal Dracalus is in temporarily in charge. Tell the guards at the gate I sent you and they’ll let you in. The name of Yor means something, Father. No one will harm you. The Prophets sent me here to protect the Bajoran people.” It was a wild boast on my part, it was actually true. He stared at me, not sure if I jested or not. I wasn’t surprised when he made no inquiry about my statement. He should have.

“Then you have more faith in the Cardassians than I do,” the priest said.

I watched the child lead the priest forward. I returned to Garak and found him hiding behind a boulder. He motioned me over, a disgruntled look on his face as he took the binoculars out of my hand, hooking them to his belt. We watched the last of the refugees past.

"I need a closer look, Yor. It appears Kenmar is losing this battle. He will most certainly attempt to vanish into the hills. We need to be sure the refugees were not followed," Garak said. "I've a feeling we're being watched and not by Bajorans."

"Stay put and I'll take a look."

Lifting my rifle to my shoulder, I stepped around the boulder and advanced on the path, finding a single shoe someone had lost. Several knapsacks lay on the path as well. They Bajorans had certainly been in a hurry. I scanned the area for any stragglers, found no elderly fold sitting in the brush and moved on. The path curled in a serpentine fashion, blanketed by scraggly trees, rocks and brush. Assuming Garak had returned to his rock and used his binoculars to watch my progression while I crept on, slowing my gait as I heard voices coming up the path. Enough noise was made by the oncoming Cardassian to let me know I was outnumbered. I suspected it was Fifth Order renegades and I was not disappointed. Taking position behind a tree, I opened fire on the enemy soldiers. It was a bold move on my part. Garak offered support, shooting soldiers unable to move off the path and the rest started to run in the opposite direction. Moving onto the path, I advanced, shooting soldiers in the back, feeling a bit cheap and dirty.

Garak joined me. Together we moved on, passing dead bodies, each collecting a spare rifle as we walked along the trail. The vegetation grew thick ahead of us, a natural canopy grew over the path, turning the next twenty yards into a dark tunnel. I grabbed Garak's shoulder.

"Let's hold back a second." I gave him a nudge. Garak kept his weapon high and glanced at me. His eyes looked wild. "I want to do is give the Bajorans a chance to reach the fort. Calm down."

"I'm calm. Very calm."

Movement on our right made me step backwards. I aimed the rifle at a bush riddled with thorns. A woman hid behind the bush. Garak lowered his rifle and held out his hand.

"You can come out now, my dear," he said.

The figure lifted her head and stood. Her gown was torn. A scarf wrapped around her head loosened as she came around the bush and blew away on the breeze. I stared at a

male Cardassian covered with soot and fresh oozing cuts. Garak aimed his rifle at the soldier as I stepped forward, ripping off the dress, revealing armor and the insignia of the Fifth Odder.

“We’ve caught ourselves a gul,” I said.

Our distinguished prisoner ignored me. He seemed to recognize Garak and lifted his hands in the air. The gul was overweight and winded. I doubted his was alone and let Garak deal with him, walking around the bush to look for more soldiers.

“Garak. I didn’t expect to find an OO agent in the middle of a battle. You’re either very brave or very desperate,” said the gul. “Or very stupid.”

“Gul Kenmar, I see no reason for you to insult me. Consider yourself our prisoner. In fact, I was coming here to find you. Dare I say it? You’re so predictable. I knew the moment Dukat obtained the upper hand you’d retreat into the hills.”

Removing an extendable rope from my kit, I secured Kenmar’s hands behind his back and led him onto the bath. I searched for weapons and a com-link, he carried nothing of value.

“Attacking the Bajoran village was foolish. Why did you do it?” I asked.

“Necessity. My troops were starving. Of course I know who you are. You’ve been keeping us on the run for weeks, Glinn Yor.”

“And yet you thought you could kill Dukat,” I said.

“Something like that,” Kenmar said glancing to his left. He acted as if his soldiers intended to return for him. I pushed him along the path away from the tunnel. “Careful, girl. I do not like to be shoved.”

“But you do like to wear dresses,” I said with a snicker.

“Kenmar has been enjoying skimming off the profits of the shipments sent to his troops. He sells them to the Bajorans. He’s not the only one who does this either. It’s the reason why they’re losing the war. They seek profit, not honor or glory,” Garak said.

“You didn’t escape alone,” I said. “Where is your escort?”

“Not far. You are in a dangerous situation, Glinn Yor. If you release me, I will order my soldiers to let you and Garak go free. If not, they will kill you after they...well....you are

female.”

I stuffed the scarf retrieved off a bush into his mouth.

“Gul Kenmar, I’m taking you to Gul Dukat. If your men attempt to stop us, I’ll kill you and then kill them. Now move it.”

Shoving Kenmar toward the tunnel, he snarled and fell to his knees. I hauled the gul to his feet, holding onto his gun belt and forced him to enter the tunnel. Garak walked behind us, keeping his eyes for enemy troops, appeared they’d deserted their Gul. No one appeared on the path or took pot shots as we made our way to the outskirts of the settlement. We walked past a single burning tank and dead Second Order soldiers. More Bajoran refugees headed toward us. Using my rifle, I knocked Kenmar to the ground. He toppled to his side. I placed my boot on his ribs as old man led by a small child approached. I motioned the man over to me.

“What are you doing, Yor?” Garak asked.

“We came to save these people. I want to talk to him. Watch this piece of trash.”

Moving away from Kenmar, I left Garak to watch him, shouldered my weapon and stopped in front of the old man. He gazed at me with forlorn. The child looked terrified. A few refugees walked past us, passing several tanks in the road and vanished. I repeated my same offering, informing the Bajorans they could find safety at Fort Varnok. The last few Bajorans walked past, carrying their belongings on their backs. The old man and child moved a bit slower than the rest. It would take them a day to reach the fort and I intended to look for them on the way back. Several Bajorans threw stones at Kenmar. He gave a muffled cry each time a stone struck his head.

“Get anything out of Kenmar?” I asked blocking Kenmar with my body. No one threw a stone at me. I felt fortunate for it was clear the Bajorans hate all Cardassians. Dukat was the lesser of two evils.

“Kenmar did mention one name. He states Vardon is with the Circle,” Garak said. “Vardon was with the Fifth, he swore his loyalty to the Second months ago. After my recent stay on board his ship, I found no evidence he is a traitor. I will make a note of it, Gul Kenmar and continue my investigation.”

The gul remained silent. I didn't have time to interrogate him. I pulled him to his feet. Garak had found rope on the ground, which he used to tie around Kenmar's neck. Garak gave a tug on the rope, chuckling when the gul protested. I walked ahead of the pair, passing a row of prisoners watched by the Alpha Brigade and motioned for Garak to wait.

"We'll remain here with Gul Kenmar. We can come back for the bike later. I want the credit for capturing this prick...for personal reasons," I said. "I can't let the boys have one up on me, now can I? It's a matter of female pride, Garak. Of course you did help."

"Ambition knows no gender, Glinn Yor. If I remember, I'll dash a little salt on your ego later and feed it to you on a silver platter. I did the same to Dukat's father. He chocked."

I tasted a threat in his comment. I wouldn't forget Garak was dangerous when dealing with him in the future. He'd made a deal, not a promise. He played the game well.

Tanks churned dust as they past, blanketing the line of soldiers marching back to the fort. The battle hadn't lasted as long they looked tired and miles to go. Transport vehicles filled with Bajorans driven by Cardassians appeared. I hoped they'd pick up people on the road. As the Alpha Brigade approached with Torgan in the lead, he looked surprised and slightly annoyed to see me. Ravon pushed past him and lifted his hand, bringing the troops to a halt.

"Glinn Yor," Ravon shouted. He saluted me.

A tank pulled out of line and came to a jerking halt in front of us. Damar and Dukat were seated together in the back seat, covered in soot and blood, looking battle worn. The anger on Damar's face was matched by Dukat's, it was my lover who jumped out of the vehicle. I pointed at Gul Kenmar as Garak led him forward on the rope. The brigade started to cheer.

"We found Gul Kenmar sneaking out of town dressed like an old hag," I said. "It was Garak's idea to find him, Gul Damar. The Obsidian Order insisted and I had no choice to accompany him. A few soldiers deserting the battle escaped. A few were shot."

"Kenmar," Damar said with delight. "You've lost your pride along with the battle."

“Remember me when you drink a bottle of kanar tonight,” Kenmar said. He snarled when Garak pushed him forward. “I told you not to shove me.”

“I’m a bit deaf,” Garak said. “The Order needs answers Kenmar has, so before I turn him over to you, Gul Damar, I want your assurance I may first question him before you shoot him.”

Damar pushed Garak aside and grabbed hold of the rope. “Trying to escape were you? You massacred five hundred Bajorans. You dishonor Cardassia, Kenmar, and bring shame upon your family. If you want to question him, Garak, you may do so, you have to while walking back with this butcher.” He tossed the rope at Garak. “Should he happen to escape on the way to Fort Varnok, I’ll ask Glinn Yor to hunt you both down.”

Garak led Kenmar forward. The brigade followed, taking the prisoners with them. “This is just the beginning, Gul Damar. The Fifth Order will never surrender,” shouted Kenmar. “We will not stop until Gul Dukat and the Union are dead. There will be a new Cardassia and we will show no mercy to the likes of Bajorans, humans, or drunks!”

“How did you arrive ahead of us?” Damar asked, walking with me to the tank. “You would have had to be in position on the hill waiting for Kenmar and Garak must have known what path he would take. I do not believe in coincidence. tailor knows more than Kenmar. Garak is the one who should be questioned.”

“Garak said I could help him or the OO would come for me,” I said.

“We’ll talk about this later. Climb beside Gul Dukat. is where you want to be, isn’t it? At his side when we return to Fort Varnok as victors? Then is what you shall have.”

Finding an underline threat in Damar’s words, as well, I knew his jealous gnawed at his guts, for he assumed I was motivated only to impress Dukat. I climbed into the tank, placing my rifle on the floor as Dukat scooted aside. I sat next to him. I would have preferred to return for the glider and ridden it home. Damar joined us and the tank moved forward.

“Explain,” Dukat said.

“The OO insisted I help Garak in finding Kenmar and members of the Circle. In exchange, he said Helen, you and I would no longer be under investigation. No doubt the

OO has been watching our every move, Gul Dukat. I thought it would alleviate problems for you with Central Command. I know you're waiting to hear you've been made a legate."

"I do not recall giving Garak permission to use you as a spy," Dukat said. "I appreciate your concern. Damar, this time Yor will not be shot for disobeying your orders. I've had enough blood shed for one night. That is an order."

"She will be disciplined. I think a week of guard duty sufficient," Damar said.

Passing the infantry, I stared straight ahead, saying nothing to either Cardassian. Neither respected Garak nor seemed worried about the Obsidian Order. While Garak and I had captured Kenmar, I realized it had been too easy. In the right place, at the right time seemed prearranged. All I'd done by assisting Garak was prove he could manipulate me and withheld information about what went in the Order and with the Circle.

Once more I felt I'd made the wrong move. I kept my chin high, refusing to look at either man until spoken to, left troubled by Dukat's comment I was not to be shot. It didn't help Dukat threw his arm over the back of the seat or Damar placed his fist on my thigh. A battle was playing out in the backseat of the tank for ownership over me. It made me uncomfortable to sit between them, remembering a night we'd shared on Bajor lying on blankets beneath the stars, torn then by my love for each, I was no longer the same woman.

"Garak will get nothing from Kenmar," Damar said. "All prisoners will be shot when we arrive. I'll have Dal Dracalus see to it. As further discipline, Glinn Yor, you will stand at my side and watch as a reminder what happens when you disobey."

"Not all is death and dying, cousin. We will continue to sweep away the remnants of the Fifth Order and turn our attention to ending the Occupation. It's time for Bajor to become part of the Union, as our equals, not as slaves. I've already proposed the idea to Central Command. I will not be seen as a warmonger. What better way to reassure the Bajorans I want only what is best for them by having their savior at my side. Yor the Brave."

Damar leaned toward me. "Don't ever disobey a direct order again. I do not think you'll find another gul hiding in women's clothing in the bushes," he said. "Remember Saja."

"I do every day," I replied.

HELEN

Chapter-Thirty Six

“Mistress Helen, you shouldn’t wear yourself out like this,” Dr. Lazlo said. “You’ve done all you can. I must insist you take the boy and return to your quarters. It is important you do not overly stress or exhaust yourself. Young Yor, if she won’t listen to you, perhaps you can use convince this young woman to go to her bed.”

The young doctor knelt beside a Bajoran refugee, one of many who had arrived at the fort, seeking aide. He used a dermo-replicator on a laser burns. His staff of five Cardassians and one female Bajoran who had medical training had hundreds of people to care for, most were minor injuries, though not all who came to the fort had survived. The dead were taken to a tent away from the camp, which had been set up behind the medical building.

“Aunt Helen, he’s right. You need rest,” Eben said.

“There’s so many of them,” I replied.

“Dal Dracalus has set up dozens of tents. The soldiers are doing their best and so is Dr. Lazlo.” Eben took hold of my hand. “Please. Come me. Mother will be angry if you make yourself sick. It’s almost dawn. The army should be returning soon.”

“Thank you, Helen,” Dr. Lazlo said with relief. He stood, joined by an assistant, hurrying over to another group of refugees who had arrived.

“Let’s go,” I said squeezing Eben’s hand.

We walked across the courtyard, trying to stay out of the way of tanks and soldiers as they filled the courtyard, headed toward hangars and the barracks. I kept hoping Sawyer and Garak would make their appearance, no one had seen them. I’d been too

worried to ask Dal Dracalus if he knew where to find my friends, fearing a simple question would cause more harm than good. Sawyer and Garak wouldn't have vanished unless it was important, I couldn't help fretting they been hurt or killed. I didn't share my thoughts with Eben as we approached headquarters. Another tank pulled up to the front doors and halted.

"It's Mother. I told you she'd gone off to join the Alpha Brigade."

"And you were right," I said.

My hand pressed to my back, I approached the tank as Dukat, Damar and Sawyer climbed out, I didn't see Garak. Eben ran to Sawyer and threw his arms around her. She lifted the boy into her arms and hurried over to me. Dukat and Damar paid us no attention. They were joined by Dal Dracalus. The three Cardassians stood together, talking, as a line of Fifth Order prisoners marched into the fort. The prisoners were left in front of a fifty foot long steel wall had been erected earlier evening in the courtyard.

"Glinn Yor," I called out, waving. She laughed to hear me say her official name, something I seldom did, nodding at me to come with her. I hurried toward her. "What's going on? Did you defeat Gul Kenmar? The Bajorans said he burned Lillihaven to the ground. They said he'd been raiding towns and killing Bajorans in several provinces far from here."

"Give me a second to answer," she said.

Sawyer placed Eben on his feet and collapsed on a chair. Stretching out her legs, she let one arm hang to the side and rubbed her temples. I knew she was exhausted. I sat beside her on one of twenty chairs lined beside the windows. Eben knelt at her feet. He lifted his wrist and tapped an armband he wore. A hologram of Glinn Yor appeared wavered, its details not as sharp as the dog or snake, it was remarkable. He turned it off and smiled at Sawyer.

"Very good, Eben. Pretty soon you'll have a perfect replica of me," she said. "It was one helluva night. Garak asked me to join him on a mission. The OO insisted. Apparently they agreed to leave us alone if I helped Garak compile a list of Circle members."

"Then what's wrong? You don't sound happy about it," I said.

"It's just how it all went down. Dukat didn't know anything about it. He and Damar aren't happy I disobeyed orders and went with him. Garak had it all arranged. There was a glider waiting for us on the top hangar, like a flying motorcycle, which allowed us to reach the town ahead of Dukat's forces. Garak knew precisely where Kenmar would be. The gul deserted his forces shortly after Dukat arrived, leaving them to die while he snuck into the hills in a woman's dress. If I hadn't been there, I can't help wonder if Garak meant to let Kenmar leave on the glider."

I placed my hand on my stomach. The twins relentless kicked my ribs.

"That can't be what Garak intended to do. He wouldn't have taken you with him if he meant to help the Circle. And he has no reason to help him. He's on our side. What's going to happen to the prisoners?"

Before Sawyer could answer, Glinn Venna and five of her soldiers approached us. I hadn't noticed them step off the turbolift and wondered why Dal Dracalus had given them rooms in the main building and not in the barracks. Her black curls hung to her shoulders and she wore lipstick, along with a strong perfume wrinkled my nose as I caught a whiff.

"An execution," Venna said, angrily.

"Well, that's what you do with traitors," Sawyer said. She rose to her feet. "I'm Glinn Yor, commander of the Alpha Brigade. Second Order. Who are you?"

"This is Glinn Venna of the Fifth. She was one of Gul Kenmar's officers," I said. The look I received was murderous.

"I've taken the Oath of Allegiance to the Second. I'm the one who informed Gul Vardon what Gul Kenmar planned to do. He beamed those loyal to the Cardassian Union onto the Kobrak and then transferred us here. I was going outside to introduce myself to Gul Dukat."

"You should join Gul Kenmar instead," Sawyer snarled. She stepped in front of Venna, keeping her from leaving. "You and all of your soldiers. Vardon had no business bringing you here. Only Dukat decides who is loyal and who is not."

"Then you should step aside, Yor, and allow me to address your cousin."

"Your commander killed thousands of Bajorans. All he has done is cause the

Resistance to grow stronger," Sawyer said. "Dukat wants the Occupation to end once and for all. He intends to make Bajor a colony. You didn't know that, did you? Well, I'm sure Dukat will have a great many questions to ask you, Venna. I suggest you tread lightly."

Venna took a step closer to Sawyer. They were the same height and both lifted their chins and then placed their hands on their hips. I only noticed after Sawyer dropped her right arm to her brush across her pistol Venna did the same thing a second later. Venna was shadowing her every move. It would have been comical if they two women didn't look ready to trade blows. To add to the tension, Venna took one step toward the door. Sawyer did the same thing, only she ended the charade by jerking Venna's pistol out of its holster and aimed it toward her. The five soldiers with Venna reached for their weapons, she waved them off.

"Oh, I'd love for your soldiers to do something stupid," Sawyer said.

"I'm sure you would, Glinn Yor. That's not going to happen." Venna crossed her arms and glanced out the windows. "Dal Dracalus is an attractive man, don't you think? Not quite as handsome as Gul Dukat, attractive nonetheless. So is Gul Damar."

"Now sounds like a threat. I've always wondered why Dukat doesn't like women in the Second and now I have my answer," Sawyer said. She twirled the pistol around her finger and thrust it into Venna's chest. "Let me give you a little advice. Dracalus loves his wife and children. Make a move on either Damar or Dukat and I'll break your arm." She released the pistol and Venna caught it before it fell to the floor.

"I heard about you. You rose fast through the ranks by sleeping with your commanders," Venna said. "I heard the only reason you were given command is because your Dukat's cousin. Gul Yor was a coward. I'm told that..."

"Venna. Stop annoying Glinn Yor." The disapproving voice of Gul Vardon silenced her. He walked across the lobby, taking long strides and caught hold of her arm. "Yor is the one who captured Kenmar. No one doubts her bravery or loyalty. Go outside and make your introduction to Gul Dukat and Gul Damar. I'll handle things here."

"Very well," Venna said. She left with her soldiers.

Sawyer saluted Vardon. "I want to thank you, sir, for saving the lives of Damar and

Helen. I owe you a debt," she said.

"Think nothing of it, Glinn Yor. I'm sure you don't want your son here when the executions commence. May I suggest you take him to your room. This isn't the place for a child to be. I'll sit with Mistress Helen. We're old friends."

"I'll see you later, Helen," Sawyer said. She lifted her hand and Eben ran to her. She scooped him into her arms and headed toward the turbolift.

Easing into a chair beside me, Vardon patted my hand. The sound of pistol blasts made me wince. I wanted to put my hands over my ears. I tried to remain relaxed, not wanting Vardon to know the depths of my disgust and horror at what was going on in the courtyard. I had no doubt the Bajorans thought they'd be next.

"It's unfortunate you witness to the atrocities of wars, Mistress Helen. I should have insisted you remain in your room," he said. "Gul Kenmar and Gul Tychek were two of the worst insurrectionists. The Fifth will keep fighting to the last man. They have many allies. Your friend can scour every valley and mountain, she won't find them all. It's impossible."

"she'll try."

"Glenn Venna will not cause a problem. She's here to help. I'd hoped she and Glinn Yor might take a liking to each other, doesn't seem to be the case. I'm sure it's difficult for you to appreciate Cardassian justice. In war, we seldom take prisoners unless they can be used as hostages. Feel no remorse for Kenmar or his soldiers. These Cardassians dared to fight against the Union. They cannot be reformed or forgiven for their crimes. It is better this way. They will not suffer the indignation of being sent to a prison or slave mines."

I didn't want to go into detail about how I felt about democracy and the lack thereof in Cardassia. It would have taken too long to explain the birth of the United States, which sprung out of the War for Independent against the British Empire, for at time they'd behaved like Cardassians. It was stupid of me to think maple syrup could sweeten the disposition of a Cardassian. Gul Vardon was as sweet as they came. What I found to work best when feeling pressured by a man to state my opinion, I smiled in a demure fashion and batted my eyelashes. Vardon continued to stare at me, not taking the hint. I turned my hand to hide a wide yawn behind my hand.

“You are tired,” Vardon said. “I’m sure waiting here for Gul Dukat seems an eternity. I’m afraid he’ll be delayed for quite some time. The Second is celebrating tonight. I’m sure Damar and Yor will be attending. It’s quite possible Dukat will join them. You are in for a long wait.”

“Before I retire, I have a request,” I said, helped to my feet by the gul. “We’ve used most of our supplies to feed the Bajorans. We’re going to need everything you can spare, Gul Vardon. There must be six hundred Bajorans here. More keep arriving.”

Vardon held my arm, gazing deep in my eyes. His scrutiny made me nervous.

“Be thankful the Bajorans won’t be asked to dig more Cardassian graves. It is disgraceful it happened at all. I hear they were forced to do so in the Valley of Shadows,” he said. “Of course I know Dukat felt he had no other choice. No Cardassian would dare set foot in haunted place. While we tend not to be a superstitious people, the stories of the place frighten even me and I do not frighten easily. It is said Pah-Wraiths live in place.”

“So I heard. They’re the enemies of the Prophets.”

“Not exactly,” he said. “Whatever I can provide for the Bajorans, I shall certainly do so. I’ll have my crew send down additional replicators. I would not want any of them to starve or suffer any more than they have. Believe it or not, I have always found the Occupation of Bajor to be quite distasteful. I’ve voiced my discontent to Central Command many times. Everyone knows I believe Bajor should be a colony. Isn’t what the Federation does? Garners a treaty with planets and makes them colonies?”

I burst into laughter to hide my nervousness. “Gul Vardon, I’m not a member of the Federation. I may be human, doesn’t mean I’m automatically with the Federation,” I said, patting his arm. “You don’t have to tell me part of the reason the Fifth rebelled is because Central Command decided not to declare war on the Federation. I know a little about your politics and military operations. The Federation represent democracy and don’t approve of slavery. They want peace, not war. If Cardassia joined the Federation, they’d have a friend far more reliable and dependable than the Dominion. Oh, I’ve heard talk about Cardassia joining the Dominion. It would be a mistake.”

“My apologies. I have offended you and did not mean to,” Vardon said. “Let us

hope Prefect Dukat, as he should be addressed on Bajor, will find a way to bring lasting peace here. As for the Federation, perhaps one day we will...join them."

His last comment about the Federation didn't make me all warm and fuzzy inside. There was resentment in his tone. I was unable to inquire further as Dukat entered the lobby. He spotted me with Vardon and approached us.

"We have victory," Dukat exclaimed. He pulled me into his arms and kissed me on the lips. When set me back, I felt quite breathless. "Gul Vardon! It's good you are here. You'll be pleased to know my cousin captured Gul Kenmar."

"Yes, I know. Word travels fast," Vardon said.

Dukat stared at him. His mood changed in the blink of an eye. "I would like to know why Glinn Venna is here?" he asked. "She was Kenmar's fourth-in-command. As far as I know, she has not sworn loyalty to me. Damar wants her shot."

"Glinn Venna signed an oath as I did. It is official. She is now part of the Second Order and as such, loyal to you, Gul Dukat," Vardon said, not at all intimidated by Dukat's angry tone. He rose to his feet. "Perhaps you were not briefed by Central Command. Venna was the only one of Kenmar's officers who reported his illegal actions. She deserted his camp with fifty good men, all loyal Cardassians, contacting me. I arranged to have her brought here after she swore an oath. All have joined the Second Order. I should think you're pleased to have reinforcements."

"How dare you presume to tell me who can be enlisted into my Order, Gul Vardon. I intend to question Glinn Venna myself. If I find her to be truthful and loyal, then, and only then, will I accept her Oath of Allegiance and those of her men. You know my policy on prisoners. I find your interference and failure to report this to me quite unsatisfactory. While I believe you have proven your loyalty, do not overstep your position as joint-commander of my own fleet."

"Not all of the Fifth is disloyal, Gul Dukat. There are exceptions like me and Glinn Venna. She comes from a very wealthy and influential family. Central Command has already accepted her Oath of Loyalty. I see no reason to doubt her, Dukat. Kenmar would have executed her if I'd not offered assistance. When she told me what Kenmar was doing,

I came straight here to warn you about the ambush. You failed to answer my hails."

"You should have met me at Lillihaven instead of taking liberties with my mistress," Dukat said. "I said I would talk to Glinn Venna and will make my decision then. You look tired, Helen. Go to bed. I'll come to you later."

"I want to stay with you," I whispered.

Dukat gave a quick nod and kept his arm around me. "Does my wife send her regards? Or has she finally agreed to return to Cardassia? I have not spoken to her in several days," he said. "I hope you made the appropriate arrangements if is the case. My wife has been gone too long from home."

"There's been trouble on Cardassia Prime. Insurrectionists attacked the capital earlier today. I'm afraid Gul Damar's wife was killed in the battle. I thought it best to tell Damar the news in person and kept your own wife on board my ship. I hope you do not doubt either my sincerity or my loyalty, Gul Dukat. I pride myself on being a man of my word."

"Vardon, we may not agree on how to deal with the Fifth Order, I have no reason to doubt your loyalty," Dukat said. "I respect your opinion and your thoughtfulness. If all of the Fifth were like you, we never would have gone to war."

"Thank you for the compliment, Gul Dukat." Vardon bowed his head. "If you will both excuse me, I should return to my ship." He used his com-link and within seconds, teleported out of the lobby.

"Will you go to bed now?" Dukat asked. He kissed me again.

"All right. Don't be long."

Laughing, he escorted me to the turbolift, kissed me again, this time with passion and sent to third floor. I was weary to the bone. On my way to my room, I spotted Sawyer walking past in a clean uniform, her hair dyed blonde and hanging in a wild mass around her shoulders. It seemed a clear statement of rebellion confused me. She was the hero of the battle. She carried a bottle of Romulan ale. I hurried after her and joined her on the turbolift.

"I'm going to the celebration," Sawyer said.

"Did you put Eben to bed? I thought you'd stay with him."

"I don't intend to stay long. Did you happen to see Damar?"

"No," I said. "Sawyer, Vardon told me Damar's wife is dead. She was killed during a battle in the capital of Cardassia Prime. I don't know anything more about it."

The turbolift came to a jarring halt. Sawyer proceeded first, peering into the lobby. Several soldiers sat in the chairs at the window. She waked slowly to the front doors and paused, stepping closer to me to whisper.

"Don't repeat this to anyone, especially Dukat. When Garak and I captured Kenmar, he asked the gul about members of the Circle. Kenmar offered a name. Only one. Vardon. I know you like Vardon, Helen. I have to look into this."

"Vardon is my friend. He's not a traitor."

"I hope you're right," she said.

Placing my hand on Sawyer's shoulder, I kept her from leaving. She was impatient and pulled me along with her. The courtyard was being cleared. Dead bodies were loaded into a truck and removed. Tanks formed three straight lines to the left of us. In the distance, cheers and laughter came from the barracks. I walked along with her, needing to confide in her. She continued to walk slow for me, though she kept glancing at the barracks, making me yank on her arm to bring her to a halt.

"Sawyer, I'm having twins. Dukat doesn't know. You'd think he'd seen enough pregnant women to suspect I'm caring twins. He has ten or twelve children. Most are illegitimate. Three of his son's with Mikelya belong to the late Legate Mikor. How's for irony? I'm the one who, well, you know....killed him."

"Vengeance is color blind."

"What's mean?"

"Something Saja used to say. You did Dukat a favor. Things are so complicated. I'm tired, Helen. Tired of going on patrols and fighting. If it wasn't for you and Eben, I ask the Prophets to dump me off on the plane. I don't care if it crashes or not."

"Wow. I don't know what to say."

Sawyer took a deep breath of air through her nostrils, lifting her head in the air,

distracted for the moment by something she smelled. Her gaze drifted across the courtyard. I turned to find what she was looking for and spotted two shadowy figures enter the garden. It was impossible to tell who they were, Sawyer gave a nod and we altered our direction.

"I told you long ago the Cardassians were bad guys. Now we're both in love, it's kinda hard to see things clearly," she said.

"Everything is black and white. We either love them or hate them. We either stay or leave. Maybe that's what Saja meant," I said, pulling my cloak tighter. It was always cold in the early morning and my joints ached.

"The Cardassians have such a strong sense of loyalty to their families. loyalty comes first before honor and duty. I want to believe that's true, Helen."

Outside the garden gate, Garak appeared, looking quite surprised to see us. He blocked the path to keep us from entering, sliding a small device into his pocket, which I assumed was a com-padd. He'd been recording something.

"Your friend has done you a great service," Garak said. "She's made it possible for me to make a deal with the Order. Any further investigation concerning you two has been called to a halt. It's rather late or early, depending on your point of view. Yor, you're late to the party. Why don't you leave and I'll take Helen to her room? I'm sure she's tired."

"What's wrong?" Sawyer asked. "Why don't you want us to go into the garden?"

"I'm sure I don't know what you mean," Garak said.

Sawyer stormed through the gate. I naturally followed. Garak placed his hand against my back, walking beside me, though I lost Sawyer amongst the trees and thick vegetation. Left untended, it had grown wild. I'd meant to prune the weather had turned and soon the plants would die, so it seemed a waste of time.

"What's wrong? What is Sawyer think is going on?"

"No doubt she is looking for Damar. You know his wife was killed on Cardassia Prime. I'm sure Glinn Venna means well. I saw him come in here with a gul only moment ago. I'm afraid you caught me spying, my dear. I suggest we let your friend take care of the matter."

“Venna? You’d better come along with me before Sawyer starts a fight.”

Grabbing hold of his arm, we hurried along the cobblestone path. As we rounded the fountain, female laughter brought us both to a halt. Garak pulled aside a tree branch, careful not to make a sound, revealing Venna with a male officer. His back was turned to us, she leaned against the shed, her pants dropped to her knees, allowing him to caress her intimate parts. Neither noticed were we hid behind the slender trees. I didn’t see Sawyer.

“I know what it’s like when you’re fresh from battle,” Venna said panting hard. “Let me show you just how loyal I am. You need a real woman to relieve sexual tension.”

Venna placed her hands around the man’s neck. She was doing something with her hands drew Garak’s attention. We weren’t close enough to see, the officer stiffened, letting out a groan and removed her hand to rub his neck.

“Isn’t better?” she asked.

The officer didn’t answer, pulling Venna into his arms to kiss her. As he turned her, I saw able to see his profile. It was Dukat. Garak caught hold of me to keep me from collapsing to the ground. Humiliation mixed with jealousy brought a sop from my lips. The bottle of Romulan ale crashed against the side of the shed. Dukat and Venna broke apart. She reached for her pants, pulling them as Sawyer came around the side of the shed, holding her dagger in her hand.

“Step away from Gul Dukat, you bitch!”

Sawyer pointed the blade at Venna. Dukat’s eyes widened. Venna hid behind Dukat, muttering something brought Sawyer forward two steps. I wanted to believe Dukat had merely been toying with Venna, wanting to see how far she’d go to test her loyalty. I knew him too well to deny what I saw with my own eyes. He would have taken her in the garden and later come to my bed. Garak hold me in his arms while I sobbed.

“Lower the blade, Yor,” Dukat ordered.

“Fifth Order scum. Get out of here before I cut your ugly face,” Sawyer shouted. “What’s wrong with you, Dukat? Have you no shame? You threaten to shoot me after I captured Kenmar, yet allow this traitor to...to...you both sicken me.”

“Yor, it’s not your place to tell me how to handle my own affairs,” Dukat said. He

must have heard my sobs. His eyes narrowed. He was able to see Garak and me hiding in the trees. "Why did you bring Garak and Helen here? Have you lost your mind?"

"I told you Yor was dangerous," Venna said. She sounded haughty. If Sawyer didn't draw blood, I was going to do it myself.

"Is this the Klingon dagger?" Dukat asked. "Yor, I take this as a personal insult."

"Both of you shut up!"

Sawyer made a move. She slashed the dagger at Venna. I heard the woman scream. She pushed Dukat aside and fled past us, running out of the garden. Sawyer turned on Dukat, wavering and lowered the blade. He lifted his hand, she slapped it away.

"Crocodile," she hissed. She ran past him and disappeared down the path.

Nothing could prevent me from having the last word. I felt something pressed into my hand, finding it was a small dagger, no more than the size of my palm. Garak waited for me as I stepped out of the trees and approached Dukat. He didn't look ashamed. He smiled.

"Just when I thought it was safe to love you, you rip out my heart yet again!" The words burst from my lips. Hot tears scalded my cheeks. "I'll never trust you again. Never."

Dukat's hands gripped my arms. I struggled against him, not wanting him to touch me, for his hands were soiled. No assistance came from Garak. He stepped onto the path behind us. I kept my eyes locked on Dukat's, amazed his eyes looked kind, hiding whatever he was feeling. Since I'd met him, I not be able to tell when he lied or told the truth. His eyes didn't reflect his true emotions. He was a master of manipulation and devious charm.

"Hell hath no wrath like a woman scorned," Garak said. "And I might add, you're loyal guard dog has just run off barking mad. Try not to blind him, Helen, though he deserves it."

"I'm sorry you had to see that," Dukat said, the moment Garak left. "This has nothing to do with the way I feel about you. I needed to know for certain Venna is loyal to me."

"By having sex with her? Take your hands off me, Dukat," I said.

“Let me explain.”

“I’ve heard quite enough!”

Jerking free of Dukat, I stood before him, considering my options. A mere argument wasn’t going to settle anything between us. I’d come to the end of the road. As he reached for me, I caught a strong whiff of Glinn Venna’s odor. Enraged, I drove the tiny dagger through the palm of his hand. He bellowed in pain and rage. I stepped backwards, catching hold of my cloak, prepared to run.

“I’ll never forgive you for this, Dukat. I hate you for being so kind and loving these last few weeks. Don’t worry. I won’t stay here a moment longer.”

I turned and ran.

“Helen! Helen, come back!”

His voice faded as I fled through the garden, grateful to find Garak waiting for me at the garden gate for my legs weren’t going to take me much further. He pulled me aside, a knowing look on his face and withdrew his com-link. I stared at him, biting my bottom lip as he lifted the com-link to his lips.

“Gul Vardon? This is Garak. Two to beam aboard.”

I felt the sudden tingling sensation always occurred before being transported. With Dukat’s shouts growing louder, I stepped away from Garak, closing my eyes. I feared I’d never see Sawyer again, I was certain I didn’t want to see Dukat for the rest of my life.

SAWYER

Chapter Thirty-Seven

Drinking Romulan ale and smoking a cigar, I spent the next hour mingling with the Alpha Brigade. I congratulated Ravon and Torgan, shared a toast to victory, and then moved on to shake the hands of the soldiers who stepped forward to greet me and to tug on my golden hair.

“Anything to bring attention to yourself, Yor,” Dunatar said slamming his hand on my back. The force behind the pat sent me tumbling into the arms of Dorric, Damar’s aide. He set me on his feet.

“Damar is waiting for you.” Dorric pointed to the far side of the barracks.

“You’ll never make it through at this rate,” Dunatar said. He lifted me onto his shoulders. “Yor the Brave!” The chorus was shared by the men as I was carried through the barracks. There was no doubt the Alpha Brigade loved me.

In the corner of the barracks, seated beneath brigade flags. The emblem, a gold sword thrust through a gray stone on a field of dark purple, was my own creation. Every company, platoon or regiment now had their own personal flag; something else I’d insisted upon to give the men a sense of personal honor. Before the Cardassians had always marched under the banner of their Orders. Emblems were painted on helmets as well as their foot lockers. I found Damar seated at a table, drinking kanar, playing cards with Korvinus, Jenrak and Zolon. I’d sent Ikarus to stand guard outside my room to make sure Eben stayed put, the soldiers considered this duty great honor.

“There you are,” I said taking a seat on Damar’s leg.

The soldiers laughed, toasting me as Damar wrapped around his arms around my waist, playing his next card. I placed the cigar in a tray, set aside my glass and turned to hold his face in my hands. He smelled like kanar. I knew he’d broken his oath not to drink

anymore because he'd heard about the death of his wife. There was a trace of sorrow in his eyes. I placed a kiss on his full lips.

"I'm sorry about your wife, Damar," I whispered into his ear.

"No more than I am. Her death will be avenged."

Damar didn't seem to care we displayed affection in front of the soldiers. If any soldier or officer doubted we were together, his passionate kisses dispelled any such gossip. A crowd gathered around us, lifting their glasses of kanar. Hadran, a descent baritone, started singing an American Civil War marching song I'd taught the men on patrol. He was joined by most of the soldiers.

"The Union forever,
Hurrah! boys, hurrah!
Down with the traitors,
Up with Gul Dukat;
While we rally round the flag, boys,
Rally once again,
Shouting the battle cry of Freedom."

The soldiers cheered, sloshing kanar onto the ground, each other, as well as the card table. Another chorus infused the men with excitement. Dorric, the only officer not with the Alpha Brigade, there because he was Damar's aide, found himself in a headlock, forced to drink half a bottle of kanar.

"Perhaps we should retire to my room," Damar whispered.

I slid off his lap, took his hand and pulled him along after me. The soldiers parted, at least those still able to stand, allowing us to reach the door. The morning light was far too bright. With Damar's arm around me, we attempted to walk across the courtyard, unsteady on our feet. I kept him moving at a fast pace until we reached the lobby of Building 1, where he yanked me into his arms and kissed me as if it was the last time he'd ever get the chance.

"Come on," I said laughing.

"I would take you right here, if you were not so impatient for my bed."

“And give the guards something to write home about, I’m sure.”

Somehow I managed to get Damar onto the turbolift. I hit the button for the third floor, fighting him off as he attempted to unfasten my jacket with clumsy fingers. We stumbled out of the turbolift onto our floor. Guards were posted in the entryway, outside Dukat’s door, while Ikarus stood at my door. The guards stood at attention as we past. Outside Dukat’s door I noticed droplets of dried blood on the floor.

“What is this? What has happened?” I asked.

“An accident, sir,” a Second Order guard said.

“Move aside. We’ll check on Gul Dukat personally,” Damar said.

He stumbled forward as the door opened, righting himself when Dukat came into view, seated on the couch. Three bottles of kanar were placed on the table. Two were empty.

“Sir? Are you all right?” Damar asked.

“Helen has left Fort Varnok,” Dukat said, in a sullen voice.

I helped Damar sit in a chair, barely able to remain on my feet. Dukat held out his hand, wrapped in a bloody bandage. His eyes narrowed as he glared at me. A small dagger lay on the table still covered with Dukat’s blood.

“This is your fault, cousin,” he said. “You should not have gone looking for me.”

“I was looking for Damar, not you. You’re the one who kissed Venna in the garden. I hope your hand hurts. Venna too will have a scar to remember the night.”

Damar sighed. “I told you before the Fifth can’t be trusted, Dukat. Did Venna try to convince she’s loyal with her body? Is why your mistress harmed you?”

“Not is it your business any more than Yor’s, yes, my mistress caught me in a compromising position. Yor intervened as always. The champion of all women. Only not Cardassian women. She laid open Venna’s cheek.” Dukat took a drink of kanar, wiping his hand across his stained lips. “When I tried to apologize to Helen, she impaled my hand with small dagger, and then fled with Garak onto the Kobrak. Vardon will not be thanked for playing the gallant hero.”

“Tick tock. Tick tock,” I said. Both men stared at me. “The old crocodile got what he

deserved. He shouldn't have put his hand in a place it had no business being in."

Damar laughed and pounded the armrest with his fist. Dukat glowered at me.

"I'm in no mood for your company. My head is killing me. I told the guards I didn't want to be disturbed," Dukat said with a snarl. He lifted the bottle of kanar to his lips. "Venna threw herself at me. You know how it is, Damar. Women often behave in this manner. They cannot resist men in power."

"If anyone is to blame, it's you," I said. Anger fueled my energy, allowing me to pull Damar to his feet. I led him toward the door. "Helen is having twins. It's a shame you won't be there when they're born."

"Yor! Come back here!"

I ignored Dukat's angry cries, dragging Damar to my room. Ikarus helped me carry Damar into my bedroom and left. I'd noticed Eben seated at the kitchen counter eating breakfast when we entered. The boy appeared in my bedroom. While he removed Damar's boots, I unbuckled his armor and undressed him.

"Dukat will never forgive Helen for leaving him," Damar muttered. "You should go to talk to him. I can undress myself."

"I've never seen you drunk before," Eben said giggling.

Damar closed his eyes, unable to move. With Eben's help, we managed to strip Damar to his undergarments and placed the blanket over him. Eben sat on the edge of the bed, watching quietly as I removed my boots and jacket, tossing them aside. Damar groaned when I moved closer to Eben, making the mattress bounce. I pulled the boy into my arms.

"Listen. I want to tell you both something," I said. "Not long ago, Helen and I were visited by the Prophets. The Prophets, like us, are being forced to play Q's game. They want Helen and I help them on Bajor, I don't what they want from us All I can do is try to help you and Dukat find the members of the Circle."

"Are the Prophets are friends, Mother?"

"I think so. They offered Helen and I a chance to return to Earth, to our own time, we turned down the offer. Helen wants to stay here as long as I do."

"Don't ever leave me," Eben said, burying his face against my chest.

"I won't. We're a family. I love you both very much."

Damar chuckled. "I admit I like the sound of that. I would be honored to be the boy's father. When the time is right, I will officially give you both the name of Damar," he said. He opened his arms.

Eben crawled toward him, wanting a hug. When the boy finally slid out of the bed, I removed my pants and slid beneath the blankets. Eben smiled as he closed the door.

"I'm so tired I could sleep forever," I groaned.

"I wonder what you would have done had it been me instead of Dukat who you found in the garden," Damar said. He pulled me against his chest. "Venna asked I wasn't tempted. I broke my promise not to drink against because of the loss of my wife. You know that. I will grieve her death, as is proper. Had you left with Helen, I would go after you. Dukat should do the same, only he won't. Not unless you convince him too."

"I only want to be with you. I love you, Damar."

I'd chosen the right lover, one who was faithful, honorable and kind. This was the Cardassian who I wanted to make a life with. I felt sorry for Helen. Garak and Vardon would take care of her, and I had Damar and Eben to take care of me. As for Dukat, I didn't think about him. Damar turned me around to kiss me; nothing else mattered.

* * *

HELEN

"What is wrong with Cardassians? Why do you all treat any other races as inferiors? It breaks my heart. I'm as good as you are, yet you people see humans as inferior. Why don't you say something? Why are you just standing there staring at me?"

Vardon had joined me for breakfast. I had my old quarter's back and a new wardrobe created by Garak while we traveled to Terok Nor. The plate of eggs smelled horrible. I pushed it aside, not able to eat and sipped on a cup of red leaf tea.

"Because I am concerned for your welfare. Why else do you think I risk Dukat's anger by beaming you on board my vessel?" Vardon's harsh features softened, a look I'd

never seen on Dukat's face, reaching across the table to take hold of my hand. "You are not inferior, Helen. I don't know what happened at the fort, I suspect it has something to do with another woman. I'm sorry. I know you care for Dukat. I'm a poor replacement."

The chair swiveled as Vardon stood, tossing his napkin aside as knelt beside me. I wasn't quite certain what he was going to, for the expression on his face was far too serious. He pulled against his chest, my face crushed against the rough armor, allowing me to cry against his shoulder. Hiccups followed a floor also vanished with a few taps on my back. Vardon didn't release me when I quieted. He continued to embrace me and it crossed my mind his efforts to rescue me did not come unconditionally.

"I suppose you think I'm foolish, considering how well know Dukat's reputation is with women," I said. "I considered being angry with you. Most of the night I called you every name I could think, since you're the one who brought little snake to Fort Varnok. Venna struck me then as the type to sleep of woman to her way to the top. It's not her family's wealth or intelligent got her where she is, her sexual prowess, which I must say she's honed to a fine art."

"One heard the same thing said about Glinn Yor. A poor country girl who relied upon her rich and powerful cousin to elevate her to a brigade commander."

"That's not fair," I said wiggling out of his embrace.

I reached for my coffee cup, not wanting him to continue holding me, for in my distraught move, I knew it was exactly the right moment for a man to make a move on a woman. He had the decency to stand and return to his seat, while I drank the coffee, knowing in my heart he'd spoken the truth.

"Dukat is a fool to let you go. You're so beautiful. Such pale, fine skin with a trace of freckles on your nose. Your eyes are green like my own. And your lips. I could write sonnets about your lips, Helen. Forgive me for speaking as a man, it's impossible to be in your company and not be dazzled by your radiance. Pregnant women glow with such beauty it is hard to ignore. I never would have hurt you way."

"I'm sure you tell all women they are beautiful. You're only being polite." I stood and returned to my bed. "I can't eat another pancake. I'm tired, Vardon. Let me sleep."

There is surely a great many things on the Kobrak require your attention.”

Vardon covered me with a blanket, breakfast forgotten. He cleared the table, putting everything in the replicator and with a touch of a button, it vanished. I didn't want to compare him to Dukat, I noticed they both shared a love for domestic chores.

“This room is yours, Helen. It will be a week before I'm able to take you to Terok Nor. My superiors at Central Command have given me a task I must complete. Dukat is not technically my superior. He answers to the same war council I do. In the meantime, you have to ask and I will provide you with whatever is in my power to give you. I wish it were freedom and happiness. I do promise to keep Madame Dukat away from you.”

“Thank you.”

“It's my pleasure,” he said.

I gazed at Vardon as he walked to the door. He was a handsome for a Cardassian, with a haunting look in his eyes made him a mystery to me. The tiny clay four armed statue had been in my room was no longer on the shelf. I felt relieved to see it missing.

“You're very kind, Gul Vardon. It's the first thing I noticed about you.”

“Then it makes my task my easier, my dear, for I enjoy having you on board.”

Vardon laughed as the door open and bowed in a courtly fashion he'd certainly picked up on his many adventures to alien planets. “I shall do my best to make you happy. I'm not like him, you know. I never would have given you a reason to leave me. Rest now, Helen.”

As soon as Vardon left the room, I felt my eyes close as I drifted off to sleep. I dreamed about a place on Bajor I'd not been to before, a beautiful vineyard with a large villa surrounded by hills and trees. I stood near a fountain, a wide brimmed hat on my head, holding a basket filled with fresh cut flowers. A Cardassian approached me. He wore the clothes of a farmer, his head bowed. When he lifted his eyes to mine, I saw Gul Vardon, not Gul Dukat. He took my hand, lifted it to his lips and kissed it.

“Love is blind, Helen. Like vengeance, we can lose ourselves to both, doing things we never thought we'd ever do. Both can be a cruel mistress,” he said. “However, only time can heal all wounds. Stay with me and I'll give you all the time you need.”

When I later awoke, finding the ship passing a planet colored a strange yellow, I had

a strange new awareness of the man who offered me shelter. I'd not considered being more than a friend to Vardon. A sharp kick in my side widened my eyes. I carried two babies. Not having thought of names for either, I decided if I gave birth on his ship, I'd call the boy Vardon and name the girl Madison, which was Sawyer's middle name. It seemed only right.

* * *

SAWYER

Returning to the fort on the glider, I landed on the hangar, removed the helmet and took my time studying the courtyard and garden. The Bajorans had been relocated to another city, not a trace was left they'd ever been at the fort. I'd not heard from Helen since she left. I wanted to wait for her to contact me despite how many times Eben begged me to send her a message. Since Garak had left with her, I knew she was in good hands. Things had changed since their departure. Damar had promoted Ravon and Torgan to the rank of glinn. He'd placed Ravon temporarily in charge of my brigade with Torgan as his second officer. I was angry about Damar's decision. The return of the glider was possibly the last time I'd be allowed outside the fort. I hadn't given up hope I'd be restored as the commander.

"I am Ren Yor," I shouted into the wind. "I take what I want, when I want. Do you hear me, Bajor? I'm Ren Yor the Brave!"

Feeling a bit foolish, I fell silent and lashed the glider to the platform, securing the helmet under the seat. A cold breeze followed as I climbed down the ladder. The hatch closed with a loud bang. I took my time returning to headquarters. I'd be expected to stand guard outside Dukat's door. It was humiliating for my duties to be altered so drastically, Damar wanted to make certain no one disturbed Dukat, and since Helen had left, he refused to leave his quarters. Damar was in charge of the fort, he allowed Dracalus to handle the daily patrols and security, spending his time in his office, assuming Dukat's forgotten duties.

I'd left Eben in the care of Ikarus once more. The soldier's father had been a teacher,

so I'd assigned him to act Eben's tutor and a type of babysitter. Korvinus stood outside Dukat's door. He gave a shake of his head and walked off, leaving me to guard the door. I didn't have time to go to the bathroom or check on Eben, so I drank from my canteen to quench my thirst.

From behind the door came muffled curses and shattering bottles on the other side of the door. I was glad Dukat suffered. Nor did I feel compelled to comfort him or check on him, letting him howl and scream as loud as he wanted. This behavior continued for two more days before I decided it was time to check on the wounded beast. I entered Dukat's quarter's, finding it dark and reeking of vomit and kanar. I heard groans from the bed. It was the odor needed to be taking care of first and I opened a window, allowing the breeze to enter and then turned on a light in the living room, finding the entire area a demolition zone.

"Were you telling me the truth?"

Dukat's voice came from behind me. I whirled around, trying to pinpoint where he was and found him seated in a chair in a darker corner of his bedroom. The chair creaked as he stood and walked into the light. I was shocked at his appearance. I'd never seen Dukat look so drawn or exhausted. He'd not shaved in days. Facial hair looked strange on him, giving Dukat the appearance of a hermit living in a cave. It certainly smelled way.

"You stink," I said. "You need to shower, shave and eat something."

I walked over to him, trying to decide what to do with him and where to start to clean the mess he'd made. Giving him a pushing, he fell onto the bed, groaning. I knelt to remove his boots. Close proximity to his unwashed body convinced me he needed to bathe first.

"Were you telling me the truth?" Dukat sounded so lost and pathetic my anger drained away.

"I have no idea what you're talking about. I always tell the truth."

Dukat threw himself face down on the bed like a little boy throwing a tantrum. Just like Eben, I thought. His hands fisted the bedcovers. I thought the material would tear from the strain. I tossed aside his boots and tried to touch his shoulder, he waved me off.

"I thought she stayed with me because I gave her no choice. How was I to know she truly loved me? I told her Venna meant nothing. Yet, she leaves me for Vardon. He's taken care of my wife for weeks. So why not my mistress? He's become the defender of female virtue and high morals. How I hate him."

Dukat was fighting for control. I was afraid he might actually cry. would have been just too weird. I started to pick things up, tossing trash into a bag, for there was too much to stack in a replicator. It had to be manually removed.

"I never believed she truly loved me. I wasn't sure I even loved her. I tried my best to make her happy," he said. "I didn't know I actually cared for her until she left."

"Stop feeling sorry for yourself. You're make me mad. You're the one who went back to your old tricks. Hell, any garresh could have told you she loved," I said, staring into his blood shot eyes. "Helen has shown you in a hundred different ways she loves you. She doesn't care about your rank. She never did. It was never about impressing you or trying to win your approval. Helen isn't like me. She doesn't want to be your equal and she doesn't want to be Cardassian. The fact is Helen never gave up being human. Remaining human says a lot about her strength of character. She's a strong woman. A woman worthy of being loved, not just by you, by any man. She remained with you because she loved you. She wanted to be the mother of your twins. Now she's gone."

"Twins?"

Yes, twins. You'd think you'd have noticed. You have a dozen. I'd have thought you'd ask the doctor about her. Not Dr. Lazlo. Dr. Zephyr has been around her the most. He knew she was having twins, something Dr. Quirin failed to note. I'm beginning to wonder if Cardassian doctors have any medical training at all."

Dukat didn't speak. He laid flat on the bed, burying his face in the pillows, his muffled screams ringing in my ears. This behavior wasn't acceptable. He needed to calm down. I sat on the bed, placing my hand on his back. He surprised me by curling into a ball and wrapping his arms around my waist, burying his face against my side. I realized now why Damar had insisted I stand guard, for no one should witness Dukat in this fragile state.

"I made a mistake, Yor. Women have always attached themselves to me because of what I could provide for them. Even you. I thought Helen only chose me because she wanted my protection. If I am disgraced, if I lost everything, I would be alone in the universe."

"More people love you than you realize. I do. So does Damar. Eben worships the ground you walk on. If you lost everything, we'd still be there for you. If I believed for a second you really love Helen and this isn't all about your bruised ego, then I'd tell you to contact her and ask her to return."

"Won't you intercede on my behalf, Yor?" Dukat's voice cracked. "I would have given her anything had she asked for it. She has humiliated me by leaving. Facing her again would be impossible. I'd be required to apologize for the rest of my life."

"Humans are different from Cardassians. Helen accepted the fact you married and could never marry her. She would have remained with as your mistress. Maybe it was best she saw you with Venna. A snake can't change its stripes. It's your nature to cheat."

"You're cruel."

"I'm trying to help you. No one has bothered to come in here," I said, stroking his greasy head. "She's proud. Perhaps prouder than you and that's saying a lot. You always say I act just like you in reality you and Helen are similar. You both are quick to anger, hold grudges and take a long time to forgive. You never forget. If you cared about her, you'd clean yourself up and go after her. I'd expect you to do the same if I was in her place."

Dukat lifted his head. His breath was foul. I rubbed his back with the flat of my hand, trying to comfort him as best I could, while he clung to my leg.

"I never meant to hurt either of you," he said, his voice barely above a whisper. "You remain faithful though I have sabotaged our relationship from the moment we met. You are a Cardassian, Yor, though I gave you little choice in the matter. Countless times you've saved my life. You've done more than anyone else ever did. How do I repay you? I let my fear get in the way and gave you to Damar. No other Cardassian has shown such loyalty to me. And you are human beneath those ridges. You are like Helen. Why, Yor?"

Why?"

"You really don't understand a damn thing."

"Yor, please. My head throbs. Just explain. Quietly."

"I don't know if I can explain how I feel so you'll understand. Regardless of Q's game and everything has happened, neither Helen and I are being forced to remain. No, I'm not like her. Not at all. I forgive you when you are cruel or callous. I overlook your insults and your threat. I do so because I want to be as close as possible to you. Don't ask me to explain how Helen feels. I don't have any idea what it feels like to be pregnant and know the man you love can never marry you. She's braver than I am."

"An inconvenience for her, surely."

"You chose me to be your cousin and not your mistress. It was the right call. I can honestly say I'd rather be your cousin than your lover. Being said, I will never leave you, unless you force me to. I will never betray you, unless you turn on me. Over these last few months, you and I have become friends. Helen is more than a friend. She was your mistress and yet less freedom and rights than me. Humans can tolerate many things, once we fall hopelessly in love it becomes madness. That's why they call it 'crazy in love'. Unlike Helen, I am not hopelessly in love with you. Not anymore."

I patted his back, wanting to rise from the bed. I needed to clean every inch of his filthy quarters and he needed to shower. He kept hold of my leg, refusing to let me leave.

"What do you want me to tell you, Dukat? I've said everything you need to know. Perhaps after she's given birth to the twins, she'll want to hear from you. I would. You'll have to apologize. That's part of the healing process, for both of you. Just...give it time."

"Time? How much time?"

"As long as it takes."

Dukat nodded. He leaned across the body and kissed me. It was merely a peck.

"It's difficult to love these humans, isn't it?" At the sound of Damar's voice I turned toward the doorway. Damar held his hand to his face, moving through the trash and destroyed furniture to stand at the foot of the bed. "Humans don't have our strength or the intelligence and logic of Vulcan's. Nor are they warriors like the Klingons. Humans do

have an ability to adapt to any situation. Perhaps makes them stronger than all of us. Do you remember, Dukat, when Helen and Sawyer first came to Terok Nor? No matter what we said or did to them, they past every challenge and test. They proved they are not only loyal, care for those unable to be caring."

"I remember, Damar. It is Yor who remains the most faithful to both of us. Tell no one about what you've found here. I am ashamed you have seen me like this."

Dukat released me and flung his legs over the mattress. He sat up, staring at the sorry condition of his room and placed his hand around his whiskered chin. I walked over to Damar to slid my arms around his waist, resting my head on his shoulder.

"I do not know what I'd do without Ren Yor in my life. Yor has become a part of my heart. If she had left when given the opportunity, I would probably be in a similar state of mind, Dukat. Rise, my friend. Be whole again. There is still much to live for."

"Very well. Yor has given me wise counsel. I will give Helen the time she needs to heal. A few more days, at best, and then I will find her and apologize. She will look at her children and think of me. She will want to be with me, of I'm certain."

"Ah, yes," Damar said. "brings me to why I came here. Glinn Venna has been arrested."

We were all silent for a moment. Dukat sat and rubbed his face with his hands. When he spoke, it was with his natural arrogance.

"I trust you didn't do this because of my thoughtless actions," Dukat said.

"No, sir. Venna was caught sending a message to Gul Mukot, informing him of the status of our defenses," Damar said. "I would have shot her on the spot, I believe an interrogation is warranted. I also think Gul Vardon should be removed from co-command of your fleet. He brought Venna here. I don't think we can trust him, sir. In fact, I'm certain we can't."

"Helen is with Vardon," I said. Damar shook his head. He didn't want me to interrupt. I felt silent, wondering if Kenmar had told the truth Vardon was in the Circle. I'd not confided what Kenmar had said to Damar. I was afraid to do so after the fact.

"Gul Mukot has long been a thorn in my side," growled Dukat. "Use whatever

means necessary to obtain information from Venna regarding Mukot's location. I want Vardon back here by tomorrow and no later. The Kornak will help find and destroy Mukot or Vardon will be arrested and tried for treason. See to it at once."

"At once, sir. Yor, accompany me."

"Go with him, cousin. There's nothing you can do further here. You've helped me more than you know. Given the circumstances, I can give Helen no further time in the company of Gul Vardon. The fleet must be recalled at once. I'll go to Terok Nor and see to the operations from there, Damar. You will remain here and take charge of planetary defenses."

"Of course," Damar said.

With the arrest of Glinn Venna, the soldiers she'd brought with her from Kenmar's former army were considered traitors as well. No one had questioned them. They were guilty by association. Dal Dracalus stood beside me, Damar, and Dorric as the prisoners were led forward by a squad from B Company, Second Order. They'd been assigned to execution detail and burning the bodies. It was windier than it had been when I arrived on the glider and Venna's black curls blew across her face, hiding the scar I'd given her.

"By order of Gul Dukat of the Second Order, Prefect of Bajor, you are condemned to death for leading a rebellion against the Cardassian Union," Dal Dracalus said. He lifted his hand.

Three squads moved into position in front of the prisoners. At the sound of a drum roll, Venna lifted her head and stared at me. I felt nothing for her. The moment the drums quieted, the squads fired on the prisoners. The bodies fell to the ground. A moment of silence was offered for the Cardassian dead. Dal Dracalus saluted Damar and walked forward to see to the removal of the bodies. My hand brushed against Damar's hand.

"Gul Dukat will leave for Terok Nor tonight," he said. "I appreciate you sorting him out. I'll be taking charge of affairs on Bajor. From now on, I want you to handle security. You are to post guards and manage the patrols."

"Yes, sir."

"I have work to do. You're dismissed."

Turning on his heel, Damar returned to the main building. I remained where I stood, watching the bodies loaded into a transport vehicle and the gates open. Their bodies would be taken to the north side of the fort to be incinerated. There was already a large blackened area in back, where hundreds of dead Fifth Order bodies and their slain allies had been burned. I wondered when the war was over if anything grass might grow on the blackened area, then again, nothing might ever grow. Bajor might decide it wanted to remember what had happened on her soil. I really didn't know what type of power the Prophets had or how the might control nature itself on the planet. I hoped something might grow there in time.

"I guess we'll have to wait and see," I said out loud.

A sudden change in temperature made me shiver. I lifted my gaze, able to see snowflakes fall from the sky. It was too earlier for winter. The soldiers had said it would come early this year. Apparently the Prophets had decreed it so.

HELEN

Chapter Thirty-Eight

Garak arrived at my new quarter's bringing an armful of new clothing for me. While he hung gowns in the closet, I composed a 'thank you' message to Gul Vardon. He'd dropped us off at Terok Nor as he'd promised. Madame Dukat was also beamed onto the station. I assumed she'd moved into Dukat's quarters. Odo had arranged a spacious suite for me to share with Garak, with private bedrooms and an adjoining living room with a same small kitchen I'd had before. I sat at the desk in the living room, using two pillows behind my back and one beneath my backside for extra comfort.

"Should I add anything from you?" I called out.

"I shouldn't think Gul Vardon wants to hear from me. He banned me from the bridge, making certain any outgoing messages from me were intercepted." Garak stepped into the doorway, holding a pair of my underpants. They were new. "I know you like Vardon. He is quite resourceful, I have my doubts about him. I hope you don't have any romantic notions about him, my dear. I'm not quite certain yet he's on our side."

"Of course he's on our side. I mean you and me. As for his political views, he's made it clear he wants what is best for Cardassia," I said.

I pushed send and smiled to think of him receiving it, for I'd also said he was 'the kindest Cardassian I'd ever met', though I didn't share this with Garak, knowing he'd feel slighted. Garak was my friend. He'd remained at my side even though it put him at odds with Dukat, someone I didn't want to think about. I noticed I had twenty messages from Dukat still pending and deleted them.

A chime at the door brought Garak running across the living room. He stuffed the

panties into his jacket before opening the door. Quark and Odo stood outside. Quark held a large floral bouquet in his arms. He proceeded Odo into the room, placing the flowers on the long coffee table and took a seat. Odo walked over to me and presented me with a rose.

"I believe this rose represents you best," Odo said, handing it to me by the tip. "It's bloom matches the glow in your cheeks. The thorns keep fingers away from the stem. How are you settling in?"

"Very well. Thank you."

"I am so glad you came back, Helen," Quark said. He sprang from the couch like a gymnast, standing behind me to kiss my cheek and then commenced rubbing my shoulders, a bit too hard. "With you back on Terok Nor, I'm hoping you might be able to lend me a hand. Madame Dukat has ordered all Dabo girls to quit their jobs. She refuses to allow any Bajoran girl be seen on the station. She's got everyone so jumpy I'm actually hoping for an invasion."

"It's good to see you, too, Quark. I won't be able to come and work for you, Quark, until after I give birth. It should be any day now. Is Dr. Quirin going to visit me, Odo? Were you able to send him a message?"

Odo inclined his head in genteel way of his. "Of course," he said. "He will drop by after he visits his last patient. There's been an outbreak of the flu among the Cardassians. Nothing to worry about, he'll inoculate you all the same to protect the children. They are half-Cardassian. I wish I could tell you to ignore Quark, unfortunately what he says is true. The moment women arrived, she started giving orders. I'd ignore her, Gul Dukat has sent me a message saying his wife is to be treated with the utmost respect."

"Did he say anything about me?" I asked.

Odo, Quark, and Garak stared at me.

"Well, he is the father," I said. With a groan, I press my hand to the small of my back. "I don't want to alarm anyone, I think my water broke."

Quark went into a panic. I reached for Odo, the calmest of the three. He caught hold of my arms, steadying me as he lifted me off the chair. My skirt was damp, sticking to my legs. With Garak's help, they led me into the bedroom and laid me on the bed. Quark was

left to clean the mess; I needed more than a housekeeper.

"Um, Odo?" I muttered. "You might want to call the doctor. I mean right now."

I let out a piercing scream. Garak took hold of my hand. I gritted my teeth, watching Odo use his com-link to contact Dr. Quirin. *"As I told you, Odo, I am unable to be of assistance at this time,"* Dr. Quirin said. *"If I want this outbreak contained, my assistant and I must vaccinate every Cardassian on this station. Madame Dukat is here. You will have to make do without me. I'll come as soon as I can and not before"*

"Not to worry," Quark said. "I can deliver the babies."

"You?" Odo asked and Garak at the same time.

"I've delivered more than a few children in my time."

Quark placed a tray on the bed, along with towels, a bowl of hot water and a hypospray. He did not explain where he'd obtain a hypospray, or what was in it, but once he injected me, the pain vanished. With authority, Quark pushed my skirts to my waist, motioning for Odo and Garak to move aside. A towel was placed beneath me and then he paused to wash his hands in the bowl of hot water, using liquid disinfectant. Garak was sent for another bowl of water, while Odo sat near my head, dabbing the perspiration from my forehead with another towel.

I'd never dreamed not even in my wildest flights of drug-induced fantasy of - this situation. A Ferengi bartender was going to deliver my half-Cardassian children. He gave the orders, which I followed, pushing when he said to push as well as keeping my breathing at a steady pace. He made an excellent midwife. He helped deliver my son as if he did it every day. For all I knew, maybe he did. Roxell arrived, out of breath, took one look at the situation and moved in beside Quark to help.

"I've done this a few times myself," Roxell said.

Both Quark and Roxell leaned in between my thighs. I felt something plucked from my body, heard a soft snarl, and widened my eyes.

"It's a boy," Quark said, handing the little babe to Roxell.

Roxell cut the cord and washed the child before wrapping him in a blanket. Odo dabbed my head with a wet rag. I felt another kick in my side and let out a gasp. Quark

returned to kneel between my legs.

“Here we go, folks! I see another ridged head poking out!”

Quark placed his hands between my legs. I groaned as I gave another hard push. The second child was harder than the first. Despite the sedative, the pain came fast and furious until I nearly blacked out. It wasn't long though before Quark held another child in his arms.

“A beautiful little girl,” Quark said grinning at me.

“Twins are quite rare among Cardassians,” Garak said. He held the boy in his arms, while Roxell cleaned my daughter. “It is seen as a sign the parents are particularly blessed. In this case, it's the mother. He's a beautiful boy, Helen. Did you think of a name?”

“Not yet,” I moaned.

Now the excitement was over, Dr. Quirin arrived. He made a quick examination of me, deemed me healthy and gave me a shot, which I assumed was the inoculation for the Cardassian flu. He looked over my child, giving Quark a dubious look as he produced a tiny hypospray he used on both infant. Neither child cried.

“I had no idea you knew how to deliver a child,” Dr. Quirin said.

“My talents come in a wide variety,” Quark said.

Roxell held my daughter. Garak held my son. Both walked over to show me my children. The girl had blue eyes and black hair like her father, the boy's eyes were green like my own and a tuft of red hair grew on top of his head. Quark removed my damp skirt, along with the towels, placing them aside. He took hold of the girl, letting Roxell clean me before she covered me with a thick, clean blanket. Both babies were tucked into the nook of my arms. The boy favored me, his ridges merely outlines on his face, while the little girls were pronounced.

“The ridges? Are they...will they...?” I paused.

Dr. Quirin stood in the entrance, typing information onto his com-padd. “The ridges on newborns are usually less pronounced than they will be as adults,” he said without looking up. “Babies grow into them. They are both healthy, Helen. I'll run a few more tests tomorrow. You need rest today. Roxell, stay and assist Helen.”

"He has my eyes," Quark crooned.

"I need names to enter into my report, Mistress Helen," the doctor said.

"Madison for the girl," I said. That one was easy. I gazed at the boy and found him as beautiful as an angel. "This is Gabriel."

"Very well. And the last name?" Dr. Quirin stared right at me. "You may choose any name you like, Mistress Helen. I assume the father is Gul Dukat. Correct?"

"Not name," I said sharply.

Garak placed his hand over his heart. "May I suggest my own? I realize the children are not mine, I offer you my family name and the protection comes with it. You're well aware of who my father is, Helen. No one will harm your children if they have my name."

"Then let it be so," I said.

* * *

SAWYER

Gathered in the dining hall sat Damar, Eben, Ravon, Dorric, Dracalus, and me for Dukat's farewell super. Torgan had declined to join us. I'd heard through the grape vine his cousin was amongst the Fifth Order prisoners who had been executed. My heart went out to my second officer; if asked about his whereabouts, I was going to lie. Any connection with the Fifth Order was taken seriously and more than a few soldiers were sitting in a detention cell having their backgrounds checked. I didn't want Torgan to join them.

"The replicators are not working. An engineer is working on the problem," Dorric said. "We'll have to make due on the vegetables the Bajorans have brought to us. A few chose to remain here, hoping to return to Lillihaven. You must admit their willingness to share what little they have is quite generous."

"While Vardon dines on fish and yamok sauce on the Kobrak," grumbled Ravon. He brought pitchers of wine and water to the table. Eben set glasses on the table.

"Don't start complaining," Dorric snapped. "I'm an aide, not a chef. And I didn't prepare this meal. A Bajoran did. Be glad you have it, Ravon."

I sat at the table, wearing loose slacks and a soft sweater. One more night in armor

and I was going to resign. It was heavy and my shoulders were killing me. Ravon poured beverages, while Damar and Eben set out plates and bowels. A loaf of hot bread and butter, along with a bowl of fruit was brought in by a garresh on hand. Eben sat next to Ravon who he'd taken a liking to, while Dracalus sat at one end of the table. We didn't wait on Dukat. News had arrived Helen had twins and he'd put off leaving as long as possible.

"Bajorans make better cooks than Cardassians. It's a fact," Dracalus said sampling the stew. "You should see the kitchen they have in the refugee camp. I'll actually be sorry when the rest leave the fort. The soldiers have started to go there for evening meals."

Dorric nodded. "I do as well," he said. "I sometimes drop by and lend a hand. I'm beginning to have new admiration for the Bajorans. I had no idea they were so resilient."

"We all know you've met a woman, Dorric," Ravon said.

"I don't approve of fraternizing with Bajorans." Damar rapped his spoon on the table. "If you desire to remain my aide, Dorric, then you will terminate this relationship. It will only complicate things when she returns to Lillihaven. You'll be too busy to visit."

"That is rather harsh, Damar," Dracalus said. "Most of the men haven't seen their homes and families in a long time, myself included. I don't have a problem with it. Nor should you. The Bajorans will be more willing to help us, when needed, if they believe we sincerely care for them. I think the relationship helps in regard."

"Thank you," Dorric said.

Damar didn't respond. Dukat came in, dressed for his departure, and sat in his chair. He was served dinner by Dorric. He took one bite of soup when Hadran burst in. He looked frantic, which wasn't his manner at all. He held a com-padd in his hand.

"What? Is something else wrong?" Dukat asked, annoyed.

"I just received a message from Terok Nor. It was coded and rerouted through a dozen intermediaries but...?" Hadran paused, not wanting to finish his sentence.

"Report, Gil Hadran," Damar said.

"I'm sorry, Gul Dukat. The report states Helen and your newborn children are dead. She died in childbirth and both were stillborn."

Dukat paled, slammed his fist to the table, upsetting his bowl of soup. Damar stood

and removed the com-padd from Hadran's hand, reading the message. I stared at Damar, waiting for him to say something, a crust of bread lodged in my throat. Eben wiped away a tear, trying his best to remain calm. He crawled into my lap. I held him tight.

"I don't believe it. Nor should you, sir. The message was most certainly sent by Torell," Damar said handing the com-padd to Dukat. He didn't take it. "Allow me to look into the matter further. Hadran, come with me."

"Don't bother, Damar. I'm leaving. Immediately," Dukat said. "Dracalus, prepare my shuttle. I'll have to meet the Govatt since they're not able to come to Bajor. You will have command of the fort, while Damar oversees my duties on Bajor. If any problem arises, then don't fail to contact me."

"It's all arranged, sir." Dracalus stood and left the room with Hadran.

Dukat rose to his feet. He motioned for me to remain seated. Eben climbed from my lap in an instant. He threw his arms around Dukat, hugging him tight. I'd wanted to do the same thing refrained from doing so. Dukat ruffled the boy's hair, nodded at us and followed after the officers. A heavy stillness fell over the room. Eben returned to his seat he didn't eat. None of us had much of an appetite. The garresh was ordered to clear the table. Damar lifted Eben into his arms and carried him to my quarter's, which we'd now shared. A guard remained outside the door.

"I want to sleep with you tonight," Eben said. He wiggled free from Damar and ran into our room, stripping off his clothes, leaving on his under shorts. He dove into the bed.

"Really?" Damar asked.

"He's upset. So am I. Let him stay tonight."

"This once, Eben."

"Yes, Father."

Damar undressed in the bedroom, while I changed into my pajamas in the bathroom. I returned to find them both in bed. Eben was placed on the outside, with Damar in the middle. I climbed into the bed, snuggling against Damar, feeling a nip in the air. It had snowed the rest of the day and the thermostat had yet to adjust. With the three of us together, it soon grew toasty. I played footsies with Damar to warm my toes. He pulled

me against his chest to kiss me.

"I'm sure the message is false. Dukat will sort matters out," Damar said.

"And if it was a trap? One shuttle can easily be destroyed in route to a cruiser."

"Let's not think the worst. What concerns me most is how Torell managed it? I want you to contact Garak in the morning. Find out what he knows. While I don't approve of you working for Garak and the Obsidian Order, it seems unavoidable. You've done well on security. I see no reason you can't assist Garak, as long as you are cautious."

I slid his hair behind his ear, toying with his ridges. I felt him shudder. With the boy with us, we had to limit ourselves to fondling. With Dukat gone, I was relieved for many reasons. Damar would no longer have cause to be jealous and I didn't have to worry about another assassination attempt on Dukat's life at the fort. I was going to miss him all the same. At the rise of Damar's erection, I tapped him on the nose, meeting his gaze. He chuckled softly.

"I love you, Damar."

"It doesn't matter if you're human. I love you for who you are, Ren. Your spirit and compassion are the qualities keep me at your side. I want and need you for all times, until the suns grow cold and the universe is no more."

"Sounds like the lyrics to one of your songs."

"Sawyer," he said. I hadn't heard him say my real name in a long time. "You're too loving to be Cardassian. My wife didn't show me half this much affection. In the days come, things will be harder on us both. I have many duties, far more than before. I am your commander, I'm also so much more."

"Like what?" I asked, pressing my head against his shoulder.

"I'm yours."

Held tight in his arms, I fell into a restless sleep. I dreamed of riding through a valley, surrounded by dead Cardassians, and wild dog pursued me. The horse was covered in blood. I wondered at the source, feeling a pain in my side and touched it. My fingers came away slick with blood. I glanced down to find a gash in my side and from this poured so much blood it covered the ground as far as I could see.

I awoke to find myself standing on the balcony, the door open behind me, grasping the railing. The five moons were crescent-shaped, with four distinct colors, pale blue, dark blue, yellow and red. My bare feet were numb. I was half-frozen and shivering. As I lifted my stiff hands from the rail, I noticed a shadow glide across the courtyard and paused beneath me. It was solid black and its form humanoid. It vanished under the awning, left no footprints in the snow. The lines of a poem written long ago by Poe popped into my head. Tiny white clouds appeared in front of my face with each spoken word.

“Gaily bedight,
A gallant knight,
In sunshine and in shadow,
Had journeyed long,
Singing a song,
In search of...”

I paused, trying to remember the rest of the poem, I ran into a mental barrier. Fixated on the snow collected on the ground since dinner, with a shiver, the words tumbled out of my mouth.

“Over the Mountains, Of the Moon, Down
the Valley of the Shadow,
'Ride, boldly ride,' the shade replied.
'If you seek for Eldorado.”

“What are you doing out here?” Damar asked. His voice made me jump. I was too stiff to turn. He moved in close behind me, wrapping his arms around me. His body felt hot in comparison to my own, a shock contrast made it clear I'd been outside for a while.

“Huh?” I wasn't thinking clearly.

“I asked what you’re doing outside in the snow, darling. It’s freezing. Come inside.”

Damar lifted me into his arms, carrying me into the living room. He managed to shut the door and placed me on the couch. Using his hands, he rubbed my arms and legs, trying to restore the blood flow. He was worried when another spasm of cold made its way through my body.

“You could have frozen to death. It shouldn’t be this damn cold at this time of year. We’ve another few weeks or so of fall weather. This is unusual. Are you all right?”

“As his strength failed him at length, he met a pilgrim shadow,” I muttered. “I saw something out there. I...I think I was sleep walking. I’ve never done it before. I’m just so cold.”

Not satisfied with his efforts, Damar took drastic action. He removed his pajamas and then my own, pushing me down on the couch. His heavy weight crushed me. As he pulled the blanket over us, I managed to wrap my legs around him. He held me close, kissing me, doing his best to his body heat to warm me. It only crossed my mind later he wasn’t human and the cold should have lowered his own temperature, passion worked its own magic.

“I know best how to warm you,” he said kissing my neck.

We made love on the couch. When we finished, we laid in each other’s arms, the aftermath all toasty and golden. He kissed my forehead.

“To bed we go. It will be morning soon,” Damar said.

Dressing in the dark, I followed him into the bedroom. Eben lay sprawled across the mattress, consuming every inch of space. For one so small and young, it was quite a feat. Damar gathered the boy in his arms, making a place for me. I crawled inside the bed, pulled the covers of us, the moment I settled down, I caught the slight movement in the room. A shadow slid across the bedroom wall and vanished out the window.

“Sleep well, my brave warrior,” Damar said, in a sleepy voice.

I couldn’t sleep. Somehow, I knew when I’d entered the Valley of Shadows; I had brought home something evil. I lay awake for hours before I finally fell asleep.

* * *

HELEN

While lying in bed on my side, my two babies next to be, swaddled and sleeping, I had plenty of time to think about my position on Terok Nor. No matter which way I looked at it, no matter what angle I thought about, I loved Dukat. I wanted him back. I knew it meant I'd eventually have to share him with another. It wasn't his wife troubled me, not even Yor who would always be there, the mistresses in the future who would appear. I needed to accept Dukat for who he was, and stop demanding more from him, or my children would never know their father, and I didn't want to happen. Gazing at the two little faces sleeping at my side, I felt content. Terok Nor felt like my home, not Bajor.

The only fly in the ointment was Madame Dukat. I'd heard from Garak on the previous day Dukat was returning to the station. I hoped Dukat meant to see me; I remained worried what we might say to one another. Garak was to pay me a call morning. When I heard the door open, knowing it needed a special code to access; I assumed he was coming to bring me breakfast in bed. I heard loud footsteps and lifted my eyes as Dukat appeared in the doorway. He dropped his bag on the ground and rushed toward the bed. He fell to his knees and reached out for my hand.

"What are you doing here?" I asked.

"I came the moment I received a message from Terok Nor. I was told you died in labor. I didn't believe it," Dukat said. "In fact, I'd already made arrangements to come here to see you. Forgive me, Helen. Please isn't a word comes easily, please forgive me. When I thought I'd lost you forever, I used every resource to reach your side. Nothing was going to keep me from you. Not even death."

"I'm alive. So are the twins," I said, my heart aching.

Dukat eased his large frame onto the bed, placing the children between us. I wanted him to hold me. I needed to feel him against me. He took his time, not rushing me. It seemed like a dream he was with me. I'd had so many dreams of late. Dark, disturbing dreams vanished on waking, leaving me frightened. My fingers glided across his face. He looked more tired than I'd ever seen him look, his cheeks gaunt, and he'd lost weight.

"You're really here with me. I can't believe it."

“Believe it, Helen. I’m only sorry I didn’t come sooner.”

I caught my breath, not wanting to cry. His features softened.

“My darling, I never mean to hurt you. I wish I’d been here when they were born. Just look at him, so strong and handsome,” Dukat said. He reached out to stroke our son’s cheek with a finger. “Our son looks more like you than me with his red hair. Our daughter resembles me. She’s so fierce. means she has your temperament. No one could ever question we’re their parents. Have you named them yet? I have a few suggestions.”

“You should have been here when they were born. I’ve already named them Gabriel and Madison. Their family name is to be Garak.” He stared at me as if I’d wounded him yet again. “I couldn’t name them Dukat. We’re not married. The law is quite specific about this.”

“No. You did the right thing.” Dukat caught hold of my hand, lifting it to his lips. “Say you’ll forgive me or I’ll never be able to forgive myself. I was so callous. So heartless. I had hoped my arrival would bring you a little happiness. I am sorry. Do you forgive me?”

I nodded. “Yes, Dukat. Yes, I forgive you.” He let out a heavy sigh.

“I would have liked for the children to have my name. Of course, I know it’s not possible. There are many things I’d like to change. I tried to convince Mikelya to return home, things on Cardassia Prime remain unsettled. In good conscious, I could not send her back to her parents, not until the fighting subsides. I didn’t know if I’d reach your side or not. Too many renegade ships operate in the outlying star systems. Gul Mikor is gathering a fleet to attack me. I don’t mean to lay my problems at your feet. This is my concern. Not yours.”

“I want to be with you, Dukat. Being married to you isn’t in the stars for us. I can accept that. I can accept most things. I’ve had quite a bit of time to think about us, Dukat. The one thing I discovered since leaving you is I can’t live without you. This may not last; I’ll take what I can. I love you. I want to be with you. I’m...I’m sorry I left on the Kobrak. I didn’t know what else to do. I was so emotional. So hurt.”

“As you should have been. However, your abrupt departure has placed Vardon under a great deal of scrutiny,” he said. “I’m not the only one displeased with his recent conduct or allegations he may be a traitor. For now, Central Command believes Vardon is loyal to the Union. When asked, I had to tell the truth. He has treated you and my wife with nothing

respect. He saved the life of Damar as well. Perhaps now is not the time to mention it. I feel I must tell you Glinn Venna is dead. Damar found her sending a message to Gul Mikor. Not her death will ease your pain. I mention it only to ease your mind."

I knew I shouldn't be glad a woman was dead; she'd been a traitor and deserved it. I told myself this to rationalize the death surrounded us. Sawyer had been right about Venna from the start. She'd remained behind with Damar and Eben. As he stroked my cheek, I reminded myself to send her a message in the morning to tell her about the twins and about Dukat returning to me. I believed it's what she wanted for me. She was in good hands, but I remained worried about her.

"You're lost in deep thought," Dukat said. A smile curved up the corners of his mouth. "Let me tell you a secret, my dear. Whether we are here or on Bajor, I intend to keep you and the children at my side. I intend to prove my feelings for you are sincere."

"I guess that means you love me. But I'm not going to make any rules."

"A few rules might be helpful," Dukat said. "I can honestly say I do not want to spend another day without you at my side. I promise I will do whatever is necessary to make you happy and to keep you and the children safe. You've no need to worry about Gul Vardon, Gul Mukot, or the war."

"I love you," I said.

Dukat chuckled. "I love you, too. I also love Gabriel and Madison. They are beautiful like they're mother. Quite beautiful. You should have told me you were having twins. You kept it a secret, Helen."

"I don't know why. Something kept me from telling you. I'm sorry."

"No. No apologies. Not from you. From now, there will be no more secrets between us. We will start afresh with our new family. All you have to do is remind me now and then what exactly it is you need. I'm not able to read minds, especially not humans."

"You're doing a pretty good job right now."

"I'd like to sleep here tonight. It is too soon? I want to hold you and kiss you."

"Not at all," I said. "I'll even let you put our children in the crib. It's right in the corner, a gift from Garak, so you must be sure to thank him."

“Whatever you want, my dear.”

Whether he was sincere or not, I wanted to believe him. I knew how a woman gained a man was also how she lost him. As he removed his clothes and slid into bed, I didn't want to think about such things. He said he loved our children and me. He kissed me and nothing else mattered. He'd come back to me.

SAWYER

Chapter Thirty-Nine

“Battle Log: Day 86. The Alpha Brigade has grown into five battalions. Dal Dracalus calls us the elite core of the Second Order. Gul Damar has been relying on Dal Dracalus more and more. At Dracalus’s urging, I’ve been allowed to lead patrols to scour the surrounding provinces for the Fifth Order renegades. The enemy remains firmly entrenched in this province, sixty miles of hostile territory, now covered in snow.

Security has tightened at the fort. Damar is meeting with Bajoran leaders, mainly merchants, bankers and wealth landowners to discuss forming a provincial government to help with administration. A First Minister will be selected by the Cardassians. However, there is still no Kai, who in many ways it like a Catholic Pope, who oversees the Bajoran faith. Normally, the people would vote for a Fifth Minister and Kai. Dukat is not ready to select a First Minister. He is willing for a new Kai to be selected; only the Vedeks, similar to cardinals and bishops, refuse to offer any candidates for the position. The Vedek Assembly, the spiritual voice of Bajor, had functioned without a Kai for years. I don’t think they want one. The Vedek Assembly refuses to acknowledge the Cardassians and until they leave, which they won’t, they remain hidden in their cloisters, refusing to participate.

The Kai who is selected will also function like a First Minister and assist the Cardassians in all matters. I’m told one Prylar will attend the meeting. A prylar is a monk. I think he’s coming more out of curiosity and will report to the Vedek Assembly. Having these Bajorans here is far too tempting for the Fifth Order. I fear they will attack the fort. Dal Dracalus has the entire fort at Level 2 for this very reason. Eben will accompany me toward into the south hills. My son is eager to see Outpost 9, which has been rebuilt. The boy knows

the area better than anyone else. I also owe it to him to allow him to pay respects to his parent's graves."

I put away the com-padd in my desk drawer. Eben appeared in front of me, dressed in warm clothes and a fur-trimmed cloak. He wore gloves muffled the sound of his clapping and he hopped from one foot to the other.

"I'm ready, Mother."

Eben ran to the couch, lifting a heavy black cloak off the couch. He stood on the couch in order to pull it around my shoulder. I fastened the metal clip. I wore armor and a double layer of clothes beneath.

"You sure you're up to this? These are Kenmar's deserters. They are the worst of the bunch. I'm taking a great risk by bringing you with me. Ikarus can't be expected to look out after you. You must do what I say when we're out there. I want you to promise, Eben."

"I promise, Mother. You don't have to worry about me," he said, grinning. "Before we go, I have something for you. It may come in useful."

"Well? What is it, my little monkey?"

I watched as Eben scurried into his room. The way he scurried about and clung to Damar or me had given rise to his nickname. He'd never seen a monkey before, we'd both promised to take him to a zoo on Cardassia Prime after the war. Everything we promised the boy seemed to include 'after the war'. My son returned with a wristband with a round, white, power crystal and with a push of a button, activated a hologram. I stared at two Eben's both moved and turned in unison. It was impossible to tell the difference between the real Eben and the hologram. One boy came over and put his arms around me, while the others remained standing in the room, moving at random.

"Eben, you are the cleverest child in the universe. If Garak saw this, he'd have you joint the Obsidian Order quicker than you can say yamok sauce."

"Yamok sauce."

His whole demeanor and manner of speech changed as he explained the device. I realized he only acted childish because it was expected of him at his age.

"I haven't thought of a name for it yet. The hologram is recorded on a computer chip.

It's actually a genetic code creates an image of whatever person it is designed for. I made it to fool our enemies. It has a range of thirty yards and it works through walls, plus, it's water resistant. I've tested it on Ikarus and slipped past him several times."

I set him in a chair and went over to the hologram. I put my hand through it and felt a mild tingling sensation.

"I'm impressed, don't do again," I said. "When I tell you to stay in your room, I mean it. I don't want to have to worry about you any more than I already do. And I don't want to put Ikarus on report. Is this the only one? Can you replicate me?"

"This is a prototype. I coded it for you. You must wear it for it to work. Just turn the dial and you'll see."

I flipped the switch. An exact duplicate of me appeared. It moved when I moved. I stared at my image, finding it quite strange to my replica circle me.

"I guess I've finally met my Doppelgänger. That's a good name for it. It's a monster in Earth legend can assume the likeness of whoever it wants," I said. I felt as devious as my soon looked in instant. "Come on. We have fifteen minutes before roll call."

Heading to the lobby, I hid with Eben behind a pillar and lifted my wrist. The hologram walked through a thick glass window and stood outside. Damar stood under the metal awning with Dracalus, Ravon, and Dorric. He was first to notice the hologram and smiled. I wondered what expression was on my face, for I was laughing. He excused himself and walked toward the hologram. My duplicate moved away from him toward the front doors. Damar's foot on the front laughing opened the door. He followed my hologram inside, completely fooled by who he thought was me. Eben had created something far more advanced in technology for a mere child. His intelligence was almost scary.

"Did you know it would do that?" I asked.

"It's supposed to respond to your thoughts. That's what makes it fun."

I had the hologram stop and turn toward Damar, as if to embrace him. He walked into my arms and stepped right through. He spun around as if he'd seen a ghost. My hologram stood behind him with her hands on her hips. I wanted to kiss Damar. The hologram approached, planting a ghostly kiss on his lips.

“What is this?” Damar muttered. Turning to search the lobby, he spotted us hiding behind the pillar. He kept his eyes on the hologram as he came toward us. “One of you had best explain what is going on.” He grabbed my arm. Finding me solid, he pulled me against his side. “I find one of you sufficient, Yor. Did you invent this, Eben?”

The boy nodded. Damar glanced at me.

“You’ve seen his hologram dog many times, Damar,” I said.

“In the wrong hand, this could be turned into a weapon.”

“Well, I’m not going to let happen,” I said, turning it off. The hologram vanished. “I want to try it out today. All I have to do is think about what I want and the image does it for me.”

“I had hoped you’d not take the boy with you,” Damar said.

“Eben does know the countryside better than anyone else. There are places aren’t on the map, including traps he may have overlooked. He’s wearing armor beneath his clothes.”

“Son, you are an asset to Cardassia. Gul Dukat said we could expect great things from you. Obey orders and make me proud.”

“Are you really going to be my father?” Eben asked.

Damar gave me a sideways glance. “Yes. I hope to make it official one day soon,” he said with equal bluntness. “I shall ask your mother to marry me when the time is right.”

I was totally shocked to hear matrimony was on Damar’s mind. Eben looked as if he might bust with excitement. Damar took hold of my hands. I felt a lump form in my throat.

“Consider it, Yor. That’s all I’m saying.”

Laughing, I kissed Damar. It wasn’t a formal proposal, felt like a promise of one in the future. Eben lost his interest in us the moment horses were led forward. He bolted out the door, slamming into Dal Dracalus who lifted him into the air and set him aside to enter the building. Ikarus placed Eben on a black horse I’d selected for its stamina and speed. I was taking two squads with me. Ravon, Torgan, and Hadran led their own patrols. They were headed in opposite directions in tanks or on foot, while I was going south by horseback. I’d assigned Hadran the task of entered the northern valleys haunted by ghosts. He was twenty years older than Ravon and Torgan and didn’t scare easily. Of course, Dunatar, Zolon, Jenrak,

Ikarus, Komash, and Korvinus were going with me.

“Keep to the training you learned at the academy,” Damar said.

I wore my sword presented to me by Damar on my left hip. I wasn't the only one in the squad wearing a sword. In close quarters, the Cardassians had come to value swords. Damar grabbed the hilt, pulling me toward him for a final kiss.

“I'll give you regular updates. We'll return in a few days.”

I hurried outside. The horses were anxious this morning. Each horse was covered with a warm quilt hung several inches beneath their bellies, and over this were the saddles with saddlebags. Eben moved forward to allow me to mount behind him. I pulled the cloak over him, trying to hide him as best as I could and rode out as the gates opened wide. It must have looked impressive to the guards in the towers, watching four platoons ride out in the snow, separating like a black wave across the snow.

We rode due south with me riding in the lead beside Dunatar. He'd excelled in cryptology and tracking at the Cardassian Military Academy. He also listened when Eben pointed out the trails to take. The War Dogs rode directly behind us. For every twenty soldiers, I had one gil armed with a tricorder and soldier outfitted with a rifle with a grenade launcher, in great demand and hard to obtain. Central Command could be downright stingy with funds and supplies. The weather held while we rode fifteen miles, taking a break on the ridge above Outpost 9, which stood to the left. Soldiers stood on the high walls.

“Garresh Dunatar, contact Outpost 9 and inform them we're in the area. I don't want anyone taking pot shots at us from the outpost. They now have laser cannons and as soon as we clear the next ridge, they'll be able to see us on their scanners,” I said.

“Yes, sir.”

As soon as he contacted the outpost, a soldier lifted a Cardassian flag in the air, waving us on. Another few miles brought us to the cliff Torell had destroyed. Eben pointed out another trap in the ground, an electrical wire if tripped by a horse would have caused an explosion took out the rest of the cliff. We wouldn't have found it without the boy. Nor could it be cut, for it lay beneath the snow, requiring too much time to remove. We placed flags in the ground near the wire as a reminder and rode in a single file along the treacherous path.

The trail twisted through the trees, which grew thicker, a familiar place I feared only a bit less than the Valley of Shadows. My son was fearless.

“You’re leading us into the Deben Forest. Why this place? I’ve been here before and never found any soldiers. There are large predators in forest. Carnivores. It’s not place anyone with any intelligence would venture.”

“My other father said it was the best place to hide, for trees swallow men alive. Are you afraid?” Eben asked watching me intently.

“Damn straight I am.”

“Don’t be. I’m with you,” he said with the confidence of a grown up.

Ahead of us opened a wide valley covered with dense pine trees stood taller and more prickly than those on earth. Nearby I heard a branch crack under the weight of the snow and fall to the ground. Rifles lifted and a few horses snorted in response, growing nervous to match their riders’ emotions. Something else not like Earth horses. Brownies, ridden by Bajorans, were highly sensitive. It required a firm hand to keep them from bolting in combat. Jenrak rode up to me and saluted.

“We have possible life forms a half mile further. They’re located right in the middle of the forest. It could be Bajoran refugees, doubtful in this weather,” Jenrak said. “That’s rough terrain, Glinn Yor. I suggest we dismount and leave the horses here.”

“Tether the horses. Pick as squad to remain with them. You’re command squad, Jenrak,” I said, noticing his looked disappointed. “Who else is going to keep the horses from running when we start shooting? You’ll see we have horses when we return.”

“I will, sir.”

Dismounting, I kept Eben beside me, while he pointed out traps set by his father. The horses vanished from sight as we descended a hill. I turned on the hologram and let it walk forty yards ahead of us. The soldiers fanned out, moving slowly through the snow. Ikarus appeared at my side. He had one of the tricorders to scan the area ahead of us. At his signal, we held up. I kept the hologram moving forward, a bit tricky when I wanted to use my rifle to peer through the telescope. Eben helped by handing me a pair of binoculars he’d brought. The hologram moved toward a series of boulders formed a rocky hill. A push of a button

brought the details closer, allowing me to see a cave and chunky snow before its entrance, as if someone had recently tossed buckets of snow onto the ground to hide footprints. It wasn't long before a ragged figure, supported on a makeshift crutch, walked out of the cave. It was a shame I couldn't hear what he said to the hologram, he was talking to my image. The hologram raised its rifle and stepped away from the man, looking nervously to each side, matching my thoughts.

"Pass the word. We found the renegades," I said.

"It could be a Bajoran," Eben whispered.

"Doubtful. They'd never approach a Cardassian soldier."

"He's Fifth Order, all right," Ikarus said. "I can see his insignia. What are your orders?"

"Let's surround those rocks. Leave a squad here to provide us with cover. Don't fire until I give the order." I glanced at Dunatar. "Stay with Eben."

Dunatar pulled Eben against his side, taking refuge behind a tree. I advanced forward with Jenrak and Zolon flanking me. My hologram motioned the soldier to kneel, but he shook his head. The snow lessened beneath the trees. Able to move faster on the soft snow, I motioned the squads to halt, no more than twenty yards from the soldier. He sagged against the rocks, looking confusing the hologram wouldn't answer him. The soldier's voice carried to me on the breeze.

"I've been out here for weeks, afraid to come in. My leg is infected. Have you a med-kit? How about field rations? I could use something to eat."

The hologram shrugged. The soldier started to weep. I wanted to touch him and nearly gasped when the hologram started to do so. I remembered what I was doing and kept the hologram aiming a rifle at him.

"I'm going out there to talk to him," I said to Ikarus.

"It might be a trap. Wait one more minute, Yor."

Within a few minutes, another soldier appeared. He had a thick beard and carried a club. The first man stopped crying. Both tried to grab the hologram. They walked right through the image and slammed into one another. The hologram vanished. The two soldiers

started to withdraw into the cave, I stepped forward, my rifle on stun, shooting them both. They dropped to the ground. My soldiers advanced. Three men went into the cave, didn't find anyone else. The two prisoners were tied and dragged through the snow to my position. The wounded man left a trail of blood in the snow. Dunatar gave a whistle, pointing at large animal tracks in the snow. Something had been circling the rocks with giant-sized paws.

"I want those two taken back to Outpost 9. We'll transfer them in the morning to Fort Varnok. See to it Korvinus. Zolon, take a squad and search behind those rocks. Let's see if we can find their camp. I want a full sweep of this area. If they don't surrender, shoot them."

A squad led by Korvinus circle around the rocks. Seconds later laser fire pierced the air with its buzzing blasts. Excited, the soldiers advanced on the rocks. Sporadic gunfire continued. I advanced on the cave, sending a soldier to scale the rocks to get a look at the area beyond, while the battle continued. Fifteen minutes later the soldiers started to return to the cave, dragging dead bodies with them. I counted three dead enemy soldiers. They'd put up one helluva fight before they died. Their insignias were removed, marked with their registration numbers on the back, stuffed the bodies inside the cave, and sealed it shut with explosive.

"If there were any other soldiers, sir, they've cleared out before it snowed," Komash said. He carried his helmet under his arm. He was so large his helmet never fit him well.

"Let's get back to Outpost 9," I said. "We'll spend the night there and then head further south in the morning. Not with you, Eben. You're going back tomorrow with Korvinus."

The outpost commander had no extra bed for us. We were given the use of the mess hall, a hard floor recipient of our bedrolls. It was warm enough and we had plenty of food. The prisoners were watched by four guards. I left Eben sleeping between Ikarus and Dunatar, eating a piece of fruit as I walked over to squat in front of the two Fifth Order soldiers.

"You can have field rations if you're hungry," I said. Neither soldier answered me. I glanced at Jenrak who stood guard. "Get anything out of these two snakes?"

"They claim they've been hiding in cave for months and didn't fight with Kenmar at Lillihaven. I actually think they come for Outpost 9. I'll get the truth out of them once I finish

my dinner.”

“I’ll handle it, Jenrak. Eat.”

The injured man was asleep. Someone had wrapped his leg, no one had asked the outpost doctor to tend to him. Nor had I. The other soldier was dirty, thin, he held himself with a certain pride. Cleaned up he’d have been handsome. Nor did he look away when I stared into his eyes. His eyes were a usual shade of gray, held only contempt. His eyes were gray. He was bearded like his companion and smelled.

“I’m Glinn Ren Yor of the Second Order, A Company, Alpha Brigade,” I said handing him the other half of my yellow apple. It was a bit sweet for my liking. He wore manacles. He took it from me and ate it whole. He was starving. “You didn’t fight for Kenmar?”

“I was with Gul Parnal.”

“What’s your name and rank?”

“That’s all I’ll say. I want to speak with your commander.”

“I’m sending you to Fort Varnok in the morning,” I said. “Just tell me where to find the rest of your men and I’ll put in a good word for you.”

“Don’t go south. They’re not there.”

I stood, noticing the man was shivering, while his companion was burning up with a fever. It wasn’t I felt sorry for him, not entirely, and when I removed my fur lined cloak and placed it over his legs and the man beside him, he didn’t take it for charity.

“You were hiding in the Deben Forest. As far as I know, there could be more of you hiding there. It’s a good place to hide,” I said.

“If you enjoy fending off wolves at night.”

“I like wolves.”

“Not these. They’re giants. We stayed in the cave, building a large fire each night to keep them away, anything we tried to catch, they’d claim it first.”

“How did you friend get to be wounded?”

“He was careless.”

“Where did the rest of Gul Parnal’s men go?”

“They took refuge in the Valley of Shadows. No doubt Kenmar’s men are there too. It

has hundreds of caves to hide in.”

I licked my lips, still tasting the sweet juice of the apple. “I hate tell you, friend, those men were found dead. Hundreds of them,” I said. “I found them. Tell me about the battle at Outpost 9. What really happened?”

The man pointed toward Eben. “That’s Parnal’s son. I know the boy.”

“He’s my son now. I’ve adopted him.”

“I have nothing further to say to you, Glinn Yor. Goodnight.”

I jerked the cloak off his body and wrapped it around my shoulders. Not saying anything else, I returned to my pallet and lay beside Eben, covering us both. I didn’t sleep. I heard the wolves howling outside the outpost. I’d never seen them, I had run across large tracks in the snow in the forest and now I knew what they belonged to. I wasn’t about to venture further into the forest, not while it kept snowing and game was scarce.

We returned to Fort Varnok, using a secondary trail kept us out of the mountains led along a former dry riverbed had turned into a stream. Riding along the side of the stream, Dunatar gave a shout, finding footprints in the mud. A quick sweep of the area brought us to a camp. Thirteen soldiers from Kenmar’s army surrendered. Had I been one of them, I would have fought to the bitter end. Marching them in front of us, it took longer to reach the fort and we arrived in the evening. The gates opened and we rode in with the prisoners.

“Tell Gul Damar and Dal Dracalus I’ve returned,” I said to Zolon.

The soldier ran across the wet courtyard, his boots slapping on the pavement. The last traces of snow was left in mounds beside the buildings. If the weather stayed warm, it would melt by later afternoon. Eben was exhausted. Ikarus carried the boy to his room. My son been invaluable, providing locations of more traps for the commander of Outpost 9. I knew Damar would be impressed with the boy. I handed the reins to a soldier. The horses were led to the stables. I followed a squad leading the prisoners to the stockade.

Dunatar and Korvinus carried the wounded prisoner. Inside the building were two hallways filled with cells. Removing my cloak, I sat in a chair while the prisoners were separated. Kenmar’s men were tossed into a large cell with bars, not a force field. The two men from the forest were placed in a cell across from them. The larger group shouted and

cursed Parnal's men, though I couldn't be sure if their hatred was genuine or part of an act. I sent Korvinus to find Dr. Lazlo with orders to outside until I sent for them. The soldier left and I approved Parnal's men, while Dunatar stood behind me.

"The stockade is rather like the stopping point between life and death. Some people call limbo," I said. "That's where you are now. In limbo. If you talk, I'll make sure neither of you are executed. I have a little pull around here. Your friend has a fever and from the smell of it, his leg is infected. How did he injure it?"

"A traitor shot him," the grey-eyed soldier said. "You don't believe me. Put us in with Kenmar's men and they'll kill us. I'd rather die than be called a traitor."

"What's your name and rank?" I asked once more.

"You're persistence. I'll wait for your commander."

The gray-eyed soldier sat beside his friend, watching me intently. His buddy woke up. He let out a sharp cry and reached for his injured leg. The bandage was rank. He whispered to his friend as Damar and Dorric arrived.

"Well done, Glinn Yor. Fifteen prisoners. I wonder why you didn't just kill them. I don't take prisoners," Damar said. "You know my orders."

"These two claim they were with Gul Parnal. They insisted they be allowed to talk to you," I said. "We found them in the Deben Forest. Kenmar's men were located no more than five miles from the fort. This one says more deserters are in the Valley of Shadows."

Damar crossed his arms over his chest. "Well? I am here. Speak."

"Sir, I am Dalin Renalt. I served under Gul Parnal at Outpost 9. I recognize the boy. He is Gul Parnal's son. The boy can verify who I am."

"Leave the boy out of it. If you want me to spare your life, give me something useful," Damar said. The rank of dalin was beneath a gul and dal, which was the equivalent of a lieutenant commander. Renalt had been someone important at Outpost 9. We'd caught a high-ranking officer.

"Glenn Venna took refuge in our cave for a few days," Renalt said. "There were thirty of us then. When we refused to join Gul Kenmar, she killed all six of my men. Durgan was injured in the fight and needs medical attention."

“Where are the rest of your men?” Damar asked.

“A wolf carried away two men. Glinn Yor’s soldiers killed the rest. I admit they opened fire first. We didn’t know you were with the Second Order,” Renalt said. “I have heard of you Gul Damar. I am told you are a man of honor. Neither of us are traitors to the Cardassian Union. We desire to join the Second. If you will send for a doctor and feed us, I’ll provide whatever information you need. Hideouts. Routes they use. Names of their commanders. Locations of traps. You have to ask.”

“Traitor,” the other prisoners shouted.

Dorric removed a baton off his belt and smacked the bars of the cell. He stepped away when one of Kenmar’s men reached for his baton and didn’t try it again.

“Gul Kenmar and Glinn Venna were shot, Dalin Renalt,” Damar said, loud enough so the other prisoners heard. “This is the same fate for all of you. Unless? Glinn Dorric, give this man a map and a pen. We’ll do it the old-fashioned way. Dalin Renalt can draw a circle around positions and we’ll send out patrols to verify whether he speaks the truth or not.”

Dunatar handed Dorric a map and pen. Dorric gave the items to Damar. He handed them to me. It was a bit comical. I walked over to the cell and handed the items to Renalt. He sat on the floor and started circling positions. It didn’t take him long. He handed me the map and the pen. In turn, I handed the map to Damar.

“Have Dr. Lazlo come in,” Damar said.

Dorric left the room. Dunatar remained with us.

“Your glinn was kind to us. She could have shot us, didn’t. She apparently thinks we have value,” Renalt said keeping his voice low. He handed me the map. “Perhaps you were unaware Gul Parnal was shot by Gul Kenmar. Parnal and Kenmar disagreed on how to handle the dispute with the Second Order. I know this because I was Gul Parnal’s first officer. When Kenmar attacked the outpost, I managed to escape with thirty-eight men. We planned to go to Fort Varnok and pledge our loyalty. She killed most of us.”

“Then I’m glad I killed her,” Damar said. “Anything else?”

“There are others loyal to the Union. I can help you find them if you give me your word Durgan and I will not be executed as traitors.”

Damar tucked the map under his arm. "I will consider your offer," he said. "If we find you've been truthful, I'll spare your lives. Until then, enjoy your cell."

With a nod, Damar signaled me to follow him. I dismissed Dunatar. Security guards arrived to watch the prisoners. I walked ahead of both men. Dr. Lazlo and Dorric walked past us and entered the cellblock. The sun had faded behind the hills by the time we walked outside. The temperature had already dropped. I shivered as we walked across the courtyard.

"I don't trust Renalt," Damar said. "I'll have Hadran check out the valley."

"I'd like to join Hadran with your permission, sir. It's possible Renalt was his father's friend. I owe it to Eben to help find his father's soldiers. They don't deserve to die."

"You have done far more than anyone else for boy. I don't take Fifth Order prisoners. Hadran will handle this matter."

"My honor dictates I try to help the Fifth. I know how those men feel. I've been arrested and threatened for something I didn't do. I didn't murder of Legate Mikor."

"Then who did?" he asked.

"Helen."

Damar gave me an incredulous look set my blood boiling. He didn't believe me. He thought I'd killed Legate Mikor even now. He grabbed my arm, pulling me toward Building 1, not caring I dragged my heels. He was stronger and made me hustle to keep up with him.

"When I first arrived at Cardassia, you believed I was a Federation spy," I said. "I had to prove I wasn't with the Federation. Let me prove Renalt is loyal."

"You were a spy for the Circle, which is far worse," he replied. "Glenn Venna did her best to prove she was loyal. Had I not discovered her true purpose, thousands could have died. The only way to end this war is to kill the enemy."

I jerked my arm free. "You told Renalt you'd spare him if he cooperated."

Damar led me inside the lobby. "Did Eben recognize Renalt?" he asked. I gave a nod. "The boy will not go out on another mission. I have enough of my hands without having to keep my eyes on the two of you. Please, Yor. Promise you'll do what I ask."

"Are you asking me as your lover?"

"I thought perhaps it might work, I see I was wrong. You leave me no choice to assign

you to guard duty. Stand outside the door of our quarter's from now until dawn. Maybe way I can keep you alive a little longer."

"Are you going to give me orders once we're married?"

"I haven't asked you to marry me. Not formally," he said. A few officers walked past and he waited until they past to speak. "In the future, Glinn Yor, remember I'm your commander. You will obey me or sit in a cell."

"To be shot later?"

Damar sneered. "I am your commander whether you like it or not," he said. He grabbed my arm again and yanked me onto the turbolift. It started to rise. "Do not challenge my authority again or I will send you and the boy to Terok Nor. Is clear?"

"Yes, sir."

We got off the turbolift and walked toward our room. Guards stood at their posts in the corridor, keeping their eyes averted as Damar escorted me to our quarters. He pushed me against the door, jamming his index finger into my chest.

"While you may disagree with me in private, when in uniform I expect to be treated with the same respect you show to Gul Dukat or Dal Dracalus. Stay here until I say otherwise, Glinn Yor. is an order. Not a personal favor or request."

"Yes, sir. Sir? May I check on the boy and piss first? It will be along night."

"Five minutes."

Damar held up his finger when my lips moved. I softened my expression. He leaned toward me, about to kiss me, and then sneered.

"I'm not going to do it," he said. "I won't kiss you. You'll take is as permission do whatever you want. Now Dukat is gone, you're going to push me until I can't be pushed anymore. You now have three minutes."

I entered our quarters. Ikarus nodded and left. Running into the bathroom, I freshened up and then check on Eben. I was relieved to find Eben in his bed, sleeping soundly. I touched him to make certain he was in his bed, didn't wake him, and returned to my room. Removing my cloak and armor, I belted on my sword and grabbed my gun hostler, fastening it as I returned to stand guard. I stood there all night, simmering with anger toward Damar,

convinced he was the most difficult and hardheaded Cardassian I'd ever met. He never checked on me and he returned to the room late. I stepped aside so he could enter. Neither of us spoke to the other.

At the crack of dawn, Zolon came to take my place.

Grateful to be able to urinate, I dropped my sword on the bedroom floor, not caring if I awoke Damar and entered the bathroom. Seated on the steel throne, I stripped off my clothes and tossed them into a hamper. I took a quick shower, brushed my teeth, pausing to stare at my reflection in the mirror. My blonde hair looked ridiculous.

"You're hideous," I said.

Entering the bedroom wrapped in a towel, I glared at Damar, his back turned to me, sleeping soundly. He was snoring. I crawled into the bed and tugged on the blankets, leaving him only a corner. I turned away from him. He yawned, stretching his arms wide and rolled over. I kept my eyes shut, pretending to be asleep. I didn't fool him. He pressed his chest against me and threw one arm around me. He had the gumption to cup my breast in his hand. I felt his breath on my neck and I tensed, about to give him an elbow in the ribs.

"What time is it, my love?" he asked.

"Go to work," I snapped. This time I gave him an elbow. His arm withdrew. "I'm not going to apologize and I'm not going to talk to you. And no, even if you begged, I wouldn't marry someone who intends to order me about for the rest of my life."

"You remain angry with me. Why?"

I flipped over and found him staring intently at me. His eyes narrowed as he surely saw the stubborn set of my jaw. He actually looked worried. Annoyed, I presented my back, hugging the pillow, flinching when I felt his hand touch my shoulder.

"Does it not mean anything to you I desire to marry you, Ren?"

"The poor cousin with a shamed father? You don't have the balls to do it."

"Your insult is duly noted," he muttered. "Perhaps I will rise early since my company clearly upsets you. I had thought we might be able to talk about what happened. Your behavior is quite...childish, Ren."

"Then it's obvious I wouldn't make a dutiful wife. You've made it clear I'm not a good

officer. When you find fault with me, it wounds me deeply, Damar. It might be hard for you to be involved with a subordinate; it's doubly hard for me to be in love with my commander. If Cardassians were taught to think instead of just following orders, I doubt the Fifth Order would have turned against the Union. Their complaints would have been heard and we'd be trying to salvage the Fifth in preparation for a future war against the Dominion."

"You are not a Cardassian," he said, forcing me onto my back. "Perhaps is why you cannot follow orders. Perhaps I expect too much from you as an officer and as my chosen mate."

"Must I sleep on the floor? I don't want to talk to you. And stop staring at me. You have the beady eyes of an iguana."

Damar found the comment amusing. A smile pulled at the corner of his lips.

"I did not mean it in the way it sounded. I know in your heart you are Cardassian," he said. "Don't be angry with me. I said things I now regret. Forgive me."

I pulled the blanket over my head and refused to say another word. My hope is he'd shower, put on his armor and leave.

"If you no longer wish to be my wife, you have only to say so. The same applies if you no longer desire to be in the military. I did not realize I was placing such a great burden on you. If you would like to return to Terok Nor with Eben, I will make the appropriate arrangements. Is what you want?"

I lowered the blanket from my face and met his gaze. He looked hurt. It was impossible to remain angry with him. I pressed my head against his shoulder and put my arm around him. He held me tight, clearly waited for a response.

"You're so stupid, Damar," I said tears in my eyes. "I'm in love with you. I didn't stop loving you because we quarreled. Lovers quarrel all the time and then kiss and make up. I want to marry you one day, but you have three months to mourn your wife. You need to mourn her. We both need to be sure this is what we want. I am not in uniform right now, Damar. Try to be nicer."

Damar enfolded me in his arms. "I apologize. No matter what you think, I do love you, and I care a great deal the boy."

"Shut up," I said kissing him.

PART THREE

THE DEATH LIST

HELEN

Chapter Forty

Rising late, I found Dukat absent from bed and Roxell in the living room, tending to the twins. She remained seated on the couch, shaking a rattle above the crib. I made coffee and then sat beside Roxell, needing to breast feed the children. the Kobrak. Roxell handed Gabe to me. I held him, noticing a faint smell and carried him into the kitchen. I changed his diapers and let him suckle, while Roxell brought Madison over. She removed Madison's diapers, placing them into a trash and bathed the little girl in a sink of warm water.

"I love helping you with the children," Roxell said. "I lost my own mother was I was quite young. Finding work in Bajor City, I was among the first rounded up by the Cardassians upon their arrival. I've been on Terok Nor for three years."

"That's a considerably long time to be a slave," I said.

"My situation has vastly improved since you and Yor arrived. Before I was always afraid to set foot outside of Quark's bar. Now the Cardassians treat the Dabo girls with more respect, I can shop at Garak's and sit with my friends on the Promenade without fear."

"You like her, don't you?"

"Of course, mistress. I miss her. I know you do as well."

After the children were bathed, dressed, and fed, we placed them in their large crib in the bedroom. We sat at the kitchen counter. I drank my coffee. Roxell sniffed at the brew, took a sip, and wrinkled her nose. Laughing, I set out a saucer of cream and sugar, showing her how to doctor the coffee to make it taste just right. As we chatted about Garak's shop

and a new arrival of dresses had arrived from Cardassia, loud voices outside the door ended our conversation.

“sounds like Madame Dukat,” Roxell said. She pressed against me, her eyes wide with fear as the door swooshed open and Dukat and Mikelya entered, each tugging on the end of a suitcase.

“I have already told you this room belongs to a guest,” Dukat said. “You are staying in my quarters, Mikelya. I can’t help if I must work through the night.”

“And I said I’ll stay with you or nowhere else.” Mikelya dropped her suitcase into the living room, unaware Roxell and I stood behind the kitchen counter. “I’m sure Central Command would be interested to know your mistress is not really a Bajoran. Oh, I’ve heard the gossip, Dukat. Vardon told me she’s human. Human!”

Dukat stiffened as he noticed Roxell was with me. The Dabo girl crouched, vanishing behind the counter, while I remained standing, refusing to cower.

“Why you can’t follow a simple request, Mikelya? Must I phrase everything I ask of you like an order?” Dukat moved in front of her, cutting Mikelya off from the kitchen, his tall body blocking me from view. “I have asked numerous times you return to Cardassia and ensure our children are safe. While it is always a memorial experience whenever I see you, I would prefer you leave Terok Nor.”

Mikelya pushed past Dukat further into the room.

“I suppose you are only talking about your eldest son and precocious daughter of yours. You’ve always claimed Farka, Tosca, and Minorus are not your sons. That’s why you send them to my parent’s estate in the country. The boys know how you feel about them. They have grown to resent you, Dukat. They are your flesh and blood. As for Shazel, I brought her with me. She wants to see you, as you’ve not made us welcome on Terok Nor, I have left her on the Kobrak.”

“All the more reason to return with her to your parent’s home.”

Dukat’s voice was tight with anger, he wasn’t yelling. Something caught my eye, for standing in the doorway, listening to Dukat and Mikelya argue was a young girl who appeared to be nine or ten year’s old. Her resemblance to Dukat was unmistakable. She

trembled as her parents argued, her face going paler with each passing minute. She glanced at me and I motioned her over. I expected her to run to me, seeing the fear in her eyes; she lifted her head and marched toward me, reminding me a bit of Sawyer.

“Hello,” I said softly.

“I’m Shazel,” the girl said. She walked around the counter and stared at Roxell. Giving the Dabo girl no greeting, she reached for Roxell’s cup of coffee and took a sip.

“What is this? It tastes like sugar and cream.”

“That’s because it is, alone with a little bit of coffee.”

“And what is coffee?”

A ringing slap echoed through the room. I pulled the girl into my arms, able to see Mikelya standing toe to toe with Dukat. She looked smugly satisfied and then noticed me. Dukat turned to face me as his wife advanced toward the counter. Her handprint darkened his cheek.

“I knew you were hiding her from me!” Mikelya’s voice sounded like a screech. “Now I know why you want me to leave. You’re actually cohabitating with this Bajoran whore. At least I never flaunted my bastards in public.”

“I’m glad to hear you admit the three boys are not my own.” Dukat caught her arm, holding her back. “Do you think me so unintelligent I wouldn’t learn about your indiscretions? Mikor was your lover for years. I was the one who cares for them and pays for their education. If you continue disrupting my life with your demands and tantrums, I will disown them, set you aside you, and let you and your bastards fend for themselves!”

The girl pressed against me. Roxell managed to crawl into the backroom where the twins were safe from the argument. Dukat finally noticed I held Shazel in my arms.

“What is the meaning of this? Why did you bring Shazel here?” Dukat asked.

His wife shrugged. “Shazel wanted to see you and wouldn’t take no for an answer. The child is just like you, Dukat,” she said. “Selfish, heartless, and entitled.”

Hastily, I covered Shazel’s ears with my hands so she wouldn’t hear what her mother said. My palms itched to slap the smug expression off the proud woman’s face. I had to clamp my lips together to keep from saying something I knew I’d regret. Dukat was

so furious that, for a moment, I feared for his wife's safety, he managed to keep his anger under control.

"That, madam, is the last insult I will ever suffer from you." Dukat released his wife and crossed the room to his desk. He opened a channel on the comm system. "Glinn Rugar, find Gul Vardon and bring him to my quarters. Now." Without waiting for an acknowledgment he cut the signal. "You will return to Cardassia with Gul Vardon or whomever he assigns to escort you. Once there, you will retrieve your belongings and will vacate my residence. Join your sons at your parent's country estate. If you do so quietly, I will settle a monthly stipend on you and your bastards, which will allow you to live comfortably. Continue to argue and I will divorce you. Is clear, Mikelya?"

The woman opened her mouth and closed it, unsure how to respond. I almost felt sorry for her. Dukat swaggered across the room. He slid around the counter, gave me a cold look I didn't deserve and yanked Shazel from my arms. He lifted the girl into his arms and crooned soft words into her ear. A hesitant smile formed on her face.

"I will do as you ask, Skrain. There will be no divorce," Mikelya said.

Still trying to keep a rein on my temper, I looked directly at Dukat's wife. Shazel was quiet. I could sense she was alert, listening for clues on what would happen to her. My disgust for a mother who used her children as pawns forced me to speak.

"Shazel will be welcome here as long as she wishes to stay," I said. "It doesn't matter to me who her parents are or are not. Every child deserves to have a parent."

"Why is she speaking to me?" Mikelya demanded to know.

The door slid open, cutting off whatever else Dukat or might have said to such a spiteful woman. Gul Vardon appeared in the entrance, looking nervous, before finally spotting me and Dukat. Dukat placed Shazel on the floor. I took hold of her hand, keeping her close to me, while he approached Vardon. His wife took a seat on the couch, maintaining a sour look on her face. She was not the type of female who cried. Any sympathy I felt for her faded.

"Shazel, I'm Helen. Would you like to meet your baby brother and sister?"

The girl looked thoughtful for a moment and then nodded solemnly. I led her into

the main bedroom. Roxell sat on the bed. The play crib was in the corner. The twins crawled toward the bars as Shazel knelt, reaching for them.

"This is Gabriel and Madison," I said.

"I had two younger sisters. They caught ill last year and died." Shazel glanced toward Roxell who handed her a rattle. She reached over the crib and shook it.

The manner in which she spoke of two dead siblings was so matter-of-fact I wondered if she'd been allowed to mourn for them. It couldn't be easy for her to have one brother at the academy and three other brothers sent to the country. Anyone left alone with Mikelya deserved a little sympathy. The girl was tender with the twins, showing no bias or prejudiced toward their less than Cardassian appearance. In the living room I heard Dukat giving Vardon orders, thankful his wife had not entered the bedroom. I assumed Mikelya had seen enough of Dukat's bastards to take no interest in two more.

"Have an officer take a shuttle and see my wife moves into her parent's estate. I will give orders for the servants at my house on Cardassia Prime pack her belongings. These orders will not be countermanded or changed, Gul Vardon. Inform me when you arrive as I will have additional orders for you at time."

"Certainly, sir. Madame Dukat, if you are ready?"

"You haven't heard the last of me, Dukat," his wife said haughtily. "I will do everything in my power to destroy you."

"I advise you to remember what I said. Accept the situation and you may continue to share my name. It is for you to decide the fate of your own family. You've been warned."

It grew quiet in the living room and I returned my attention to the little girl. Roxell stood, clearly eager to leave and left me along with Shazel. The girl gave the rattle to Gabe and sat beside the crib, watching the twins at play.

"They look funny."

Shazel had been examining the twins and made her pronouncement firmly. She sounded so much like Dukat then I had to bite my lip to keep from laughing. Dukat joined us. He sat on the edge of the bed, exhausted, and leaned over to rest his hand on top of Shazel's head.

“They only look funny to you because you’ve never seen babies have a human mother,” Dukat said. “Helen is their mother and she’s human.”

Shazel turned the full force of her scrutiny on me. “Human? Not Bajoran?”

I laughed and touched my ridges. “It’s hard to explain.”

“And there’s no need to,” Dukat said. “From now on, you are staying here with me on Terok Nor, Shazel. Would you like that? Would you like Helen to take care of you?”

“I’ll live here? With you both?” she asked.

“Of course. I think the twins could use an older sister to teach them how to behave, don’t you? first,” I said, “while your father is getting your bed ready in the guest room, why don’t we get you cleaned up. The twins already had their bath, though I suppose you’re too large to fit in the kitchen sink.”

“She’s funny, Father.”

“Yes,” he said. “You could say that, my dear.”

Shazel smiled shyly and took my hand, letting me lead her into the bathroom. I was glad Dukat was rich enough he’d installed a tub, in addition to the regular shower, figuring a warm bath would help relax the girl. While I ran the water, she stripped off her clothes, then stood there hopping from one foot to another impatiently.

“You enjoy baths?” I asked, amused.

Shazel grinned and nodded when I turned off the water. She tried to push past me to climb in, nearly knocking me onto my backside.

“Easy now. You don’t want to slip and hurt yourself, do you?”

Laughing, the girl slid around me and climbed into the tub. I caught my breath seeing a pattern of bruises covering her from neck to her knees. Someone had beaten her. Judging by the variation of the discoloration of the bruises, it hadn’t been the first time. I hated her mother more than I thought possible. Plastering a smile on my face, I settled Shazel in the water and handed her a sponge and a bar of scent soap, making sure she was safe before I stood.

“I’ll be right back, honey. Ok? I want to make sure your father is making your bed.”

“You can kiss Father if you want, too. All the girls kiss him.”

The girl giggled. I thought it an odd comment and one not worth replying to. It was obvious she'd seen more of Dukat's mistresses in the past. Once the bathroom door shut behind me, I leaned against the wall, breathing deeply. I was so angry I was literally shaking. It took all I had to not go charging after Mikelya and beat her until she bled.

"What's wrong?" Dukat asked.

I couldn't speak, just jerk my chin at the bathroom door, indicating Dukat should go in, and see for himself. He left the door open as he entered. His voice was low and muffled when he spoke to Shazel. I couldn't make out any words, he didn't sound angry or upset. When he finally emerged from the bathroom, the first thing I did was slap him on the other cheek. Eyes blazing, Dukat grabbed my wrist, grinding the small bones together until I gritted my teeth.

"I am tired of being struck today by the women in my life." Dukat bit each word off in a temper. He looked at me almost in disgust. "Would you care to explain why you felt it necessary to do so? I assure you, Helen. I was not the one who gave my daughter those bruises. Her mother can be quite strict."

"And I thought you said Cardassians loved children. That woman is never to come around child again, do you hear me? If I could report her to the authorities, I would. She's a horrible mother. I would never hurt a child."

Dukat rubbed his cheek, eyeing me. "It's nice to know you can actually care about my own child." He walked into the kitchen and poured a glass of kanar. "I can assure you we do love our children. Regrettably, my wife takes her anger out on the child. I suppose it is my fault. I should have sent for Shazel sooner. The three boys I mentioned will be well cared for by my wife's parents. They are far safer there than with their mother."

"you sent her to them?"

"They are her children."

My own anger drained away, leaving me feeling weak and sick to my stomach. a mother would abuse her own child simply to get even. Hesitantly, I approached Dukat from behind, wrapping my arms around him.

"I'm sorry. I shouldn't have hit you. I just saw red for a moment."

"My wife is not a kind woman," Dukat said. "We have both endured a great deal for each other over the last twenty years. Perhaps I should have left her long ago. I knew it was older when our youngest children died last year while I was away. She never forgave me."

"Well, I can't forgive her for what she's done to poor, little girl."

Dukat turned around, setting his empty glass aside and pulled me into his arms. It couldn't help wondering what his own childhood had been like, for he'd never told me. Now wasn't the time to ask, abuse seemed prevalent behind the doors in Cardassian homes.

"You feel strongly about this. Why do you care about Shazel?"

"Because she's a child. As long as I'm here, no one will touch any of our children like again. If they do, I'll give them more than a few bruises."

Smiling, Dukat kissed me. "I'm sure you will, my dear."

* * *

SAWYER

The following day, I stood on guard outside the meeting hall, relieved of all other duties. A new staff had arrived to serve Damar; coming from several elite battalions brought to the planet who sat in on the meeting. The fort now housed an army ten thousand strong. I'd heard from Dunatar Ravon, Torgan and Hadran had found no deserters and been ordered to return.

Behind the door, Damar conducted a meeting with the Bajoran leaders. They were influential men who had grown rich collaborating with the Cardassians against their own kind. Damar had the task of creating the new civilian Bajoran government included magistrates and a new Kai to lead the Vedek Assembly. I didn't know who the three Bajoran leaders were, I'd seen them enter the conference room, wearing expensive clothes and elaborate earrings.

"How are you this morning?" Dunatar inquired. He handed me a thermos filled with red leaf tea. "I heard a prylar is here. His meteoric rise from a favored slave of a Fourth Order legate, whose life he'd saved, earned him the title of the Voice of the People."

“Thanks for the tea. Any word from Ravon or the others?”

“They’ll arrive this evening.”

“And Renalt and Durgan? How are they this morning?”

“Their attitude changed after the executions of Kenmar’s men,” Dunatar said. “I’m told they’ve requested to speak with Gul Damar once more. They are eager to join the Second Order.” He flashed me a smile and left. I set aside the tea and stood at attention.

A Bajoran protested about the formation of a civilian government without formal elections. The same firm voice demanded aid for more refugees. Someone else demanded the formation of a Bajoran militia to assist capturing the Fifth Order. After the meeting, I was relieved of my duties. Damar and his officers escorted the Bajorans to the turbolift. Curious about the Bajoran priest, I decided to leave my post since there was no need to guard an empty conference room and took the stairs. Entering the lobby, I stood back as Damar led the large group outside and then followed.

Ten Bajoran soldiers in matching maroon uniforms stood in a group in the shade of the building. Each wore embroidered patches reflecting their ranks. The priest stood with Damar and his officers engrossed in conversation. Dorric turned and smoothed his hair from his face as he approached me.

“The pryler is named Evanya,” Dorric said. “The Bajoran major is Kira Nerys. We had to confiscate their weapons for safety measures. They’ve requested they be allowed to stay at the fort. Gul Damar has agreed, but I don’t trust these people, Yor. Shouldn’t you still be at your post?”

“Don’t worry about me, Glinn Dorric. You’d best return to Gul Damar. We wouldn’t want you to get into any trouble,” I replied. He gave a nod and rejoined the officers.

The three slimy politicians climbed into a vehicle and left. I remained in the entrance, watching the Bajoran soldiers. The Bajoran People’s Army were once Resistance fighters. Ravon didn’t trust them. If he didn’t, I doubt any Cardassian, including Damar, wanting them at the fort. Ducking my head low, I walked toward the Bajorans and paused to kneel, fiddling with the buckle of my boot, trying to overhear what they said.

“Have they reached a decision, Evanya?”

Major Kira's voice was like no other. I recognized her voice immediately. I couldn't stop staring at her. She'd been on the TV show, all seemed like a dream, as if I'd never come from Earth, I hadn't forgotten Kira Nerys. She was right in front of me, a distance of ten yards, and turned to glare at me. In my Cardassian armor, with a purple beret on my blonde head, I had to look strange to the Bajorans; was the whole point.

"What are you doing here?" As bold and nasty as ever, Kira sauntered toward me. She jabbed me in the chest with her index finger. I glanced at her finger and slowly lifted up my eyes to meet her own. "I've never seen a blonde Cardi before."

"Got a smoke?" I asked.

Kira eyeballed me. "I'm told you lead the Alpha Brigade."

"And you want me to explain?" I watched her nod. "I'm Glinn Yor and you are Major Kira. I am right? is your name and rank, isn't it?"

"Yes," she said.

"I dyed my hair blonde to annoy my commander. And you, it seems."

"Well, you must be in tight with the commander or you wouldn't get away with it," Kira said. She glanced at her cohorts who were staring at us. "Hey, we got us a talker!"

Her friends came toward me in a rush, one of them who was smoking what appeared to be a cigar, so giving them all a glare I knew to be effective, I reached out and snatched it away.

"Just what I wanted," I said.

"Do you know what is?" asked Kira.

"No idea, I'm off duty," I said, glancing at my wristband and the digital numbers in the face of the clock. I met the smoker's eyes as I took a puff on his cigar. It might not be exactly tobacco, but I liked it and didn't give it back. Damar and his staff walked on with the priest, giving him a tour of the fort. I caught Ravon staring at me, ignored the officers, puffing on the cigar like a regular pro.

"What do you want?" Major Kira asked.

"Conversation," I replied. "Do you know who Suna is? He's an old man I met from the nearby town of Lillihaven. That's the town Gul Kenmar attacked was repelled and

defeated by Gul Dukat. I was the one who captured Gul Kenmar. Suna is one of the town elders. He was being led out by his great-grandson, Isia, and I sent him to Fort Varnok. Suna has overseen a network of refugee camps across this planet with our help. Ask him who I am."

"I know Suna," Kira said. "He is a well-respected man. Evanya spoke to him prior to coming here. We want to believe the Cardassians want peace. What's the catch? Call me curious, I'd really like to know."

"I'm the cousin of Prefect Dukat. Kenmar supposedly murdered his commander Gul Parnal. I have adopted his eight-year-old son. I'm told Parnal's soldiers are in a canyon not far from here. I'd like to find them."

"Really?" Kira put her hands on her hips. "Why are you telling me this? So, you adopted Parnal's son. Is this supposed to impress me? Kindness among the Cardassians isn't something they are known for. Prefect Dukat is an evil man and he's killed millions."

"If millions of Bajorans died in ore mines or during the resistance, as you claim, Dukat prevented far more deaths by bringing both sides together. I think that's proof Cardassians are not here to destroy Bajor. Some of us want to be a friend to Bajor."

"You?"

"That's right," I said dropping the cigar. I stubbed it out. "Not all of us are here to put you in chains. Some of us want to be a colony. This is a lovely place and there's no reason we can't all live here. From the way I see things, you can either be part of the solution or remain part of the problem."

"Prefect Dukat's cousin is telling me I need to change my attitude?" Kira laughed, as cynical as I remembered her to be portrayed on the show. "What I don't believe is you. Dukat has to be desperate to rely on the advice from an albino. I bet you're popular with all the soldiers. I heard about Dukat's brothel on Terok Nor. Some say you helped clear out the Bajoran pleasure slaves."

"That's right. I've seen what I needed to. Excuse me. I need to go check on my son."

Her eyes lit up like fireworks. "So it is true," she said. "You really did adopt the son of the late Gul Parnal of Outpost 9. man butchered hundreds of Bajoran women and

children. He said he could no longer afford to feed them," she said. "The bastard spent the money provided by your superior on a fancy villa for himself and his brat. Most of the guls stationed here did the same. As for Gul Tychek, he had it nice at Fort Varnok. Outpost 9 was a luxury palace. The den of the so-called pirates in the Fifth Order, and Parnal was a lord among thieves."

"Tychek killed Parnal and then ordered Kenmar's men to kill his family. I found the boy in the forest where he'd been living for months like a savage."

"Because he is a savage," Kira said. "See, I talked to Suna. He painted a different picture of Gul Parnal and his staff. I hear you have two of them locked in a cell. Is your idea, Yor? Take it from me. Execute them."

"Your opinion is noted. Sorry, I don't agree with it."

Kira stepped back, shocked and I walked on. She was as annoying as a gnat and she caught me by taking two steps to meet my one giant step. I entered the main building and strode through the lobby like I was the proudest soldier in the Cardassian army. I felt her reaching out to touch my laser pistol and was all it took to slam her against the wall, one arm across her throat and one hand pressed against her diaphragm. The wind went out of her lungs and she gasped for air. I cut off what little air remained in her pipes. She sank like a rag doll. I let her hit the floor.

"Major Kira, you don't have to be my enemy. There is enough among your own people. Ever hear of Niyal Gora? I was his prisoner. He tortured me. I don't hold grudges. When I could have killed the Bajoran rebels, your friends, I didn't. I let them go."

"You are too humane to be a Cardassian, Yor."

I checked my weapons and comm, finding nothing missing, while she rose to her feet. My stomach growled. I wanted to a bath, dinner, and sleep.

"Don't ever accuse me of being less than a Cardassian again."

"You're a spy. Come on. Admit it."

I sighed. "I've heard this before. I am not a spy."

"Okay," she said. "You do know you can't trust Renalt or Durgan? Both served under Gul Parnal. Maybe you didn't know Gul Parnal called the shots around here. No

matter what Renalt and Durgan tell you, they were Parnal's henchmen. There was another, a female glinn, who followed Parnal's every order. She was the worst of the bunch."

"She's dead."

"Glinn Yennis is dead? You're sure about that?"

"I meant Glinn Venna," I said. I wondered who this Yennis was and hoped Kira would tell me more. "Gil Hadran thoroughly questioned both, as did a field agent, there was no mention of Glinn Yennis."

"No? Well, you better talk to your sources. I'm impressed, truly I am, but you don't have any idea what you're up against out here. Look. I want to help you. That's why we are here. To help you find and kill the rest of Parnal's cronies. You haven't even found the worst of the bunch, we can show you where they are hiding."

"That's what Renalt said."

"Yeah, I'm Bajoran, not a lizard. Did he give you a location of where you can find the deserters? And you believed him?"

"Your offer tempts me," I said. "I'll see if I can arrange to have you be my guide. Just you. I don't trust your friends." I saw a bruise at Kira's throat. I'd gotten her good. I didn't apologize.

"Dukat's first cousin twice removed, huh?"

"I happen to be a patriot. Your parleying skills suck, Nerys. You have to know what to ask for, in the right way, if you ever hope to be heard. It's not for Cardassia to hand out freedom on a silver platter. You have to earn it. And don't smart off."

"Wait," she said. She stepped toward me. "I know who you are. I mean, I know you were one of Torell's assassins." Her eyes flickered as they met my own. "Niyal Gora was a friend of mine. He told me in a message about you and Dukat's mistress. I know you're both human. You really should dye your hair black."

"I'll do it today. You won't tell anyone what I really am?" "No, I won't tell anyone. You can't trust the boy."

"Why not?" I asked.

"Niyal told me there were a dozen people implanted with Romulan devices to be

activated by the Circle. One of them happens to be Parnal's son. They wanted to use the boy to kill his father, he ran into the forest instead. His father was looking for him when he was killed. If you don't believe me, ask Renalt. He knows what happened. You just have to get him to talk."

Officers were coming down the hall and the last thing I knew Damar wanted was for me to be seen in a long conversation with a Bajoran rebel who considered herself a friend of Niyal Gora. Her story had me concerned. I grabbed her arm to keep her from walking away this time.

"You are telling me the truth? The boy has an implant?"

"Yes. You know how to identify them. Look for it. And when you find it," Kira said. She reached into her pocket, removing a medical device. "Use this to remove and destroy it."

"We must proceed with caution. Say nothing of the content of our discussion, for I will surely deny it all and accuse you of being a rebel. We do not keep prisoners for long."

"Well said. I give you my word as a free Bajoran."

"And I give you my word as a daughter of Cardassia. I hope you have told me the truth and in the morning we will hunt for traitors, together."

"I do as well, Yor."

Filled with a great sense of dread, I left Kira and hurried to my quarters. I went straight to Eben's room and found him sleeping in his bed. His book was closed beside him. Enough light entered the room to allow me to see the boy in the bed, his back turned to me. He wore no shirt. His black hair was pushed away from his neck. He'd been rubbing the skin around the implant so much it had scabbed over. I touched the area. My heart leapt to my chest at a tiny throb beneath my fingertips. There, beneath the crust, was the implant. Tears blurred my vision. I paused to raise my hand to my face, trying hard not to lose control and cry. It broke my heart to see with my own eyes the extent of the abuse the boy had suffered. Our enemies would go to any length to defeat Gul Dukat.

"Mommy?"

Eben woke and turned to face me. I stroke the hair from his pensive brow.

“What is wrong, Mommy?”

I placed the device on the nearby dresser to gather Eben in my arms. “Nothing is wrong, darling. It’s been a long day and I’m tired. I just wanted to make sure you were safe.” I said bending to kiss his head.

“I was dreaming about the caves where fire comes from. My daddy was there. So was my mommy. They are waiting for me to join them. Am I going to die?”

“No. It was a dream, Eben.”

Leaving the room with the small device in my hand, I felt guilty for not having removed the implant. I could always do so later. There was time to research the nearby caves and try to find one where fire came from. It could have been nothing more than a campfire, and there were hundreds of caves in a twenty-mile radius where Dukat, Damar, and I had failed to find the Bajoran rebels when we first came to Bajor. The soldiers at Fort Varnok had never found the right caves, somewhere nearby, hiding in one of them was the last of Gul Parnal’s renegades, and I wanted to find them. I placed the device in a drawer under my bed.

Removing my armor, I entered the bathroom and with reluctance dyed my hair black. I’d no sooner stepped into the shower when I heard Garak’s voice.

“Yor, are you there? I need to talk to you. Do hurry.”

Opening the door, I grabbed a towel to wrap around my body, entering a mist caused by the hot water. Garak wasn’t in the bathroom. I heard a whistle from the mirror. In the center of the fogged mirror was a monitor. Garak stared right at me. I gawked at him.

“Surprise,” he said. “I had the monitor installed for emergencies. I believe you are in the middle of one. Am I right?”

Pushing back the wet hair from my eyes, I gazed at the monitor. “Eben has an implant,” I said. “I haven’t had a chance to tell Damar, Major Kira, a Bajoran, and Helen know about it. Major Kira provided me with a device can remove it without harming the boy. She obtained it from Niyal Gora. I haven’t removed it yet. Eben woke from a dream. He says there is a place nearby where his parents are waiting. He mentioned a cave of fire.”

I frowned. "I thought his parents were dead."

"I said it was a dream, he said he knows where this cave is. Do I remove the implant before or after he shows me where it is? Kira said Torell wanted Eben to murder his own father, he ran away. Gul Parnal was in the Circle. I don't know why Torell wanted to kill him. Is this true, Garak? What happened at Outpost 9?"

"I'm getting to that," he said a bit testily. "There is a spy at Fort Varnok who has been sending out coded messages to a ship operating in the area near you. My contact believes it is one of Gul Mukot's allies, a Romulan ship, it's cloaked, and he has many more like them. If you can find the spy, then you can get their transmitter for me. I'm coming straight there, it will take me a day to arrive."

"Do I go ahead and remove Eben's implant? I don't want to hurt him. Tell me what I want to hear, Garak, or I'll end this transmission."

"Hold on," Garak said.

The moisture in the room formed on the monitor, requiring me to use my towel to wipe it clear. Garak wasn't alone. Dukat stood beside him, smiling wide. I pulled the towel around my body, trying to act cool.

"Garak has wasted enough time jabbering and I want to keep this transmission brief. We may be monitored." Dukat paused and gave me an appreciative look. "I must admit I like what I see. My compliments to Damar."

"What do you want me to do?" I asked.

"Find the spy and eliminate him."

"And if the spy is Eben?"

"Remove the implant at once, Yor. It's not the boy. Garak will give you the coordinates of the spy. You have time to do both. You'll find everything you need right at your fingertips."

Dukat paused as a drawer beneath the mirror-monitor opened. Within was a sleek pistol, small explosives in the shape of balls I assumed I threw at the target, a dagger released a poison, and a wristband with a monitoring device. I put on the wristband and activated it.

"Garak was right. You do make the perfect assassin. Your target may or may not be working alone, so proceed with the utmost caution. This is to remain our secret, Yor. I do not want Damar or anyone else to be told. There can be no mistakes."

"Yes, sir."

My eyes must have lit in excitement for when Dukat spoke again, his voice was serious and stern. "Cousin, please be careful. Helen would never forgive me for depriving our twins of an aunt," he said. "I approve of your hair color alteration. And the peep show."

"I thought we were being formal, cousin."

"You're naked. I can only be so formal," Dukat replied.

Garak moved in front of Dukat. "Get ready," he said. "I'm sending you the coordinates now. You must move fast. Your target could be monitoring this call and are aware you have locked onto them."

"What if something goes wrong?" I asked.

His expression turned almost menacing. "This mission is classified and this transmission was never sent. Don't fail, Yor."

The monitor went blank and disappeared, replaced by a normal mirror I'd never stand naked in front of again. The drawer slid back and I was unable to see even an outline. I glanced at the wristband on my right wrist, able to see a red dot moving on the green screen, and within the same building. I took my weapons and darted into the bedroom, dressed in my black uniform and buckled on my gun belt.

Returning to Eben's room to remove the implant, I was delayed by a chirp at the door. I answered it to find Hadran in the hallway looking flushed and more than a little annoyed.

"Glad to see you back in one piece," I said.

"Glinn Damar has asked you return to your post. He's meeting with his staff. They are meeting in the library on this level. Five doors down on your left." Hadran stepped back and then paused. "The Alpha Brigade sends their regards. Ravon is now in command."

Hadran saluted me and walked off. I shut the door and hurried back into Eben's room.

The boy was lying in bed, sleeping, I couldn't hear him breathing. I sat on the bed and reached out to touch his shoulder. My hand went through his body.

"Damn it! It's a hologram. stupid boy."

I pulled the bed covers back and found the wristband. He'd left his room the moment I went into the shower. Why? I needed to find the boy as well as the spy. I couldn't stand guard at the same time, not unless I used the hologram. Grabbing my cloak, I placed it over my arm and turned on the hologram. My duplicate appeared beside me. I removed it from my wrist and hid it outside the library door. The hologram stood at attention. Hopefully, I thought as I walked away, I'd find the spy and Eben before anyone knew I was missing.

HELEN

Chapter Forty-One

“Dukat, there’s an incoming message for you,” I groaned. “Can’t you tell them to leave us alone? You keep getting calls in the middle of the night. I’m going to start making you sleep in the other room.”

“Oh, well. No rest for the wicked.”

Wearily I rolled over and poked Dukat in the ribs. It seemed like it had taken hours to settle down Shazel. As soon as she fell asleep, the twins woke up hungry, crying for another meal. I looked at the clock. Only ten minutes had passed since Dukat climbed into bed with me. Garak had been in the outer room most of the evening talking with Dukat and he’d only left thirty minutes earlier. It was a busy night and all I wanted was to sleep in my lover’s arms. He put on a robe to sit at his desk. I turned over and pulled the covers over my head, intent on trying to get back to sleep.

“Computer, play incoming message.”

The moment Torell’s voice filled the room, I sat upright, all thoughts of sleep forgotten. *“Ah Dukat. I see your wife was speaking the truth when she said you had replaced her. I’m sorry I didn’t believe Mikelya, you know how it is. We all learn from our mistakes.”* Torell turned his head to focus on me. *“I also understand you have given birth. Tell me. How are my children? I have a boy and girl, I’m told.”*

“You’re sources are wrong, as usual,” Dukat said angrily. “You mentioned my wife. What does Mikelya have to do with this call?”

Torell giggled and I realized we were dealing with a man gone insane. *“She has everything to do with it. It’s such a shame she must die. She did help you convince the Union not to attack the Federation. She shouldn’t have betrayed me,”* he said.

The agent gestured to someone off-screen and his wife stumbled into view. It was

plain Mikelya had been tortured. Her skin was marred with bruises and cuts. Most of the injuries bled heavily. She caught herself before she fell against Torell. With her innate self-possession, she pulled herself upright and turned toward the view screen.

“Dukat, if this is your idea of punishment, it’s gone far enough. I’ve told this man all I know about the status of Terok Nor and everything else he asked about,” she hissed. AI told Torell I had been replaced in your favors by woman. Now will you please tell him to release me so I may return home?”

Torell crept up behind her and slid his arm across her chest. *“I’m sorry, my dear, in truth your husband has no power to have you released. I, on the other hand....”*

A glint of silver was our only warning as a knife slashed across the woman’s throat, laying it open. She clutched at her throat, her eyes wide with shock, before tumbling to the floor in a spray of blood. Torell casually cleaned the knife on his pants before grinning at us.

“One down. Who knows how many more to go? Perhaps Yor will be next and then the whore in your bed.”

Dukat stood, trembling in rage. *“Torell! I will have you hunted down and flayed alive for this,”* he shouted, shaking his fist. *“I demand to know why you murdered my wife in cold blood. Surely you know I’ll provide this to the Obsidian Order. There will be no place you can hide.”*

“Now, now, Dukat. All good things come to those who wait. Let us just say this is the first in a long series of repayments by Gul Mukot. You see, you destroyed his chances for ruling Cardassia so he’s decided to destroy you.” Torell grinned slyly. *“He’s rather personal way. Right now, in fact, he’s raising a fleet to head into Federation space. The transponders have all been changed to read as Second Order ships. When he attacks, everyone will believe it was you. You will be vilified and hunted down with no safe place to hide. And in the meantime, I’ll be behind you, killing everyone you hold dear, including the twins.”*

The gore rose in my throat. I swallowed rapidly as I joined Dukat at the desk, crouched behind him, letting alone my head appear on the screen.

“I wouldn’t try it if I were you,” I said. *“You’ve had your eye repaired once. Care to be blinded a second time?”*

Torell's hand flew to his face. *"I'd actually forgotten about that. Yes, I do believe you owe me something, Helen,"* he said. *"Your death will come just before Dukat's. I want him to be watching while I sample your body before I kill you. One small thing. Something I'm quite sure Central Command will be interested to learn when they receive my transmission to them. Did you know it was your darling consort who killed Mikor? Just a thought to help you sleep at night."*

The screen went dark.

Dukat contacted Vardon and Garak asking them to report to our quarters immediately. He then contacted Damar. The Gul was in a meeting and Dukat had to leave a message with an officer.

"What about Sawyer? You must tell her what happened," I said. I wanted to comfort Dukat. The murder of his wife was shocking, brutal, and I needed to be comforted as well.

"Yor is on a mission. I need to dress. There is much to do, Helen. Go back to bed. You need not join the meeting."

While Dukat dressed in his uniform, I lay curled in bed beneath the blankets, trembling from the horror I'd witness. All this time I'd wished Mikelya Dukat would die, I hadn't really meant it, not when faced with the reality. It had happened. Dukat sat on the edge of the bed. I crept behind him and slid my arms around him.

"We should have killed Torell when he was on the station," Dukat said. "Yor wanted to kill him, I kept her from doing so. I didn't think murder was appropriate. People think I enjoy killing, it isn't true. Nor do I enjoy watching it done to someone I cared for."

"I'm so sorry. I feel like it's my fault. I was rescued, she was left behind."

"How can her death be your fault, Helen? Did you tell Torell the name of the ship my wife was on? Did you tell him the route she was taking to Cardassia? I warned her to leave months ago. I told her this was not a safe place for her. She always had to argue. No, this wasn't your fault," Dukat said. "You take on too much responsibility for the actions of others. Torell killed her. Torell will pay for what he's done."

The door chimed.

Dukat released me and stood. As soon as he left the room, I dressed and pulled my hair into a ponytail. I entered the front room as Vardon and Garak arrived. Whatever Dukat

and Vardon had said in private about me was unknown. They seemed to be on friendlier terms, which meant Vardon had redeemed himself in Dukat's eyes. Without asking, I went to the replicator and keyed in an order of hot tea for four. I carried the cups on a tray and placed it on a small conference table as they men took their seats. Garak smiled rather sadly when I met his gaze. I quietly went to a chair in the corner where I could easily hear everything was said and yet remain out of sight. Dukat wasted no time and informed both men what had happened.

"Any idea on where Torell is hiding? Or where Gul Mukot can be found?" Dukat asked in a tone offered no sympathy.

Garak looked thoughtful and sipped his tea. "There's a chance a few colleagues of mine might be able to pinpoint the location of Torell," he said. "I never worked with him, so I don't know his usual behavior patterns. Mukot, on the other hand, is in the Ankola system."

"That's nearly on the other side of Cardassian territory. Why there?" Vardon asked.

"Mukot has been known to keep a small substantial quantity of weapons hidden in system," Dukat mused. "You think he's gone to retrieve them?"

"I would, if I was him." Garak leaned forward, his gaze intense. "Mukot is a perfectionist. He'll leave nothing to chance. More than likely, he didn't know of Torell's plans to capture and kill your wife. He may not even know what's happened. Once he learned what has happened, Mukot will scurry to reinforce his ships before the Cardassian fleets finds him."

"You sound like you've had occasion to keep watch over his movements," Vardon said setting aside his cup.

"The Order has been keeping an eye on Mukot for quite a while now. We never trust anyone who experiences such a meteoric rise to power as he has. Much as the same way we've kept an eye on you, Vardon. You're estate on Bajor is one of the finest. You are considered quite a wealthy man. Wealth and power always attract the Order's attention."

"Vardon, take the Kobrak and lead your ships into the Ankola system. Be careful. The Romulans consider it their star system," Dukat said. "Find Mukot and destroy him. In the meantime, Garak you will contact your contacts with the Obsidian Order and located Agent

Torell. Somewhere knows where he is and I suspect person is your father.”

“Of course,” Garak said. “And what about Yor? Should we not contact her and apprise her of the situation?”

“My cousin has enough to do,” Dukat said. “You have your orders. See to it.”

The two men left the room.

“Well, my dear. It is time for me to upgrade the defense of the station in case Mukot is foolish enough to attack Terok Nor,” Dukat said. “I’m sorry, I must leave you.”

“Don’t stay up all night. You need your rest.”

“I’ll rest when the Circle is destroyed and not before.”

Grabbing his pistol off the kitchen counter, he kissed my forehead and left. I poured a glass of Bajoran spring wine, my thoughts drifting to Sawyer and her mystery mission. It surely had something to do with Agent Torell. I assumed Dukat would tell me later. Finishing the wine, I returned to bed and heard the twins fussing. No, there was no rest for the wicked, I thought.

* * *

SAWYER

Using the tracking devise, I went to the fourth floor, peering into the hallway. The fourth floor was used by high-ranking officers, including Damar’s new staff. The red dot was stationary. It came from a room further down the hallway. No guards were posted. I had only the surveillance cameras to worry about. Keeping close to the wall to avoid the angle of the cameras, I paused outside a door where the signal came from and used an override code to open the door. I drew my pistol to enter a dimly lit living room. The signal came from the bedroom.

I moved silently across the room, keeping my reflection being cast in a large mirror on the wall by crawling past a couch toward the bedroom. There was a light on. Still on the floor, I looked around the corner and spotted a man sleeping in his bed. I checked the signal, it was the spy, and I aimed the pistol. As I pulled the trigger, the figure moved and fell onto the floor, the blast killing the pillow. Running around the bed, I aimed at the prone figure. He

turned and I stared at the Evonya, the Bajoran priest. He opened his mouth to speak. As I started to pull the trigger, someone tackled me and I slammed into a nearby dresser. I lost the pistol as I was punched in the head, managed to toss off my assailant who was lighter than me and a female by the cry I heard her make when she hit the floor.

“You’ll regret that, Cardi,” Major Kira snarled.

I drew my second pistol, aware the first lay between us, and as she made her move to grab it, I smell fire and noticed the bed was on fire. Kira was on me in an instant, knocking my left arm down and kneeling me in the groin. I stumbled back, gave her an odd look for wasn’t a key spot to hit on a female, and backhanded her with my pistol. As she slammed into the wall and started to crawl toward the living room, I shot at her, wreaking havoc in the room and setting off an alarm. I didn’t miss, not entirely, for the last shot hit the wall above her head and she stopped moving, raising her hands before her.

“You fool! Didn’t I warn you about being set up?” Kira said. She rushed past me and knelt beside the priest. She helped him to his feet as sprinklers came on, spraying us with water. The priest wasn’t inured notably shaken as he stood and waved Kira aside.

“I thought you were smart enough to know a friend when you saw one,” she said. “Evonya isn’t the spy.”

I was at the control panels, turning off the alarm and then retrieved my second pistol, holding both on the pair as they entered the living room. I turned off the water, hoping smoke couldn’t be smelled outside the door.

“Can he move?” I asked. I checked my scanning device, the homing beacon planted on the Bajoran priest was active, he was my target, and I believed Kira. “You know someone planted a remote on you? I tracked you here to kill a Fifth Order spy. Now I’m going to save your ass and hope you can lead me to the real traitor.”

“I think can be arranged,” Evonya said. He pushed Kira off and went to change into pants, boots and attach a holster with grenades and a pistol to his hips. The man joined us at the door and wondered if he was a priest. He looked like a rebel to me. “we must first pick up your two prisoners. Renalt and Durgan. They know the way to the Fifth Order’s camp. It is there you will find the agent who set me up. The one who murdered Niyal Gora.”

“Torell? He’s been in this fort?” I put away my pistols, hoping I was right to trust them. “He’s OO. They’re cunning, Yor,” Kira said.

She waited while I opened the door and stepped out into the hallway. Several officers were standing in the hallway, muttering about pistol fire and security being called, and not knowing what to do. I motioned for Kira to join me in the hallway. She left Evonya inside, closing the door and joined me.

“You think this is wise?” she asked.

“Your pistol is in view. Turn a bit,” I said. I glanced at the officers and met their curious gazes. I heard the rustle of clothing and assumed Kira had sense enough to hide her weapon, for the three men were walking over to us. I put my hand on Kira’s shoulder, leaning toward her. “I’ll take care of everything. Go back inside. Hurry.”

I glanced toward the room as she ducked inside, giving me a second to compose myself and turn toward the officers. Three Neanderthal types who were fresh off a warship and apparently didn’t know who I was smiled.

“Those Bajorans think Fort Varnok comes with room service. Red leaf tea. That’s what they want,” I said. “Replicator is out. They usually are.”

“I thought I heard pistol shots,” a glinn said. He was about thirty years of age and arrogant.

“Well, I didn’t. You want to fetch and serve for the priest and his bitch, then you do it,” I grumbled. “I’m tired and I want to go to bed. a problem with any of you?”

A tall Cardassian, a gil like myself, with one gray eye was troubling to look at, stepped toward me. He reached out and touched my arm. I let him pull me up against him, smelling his foul breath, his friends snickering behind us, and when he tried to kiss me, I butted my head right into his nose. I heard the crack, pushed him back as hard as I could and lifted up my clenched fists. When the other two only laughed harder and made a move toward me, I drew my pistol and stunned them all. Three bodies hit the floor.

Kira opened the door. “Is that your signal, Yor?”

I nodded. “Help me drag them inside.”

The major grabbed a leg and pulled a man in. I hauled another inside. I was counting

on Kira being the person I knew from the TV show and meant she was a good guy. I hoped I was right. Together, we dragged the third one in, then I sealed the door with a password I assumed the three cave men wouldn't figure out. I went with the two Bajorans to the stairwell and ran to the lower level, the maintenance level was built beneath the entire fort. We scurried along like rats, passing power conduits and wiring had been repaired, the floor hadn't been cleared of debris left behind by the attack several weeks earlier. It was like running through an obstacle course to reach Building 3 where the prisoners were kept.

A large number on the side of the tunnel and steel stairs led upwards to where we needed to be. I went first, removing the panel and pushed it out of the way so I could crawl up and into an office. Leaving Kira to help Evonya, I scouted the area, hustling down the hallway to turn around a corner, giving me a direct view of the prison cells. I recognized the four guards on duty, checked to make sure my pistol was on stun and then I shot all four before they had time to raise an alarm. This was treason and I knew if I was caught I'd be executed, and there wasn't anything Damar or anyone else could do to prevent it. I wanted Agent Torell. The two Fifth Order prisoners stood as I approached.

"Just shut up," I said storming into the room. "You'll take me to Torell and you'll do it now or I'll kill you."

"Whatever you say, Yor," Renalt replied. He lifted an eyebrow at me. His face was covered with bruises.

Durgan looked worn and beaten as well, his leg had been tended to, and he could walk. I knew Hadran had not gone easy on them, he wanted them to talk, and they hadn't. I hoped freedom would change that. My mission was botched. I had only my gut instincts and human intelligence to rely upon, and I wondered just how far I'd go in present company.

"Don't try anything," Major Kira said. She backed me up quite unexpectedly, for she had her pistol out and aimed it at Gul Parnal's trusted men. I shot off the lock and opened the door. We didn't give them weapons. "You're taking us to your commanding officer. We have a message to deliver, in person, if you get my drift?"

"Torell better be there," I said.

I relied on Kira to guard the two officers. Evonya ran at my side as we hurried through

the offices in Building 3, passing empty officers, dimly lit and eerily quiet. No one said a word as I opened the back door and stepped right out into the night. On the battlements and at every tower in view along the wall stood guards. The noise made by the tanks and troops preparing for a night raid helped provide much needed to cover to leave the fort. We ran toward the wall, darting from the spotlights and gathered together as I revealed a secret panel. It opened a secret door used only in case of an emergency opened, it required twelve numbers, and I could only remember eight.

“What is the delay?” Kira asked.

“I’ll have to guess the last four numbers,” I said.

Evonya and the two Cardassians moved in closer. I felt pressed in by them. For some reason I thought of my old phone number back on Earth, 2149583454. I punched it in and laughed when the door slid open. Kira went first, then the other three and I brought up the rear. The door closed behind me. No alarm blared. No guards saw us. We ran into the forest and Renalt took the lead. And all I could think about was Eben was out there, somewhere, and I’d had my chance to save him and I hadn’t removed the implant. What else could I do go find him? Moving high up to the ridge, Renalt used the same path the boy had shown me. I remained in the rear, able to kill all four if they tried to get away.

“Are they taking me to Agent Torell?” I asked Evonya.

“You don’t know?” he countered.

“Just answer the question.”

“Glinn Yennis is their leader. I cannot say if Agent Torell will be there,” he said.

“Yennis could have easily entered Fort Varnok and placed the device on me. You left three unconscious officers in my room. It will not look good for them. You may very well have caused their deaths. Cardassia does not tolerate mistakes.”

“Then they shouldn’t have made one. You and Kira best not have tricked me. I won’t have any problem killing either of you. I’m desperate. This mission must be a success.”

Evonya had a laugh I found annoying. I said nothing, having to pay attention to moving through the rocks and trees as we scrambled over the other side of the hill and went into a small valley was filled with trees. The priest struggled to keep fast pace. I caught him

by the arm and pulled him along behind me.

“Yennis does not work alone. She works for the agent who killed Niyal Gora.”

“Torell. I know.”

“I don’t mean Torell,” Evonya said, holding me up so I had to stop walking. “Kira said you might be with Section 31. You are also Dukat’s cousin. Curious,” he said. “You must therefore be conducting your own investigation. You think I put the implant in the boy?”

“Just tell me if you trust those two men,” I said.

“They are Cardassian. is why I have Major Kira with me. She will kill them if you do not. All of the Fifth must be killed. The agent we are after is a member of the Circle, like Torell and Niyal. I assure you. Kira and I are not members of the Circle. We never believed in their talk of peace, for we knew it was a lie. We know they mean to sell us all into slavery. To who doesn’t matter. Cardassia is in as much danger as Bajor. I tried to explain this to Gul Damar. I told him we must stop those who would open the wormhole to the Dominion.”

My jaw dropped. “Yennis served under Gul Parnal?”

“Under him, yes, she was his lover. She was Tychek’s first officer. She was the one who memorized messages and carried them between the guls. She knew everything. My faction suspect she murdered Parnal’s wife and then brought the child to Torell. The boy must have run off. The implant may not be working.”

“And who is your faction?”

“The Brotherhood of the Prophets. Kira was with the Resistance. She’s now an officer in the People’s Army. If they are taking us into the Valley of Shadows, I fear we will never leave place, Glinn Yor. It is an evil place. Do you believe in demons?”

“This is the way to EK-1. If there are demons,” I said, “they lurk in the Valley of Shadows. We are not going there.”

Kira returned to us. The two Cardassians were waiting behind a large boulder, catching their breaths, talking in whispers. I waited for Kira to speak, heard nothing out of her, and walked over to the two Cardassians. They grew silent at my approach.

“I’ve searched this valley many times and never found anyone,” I said.

“You didn’t look hard enough,” Durgan said. He was heavier than Renalt and took

longer to recover his breath. "Yennis is hiding in a nearby cave. It's not far."

"This better not be a trap," I said.

Renalt grabbed my arm. "We're here to help you kill Yennis. I thought you knew that," he said. "You told Gul Damar you wanted to let us prove our loyalty. I know you are inclined not to believe us, we are trying to help you. Durgan and I are not part of the Circle. Nor are we a part of Parnal's ring of thieves. We didn't approve of Parnal any more than we did of Kenmar or Tyчек. Who is going to listen to deserters from Outpost 9? We're criminals. We will die regardless of what we achieve tonight, unless you still offer your support."

Why didn't you tell me Gul Parnal was alive when I captured you?"

"I wasn't sure I could trust you," Renalt said.

"Arm the Cardassians," Evonya said. He came up beside me silently. Kira was beside him, she had sense enough to keep her pistol leveled at the two soldiers. "Where we are headed, it would be best if we're all armed. I want Yennis dead and the agent with her. Do you know his name, Renalt?"

"Parnal called him the Ghost," Renalt said. "Shall we move on? It's another mile before we reach EK-1. We have another hill to climb."

I didn't provide either soldier with my own weapons, Kira came prepared. She'd brought a backpack, handing out heavy cloaks and provided Bajoran pistols to the Fifth Order soldiers. It was cold it hadn't snowed in days. We hustled along a trek of ten miles, taking a breath when the priest grew winded and took refuge in the hollow of an ancient tree. Using Kira's med-kit, I gave the priest an energy booster. I took one as well along with a muscle enhancer, never questioning why she'd brought both. She obviously knew I was human and needed extra help to keep up with the group. It didn't make her a spy, I now considered her a possibility and not just the priest.

"How far are we from the cave?" I asked. Renalt came over and knelt beside me. "You don't have to get romantic." I laughed when he raised an eye ridge. "I know this area quite well. What I don't get is how Parnal and Yennis have been hiding right under my nose the entire time?"

Renalt smiled for the first time since I'd met him. He searched my eyes with the

probing scrutiny of an innocent man looking for a friend.

“Romulan cloaking devises are not only used on ships,” he said. “They used it to keep you from finding their hideout. It’s on the other side of those trees. I suggest we approach in teams. You take Durgan. I’ll go with the Bajorans. We will meet at the cave entrance. Both teams go in at the same time and shoot everything moves. The simpler the better.”

“Or we could use a plasma bomb and kill them all,” Kira said.

“I’d like to take a prisoner or two. I’ll go in first. If you are on who you say you are, Renalt, then you’ll be there for me.”

Evonya put his hand on my arm, pulling me to my feet. “I’ll go with you,” he said. “I believe the Glinn Yor is in charge of this mission. We do what she says.”

Kira pushed past the two Cardassians and stood in front of me. “This is about the worst plan I’ve ever heard. You must be human, Yor,” she said. “You’re too stupid to be anything else.”

With Evonya at my side, we ran toward the trees. I assumed Kira could handle two Cardassians if they tried anything funny, then again, I could be walking straight to my death. Under the starlight, listening to the breeze in the leaves, the priest breathing hard, I wondered how things had gone downhill so fast. I reached into my pocket and grabbed two explosive balls, nifty trinkets called EK-1’s, and then I drew one pistol. Ahead of us I noticed firelight through the swaying branches of the trees and knew it was the entrance of the cave cut out of the side of the hill. We’d found Eben’s cave with fire.

Kira, Renalt, and Durgan arrived. Evonya and I approached the entrance, while the trio took up positions against the walls. The priest and I entered a tunnel led into an enormous cavern lit by a small fire and fluorescent globes. There was a cache of ammunition and weapons to outfit a small army. Those who would bear arms against Gul Dukat were seated around the campfire, roasting meat on a spit, unaware they had company. I glanced at my wristband as I pushed Evonya behind me. The tracker was working again. Someone at the campfire had the other communicator, which they’d used with the spy in the fort to contact one another. Evonya pressed against the cave wall, while I inched forward and crouched behind a giant stalactite protruded from the floor of the cave. I hoped Kira and the two

Cardassians had followed us.

Footsteps were heard coming down the tunnel, much louder, without concern unlike our own quiet coming. Voices rose at the campfire. I motioned Evonya to join me and we slunk behind the rock formation and made our way to a stack of crates. We positioned ourselves behind the crates and I again looked at my wristband. Now I had two red dots on the red screen. Two red dots meant to spies. Several Fifth Order soldiers returned from patrol and went straight to the campfire. When I turned to Evonya, he was holding a pistol on me.

“You go first. I insist,” he said.

The priest took the pistol from my hand and removed the second from my holster. He left me with my sword and dagger. I considered putting up a fight, he looked too eager to shoot me.

“You are the spy. I should have killed you earlier.”

“you didn’t. Now move.”

Standing, I preceded Evonya around the crates and stepped into clear view of about twenty Cardassians. Evonya pushed me forward. I stumbled a few steps and the group turned toward me, standing and raising their weapons. I kept my hands up, fingers curled down, loosely so it appeared I wasn’t holding anything, I had explosive balls.

“I’ve brought you a prisoner,” Evonya said. “This is Dukat’s cousin. Glinn Ren Yor.”

A tall female Cardassian with a scared right cheek stepped forward. This had to be Glinn Yennis. Several men remained seated. They were older and appeared to have higher rank. All three wore arrogant looks on their faces, the female was the one to speak.

“What are you doing here, Prylar Evonya? I didn’t send for you. What do you mean by bringing Yor here? Do you want to bring Damar and his Brigade down on us all?”

“This is his woman.”

“Then kill her,” Yennis said.

Her long legs carried her over to me. I dropped my hands and tossed the ball into the fire. It was the right move, for she busted me in the jaw and sent me colliding into the crates. I fell to the ground.

“Stand back,” Yennis snarled. “I’ll do this myself. This isn’t Dukat’s cousin. She’s the

imposter.”

I don't know why, I glanced at my wrist and the red dot signaled Yennis. I hadn't been disarmed, a foolish mistake, and I drew my sword and then my dagger. No one stopped us, sadly my EK-1's didn't explode, not yet. She drew a wicked looking blade from her hip and a dagger from her boot. The three old guls stood and I moved back, away from the group and the campfire. Yennis charged forward. I spun around, sliding my knife along the exposed opening between the sides of the cuirass she wore. The blade cut deep. Her yelp brought her around, slashing her blade toward my face. I dropped low to the ground, swung my sword, and tripped her, sending her tumbling onto her face. The men cheered around us, growing lusty as Yennis stood. She leered and came at me again.

Using her two blades, I kept her at bay with my sword. We moved across the floor, I swung my sword, she defended with her daggers. She was good, I was better. Deflecting each jab with my sword, I used the dagger, cutting her several more times. I expected an explosion and it wasn't happening. Forced to keep fighting, I didn't anticipate her reflexes as she dove at me again, and when I stepped aside, this time she knifed me in the thigh. I felt the blade sink into flesh and tried to ignore it, I limped when I moved.

Enraged, I felt my strength surge as the muscle enhancer kicked in. I reacted, dropping my sword to grab her arm and yanked it upwards as I stabbed my knife into her side. I kept hold of her arm as I continued to stab her under the bottom of her cuirass and into the softness of her belly. As she gasped, her eyes bugged. Another twist of my knife and I opened her stomach. She dropped to the ground. Not one Cardassian made a move.

“Bravo,” a husky male voice said. A ripple of fear spread through my body. I heard clapping and turned. Behind Evonya stood a broad-shouldered figure. The face was familiar. Put on forty years on Eben and this was how his father looked.

“It is the Ghost,” Evonya said. “He is Torell's best assassin. He is who I brought you here to kill. I'm not your enemy, Yor. I'm your friend.”

“You might have warned me before now, priest,” I muttered.

“Yes, he should have,” the Ghost said. He drew his weapon and shot Evonya dead. He laughed as the Bajoran fell to the ground and approached me. “I should thank you for saving

the life of my son. Allow me to introduce myself. I am Gul Parnal. I think you knew though, otherwise, Garak wouldn't have sent me such an inexperienced assassin. Relying on a slave priest as a guide. A bad mistake."

"And your wife?" I asked.

"What about her?" Parnal was a handsome man. I hated the sparkle of his blue eyes and his aristocratic flair. "If you think you know something, Yor, then speak. I'm listening. We're all listening." He laughed as he lifted up his hand to quiet an already silent group.

"What have you to say about my wife?"

"Did she know you put an implant in your son's head?"

"Yes," Parnal said, his eyes intently searching my face. "She objected at what I'd done and threatened to expose us. Yennis felt strongly about killing her, so she did. The boy ran off before I could stop him. You've adopted him, I know you're really a human. You betrayed us, Sawyer Kincaid. Oh, I know all about you. I also believe you killed Legate Mikor. I didn't like him, I did like Gul Raynor. As for Renalt and Durgan, I told Venna to kill them. She liked Renalt a little too much and failed to follow orders and now she's dead."

In from the tunnel two bodies were dragged. Both Renalt and Durgan certainly looked dead. They'd been shot and their armor was smoldering. Neither moved from where they were thrown on the ground. Kira was nowhere in sight. I was thankful for that. I had little else to be thankful for as Parnal struck me across my face with the flat of his hand. I lost my dagger and fell to my knees. He struck me again and again, breaking open my lip and closing my eye, slicing me up with a signet ring on the third finger of his left hand. I collapsed forward and took a kick in the ribs. The last EK-1 I'd hidden in the chink of my armor fell out and rolled away from me, disappearing in the midst of men gathered around me.

"Just look at Dalin Renalt now," Gul Parnal said coming over to peer at the two still bodies. "Thank you for bringing them here, Yor. Traitor." He kicked Renalt in the side. "Turn against me, will you, you ungrateful cur." He glanced at his men. "Let this be a lesson to the rest of you. I won't tolerate disobedience."

"It'll be your turn to die next," I said.

"You've proven to be most inconvenient, Sawyer. I was there on Hdrok 4 when Gul

Yor and his precious little daughter died many years ago. Dukat is a fool to have tried to pass you off as his cousin. Shame he won't know what happened to you."

Another kick and I curled into a ball. I took his kicks and his insults as he walked around me, and here I'd wanted to restore honor to his name, only to bring the only two loyal Fifth Order soldiers in the Union to their deaths. Damar had been right about him.

"I intend to fetch my son back, after I retake the fort," Parnal said laughing along with his men. "I happened to be fond of Yennis. More so than my wife. I don't appreciate you killing her, Yor. So you'll understand when I say I have a need for a new outlet for my desires."

Lifting my head, able to see out of only one eye, it took little effort to see the enormous cock held by Parnal in one hand. He'd dropped his pants in front of his men and intended to rape me, and I assumed give what was left to his men before I was killed. I thought I might despair until I saw the eyes of Renalt were open. He was staring right at me, letting me know he was alive with a wink.

"I thought you were murdered by Kenmar? You and your wife? I thought you were one of the good guys?"

"I'm just a ghost," Parnal said. He knelt beside me and lifted my face up with his hands. I could smell his genitals and was repulsed by his fishy odor. "Dukat believed I was dead so I could launch this last offensive. Tell me. By what means did you use to get out of the fort and do it so quickly?"

The gul took the tip of his cock and placed it on my cheek. I felt the moisture seeping on my skin. He laughed again, as well as his men.

"She doesn't want to talk. Let's hear her scream," Parnal said.

In a flurry, bodies moved around me, my clothes were cut off of me while I struggled like a hellion, it was no use. Four men held my arms and legs. My legs were spread wide as Gul Parnal dropped to his knees and sank on top of me. His full weight was nothing. I wasn't thinking when he entered me. I wasn't able to breathe or believe what was happening to me. He tore into me. I felt his full-length stab into me as he huffed and puffed. I still fought, refusing to lie there and play dead while Gul Parnal raped me, there was no way to free

myself from the hands held me. When he was done, he came on my chest, holding his purple cock in his hand, jerking the last drops onto me.

“The rest of you can have her. I think I’ll have a drink,” Gul Parnal said laughing as the next man dropped his pants and moved on top of me.

As I felt him fumbling to insert, an explosion from the campfire sent soldiers flying into the air as a hot blast of fire filled the cavern. The man on top of me was blown off by the gush of heated air. I was splattered with gore. I covered my head, curling into a ball, as screams filled the air.

Another blast came from a closer range and bodies fell on top of me, pressing me down and saved me from the scorch of fire erupted around me. The stench was overpowering. The weight of their bodies had me penned. I couldn’t move and for a moment I thought I was surely dead.

SAWYER

Chapter Forty-Two

“You do realize those were plasma bombs, Yor? Not EK-1s. You’re lucky you’re still alive,” Kira said.

I felt a hand grab my arm. I was pulled out of the scorched remains by Major Kira. She helped me up to my feet, took quick note of my condition, and troubled herself to remove the armor off a dead man and then strip off his shirt and pants, which she tossed at me. I dressed as fast as I could. Cardassians were lying all around us, groaning in pain, most were dead, including the three high-ranking officers at the fire. Gul Parnal was nowhere to be seen. Nor could I find my sword.

Kira checked on Evonya, what was left of him, and returned to help me dress. I drew away from her and went to where I’d last seen Renalt and Durgan. Durgan was clearly dead, I had to search under bodies to find Renalt, and I did, still alive and grateful I’d taken the time to locate him. I was also horrified he’d lived, for Renalt had seen it all. Renalt knew my dirty little secret. There was no reason he should not talk when given the opportunity, and then Damar would know.

“Thank you,” Renalt said in a voice held no judgment. A cripple myself, I helped him to his feet. He held his hand to his side where he was bleeding. His forehead was ripped open and blood was pouring down the side of his face. I put my arm around him and together we limped toward the tunnel entrance where Kira waited. I didn’t cry. Soldiers don’t cry. And I was a soldier, I told myself.

Together, the three of us hurried through the tunnel. We stopped at the entrance as Major Kira tossed another plasma bomb behind us. We ran toward the trees as the bomb exploded and brought down the sides of entrance, closing the cave. A wave of smoke and dust came billowing out, coating us with a layer of film. Kira coughed, first to get on her

feet, and drew her pistol.

“Gul Parnal and a few others escaped,” she said. “You two stay here. I’ll go look for them.”

Kira seemed to know what she was doing, so I let her go without complaint and turned to Renalt. I ripped off both sleeves of my shirt, balling one up to press against the wound in his side, having him hold it while I removed his cuirass. I took the other sleeve and wound it around his head. I had no idea how bad I looked, by his reaction, he was surprised I’d not seen to my own injuries first. I could barely see, I wasn’t going anywhere anytime soon. Renalt lay back with a sigh. I sagged to the ground in an upright position and about as nauseated and in as much pain as I’d ever been in my life. The pants I wore had a belt I’d yet to fasten. I removed it and placed it around my thigh, pulling it tight and tying it in a knot to staunch the flow of blood from the knife wound.

Footsteps were heard and I forced myself to my knees. Renalt remained where he lay, in no condition to offer help if it wasn’t Kira. As I turned toward the sound, searching the forest, I sighed with relief to see Kira. As she approached, I noticed a gash across her cheek. Her hands quivered at her sides and unarmed. Behind her walked a tall figure I recognized even with his pants on. He threw Kira to the ground at his feet and pointed his pistol at her head. The left side of his face was burned, as well as his right hand, which was gnarled and black.

“This isn’t the last of the Circle, ladies,” Parnal said. “There are more of us. Many more. And we will open the gateway in the wormhole and bring in the Dominion, and then you will see a new Cardassia, one in which Gul Mukot will rule with me at his side.”

“Drop your weapon,” a youthful voice said. It was a precious voice to me, one I recognized, of the boy. “Now, traitor!”

“Son? Is you?” Parnal didn’t turn around. He kept his weapon pointed at Kira. “You can drop the weapon, son, or I’ll shoot the Bajoran and then your new mother.”

“No, don’t listen,” I said, firmly. Hate filled me as I glared at the tall Gul. “Son, shoot the traitor. Don’t think about it. Just do it.”

I knew what I asked, not who the boy would save. As Gul Parnal finally turned his

head to glance at his son, Kira drew her knife and scrambled toward him, stabbing him in the groin. She withdrew the blade as Gul Parnal howled, stumbling away from her and from the startled boy, his hands at his bleeding groin as he moved toward the trees. Kira stayed on the ground, covering her head, giving me an idea. Eben ran to my side and helped me to my feet.

“Use this,” Eben said. He handed me a plasma bomb.

I’d always been a good aim. I threw the bomb and it hit the tall Gul in the back. I dropped over Eben, covering his body with my own as the blast shook the ground and blew out several trees, scattering the remains of the Gul to the four winds. When I lifted my head, the guts of the Gul were spread across the ground. It was ghastly, no other word for it, ghastly. Gul Parnal was dead.

“Mother, I’m so sorry. I didn’t know he was still alive. I swear it.”

The boy’s voice was tearful and his single question required more answers than one. I gathered Eben into my arms and rolled the boy over so I could gaze at his face. He wasn’t crying. He looked ashamed. I stroked his forehead and pressed my cheek to his own.

“It’s all right. I love you, dearest,” I said. I kissed Eben on the cheek and then the forehead before I pulled him against my chest. His arms went around my neck and he sat in my lap, clinging tight to me. “I’m the one who is sorry. I didn’t want you to be part of this, Eben. No child should ever have to....” I couldn’t finish. “I’m just so sorry.”

“Did you bring the device I gave you?” Kira asked crawling toward me. “Give it to me, Yor, and I’ll remove the implant. I know you didn’t do it. You don’t do what you’re supposed to do, your stupid plan worked.”

“It’s in Eben’s room.”

“As I said, you’re too stupid to be anything human,” Kira said.

“I hope you’re not mad at me. I knew you would come here, so I followed. I was worried,” Eben said. He cuddled against me. “I’m glad he’s dead. I hated him.”

“You saved us, son,” I said, fighting back tears.

“We need to get moving.” Kira was already on her feet. She came over and helped Renalt stand. “You can remove the implant later. Come on, Renalt. You’re an ugly bastard,

I'll carry you if I have to."

"Come on, mother." The boy pulled me to my feet. He was Cardassian, not a human child, and he handled the situation better than I would have in his shoes.

"You did good, Eben Yor," I said, sliding my hand through his hair. I felt for the implant, it was there, it wasn't hot or pulsating. I felt sure it was not working. I pulled the boy against me, not wanting to let him go. "If you could manage, Major Kira, I'd appreciate it if you'd lead the way to the fort. I can't see and I'm finding it difficult to stay on my feet."

"My pleasure," Kira said. She aided Renalt all the way to the fort.

A long hike over one side of a high hill and down the other side, returning the way we came, we arrived at Fort Varnok. I don't know how I lasted on my feet. We could not enter the way we came and it was the only exist. We had to enter from the front gate. The guards upon spotting us, raised an alarm. The gate opened and soldiers came out, Second Order, Stargazer Company, surrounding us. All around were excited voices, soldiers asking questions, we remained quiet as we headed toward the steps of the main building.

Standing outside the doors, I spotted Damar and a handful of his staff. An officer helped Renalt walk. Kira came to me, placing her arm around my middle, holding me on my feet as Damar, stern of face and silent, approached. He wouldn't look at me. I had no doubt I was to be executed. Damar jerked Eben Yor away from me. Guards took hold of my arms and led me inside. Kira was brought along, handled in the same rough manner. Renalt fared better and was provided a stretcher to ease his way over to the medical building. The guards took me to the third level, past the library where I was still stood on guard. My hologram looked menacing as she stepped out of the way, watching us enter the library. I barely was aware of being placed in a chair. Someone handed me a cold pack I placed over my swollen eye.

"You have an explanation for abandoning your post?" Damar demanded.

I tilted back my head, squinting from bruises and welts, able to see my Gul standing beside the table where Kira and I sat. I didn't see my son. There were no other officers or soldiers in the room. Only the three of us were present.

"Eben?" I managed to say.

"The boy has been sent to his room," he said in an angry tone. "Were you out looking for the boy, Glinn Yor? Is why you left your post or should I say, is why you left a hologram to do your job?"

"Yes and no, Gul Damar."

Kira gave me a sympathetic look. She looked pretty bad herself, her smile helped me deal with the pain. I'd made a friend, not one I'd expected to make, and not a friendship I'd wanted, I had earned it all the same.

"You leave me no choice to demote you, Yor. You are reduced in rank to gil."

"Why don't you give it a rest, Gul Damar," Kira said. "Glinn Yor and Dalin Renalt just stopped an assault on this precious fort of yours by the Fifth Order, not to mention the fact she killed the traitors Gul Parnal, also known as the Ghost, Glinn Yennis and three other bigwig guls you hadn't even thought of looking for here."

"Be silent, Bajoran," Damar snarled.

"It's Major Kira, and I don't think you need to take superior attitude with me, Gul Damar, because I happen to be as good an officer as you are, and I just happened to have saved your girlfriend's life, so cut me a little slack too, okay? Yor deserves your praise, not your scorn. Why am I not surprised a Cardassian would act otherwise?"

"Kira is a hero," I said. "Prylar Evonya is dead. He died a hero as well."

Damar slammed his fist on the table, startling Kira, I placed my head in my hands, holding the cold pack to my eye. I didn't care what he had to say. Any moment I was going to become hysterical. Kira must have known it. She inched her chair closer to me and threw her arm around my shoulders. I actually think she could have knocked Damar to the ground if I'd asked her to, I preferred to have the support of another woman and not to hear him shout.

"Do you not understand I have questions to be answered," Damar shouted. "number of soldiers who say Glinn Yor stunned them with a pistol and then escaped with two criminals and abandoned her post to sneak them out of the fort!"

"Be a man," Kira snorted. "Stick up for your girlfriend. If you knew what happened, if you'd been there, you'd show a bit of mercy. Can you see she's injured?"

"My head is killing me," I groaned. "Kira?"

"Hold on a bit longer, pal. I see a light going on in his square head."

"I think I have heard enough from you at the moment, Major Kira." Damar pulled Kira up from her chair. The door opened and Dorric appeared. "I have been informed by Prefect Dukat the Bajorans may now join the Cardassian army as fellow soldiers. Major Kira is to be their first recognized commissioned officer. See Major Kira to her room. Give her whatever she wants."

"Yes, sir."

Damar returned to me as the door slid shut behind him. He was at my side at once, cradling me in his arms, while I sobbed onto the table. I hadn't the strength to lift my arms. I didn't want to try. Damar pushed back my chair and lifted me into his arms. He carried me to our quarters and sent a guard for a doctor.

"I need to see Eben. Please, Damar."

Damar placed me on my feet. I stumbled into our bedroom, removed the Romulan device from my dresser, and rejoined Damar in Eben's room. The boy was in bed, awake, waiting for us. I was laid onto the bed. I found the device to remove the implant right beside me and weakly handed it to Damar, aware I had covered my son's bed in blood.

"Eben has an implant. Remove it with this. Do it now."

Damar approached Eben and the boy turned toward him, allowing him to remove the implant without a sedative, while I collapsed on the floor. It didn't take long. It was messy and Eben whimpered, the implant came out. The same device closed the wound. Not even a scar was left. Eben scampered toward me, sitting on the floor next to me.

"The doctor has arrived," Damar said. "You can fill me in on the details of your little night maneuver later. You're not going anywhere for a while."

"Will I be executed for disobeying orders?" I asked.

"No," Damar said.

Another person was in the room with us. I felt a hypospray press against my shoulder. Eben moved aside as Damar lifted me into his arms. He carried me into our room and laid me on the bed. Dr. Lazlo appeared beside me with Eben.

"I believe an accommodation is in order for your heroism," Damar said. "I'll leave you with Dr. Lazlo. Rest, my darling. Rest and tomorrow will be better. You'll see."

"I'll do my best, Gul Damar," the doctor said.

I closed my eyes and the voices faded away.

* * *

HELEN

"What's wrong?" I asked, as Dukat entered the front room. I had placed the children in the crib for a nap. Shazel was in our room, lying on the bed, drawing pictures. I'd hoped to have a quiet afternoon, Dukat had returned in terrible mood. "Dukat? Did you get the defenses in place? I want to know what is going on."

Dukat poured a glass of kanar. "It seems Agent Torell sent a message to my superiors blaming me for the murder of Legate Mikor. I advised Central Command Gul Raynor killed Legate Mikor, there is to be an investigation," he said. "They want me to return to Cardassian Prime, I am in the middle of a war and can hardly leave at this particular moment to answer questions. I had to call in a few favors. I will remain in command. When this war is over, however, I must return home to address my superiors."

"I did it."

"I can't very well send the mother of my children to be executed for a crime was no more her fault than my own," he said. "It's best to dismiss it from your thoughts."

"Sawyer is working for Garak and the OO. I thought they were going to leave us alone."

Moving so fast he blurred, Dukat was on me, his hands digging into my shoulders. "It's not the Order is behind this. It's Central Command," he snarled. "You don't seem to appreciate the pressure I'm under, Helen. I will not be disgraced because I chose to protect two humans instead of giving them to the Order." He pushed me toward a mirror hung on the wall. "The majority of Cardassians may hate Bajorans, that's nothing compared to the loathing they feel for humans. If anyone suspected what you really are, what I've done to protect you, we both would be executed. By protecting you, I am an accomplice. Long after

I am executed, you would be past from official to official, sharing their bed until you no longer care whether you're alive or dead."

"Why are you acting this way? What's wrong with you?"

His hands roved over my body impersonally, very detachment making each touch feel dirty. He squeezed my breasts. Their fullness created more pain than usual. Confused by his cruelty, I tried to pull away, he was far too strong. Hearing me whimper, he released my breasts, only to twine one hand in my hair. With a hard yank, he pulled my head back.

"I told you before you were to have no other secrets from me."

"I have no secrets. I don't understand," I sobbed.

Dukat pulled my head back until I thought my neck would snap, then pressed his mouth against mine. It was a brutal and demanding kiss.

"Why are you acting like this? You're the one who has secrets. I'm not working for the Order. I love you. I have done everything you asked. If you're so worried about yourself, then send me to Cardassia and I'll stand trial for what I did. I'm not afraid."

"you should be."

This show of temper wasn't the first time. Since he'd returned from Bajor, he'd started to show a tendency to unbridle his anger toward me whenever he had the opportunity. I didn't know if the distance between us had to do with Venna or Sawyer. Someone or something stood between us. I didn't understand his rage, he was acting like madman.

"You forget your place, woman. You are little more than my slave. I keep you in my bed because you please me. If you want to avoid being sold to Quark, then I suggest you change your tone."

With a wordless shout of pure rage, I attacked Dukat, pummeling him with my fists. I sank my teeth into whatever part of his anatomy was closest. He tried to hold me back, gave up, and went on the offensive. Somehow he managed to grab my arms and twist them up between my shoulder blades. I was no longer the attacker, subdued with ease. One of his arms wrapped around me, pressing me tightly against his stomach. I feel him hard and ready and feared I was about to be asexually assaulted.

“Let go of me,” I shouted, in a panic.

I struggled, not caring I was almost wrenching my shoulder from its socket. Rather than releasing me, Dukat kept a grip on my arm and pushed me forward so my face was pressed against the wall. He ground his cock against my buttocks, letting me feel how hard he was, then released my trapped arm. Before I could use it against him though, he’d snagged both my wrists and had them pinned against the wall above my head.

“I have been lenient with you for too long. I think it’s time you learned what it means to belong to a Cardassian. More important, you need to learn what it means to belong to me.”

Dukat spun me around so now my back slammed into the wall, my head bouncing off the hard metal and temporarily stunning me. He looked me over insolently, his hand taking the same path as his eyes and fondling my breasts. Smiling cruelly, Dukat looped his fingers into the neck of my tunic, paused, and then ripped downwards, pulling it from my body. I expected slaps and hard pinches to follow, instead his hand was tender, caressing my breasts, cupping and molding them to his palm. Another smile and my skirt took the same path, literally torn from my body. His hand moved from my breast and slid between my legs. With a shock, I realized I was ready for him. Had violence excited me this much? Truth be told, I didn’t want to examine my feelings too closely.

“Your mouth says to leave you alone this,” he paused, wiping one wet finger across my lips, “says you want me. Perhaps I should show you how the guards at the prison will treat you?” He forced a kiss on me, pressing so close I was glad he’d removed his armor earlier. “Do you know the children of traitors are usually executed with their parents? I have no intention of standing on the executioner’s block with you. As my slave, I am responsible for your every action, your very thoughts. You killed Mikor. Had the implant not been removed, I have no doubt you would have killed me.”

His words acted like a bucket of ice water on me, defusing my anger.

“I never....” I paused as Dukat fumbled with the front of his pants. His cock shot forward like a catapult. He grabbed hold of it. I knew what was coming. “What are you doing? Is this how you used to discipline Sawyer? Is what this is?” I backed away from

him. "You're upset about your wife. I understand. You're worried about Central Command. I get too. I have done nothing to deserve this hostility. I love you."

"Sadly, love has nothing to do with this. It's about control."

Using his knee to force my legs apart, he pulled my skirt to my hips and pushed his way inside, grunting with the force of his assault. A scream of pain nearly tore from my throat. I choked it back, refusing to give Dukat the satisfaction of hearing me protest. He thrust into me several times before he stopped and quickly withdrew.

"I'm sorry, Helen. I don't understand where this rage is coming from."

"What's going on? Maybe you should see Dr. Quirin. You've been so quick to answer and violence since we returned from Bajor," I said, wiping my tears away.

"It can't go any longer. I won't do this. I never wanted to hurt you. Perhaps I'm trying to show you I'm not worth loving." Dukat laughed, a harsh sound and pushed me away. "I'll release you from your duties as my mistress. First thing in the morning, I'll arrange for passage for wherever you and the children wish to go. Join your friend at Fort Varnok or return to Earth. You mustn't stay with me. Not if you and the children want to stay alive."

This love we shared was madness, close to destructive, yet I didn't want to leave him. I needed him. Wrong or right, I clung to him.

"Let me help you," I cried.

"You offer to help after what I just did? I never want to hurt you again, I can't control this thing inside of me. The headaches are getting worse. I don't understand it any more than you do. Perhaps it's the stress and my wife's death. Those are merely excuses and no reason to lay hands on you in manner. Forgive me."

"You're just...tired and a little bit frustrated."

I kissed Dukat while my mind raced. Dukat offered me the chance to leave him forever, to take the children, and go anywhere, even into Federation space. I didn't want to leave him, not when he was closing to breaking. Leaving him caused me more pain than his rough treatment.

"There is literally no place in the universe I want to be than right here with you," I

said. "Slave or free. Mistress or whore. It doesn't matter. What does matter is you love me. You have to love me if you care enough to send me away."

I put my hands on either side of Dukat's face and pressed a soft kiss against his lips. The kiss deepened. Dukat pressed closer to me. I'd never seen him afraid before, I felt him tremble as I held him in my arms.

A giggle warned us Shazel had joined us. She ran toward her father and jumped into his waiting arms. Dukat lifted Shazel into the air, twirling her around until she was begging for him to stop. I moved out of the way of flying arms and legs and watched, amused at the interaction between father and daughter. Having the girl on the station was good for Dukat. He pulled Shazel tight against his chest. Two pairs of nearly identical blue eyes looked at me, one mischievous, and the other solemn. Hesitantly, Shazel reached out for me.

"Did you do something bad?" Shazel asked. "Did you get punished too?"

"What do you mean?" I said, shaken by her words.

"My mother's friend, Gul Mikor, once said I had to be punished because I had a demon in me. He said punishing me was the only way to make sure I was good."

"Mikor touched you?" I asked shocked. When the girl nodded, I was glad I'd killed the beast. "There is no demon inside of you, Shazel. You're a wonderful little girl and Dukat and I both love you dearly." I stared at her father. "Did he really do it, Dukat? Did he hurt the three boys' with Mikelya's grandparents? Is why you really wanted the boys to live with them?"

"Now is now the time to discuss all that," he said. Dukat caught the girl's chin in his hand, turning her head to face him. He didn't answer my question, I suspected it was true. He had something else to discuss with the child. "Dearest, your mother is gone. She...she died in a...accident. From now on, Helen is going to be your mother. No one will ever hurt you again. I swear it." He pressed her head against his shoulder, expecting her to sob, she didn't. She was Cardassian.

"I'm all right, Father. Mother is in a better place. If I am allowed to pick who I want to be my new mother, then I want it to be your cousin. I want Ren Yor to be my mother."

“Yor?” Dukat glanced at me.

“People have been talking about her. She’s...famous.”

“Darling, Yor is my cousin,” he said. “I’m not involved with Yor, not like that. I’m with Helen. She is to be your mother. I won’t hear any arguments.”

The girl wiggled out of his arms. She stood before me, staring up at me and then held out her arms. I pulled her into my arms, holding her tight, able to feel her trembling. Acting tough for her father was one thing, she was upset about the death of her mother. The fame of Ren Yor was intoxicating, even to a child. It was no wonder she wanted Yor instead of me. Had I been given the choice, I would have wanted my best friend to be my mother too. She was everything I was not, brave, tenacious, and fearless. I felt Dukat move close behind him, throwing his arms around both of us, sandwiching the girl between us.

“You must be mad to want to stay with me,” he said.

“I must be,” I said, “because I’m not leaving you again.”

SAWYER

Chapter Forty-Three

Arriving at Terok Nor, I exited the shuttle with Eben. Hadran, Renalt, Major Kira, and ten Bajoran soldiers had accompanied us. I needed time to recover from my injuries, so I'd been told by Dr. Lazlo. He'd insisted I be sent to the space station. Gul Dukat and twenty officers waited in the hangar to greet us. Their numbers and armaments reminded me of how Terok Nor had appeared when Helen and I first arrived. We were at war, so I wasn't surprised. Major Kira and the Bajorans were shown out of the hangar by Constable Odo and several security officers. I presumed they'd be taken on a tour of the space station. The Bajorans were to be added to Odo's security staff on a trial basis. Another step in the right direction. I approached Dukat along with Hadran and Renalt. We saluted him.

"Gul Dukat, it's good to see you again," I said overcome with emotions.

The two officers stepped into line with the soldiers, turned, marching out of the hangar. Eben ran forward and saluted as well. Dukat smiled and ruffled Eben's hair. His eyes lifted to meet mine. With a tug on my arm, he yanked me into his arms.

"Welcome home, sweetheart."

His kiss caught me unprepared. He moved so fast to plant a possessive kiss on my lips I didn't have time to react. Eben took hold of Dukat's hand and he led us from the transporter room. A squad of soldiers joined us in the outer hallway. One of the guards carried our bags, while Dukat led the way to my new quarters. Spacious, with two bedrooms and a large living room, it should have pleased me, I felt numb inside.

"You're home. Finally," Garak said. He entered the front room, a relieved look on his face and held out his arms to Eben. With a cry of delight, Eben ran to Garak, jumping into his arms. At a nod from Dukat, Garak led Eben into his new bedroom, while the bags

were left inside the door. Within the room I could hear the pair laughing and talking in excitement. I was left alone with Dukat.

"What's all this?" I asked. "My old quarters were fine. I didn't need an upgrade."

"Of course you did. You killed the Ghost. I admit, you do look tired."

Dukat went to the replicator, while I carried my bag into my bedroom, slid out of my jacket and returned to find two glasses of kanar placed on a table. Dukat sat on the couch. He knew I didn't like the sticky, thick substance. He patted the seat beside him. I flopped onto the couch and he handed me a glass of kanar.

"I've a great deal to tell you, Yor. Helen, as you know, gave birth to twins. A boy and girl. I'm sure you heard my wife was killed by Agent Torell. It's a shame you didn't encounter Torell in the cave instead of Gul Parnal. As soon as you've settled in, you may pay Helen a visit. I know she is anxious to see you. Now drink."

I stared at the kanar, not liking the taste, knowing it would soothe my frayed nerves. Not wanting to share the details of what happened in the cave with Dukat anymore than I had with Damar, I drained the glass and set it onto a table, drawing my legs beneath me.

"What are people saying about what happened?" I asked.

"The station is buzzing with news of Gul Parnal's death. Even my daughter Shazel has heard about you. You are her idol." Dukat didn't explain further about the arrival of his child and continued. "Gul Renalt has been given the credit, along with the death of Glinn Yennis. Off the record, I'm pleased you managed to kill two spies and quite a number of insurrectionists. I have no doubt there are many more here who need to be killed. Your trip here isn't to be all relaxation. I expect you to root out all traitors the same as you did on Bajor."

"Renalt was promoted to Gul? Did I hear you right?"

"Yes, you did. I'm considering allowing Gul Renalt to take charge of Terok Nor during my absence, we will have time to discuss the details of my departure to Cardassia later. Right now, I'd like to hear from you what actually happened."

"It's in my report and those of Gul Renalt and Major Kira."

"And Dr. Xeron's as well. Yes, I read them all," Dukat said. "When Garak and I

asked you to find and kill the spy, I didn't know you would leave the fort, taking two prisoners, a rebel, and a slave-priest with you. Improvisation and insubordination are your trademarks. Not only did you disobey Damar's orders to remain at the fort, you took it upon yourself to find Gul Parnal. You've placed me in a rather compromising position. I had to ask a few favors from Central Command to keep you from being shot for your disobedience. Due to the success of the mission, I was able to transmute a death sentence into a demotion."

"So that's why Damar demoted me. It's not fair," I said. I set aside the kanar, untouched. "I thought at least I'd command the Alpha Brigade again."

"Of course. You prefer Romulan ale. I had forgotten."

Rising from the couch, Dukat silently crossed the room to the replicator, ignoring my questions. He pushed a button. A bottle of Romulan ale and two glasses appeared. The bottle was placed on the table in front of a dark gray couch. Dukat sat to pour both glasses to the rim with the blue liquid. I retrieved the glass and guzzled the contents as he watched. His blue eyes were intense and probing. I didn't feel comforted by his presence, defensive.

"A week's leave is an appropriate length of time to be absent from your duties, considering the extent of your injuries. Three broken ribs, a fractured femur, and a dislocated shoulder. Gul Renalt provided a thorough report, yet I believe some details were missing," Dukat said, stretching out his long legs. He threw one arm across the back of the couch. "Renalt paints you as a hero, Yor, and so does Major Kira. Her report provided even less information, leaving me to do a bit of guesswork. You have redeemed Renalt's honor, saved the boy, and yet you do not display your usual bravado I've come to respect. One can only assume what occurred with Gul Parnal has left its mark on you. Am I correct to assume this?"

"Yes," I said.

I power slammed the Romulan ale, feeling it burn my throat and explode in my stomach, causing an immediate dizzy sensation. Somehow I managed to stay on my feet.

"I thought as much when Damar said you'd been distant. This is my fault, Yor. I

should have been there and prevented you from leaving Fort Varnok. You've always been headstrong and take too many risks to prove yourself worthy of my esteem and affection. Now you are here, we'll put your talents to better use as a counter-intelligent agent."

Refilling my glass with ale, I noticed had not taken one sip of either the kanar or the Romulan ale. I knew he wanted to pry into the details of the assault on Parnal's hideout, I didn't feel like talking or visiting Helen. All I wanted to do was go to bed and sleep. He caught me by surprise and placed his hand on my knee.

"Damar is worried about you," Dukat said. "The fact he's given command of the Alpha Brigade to Glinn Ravon is proof he didn't approve of your actions. Don't worry, cousin. I'll add a few more metals to wear on your uniform. No one has forgotten you."

"I walked into a trap, one I couldn't handle," I said, taking another sip. His hand squeezed my knee. "Had the priest done what I said and not taken matters into his own hand, Evonya might still be alive. I lost the sword Damar gave me."

"I imagine you lost far more in cave, my dear. Your innocence, perhaps."

Lifting my hand to his lips, Dukat kissed my palm. His eyes lifted, waiting for a response, I felt nothing. His arm slid around my shoulders and he pulled me against his chest, refusing to release me when I gasped out loud. Reacting quickly, Dukat took advantage of my fragile condition and kissed me. At the feel of his lips, I stared into his eyes, seeing Gul Parnal lurking in the depths and pushed him back, proceeding to strike his chest with my fists, pummeling him, a beating he took without complaint. I finally grew calm, aware my face was damp with tears and his arms enfolded me, holding me close.

"What are you doing? Don't show me kindness or love. Not ever," I cried, pressing my head against his shoulder. I'd repeated what he'd once told me. "I'm broken, Dukat. I'll never feel the way I did. Parnal did more than take me by force. You call it innocence. He destroyed my dreams of honor and glory. Those things don't exist except in stories. I couldn't tell Damar what happened. I didn't dare. I was afraid he...he wouldn't want me anymore."

"Look at me," Dukat demanded. "Yor, look at me."

When I refused, Dukat pulled me into the crook of his arm, holding me tight and

stroked my hair as I continued to cry. Muttering in Cardassian, words I knew couldn't remember in my emotional state, I felt his lips brush against my ear. My stomach tightened. I tried to jerk away from him, he wouldn't release me.

"I'm not Parnal. Nor is Damar. All I want is to see the spark return to your eyes as it once did when I lay with you. Do you remember those times? Let me remove the stain of Parnal and restore you to life, Yor. Let me...love you."

A tiny ember inside my heart flickered to life. My response terrified me, for as my fingers spread across his armored chest and I pressed against him, kissing him. His lips softened under mine as his tongue slid into my mouth, meeting my own, the kiss intensifying until I had to break free. Turning my head, too shocked at what I'd done, I heard movement in the bedroom and hoped Garak wisely kept Eben occupied and wouldn't disturb us. Something dark came out of the ember. By sending me to Dukat, Damar had placed in me a vulnerable position. I didn't know if Dukat meant only to comfort me, being this close to him awoke emotions were better left dormant.

The bedroom door opened. Dukat's arms remained around me, possessive and demanding, while I turned my head toward the wall, hiding my shame. Garak cleared his throat to announce his presence. I hoped my son wasn't standing beside him.

"Ah, Dukat," Garak said. "Perhaps the holosuite would be more beneficial to Yor. Images of Earth would help her remember life can still be beautiful. Damar hopes you and Helen will have a positive effect on her. Shall I stay here with the boy longer?"

"Sometimes a woman needs to cry, Garak," Dukat said. "Do what you do best and see the child is fed and goes to bed. Read Eben a story while I do what I can to comfort Yor. Why do you linger? Have you anything to say to her? Then say it."

"Yor killed two spies. I am satisfied with the results. I fear it is my fault for not having trained her properly to be a field agent."

"Then train her after I leave Terok Nor. Now go see to the boy," Dukat said.

"Of course. Take all the time you need then." Garak returned to my son's room.

"old toad," Dukat growled. "Garak is always interfering in my business. My enemies are all around us. Everyone plots against me. Why else do you think I have patrols

walking the hallways and doubled security? I can trust no one.”

“You can trust me,” I said unsure why he was so paranoid.

“Yes, I know I can,” he replied. He lifted my head with a finger to my chin. “The Bajorans are not yet what I would call allies, yet you’ve won the admiration of Major Kira. Before I decide whether or not the Bajorans will be recruited into the Cardassian army, I want to discuss this matter more fully with you. I’m here to talk, to offer my support and I hardly think taking you into the other room would achieve more than further confusion. For both of us.”

His comment startled me. I hadn’t come to Terok Nor to return to his bed. I wanted to be sympathetic. He’d lost his wife. Helen had given birth to twins. He had Torell to deal with and Mukot and a renegade fleet. It had obviously taken its toll on him, returning to my bed was not going to help the situation for either of us.

“I’m fine. Really. I’m just glad to be home. I should visit Helen and the twins. I’d also like to meet Shazel.”

“You shall see them. Later. Right now I want to talk to you, cousin. I thought you’d be more receptive to my offer. I mean only to comfort you. Do you feel nothing when I kiss you? Be truthful.”

“I see Gul Parnal. It’s why I didn’t let Damar touch me. I need time.”

“You realize Damar sent you here for me to...take care of this problem,” Dukat said, his tone almost sinister. “And that, my dear, is precisely what I’m trying to do. You will feel better after one night with me. You always did before.”

With a snarl, he pulled me against his chest and savagely kissed me. He wanted a response. He got one. I’d meant to fight him off. The kiss turned passionate before I could offer resistance, inflaming old memories. I clung to him, wanting to forget everything in his arms, knowing this was precisely what I needed to be healed. Yet, a voice in my head warned me not to further. His lips glided across my cheek, traveling to my neck.

“Damar....”

“Knows what I intend to do to restore your warrior spirit,” Dukat said. “There’s no reason to be afraid or feel ashamed of your needs, Yor. Perhaps tonight is too soon. Yes, it’s

too soon." He released me and reached for the kanar. He drank most of it. "I intend to make you the most highly decorated officer in the Cardassian military. Small compensation for what you've endured, it will be done, nonetheless."

"When are you leaving for Cardassia?" I asked, aware my cheeks felt warm. I found it hard to believe Damar had sent me to Dukat for the reasons stated. The response I'd felt made me feel far more guilty than I already did. I flinched when Dukat slid his fingers along my cheek. It would have been too easy to let him take me into the other room.

"Dearest, I don't want to burden you with my problems. I want your reunion with Helen to be unblemished. I want our own to be satisfying and productive. Let me reassure you my feelings have not changed due to a miscalculation on your part. I do love you, Ren. And I have missed you. I won't leave for Cardassia until you've found the courage you once had. Hold onto it tight. Be the Yor you once were. My warrior queen."

"I don't understand. We said we'd never do this again. I don't want to hurt either Damar and Helen. Why are you reopening the past like this? It's careless. It's wrong."

"The fire burns inside of me. It must burn you too if I am to restore you to life."

His hand slid into my hair, grasping it tight as I wrapped my arms around him. He jerked my head back and kissed me, hard and demanding, breaking through a barrier of darkness made of pure rage locked inside my heart. I gave one fierce jerk and nearly bit his tongue, he deftly set me away from him at arms' length, his blue eyes glazed and guarded.

"You resist what you feel for me. Very well," he said. "I will allow you to see Helen. Tell her nothing of what we discussed or of my departure. There's no need to hurt her. I will come to you later to continue this session. I'm glad you're returned. I've missed you."

Troubled by his behavior and wanting to escape, I hurried toward the door, not looking back as I entered the hall and slammed into Glinn Hadran. He came to attention, his expression stern. Unsure why he seemed less than friendly, I went directly to Helen's quarters. Her own guard, a young Gil, opened the door, preparing to announce me, I ran past him, shut the door in his face, and turned to find Helen behind me. I ran into her arms and hugged her tight, refusing to cry, left scorched and confused by the encounter with Dukat.

* * *

HELEN

Sawyer looked gaunt and her eyes were red. I'd never seen her look so distraught before. Having her at the station took a load of my mind, could tell she was upset. "Are you all right? What happened on Bajor? I want to know everything."

"I'm fine. Really. I'm here to see the twins and Dukat's daughter," she said, releasing me. She looked anywhere into my eyes. "Eben will want to meet them in the morning. Do me a favor, Helen. Don't ask me what happened on Bajor. I need to keep my mind preoccupied. Tell me about the children."

I took hold of her arm. She gave me a steady look, preparing for what I had to say. She knew me too well. I couldn't keep anything from her.

"First, I need to tell you something else, Sawyer. Dukat's wife is dead. Torell killed her," I said. "I didn't want to tell you, you need to know. He's been acting strange, very strange. I'm worried. His daughter Shazel is quite the handful. All she talks about is you and I admit has caused yet another problem."

"I'm sorry to hear that," she said.

"Things aren't good. Not at all. And you look terrible. Dukat said you led a raid again Gul Parnal's camp. I thought Gul Parnal was killed months ago. Did you find him and kill him?"

Sawyer winced as if I'd struck her. I reached out she brushed my hand away.

"Of course you have to know what happened," she said, annoyed. "Major Kira helped me kill Gul Parnal and a few Fifth Order renegades. Dalin Renalt went with us. He was Gul Parnal's second in command. He helped us find the traitors, instead of the credit going to me, Dukat instead promoted Renalt to Gul. Renalt has now joined the Second Order. I'm sure you'll meet Renalt tomorrow, as well as Kira."

"Kira Nerys? You've got to be kidding me?"

"She saved my life. She saved Eben and Renalt's lives as well." Sawyer gave a soft sob and turned her head. "It's was awful, Helen. I can't talk about it further."

"You're about to lose it," I said taking her by the hand. "Come see the twins. They're absolutely beautiful. I'm sure they'll take your mind off things. You can meet Shazel in a few minutes. Just be ready to be worshipped."

I led Sawyer into one of the three rooms in the suite. My two little babies slept in the same cradle, each so adorable I felt tears rush down my cheeks as Sawyer leaned over to kiss them on the forehead. They didn't wake. They didn't stir. I smiled at her and slid my arm around her, guiding her into Shazel's room. The girl was curled in her bed under the blankets, so precious I hoped Sawyer would love her as much as I did.

"Aunt Helen," the girl said stirring.

"I've brought someone to meet you. This is your father's cousin Ren Yor."

Sawyer sat on the bed and ruffled the girl's head. I hadn't wanted to awaken Shazel, she crawled out from under the blankets. She took one look at Sawyer and threw her arms around her, hugging her tight. With a chuckle, Sawyer returned the embrace.

"Well, this is a pleasant surprise. How old are you? Twelve?"

"I'm ten," Shazel giggled. "And I like your uniform. Everyone says you are the best soldier in all of Cardassia."

"The best of the Alpha Brigade. Do you want to be a soldier when you grow up?"

"I am going to be a legate," the girl replied.

"Good for you. I'm sure you'll follow in your father's footsteps," Sawyer said.

"Helen and I have business to discuss. I want you to crawl under your blankets, close your eyes, and go back to sleep. We'll have time enough to get to know each other, Shazel."

"Have you killed many Bajoran rebels?"

"Lots."

"And Fifth Order renegades?" Shazel asked, her eyes growing wide.

"Quite a few. Your father depends on me."

"I didn't know Father had a cousin until recently. When I grow up, I want to be just like you, Ren Yor. Will you teach me how to fight?"

"If and when you can speak nine languages like your father, then I will be more than happy to teach you how to fight. Education comes first," Sawyer said. "I adopted a

Cardassian boy close to your age. Eben Yor is his name. I'm sure the two of you will become friends. He's very smart. You'll have to study extra hard to surpass him."

"Girls are better than boys," Shazel said pulling the covers to her chin. "I'm sure that's why Father put you in charge. Do you command your brigade?"

"Right now, I'm in command of one little girl. Go to sleep. That's an order."

Standing, Sawyer walked ahead of me out of the room. I glanced at the girl and caught her peering at me with one eye open. She quickly closed it as I shut the door.

"Let's have a pot of tea and we can discuss what happened on Bajor," I said leading her into the kitchen. Sawyer gave me a funny look. "What? No tea?"

"We're going to Quark's. You're with the kids all of the time and I need a drink."

"All right, honey. I'll send for Roxell to watch the kids for me. Who is with Eben? I have been worried about him. He's my little buddy."

"Eben is with Garak right now. He's handling things well enough. The boy is mature for his age. For his sake, I'm glad we could leave Fort Varnok for a few days."

"I'm glad you're here too. Maybe between the two of us, we can figure out what's wrong with Dukat. I have a lot to tell you too. First, a drink."

As we arrived at the Promenade, I noticed more Cardassian banners hanging from the balcony. The red and black flag, with a dab of green, gave me a twinge of anxiety, for it reminded me of Nazi Germany. There were soldiers posted every ten feet, creating a claustrophobic and threatening atmosphere, a large crowd filled the bar. Most of the patrons were Cardassian officers, Dabo girls seated on their laps, the female ranks having swelled since Sawyer's absence. I didn't have to tell her Dukat had sent for them. I could tell she was angry.

"Look! It's Yor the Brave," a soldier shouted.

"You're quite the celebrity," I said.

Sawyer was a good sport. She greeted the soldiers and officers who patted her back and lifted their drinks in a toast. She laughed. I couldn't tell if it was sincere or fake, since I needed to tell her what had been going on during her absence, about Dukat, Garak prying into my affairs, and my concern for the children. We eventually pushed through the swarm

of armored bodies and scantily clad Dabo girls and reached the bar. Two soldiers moved aside, offering us their stools at the bar. Quark waited with a smile on his face and a tall glass of Romulan ale and one beer for me. Sawyer drank the entire glass and set it on the bar, licking her lips.

“Welcome home, Gil Yor. You have been missed,” Quark said. “I’ll admit during your absence I made quite a handsome profit. The Dabo girls are on the floor and means mean more latinum for me.”

My friend made a bold move and reached across the bar for Quark. Her fingers curled around the lapel of his multicolored coat as she pulled him across the bar to caress the length of one large, round ear. Sawyer laughed when he quivered from head to toe. So did I.

“Oh, my. Say it isn’t so?” Quark slid off the bar and onto the floor. He was quite the thespian. As his bulbous head reappeared, he winked at us. “Drinks are on the house.”

“That’s very generous, Quark. Bottoms up,” Sawyer said.

“Personally, I wouldn’t have it any other way,” Quark said laughing.

Lifting the beer to my lips, I took a large swallow. It helped considerably to calm my nerves. Sawyer lifted her head, listening. I’m sure she heard the strains of Earth music played over the speakers. Quark indulged me from time to time. Not everything was doom and gloom at the station. The bar felt like its own island where a party was in full roar and I felt my dark mood slip away. Even Sawyer seemed more relaxed.

“How have you been, Yor?” Quark asked. “Is it true what I hear? Are you and Damar actually engaged? A bold mood. Why isn’t he here with you?”

I sat straighter. This was news to me.

“Damar has too much to do on Bajor. As for being engaged, it’s only a rumor.” She turned to me. “He needs time to mourn the death of his wife, and I need to figure out what I want to do with my life. I don’t want marriage to feel like a security net.”

“There’s always time for that. No need to rush into marriage.”

A booth opened up. I nodded at Sawyer and hurried over to claim it. She joined me bringing the bottle of Romulan ale with her and fell into the seat.

“What is going on? You’re crying. Did you and Damar fight? Is why you’re here?”

“If you can call a demotion and the fact the Alpha Brigade was given to Ravon to command, then yes, he’s been great. Before you say a word, Damar has been kind to Eben. They adore each other. Damar is the father Eben never had.”

“What happened to Gul Parnal?”

“I killed the dirty bastard.”

Her hatred for the late gul took me by surprise. I sipped on my fresh glass of beer. “Dukat Renalt said led the attack and Major Kira was on hand as an observer. You killed Parnal? Really?” I asked thinking of Eben. “Now you have to tell me what happened, Sawyer. Please.”

Sawyer gave me a pained look. “I led a team into EK-1. Renalt, another Cardassian named Durgan, Kira and Prylar Evonya,” I said. “We located Gul Parnal’s camp. I went in first, which was a mistake, we killed two spies a number of Fifth Order traitors. When we returned, I was demoted for leaving the fort. I could have been shot for disobeying Damar’s orders. I was doing what Garak and Dukat wanted, so I got off easy.”

“This was an OO mission, wasn’t it? You were spying for Garak and Dukat. No wonder you needed a break from Damar. You’re too good for him, that’s the problem, and he knows it.”

A figure darkened our table and Garak slid in next to me. He had a box with a red bow on his lap, which he placed on the table. Sawyer started to stand.

“Don’t worry. A Dabo girl is watching Eben. Dukat insisted. The reprieve in my duties as uncle allows me to join you both. As a way to say thank you, Yor, I have brought you a gift. I also gave Eben a box filled of unused computer parts, so he may turn his room into a tinker shop. The boy is quite intelligent and needs to be kept stimulated.”

“You’re here to keep your eye on me. So I won’t confide in Helen,” I said. “Not at all. I brought you a gift to thank you for your help.”

Garak pushed the box toward her. She opened it, not acting keen to do so, finding inside a blue tunic and slacks with matching slippers. The set was beautiful. He’d added jewelry to match, far too expensive to be from him and I assumed it was from Dukat.

“Thank you, Garak. It’s nice,” she said. “what I need is a new sword.”

Sawyer gave him a quick kiss on his cheek. I noticed a few soldiers lift their glasses, toasting the pair. Folks on Terok Nor still believed Sawyer and Garak had slept together.

“I’m glad you’re pleased, Yor,” Garak said. “But you won’t need a sword. Now you’re a civilian for a while, you should find something else to wear. And what female doesn’t like new clothes, hmm?”

Finding Garak took credit when I had actually made the outfit for Sawyer was hardly a concern. If he felt he needed to smooth things over for something had happened on Bajor between them, he could take credit. was what I found so interesting. Renalt took credit for killing Parnal, only Sawyer had, and now something as silly as a dress I’d made was now a gift from Garak. It simply reminded me Sawyer and I played a similar game. Hers might seem more dangerous, she was a soldier, I thought of the bruises covered my body. My life as Dukat’s mistress was by no means any easier. Sawyer and I needed to confide in each other, it seems imperative we were on the same page, now Garak had arrived, she’d clammed up. I remember what’d she’d said about Gul Kenmar and how she thought Garak had considered helping him escape on a glider. Again, I learned Garak was involved with Gul Parnal and the events in the cave. I couldn’t remain silent.

“I thought you didn’t want to be a spy for the Order, Sawyer. You helped Garak capture Kenmar, he’s executed, and then you kill Parnal. You’re working on list of yours. I want to see it. I want to know if Vardon’s name is on it or not.”

“It’s classified,” Garak said. He ordered a drink from a passing Dabo girl. “And I kindly remind you not to draw attention to us by saying certain names out loud, my dear. It’s not like you didn’t know how serious this have become. You have your own gul to worry about. I might add he is acting more and more like a tyrant. That’s who we should be discussing, not here. Too many people are watching us.”

“Garak, don’t make me force you to ‘cry uncle’, Uncle.”

“I can’t tell you everything I know, Helen. Nor can Yor. As I said, it’s classified,” Garak said. “What I can tell you is Major Kira is on our side. Without her help, I would not be able to comprise such a list. She’s been assigned as a security guard on this station. She

is officially working for the Cardassians. Odo will be in charge of her. If all goes well, I have no doubt she'll return later with Yor and be given her own brigade."

"Garak, would you please go to the bar and ask Quark for a cigar?" Sawyer asked. "I'd do it, I'm a bit tired of all the attention. It's easier if you go. No one will bother you."

"Very well. Not a word about any of this while I'm gone."

Smoothing the front of his coat, Garak stood and walked toward the bar. I stood and came over to sit next to Sawyer. Cardassians were watching us. I felt nervous, she spread her arms wide, one over the back of the seat and the other on a railing, filling the space with her presence. This made her look larger than life and intimidating. I leaned against her, keeping my ear turned toward her, while I casually glanced around the bar, noting who watched us. Mainly officers seemed interested in us, a few males in civilian clothes also kept their eyes on us and I wondered if they were OO agents.

"No one can know what happened," Sawyer said. "Renalt was given the credit so Dukat could promote him. Dukat needs another Fifth Order officer on his side. Not all of them are against the Union. I am working for Garak. Dukat approved it. I guess I'm on loan for the time being."

"I made the dress for you. Not Garak. And you're acting as strange as Dukat. Something else happened that's driven a wedge between you and Damar. I want to know what it is, so tell me." I set the box aside, feeling certain Sawyer would rip it up to vent her frustration. "Does Damar not approve of your new job? Did you break up?"

"I wish it was simple. Things are so complicated, Helen. It's impossible to be involved romantically with my commander. Professional matters become personal ones. I don't know what I want anymore. First, Damar chose Glinn Dorric to replace me as his aide. It didn't matter because I was given command of the Alpha Brigade, after I went after Gul Parnal when I was told to remain at the fort, he demoted to the rank of gil. Glinn Ravon is now in command of the brigade. I suppose I deserve it. I couldn't tell Damar the truth. If he knew what Parnal did to me, he wouldn't want me anymore. I'm...I'm soiled."

The truth hit me hard. By soiled, I knew she meant she'd been raped, only she wasn't able to say it out loud. Damar had no idea what happened and instead of

comforting her, he'd sent her away. It was no wonder she continued to drink Romulan ale, one after another, trying to drown her heartbreak. The only way I could help her was to admit what was going on in life, for I realized we were on the same page in Q's game. I had to confide in her; completely.

"I told you Dukat has changed since we returned. His moods swings are drastic, Sawyer. One minute he is kind and the next he does things hurt me. Terribly things. I tried to blame it on the death of his wife, I'm only making excuses. It's not like I can run away from him again. I love him. And I'm terrified of what he's become."

"I'm a little afraid of him too, Helen. Neither of us can confide in Garak about what is going on. He can't help us. We need to be realistic about what is going on. We're not going to marry either Cardassian. It's impossible. Instead of swimming in this misery, we should be figuring out what the Prophets want from us. It certainly seems clear this blind loyalty to the Cardassians has brought us to this point."

"What are you suggesting? I don't want to leave Dukat. I love him. I know it doesn't make any sense. I'm glad you haven't seen what he's become. You've always loved Dukat too much. This love for this man is making us both act out of character. We're literally being beaten into the ground by these Cardassians. We need to make a stand. Together."

Garak had been delayed by Quark who brought out a box of cigars. He was busy explaining the types of cigars. It gave us more time to talk. I pushed the collar away from my neck, exposing the bruises on my neck. Tears appeared in her blue eyes.

"I'm sure you have bruises of your own at the hands of Gul Parnal. We've both been abused and taken by force. I don't know what to do, Sawyer. How can I still care for him? I must be crazy to admit I'm in love with him. If you feel the same, then you are too."

"Maybe Dukat is being drugged," Sawyer said. "If one of Torell's agents is on this station, they could easily slip something into his food or tea. It would explain his unusual behavior. We need to find out the truth. We can't let Torell destroy him."

"He's been acting paranoid. He doesn't trust anyone, Sawyer. He arrests anyone who disagrees with anything he says. I've seen him strike his officers. If he thinks for one second you're not on his side, he'll do the same to you. Don't say anything to him about

this. I'm afraid what he might do to both of us."

Garak appeared and handed Sawyer an already lit cigar. She took it from him, puffing away as she refilled her glass, lost in her private thoughts. Garak sat across from us and placed the box on the table. He surprised me when he reached across the table to place his hand over mine. I jerked my hand away. Sawyer reacted as well and blew smoke into his face. He coughed, giving us both a disapproving look.

"I'm gone five minutes and you two have decided I'm conspiring against you," he said. "The looks on your faces make it quite clear you've confided in each other. Very well. Let me confide in you as well. I need both of you to help me find the rest of the members of the Circle. There is it. Plain and simple."

"Sawyer thinks someone is drugging Dukat, Garak. Is it you?"

His eyes widened. "No, not me," he said. "It seems Torell has found a way to get Dukat to make all the wrong moves. If he continues down this path, he'll be removed from power. When happens, I fear the Circle will bring the Dominion through wormhole and Cardassian as we know it will be irreversibly destroyed."

"Dukat is on the balcony," Sawyer whispered. "Don't look. He's with Hadran and a few other officers. Garak, if Torell is behind this, then we need to help Dukat. I admit I'm out of ideas. I'm too tired to think. What can we do? Tell us."

"I'll find out if he's been drugged or poisoned. Helen, try to keep him as happy as possible. As for you, Yor, you'll have to obey any direct order or I believe Dukat will turn against you. We act as a team. We work together."

"Fine," Sawyer said.

"All right. Act fast, Garak. I can't take much more of this."

Unable to resist, I spotted Dukat and his officers staring at the Promenade. One of the men held a com-padd, taking notes. Another held a scanner, looking for something or someone, while Hadran stared right at us. I looked away, certain Dukat was making his own list of traitors, and I was afraid our names had been added to it. Sawyer scowled as her gaze returned to Dukat. Her expression was one of pure fury. Garak was concerned as well and rapped his knuckles on the table to get her attention.

"Are you deliberately trying to get in trouble, Yor?" Garak asked.

"I want Hadran to know I'm onto him."

"Wasn't he one of your War Dogs?"

I shook my head. "The moment I realized Hadran killed for fun, I booted him out of my brigade. I have never liked him. I wouldn't be surprised to learn he is in the Circle, Garak. Hadran is the devil himself."

"And Dukat has brought him to Terok Nor. Lovely," Garak replied.

SAWYER

Chapter Forty-Four

A cloud of cigar smoke billowed over my head as I slid out of the booth, leaving the box on the table, too drunk to worry about it. The bottle of Romulan ale was empty. Dukat, Hadran, Renalt and two other officers looked in my direction as I past under them. They reminded me of predators. I left Helen with Garak. He'd escort her to her room. All I wanted to do was go to bed and forget about my problems. Now Garak had involved Helen in his cloak and dagger maneuvering, I felt I needed to protect her. A few soldiers acknowledged me as headed toward the nearest turbolift. They seemed to be following me. I waved them off and stepped onto the platform, as it rose, I felt a rise in my throat. I stopped the turbolift on the balcony level, found no one watching me, and threw up on the floor.

I left the blue puddle behind and slid around the corner. Figures past me, I didn't focus on them, having to concentrate on where I placed my feet to keep walking. The desire to purge a second time required suppression as I approached Dukat, Renalt, and Hadran. I felt self-conscious and slid my hand across my mouth, hoping I didn't have vomit on my face or uniform.

"Good evening, Gil Yor," Renalt said.

I stumbled over my feet, righted myself as Dukat and Hadran turned toward me. Dukat crossed his arms, disapproving of my pathetic condition, while Renalt looked worried. Hadran wore an arrogant expression I was accustomed seeing on his ugly face. I offered a weak salute was not returned and continued to talk past them, wishing I were invisible when I heard Dukat's snide tone.

"Is there something you need, Gil Yor? If not, then go to your quarters. You're drunk and can barely walk when you should be in your bed, recuperating from your

injuries.”

“The ale helps,” I muttered seeing three Dukat’s instead of one. I had to pause in mid-stride to give a tiny shake of my head, clearing the cobwebs and found him blocking my path.

“If you are wondering what we were discussing,” he said, “I’ll be glad to end the suspense. We are discussing your status on this station. I’ll discuss it with you later.”

“You do that, Gul Dukat. Now, please. Would all three of you move aside? You’re in my way. Honestly, I think the gravitation drive stopped working or the floor is moving.”

“Do you need assistance?” Dukat asked.

“No, sir.” I suddenly hiccupped. “My apologies. It won’t happen again.”

“See it doesn’t, for the next time, I’ll have Glinn Hadran arrest you for conduct unbecoming to an officer.”

“Glinn? You promoted the snake? Of course you did,” I muttered, pushing past him. I didn’t care what they thought of me or what they said after I stumbled off.

The hallway with its bright light became a labyrinth. I persevered and turned a corner, able to see another turbolift with one eye closed.

“Just promote everyone on the station, you horse’s ass. I don’t care. Everyone me rises in rank. I keep sinking.”

Someone walked past me. “Hello, Yor. It’s a lovely night.” The voice was male and familiar. I halted and sidestepped into the wall. “Let me assist you.”

“Odo?” I asked unable to focus on his bland features.

“Yes, it’s me, Yor. In the future, I highly recommend you never drink to this point of intoxication. Dukat will most certainly arrest you. Fortunately, I came by at the right time. I noticed your offering left on the floor. Don’t worry. I’ll see you reach your room.”

Odo put his arm around me, his help eliminating the responsibility of finding my way to the level where my suite was located. He kept me moving, picked me up when I slumped and managed to get me to where I needed to be. I grabbed the front of his uniform, finding the color was black, yet another change made by Dukat.

“He’s lost his mind, you know. I have to help him find it.”

"I'm sure you will," Odo said. "Now go to bed and stay there, Yor."

Entering my room, I stumbled forward, removing my jacket and tossed it aside. Petra was snoozing on the couch. She quietly left before I could tell her exactly what I thought of her for having slept with Damar in the past. I checked on Eben. He was asleep. By some miracle, I made it to my bedroom and stumbled into a large desk. I slid into the chair, hugged the monitor, and gazed with blurred vision at the keyboard. Pushing my hair out of my face, I used a private code popped into my head and hailed Damar at Fort Varnok.

His sleepy face appeared on the screen. It took a second for him to awaken and he stared at me. I must have looked a sight and then I hiccupped.

"Hi," I said. "I'm drunk and feeling sorry for myself. And I miss you."

"It's late, Ren. I sent you there to rest, not to drink Romulan ale."

"Can Dukat monitor this call? Is it safe to talk?"

"As a Gul, Ren, I have certain rights and powers. Neither Dukat or the Obsidian Order is allowed to monitor my private calls. You also used a secured channel. You're not drunk. What is going on? Why would Dukat monitor a personal call between us?"

"Garak wants me to be a spy. So does Dukat."

"I'm aware of this. I don't approve, it's what Dukat wants."

"What Dukat wants...I'll tell you what he wants. He wants me. Why did you send me here? Dukat said you want me to be with him, only he's not himself. He's acting like he's the Gestapo. Look it up if you don't know what it is. I think Torell has drugged him."

Damar placed his hand on the monitor. *"We can discuss this later. Know I love you. Know I'm committed to you and our son,"* he said. *"Perhaps Eben isn't mine legally, I care not about legalities anymore when it comes to what I care about most. You and the boy. If I could be there right now, I'd hold you in my arms. I'm sorry I sent you away."*

"I should have told you about Parnal. I was afraid to tell you what he did to me. I thought you wouldn't love me anymore. Everyone is laughing at me."

"The official story is Major Kira sought your assistance and with the aid of Dalin Renalt, found and killed Gul Parnal. Dukat felt obliged to promote Renalt and give him the credit, Ren. I

know it's upset you. No one is laughing at you. I thought you wanted to be with him, that's what I sent you there. I make a mistake."

"What am I supposed to do? I don't want to be here. It's not safe for me, Helen, or the children," I said. A tear slid from my eye, which I quickly wiped away.

"I heard Dukat is not himself. What happened with Parnal is not your fault, nor do I blame you. It changes nothing between us. I need you to remain there and find out what is going on. I'm giving you a new access code when you contact me next. We'll change it each time you contact me. If Dukat is being drugged, then we must proceed with caution."

"No, you can't be involved. I won't pull you down with me, Damar. What I do from now on, I act on my own. Garak and Helen will help me figure it out. So will Odo and Kira."

"We both must follow orders, Yor. Be careful how you proceed."

"I will. I love you, Damar."

"The feeling is reciprocated. I'll talk to you tomorrow. Until then, be strong and be wise, Yor," Damar said.

His image faded from view. I stripped my uniform and crawled into bed, allowing myself to feel miserable without Damar, along with a sense of hopelessness at my current situation on the space station. When I passed out from the booze, I slept until late the next day. It was difficult then to want to rise from bed.

"I sometimes faked being sick when I didn't want to do homework. I see no reason you cannot remain here. I'll bring you something to eat and drink," Eben said.

He repeated the same words on the following day.

My son spent the day reading beside me, while Petra came and went, for some reason compelled to be of assistance. I hated her a little less each day. Hiding in my quarters wasn't a solution. I needed to rejoin the living. Dressing in my uniform, I took Eben to Helen's place. He'd remained at my side for three days and had yet to meet the other children. Eben and Shazel took one look at each other and ran into her room, giggling behind the door.

"Well, he's your son and she is a Dukat," Helen said.

Seated on the couch, Roxell knitted tiny socks for the twins. The crib was placed next to her. In this new environment, she seemed perfectly content to sit with the children, leaving me wondering if she'd left someone behind on Bajor. I'd never asked her about her past, something I needed to rectify some other time. Helen grabbed a cloak and led me to the door. The amount of body fat she'd lost giving birth to Cardassian twins had required a visit to Dr. Quirin for a nip and tuck. Seeing her trim was like looking at a new person.

"Roxell styled your hair. I think I may be jealous," I said. I was pushed toward the door. "Is there someplace we need to be, Mistress Helen?"

The door opened with a whoosh. Two hands were placed flat on my back and with a hard push Helen sent me stumbling out the door. I had a momentary view of Shazel chasing two Eben's into the front room; one was a hologram. The boy was showing off for the girl.

"Well, you're not going to Ops, Gil Yor. Quark prepared something special for your return to Terok Nor. We're going to the holodeck. Our little Ferengi seems to be the one running the black market on this station, not all imports goods are considered contraband. He didn't have any Earth apps, he managed to get his hands on something from a friend. You didn't hear from me."

"I may be a spy, doesn't mean I'm an informant," I said.

"So you're a mute Peeping Tom and eavesdropper? How is working for you?"

I laughed. "You'd best not be taking me to the Chicago comic con," I said. "That would be just sick and twisted. This is my mental health week. No mind games."

The program Quark had smuggled onto Terok Nor was an app most likely used on a Federation starship, which provided a scenario of private beach resort on Honolulu, circa 1962 A.D., which delighted me. Music by the Beach Boys played on a radio. We entered a cabana to change out of our clothes into swimsuits and again I was amazed at Helen's transformation into a voluptuous, non-pregnant sun goddess. Her red hair curled down her back, freckles lightly sprinkled her shoulders, and the green bikini suited her.

"Get over it already and stop staring at me," Helen said. She spread her hands across her flat stomach. "If we leave in the future, I should be able to trim down without

months of diet and exercise. Dr. Quirin is one of the best physician's in the Cardassian Union. You might layoff the weights, Sawyer. You're starting to look a little like She-Hulk."

"Screw you, Huckleberry. I happen to work for a living."

"Painting fences red," she said.

With blood, I thought. The commonality of our reference to Mark Twain's famous story about an orphan and his shiftless buddy on the Mississippi still made us both laugh. Eben might enjoy the book, obtaining anything from Earth was impossible. The new and insane Dukat would have demanded a book burning party. It was a shame he missed out on the beach party. Whether I looked butch or svelte, I'd wore a red bikini, easily able to alter my hair to appear long and blonde, a sight Damar would have appreciated. The ridges on my face, neck, and shoulders remained, only the human employees and tourists at the resort didn't notice. Strolling onto the beach, the wind in our hair, I thought we looked stunning. A handsome male employee met us on the walkway, offering a flash of his white teeth, leading us onto the Waikiki Beach. Diamond Head was to our left.

"This is the perfect place. I could never afford to go there," I said.

"It'll do just fine," Helen said.

Chairs placed beneath a pavilion waited for us. Sipping on Mai Tai's, watching surfers careen across large waves, two cabana boys joined us. Lotion smelled of coconut was rubbed on Helen's back, while she lay in the sunshine, wearing only bikini bottoms. I removed my top, rolled over to stare at the waves, groaning as strong hands worked the knots out of my shoulders. This was the life, I thought.

"It's nice no one knows us. Rub a little harder," I said. "Tomorrow, let's bring the kids here. I'll teach Eben and Shazel how to swim."

Helen's bruises had faded. She sipped on her drink through a straw as the cabana boy started to rub one of her legs. She was enjoying the scenario as much as me.

"Stop scrutinizing me. Dukat hasn't visited me since you arrived. I really don't care to see him to be honest. I don't think they can monitor us here," Helen said. "Someone forgot to tell Quark the waves on this side of the island aren't quite so large."

"I've spoken with Damar. I told him what is going on. I'm in spy-mode."

Though I'd been in bed for three days, Eben had kept me informed on what was going on at the station. He was able to hack into the Cardassians computer system to read transmissions. Dukat was preparing to leave Terok Nor to speak with Central Command about the murder of Legate Mikor. Constable Odo had provided evidence to support Dukat's claim Gul Raynor had murdered the legate. Helen and I were in the clear. The Order had kept their word and ended their investigation, at least on us.

"Life on Earth has to continue as it was, Sawyer. I've been thinking about it and I don't see how it's possible to suspend the lives of everyone else. I bet plane landed already and you and I are just missing from the passenger list."

Helen sipped on her drink. She was already turning red from the sun. The cabana boys finished their massages and moved on.

"I haven't really thought about it much," I said. "Venna was caught by Damar sending a message to Gul Mikor about our defenses. We don't have to worry about her anymore." I finished my drink and set it aside. "I also found out Dukat is planning to marry a young girl from a rich family. Her father has the political influence and money needed for Dukat to become a Legate. Sorry to bring it up like this, Helen. I thought you needed to know. I don't think he should leave. Not when he's as mad as a hatter."

She stared at me a good, long while.

"Unless you can find out what's wrong with him, I don't think you should offer to go with him, Sawyer. You aren't responsible for happens to Dukat any more than I am. I want to help him, I value my skin too much to try and stop him."

"Those waves are rather large for Waikiki," I said, watching a surfer disappear beneath the crest of a large wave. "Sometimes I dream about the ocean. It's not any place I've ever been to. I'm a little paranoid about sharks."

Helen ordered more drinks for us. We watched kids building a sand castle.

"Vardon's ship doctor once tended to the Dukat family," she said. "Dr. Zephyr is the one who discovered Mikelya had three sons by Mikor. When he told Dukat, he was dismissed and ended up on the Kobrak. You don't think Vardon is really a member of the Circle, do you? He was very nice to me, Sawyer. So was Dr. Zephyr."

A beach ball rolled past us.

"Vardon seems quite fond of you," I said. "I suspect the OO is still investigating him. He is the one who brought Glinn Venna to the fort. night he appeared in your room strikes me as the perfect opportunity to have murdered Dukat. You were there instead."

"I don't believe that, Sawyer. Vardon is a good man. If I hadn't been pregnant when I first met him, I think we would have hit it off. I guess it just wasn't in the stars. I'm too embarrassed to ask Garak about Vardon. Can't you look into it and clear his name? You did it for Renalt."

I didn't say anything. The emotion in her voice betrayed her feelings for Vardon. She more than liked him. For her sake, I hoped Vardon was loyal to the Union and Dukat. Her nimble fingers soon had her top tied back in place. Turning her chair around, she lifted into a sitting position and reclaimed her spot, facing the ocean, her drink in hand.

"We shouldn't stay out too long or we'll get sunburned," she said "Join me for dinner tonight. It will be just us, the kids, Roxell and Petra. You know Petra feels terrible about what happened with Damar. Just thought I'd mention it. I'm not going to ask Garak to join us, so you have excuse not to come. Eben and Shazel need to spend more time together. I've a feeling Dukat will leave her with me when he leaves. We need to think about them, Sawyer. They come first and so do the twins."

"Garak will be in his shop right now," I said, toying with an idea. "You know he's been preparing a list of traitors. We haven't caught them all. I want to see who is on it. If you could visit Garak after we leave the holosuite, keep him busy, I'll have time for a little reconnaissance. Garak wants me to be a spy. I'm going to spy on him. Young Yor is quite the inventor. He's made me something is fail safe to hack into any computer."

"Young Yor? Sounds like Jung. Carl Jung."

"There are no coincidences," I said. I'd never made the connection. "If things happen for a reason, Helen, then we're in the right place at the right time. I've been looking at this the wrong way. Let's get dressed and I'll pay a visit to Garak's room."

"Sounds like you have your confidence back. First, I want to feel dip my toes."

Rising from her chair, Helen ran toward the surf. I wrapped a towel around my

shoulder, feeling the sting of sunburn. We walked to the shoreline, letting the water curl around our feet.

"I believe you can do anything you put your mind to it," Helen said. "be careful. Garak's booby traps aren't the only ones you need to watch out for. Soldiers are stationed on every level and if you're caught sneaking around...."

"I've been planning this for the last few days." I grinned when Helen looked surprised. "I'm going to catch Torell. I'm doing this for us."

"Only for us?"

"I'll do everything I can to help Dukat too," I said. "I'm going to figure out what is wrong with him, Helen."

Taking the turbolift, I existed on the level Garak lived on, hiding behind a pylon in the corridor, trying to avoid being spotted by the guards. When I heard my com-link buzz and Helen whisper, "Move it," I turned to face the air vent behind me. Removing the grill, I crawled inside and replaced it. On my hands and knees, I crawled through a shaft, able to see bedrooms from the vents, passing five rooms before I came to Garak's suite. I had arrived at his living room. I removed the panel, able to squeeze through the dropped to the floor. A thorough search of this room provided no com-padds or computer. I found a pair of gloves, slid into them to avoid leaving fingerprints and entered his bedroom. He was a tidy fellow. His bed was made and everything had its place. I knew he liked putting monitors in mirrors and first checked the bathroom, finding nothing out of the ordinary and returned to his bedroom.

I had to think like a spy if the mission was going to be fruitful. Where would Garak hide his personal computer? I opened his closet, pushed his clothes aside, and knelt. I tapped on the wall, thinking it the perfect place for a safe. Finding nothing unusual, I was able to stand when a panel slid aside and a monitor appeared. Using Eben's hacking device, no more than the size of your thumb, I placed it on the monitor. In an instant, the computer was on-line, Garak's secret code broken and a long list of files appeared.

I searched for familiar names, starting with Gul Kenmar. I found his file. Within was a list of known enemy agents and officers in the Fifth, including Yennis and Kieryl. Behind

their names with a dash and the initials "KIA", which I knew meant they were killed in action. I located Gul Parnal's file. It contained the names of Gul Raderus Yor, Gul Raynor, and Gul Mukot. These were all things I knew, what I wanted was a master list. Another file called 'Laundry' caught my attention. I opened it and found a long list contained the names of every Fifth Order gul and officer, along with Gul Vardon and Gul Dukat's name, the names of Helen Monroe, Sawyer Kincaid and in parentheses the name of Ren Yor.

"You little shit," I muttered.

I downloaded the information straight onto Eben's device. I didn't know how it worked, I did know it deleted the history of files I'd just looked at. Garak shouldn't have spent so much time with my son, training him to be a spy, for the boy had was far smarter than his mentor. As I backed out of the closet, I assumed Garak had cameras and my illegal entry was recorded, Dukat had sanctioned my status as a spy, so I had a reason for being there.

Leaving Garak's room the same way I'd entered, I made my way to the vent in the corridor. I kicked the screen aside, slid out and replaced it, and then tossed the gloves into a trash receptacle and headed to Odo's office. He was the one person I trusted completely. I needed someone to talk to about what I'd found, knowing his assistance in the past had kept me from being executed for murder. He was the right man to help me.

The constable was staring at a wall of monitors as I entered the security office. Odo gave me a nod as I walked over. Glancing at the monitors, on several levels Cardassians guards were questioning people, making an arrest or beating someone senseless. A squad stood in the hangar, tossing crates into an airlock, while a Ferengi freighter captain was arrested.

"Quark's shipment of liquor was destroyed," Odo said. He tugged at the jacket of his black uniform. "I've assigned Major Kira and the Bajorans the task of patrolling the Promenade. They're wearing uniforms as distasteful as my own. As a constable, I pride myself on being impartial to everyone."

"I came to you for very reason, Odo."

"What may I help you with, Gil Yor?" he asked turning to me.

"I've obtained a list of Torell's assassins and people suspected of being traitors to the Cardassian Union. Before you tell me to give it Gul Dukat, I need to explain why would be a bad idea," I said. "First, his name is on list, along with my own, Helen, and Vardon. This list was compiled by Garak. I'm supposed to be working for Garak, so I didn't think the seizure of this information is unlawful, not technically. I do need a second opinion on how to proceed."

"Why would Gul Dukat's name be on Garak's list?"

"Because I suspect he unknowingly has an implant. It's the only reason explains his current behavior," I said. "Secondly, I want you to get to know Major Kira better. Ask her to join you for a drink tonight. Keep it informal. She knows more than she's telling us. Niyal Gora was her friend and he was a Circle member. Dukat either forgot this or he's waiting for her to make a move against him. Either way, I need to find out who on the list is actually with the Circle or is falsely accused like Helen and me."

"Yor, you're involving me in matters placed me in a great deal of danger," Odo said. "I admit I've found you to be of great service on Terok Nor. I must ask if you know who really killed Legate Mikor. I want to close my own personal investigation."

"Yes, I do know this information. Gul Raynor."

"You're protecting someone. I know it's not him," Odo said. "The little girl who witnessed the murder never regained consciousness. She was removed from the station on Dukat's return. I don't know where he took her, I doubt she's still alive."

"Sometimes the truth has to be created, Odo, to protect the innocent. Too many lives have already been lost because of the Circle. I am sorry about the little girl."

"Is this what you think is just and fair, Gil Yor? It is not Cardassian justice to invent the truth. You're protecting someone." Odo crossed his arms. "Is it a friend of yours?"

"You would have made a great Sherlock Holmes, Odo. Sherlock was the greatest fictional detective in literature on Earth, modeled after the writer, Sir Author Conan Doyle. Read one of his novels sometime. Holmes always follows through with a hunch. You do the same thing and I'd like to think I do the same."

"Tell me who killed Mikor?"

"I can't."

"Very well. Let me see the list then. I'll remember the names," Odo said. I handed him Eben's tiny device had a small screen. Odo rifled through the list, storing it to memory and returned it to me. "You've relieved me of one problem and presented new ones. I'll make a thorough review of each person. As always, I'll proceed with caution."

Nodding, I left security, planning to return to Helen's quarters before she arrived with Garak. Gul Renalt came around a corner. He paused and smiled wide.

"My friend, it is good to see you," he said. "You've been in the sun. You're almost brown. Terok Nor has been good to you. I'll be remaining here for a while. I admit I prefer solid ground beneath my feet, I'll assume command while Dukat visits Cardassia Prime. Will you remain or return to Fort Varnok?"

"I'm here for a while, I think."

"Have you considered in what capacity?" Renalt asked. "I could use you on my staff. You'll be restored to your former rank. You are a remarkable officer, Yor, and someone I trust." Renalt's gray eyes sparkled. "No one else stepped forward to speak on my behalf, you found a way to help me. As result, you secured my promotion. Dukat has spoken with the greatest respect about your abilities. Think about my offer. I think we would make a good team."

"I'll consider it, Gul Renalt."

"I am your friend, Yor. Please know that. I owe you my life."

Unable to resist, I threw my arms around the tall, rugged officer and hugged him. Renalt held me close for only a second and then set me back. He walked on. I turned and found Dukat no more than ten feet away, watching me. He was furious. He grabbed my arm and marched me to his office. He led me to a large window with a view of one Cardassian cruiser.

"Do you want to explain yourself, Gil Yor? What did Gul Renalt say to you? It was my understanding you are committed to Damar. Yet, I find you in another gul's embrace. If I thought for an instant you had changed your feelings toward Damar, I would certainly be more than a little annoyed."

“Gul Renalt said he was assuming command in your absence. He asked if I’d like to remain and join his staff. I said I’d consider it.”

“You’ve been avoiding me,” he said. “I know it’s because of Helen. As the mother of my children, I have nothing the greatest respect for her. However, she does not satisfy my every need.”

“What do you mean, sir?”

“You know precisely what I mean, Yor.” Dukat tried to pull me into his arms. I skidded away and ran around his desk, placing it between us, glaring at him. “Play this little game with me and there will be consequences. I suggest you comply before I lose my temper. You never resisted before. Isn’t this what you want? I have no difficulty separating my life with Helen and a relationship with you. A Cardassian male in my position has certain needs.”

“A second ago you accused me of having a personal interest in Renalt. Now you tell me you want to resume an intimate relationship with me. I don’t think it’s a good idea.”

Dukat shoved a chair out of the way. He circled around his desk, his back to the door, while I ran toward the conference table. With two routes to approach me, I used a chair to gain access to the table, walking the length to trap me in the corner. At his mercy, I pressed into the corner as he grabbed the front of my jacket and ripped it open. He moved fast, yanking my tucked shirt from my pants and shoved his hands beneath the material. His hands closed around my breasts with a vengeance. I was too shocked to move as he pressed his cheek against mine.

“You know very well I enjoy the pursuit, Yor. Now I know why you play coy. You mean to excitement to such an extent I’ll take you here in my office.”

His lips brushed across mine. One of the overhead lights shorted out and sparked. For a moment, I returned his kiss, until I felt him grab my wrist and force my hand over the erection pressing against the front of his pants. With a hard shove, I pushed him away from me. For a moment, it felt like we were engaged in Klin’Ha. He had the strength over me, he thought I was sexually aroused, which gave me the advantage.

I spun him around by his arm, brought him over my shoulder, and flipped him into

the air. He slammed on top of the table. The air rushed from his lungs in a loud exhale. He lay spread eagle, stunned for the moment. I backed away from him.

“Have you lost all sense of reason, woman?”

“I’m not being coy. I said it’s not a good idea. I meant it.”

Dukat collected himself and slid off the desk, rubbing his side. “Your strength has not abated, not in the least. You have you been taking strength enhancers. I’m not sure I approve,” he said. “I’d thought to be with you before I left. In Yor-fashion you have spoiled the moment,” he said. “While I’m sure you think the Obsidian Order no longer investigates you, it couldn’t be more far from the truth. I find myself again having to prove to everyone you are in fact Ren Yor. It was my initial thought to take you with me to Cardassia and formally introduce you to Central Command. I can now see you have yet to learn discipline and control.”

I glared at him. “Tell me why you are going. I want to hear you say it.”

“To clear up this fiasco about Legate Mikor’s murder and also to take a wife, Yor. Gul Vardon will be my escort. As a single man, I thought surely you desired to be with me, but I can see that’s not what you want. Therefore, you are assigned to watch Renalt while I am away. At the first moment he shows any sign of betrayal, kill him.”

In my anger at his assault, I’d completely forgotten to use the opportunity to find out if he had an implant or not. I regretted my actions now. I stepped toward him, he moved back.

“I’m hardly in condition to play your game, Yor. You’ve caused me to pull a muscle in my back. Oh, don’t look so pleased with yourself. I neither deserve your anger or this presumptive fit of jealousy. You will remain here and do what I ask. I need your support, now more than ever.”

Dukat smiled at me. It was the same old smile. I meant to find the implant. I pretended I softened and lifted my hand to touch his shoulder, he moved fast. My legs went out from under me with a well-placed kick and I ended up on my ass. The proud Cardassian stood over me, his boots on either side of my chest, laughing.

“Two can play this game,” he said. “I understand recent events have not played out

well for you. Consider my own obligation to marry a needle in my side. In order to maintain my position as Prefect of Bajor, I have no other choice to marry this particular girl. There are at least five who are suitable, however, Legate Kurson's daughter is the best choice. This presents another problem. Having Helen on this station is a problem. She and her brood of children will be taken by Garak to Fort Varnok."

"You'll do what you see fit," I said.

"I'm glad you agree with me."

Dukat reached for my hand, pulling me to my feet. I twisted his arm behind his back, kned him in the groin, and brought him to his knees. As I attempted to reach behind his neck to feel for the implant, his arms wrapped around me and he tackled me to the floor. He was kissing me before I could stop him. His hands closed around my wrists, jerked my arms behind his back, keeping me prisoner until he found my closed lips unwilling to respond. He again misunderstood my reluctance.

"Cousin, I do not desire to fight with you today. Understand, this is a political alliance and not a love match, so there is no reason to be jealous. Legate Kurson will secure my position on the Counsel. While I know you desire a pound of flesh, I'd prefer if you allowed me to maintain my dignity and explain this to Helen. She'll come to understand I cannot marry a non-Cardassian. It's ridiculous to consider the idea. Nor will I."

"Believe it or not, cousin, that's not what I was thinking."

"Then kiss me. We'll consider it an apology to one another."

I gave him a little peck on his cheek. Dukat wasn't satisfied. He rolled over, crushing me beneath him, placing his hand around my neck. His fingers tightened, strangling me as his lips found mine. One minute I was resisting and then I kissed him as if I'd never have the chance to do so again. At the same time, I reached under the back of his hairline, feeling for a bump and found what I'd suspected. Dukat had an implant. It must have throbbed at my touch. He scrambled on top of me, nestling between my legs, dry humping me while he continued to kiss me. I had no idea how to get out of the situation. Part of me didn't want to try.

"Yor, my warrior queen," he said, his lips at my neck. "Come. Adjourn with me to a

more private place. Let me kiss the shadows away tarry in the back of your mind and show you why so many Cardassians are bewitched by your beauty and strength.”

I completely relaxed as his tongue glided across my neck ridges. He lifted his head when I didn’t respond. His blue eyes were narrowed, the whites of his eyes streaked with red. His desire faded, replaced by confusion and anger. He fell beside me, breathing hard. If anyone had entered his office, we were hidden behind the table at the far end of the large office. I took pity on Dukat when he rubbed his temples. He was in pain and I’d only added to it.

“I’m sorry,” I said pressing against him. “Does it hurt terribly? Your head?”

“Now you show me pity,” he replied. He grabbed hold of my hand, lifting it to his lips and raised into a sitting position. I was pulled against his chest. “I did consider marrying you, Yor. Does this surprise you? Of course it does. If I married you, the OO would have no choice validate your bloodline. I could restore the Yor family name to one of honor. You lack the political alliances and financial resources I need. Without a doubt, I’d be happier with you at my side.”

“No, you wouldn’t. You prefer someone you can control.”

“Perhaps. I cannot marry Helen, either,” he said. “She is a fine mother. She’d possibly be a suitable wife, not for me. I want you, only it’s not possible. Am I wrong to be honest with you?”

“You break my heart.”

“Ah, there is my jealous lover,” Dukat said. He lifted my head to kiss me. “Do not think the situation we find ourselves in pleases me. Far the contrary. I am impoverished of love and yet must endure what prevails upon me with my head held high.” He kissed my forehead. “This may be our last time together. When I return with a wife, I will not have time to visit you. It is expected I spend time with Kornica. Do you still love me?”

Unable to answer him, I remained pressed against him, able to hear his rapid heartbeat beneath my ear. He stroked my hair, holding me close. I finally gave a little nod. He slid his index finger along my cheek, wiping away tears.

“Say it one last time, Yor. Please.”

"I love you, Dukat."

"More than anyone else?" There was a threat in the question.

"Yes," I whispered.

Dukat stood so fast it left me in a whirl. He yanked me to my feet. His mood changed drastically in the blink of an eye. All tenderness vanished, replaced by anger. He walked over to his desk and threw his body into the chair, glowering at me as I walked toward him. I hid my hands behind my back to hide the fact they trembled.

"You will support my marriage and you will do what I ask. Remain here and watch Renalt. Make certain Helen and Garak are not here when I return. If and when the days comes and we enter into negotiations with the Federation, I will lead the delegation ahead of a large fleet."

I came to a halt beside his chair "What are you talking about? You're the one who convinced Central Command not to attack the Federation territory," I said. "After you spent so much time to make Bajor a colony and introduced Bajorans into the Cardassian military, I thought you wanted to join the Federation."

"I need not explain myself to a mere gil. Will you obey my orders?"

"I would prefer to return to Fort Varnok with Helen and Garak," I said. I noted a murderous look in his eyes. I quickly changed tactics. "Pin a few metals on me before you go. I want to return highly decorated. In time, I'll earn another promotion."

"You're staying here. This is where I need you. Of all my officers, you are the one who I can count on. I trust you more than Damar and that's saying quite a bit."

As Dukat rambled on about Damar's value, I stepped away from his chair and tapped Eben's hologram devise on my right wrist. I left my hologram standing beside him and moved behind a steel pillar bordered the windows to see what he'd do next. Dukat grew silent, scooted his chair toward my hologram, and reached for me. He grabbed air. The hologram stepped aside, bowing low. I walked out from behind the pillar and turned off the hologram.

"Bravo," he said scornfully.

"I can be an effective spy, Dukat."

“not a commander. is not a task for amateurs, Yor. You cannot consider the feelings of others when you are trying to win a war. Events have occurred of late have changed everything. I must implement a few new policies you may not like or understand. It is regrettable, I cannot allow you to marry Damar at this time.”

Whatever type of implant Torell had placed in Dukat, his thoughts and emotions were all over the place. A spy had to be on the station, controlling the device. I feared the moment he arrived on Cardassia, he'd start spouting wild ideas, turn violent and end up in prison. Had I only brought the Romulan applicator I could have removed the damn implant.

“It's my fault,” I muttered.

“Yes, it is. You're not really a Cardassian. Do not confuse politics with pleasure. Nor my leniency and affection for the means to obtain power. Until my own position is secure, you will do what I say. I can see now it was a mistake to rekindle the flame. Learn to play the game better, Yor, if you hope to survive. You're dismissed.”

Filled with mixed emotions, I approached the door and turned toward Dukat. He stared at me with a strange expression on his face terrified me. In the few minutes we'd tussled on the floor, whatever sanity he still possessed had vanished. I'd lost him to his dark half.

“Happy journey, cousin,” I said fearing I'd never see him again.

“Yor? The next time you disobey me, you will be shot.”

Leaving his office as quickly as possible, I returned to my quarters to change out of my uniform into civilian clothes. I hurried to Helen's room. She'd set the table. Eben and Shazel were seated together. Roxell and Petra were guests, Garak was not present. I took my seat, listening to their conversation like the drone of bees in my ears. Afterwards, we played card games until it was time for the children to go to bed. The Dabo girls went to work at Quark's, while I helped Helen clean the table.

“Can Eben spend the night? Roxell can watch the kids and I need to talk to you on the holodeck.”

Helen agreed to meet me. I returned to my room and I hailed Damar. He wore his

formal uniform. I'd called him out of a meeting. Seeing his handsome face and the intensity of his love conveyed in his eyes, I felt like a little traitor.

"Did you learn anything about Dukat's situation?"

"Dukat has an implant. I don't have the means to remove it. He's no longer in control, Damar. His orders are erratic and he's lost all sense of reason. I'm afraid for him."

"I am more concerned for the Cardassian Union," Damar said. "Dukat's marriage is one of convenience. It couldn't be more inconvenient for Helen. He's given her to Garak. She's to be his mistress. You are to remain on Terok Nor. So is Helen, Garak and the children. Unless you can find a way to remove the implant, it may be impossible to protect him, Yor. I will do what I can from here, you must make certain things remain calm at Terok Nor."

"I need the extractor. It's in our room."

"You know I cannot send you a package. Terok Nor is on lock down. You must find a way to bring Dukat to Fort Varnok. Until then, you're the only thing stands between Dukat and destruction. Stay strong."

"I'll do my best."

Damar faded from view. I went to find Helen.

HELEN

Chapter Forty-Five

Dukat was leaving Terok Nor evening and hadn't bothered coming to see me. I'd considered visiting his office, changed at least a hundred times, finding it easier to work out my frustration on one of Sawyer's battle programs than face him. I'd chosen one of her favorite battles, one of a handful of Cardassians left to defend an outpost against a Romulan invasion on Rigelus 7. I engaged the program. Romulans poured over the broken wall. I was armed with a sword. In a flurry of motions, using every trick I'd learned on my own or Sawyer had taught me, I attempted to kill as many Romulans as possible.

"Program halt!"

Warriors froze in mid-motion. A Romulan was caught flying through the air, possibly a life-threatening maneuver, he was suspended directly above me. I lowered my sword and stood there, sucking in deep lungful of air as Sawyer approaching. She her hand over her arm Blood trickled through her fingers. I'd set the safety protocols on low, minor injuries only, and in her effort to reach me, she'd been wounded.

"You should know better than entering a holosuite while a program is engage, especially when you're not armed," I said. "Are you trying to get yourself killed?"

"Me? What the hell are you doing on Rigelus 7?" Her voice was tight with anger.

"Practicing how to fight. You told me to get in shape, so that's what I'm doing."

"I said to meet me here. I didn't say to run one of my programs." Sawyer sat on the wall, the Romulan suspended above her. "Dukat has an implant. I'm sure of it, Helen. There's no way I can remove it, unless I can get him to go to Fort Varnok. He's going to Cardassia to marry some little girl," she said. "He's given to Garak as his new mistress. That's not the worst past. I found list of traitors on Garak's computer. You, me, and Vardon

are on list. I'd say it's a death list, Helen. As far as the OO is concerned, we're no better than the members of the Circle. And Helen, he knows Dukat has an implant. He's on the death list, too."

I stretched my lips into a grimace tried to pass for a smile. "You're more surprised than I am we're on Garak's list of spies. That's what we are, Sawyer. I'm sure Garak has a plan. He's our friend. Now, if you're ready to join me, let's go for Round 2," I said. "This battle gets tougher as you go along. You added ever-increasing levels of difficulty. I added a few random event factors of my own. This is addictive. You're right. It'll help keep our minds off our problems."

"Computer. This is Gil Yor. Delete program."

I shouted in protest as the entire landscape, dead warriors, and all, vanished. We were left standing on the black and yellow grid of the holosuite.

"Have you heard anything I said? I've decided to smuggle you and the kids to Bajor. Damar is waiting for you. When Dukat returns, I'll tell him you've left him. I know he'll come after you He always does."

"I'm not some puppet you can pull about by the strings, Sawyer. I'm not going. Dukat may have given me to Garak, I don't have to do what any of you say. I'll be here when he returns with his new bride. Now go away."

"Didn't you hear me? I can remove the implant at the fort."

I laughed, a bitter, hollow sound. "Then smuggle Dukat to the fort and get it done. I'm not returning to place. For once I'm going to do what I want to do. I'm Garak's Mistress now. At least I know my virtue will be safe with Garak," I said. "I'm sure you're pissed about Dukat's impending marriage. Did you think he would marry you? Of course you did. That's why you're came to Terok Nor. You've already given him every last inch of your humanity. Why not give him your soul as well?"

"The Prophets are waiting for us to return."

"Let them," I said.

"Stop being a victim, Helen. Try making the right moves for once."

"So now I'm a victim. You sound just like your cousin."

“Really?” Sawyer asked. “Because I don’t seem to recall threatening to shoot you if you don’t do what I say. It’s not the first time he’s made the threat. The difference is this time Dukat means it. I have to stay, Helen, and obey orders. If you intend on saying, then become a Cardassian.”

“Everyone is already telling me what I can and can’t do,” I said unable to hold back my tears. I stomped away from her, flailing my arms in the air. “I don’t want to go to the fort. I want Dukat to be like he was. Why can’t you just remove the implant? Why do you have to let him leave and marry some stupid girl? You know I love him. We always have to do what you want to do. Just admit it. You’re in love with him.”

Sawyer reached for me, I shrugged away from her. I felt childish after I yelling at Sawyer, as devoted as she was to Dukat, I expected her to drag me out of holosuite, kicking and screaming, instead she came to attention. A second Sawyer appeared at her side, both looked impressive in their matching Cardassian armor, and as I stared in shock, they circled me in different directions.

“What is going on? How are there two of you, Sawyer?”

“One is a hologram. One is me. You needed to be distracted.” Sawyer held out her right hand and pushed the armor up, showing off an interesting silver cuff with a dial. Her hologram flipped me off, she offered me a kerchief. “Dry your eyes and snap out of it.”

“You’re taking this spying business rather seriously,” I said wiping my cheeks dry. “If you wanted to get me to stop crying, it worked. Eben made for you, didn’t he? It’s amazing.”

“This total dependency on Dukat you’ve clung to since the moment you arrived at Terok Nor has to stop,” she said. “By remaining human, you remain his slave. You ended up pregnant and thought was enough to keep him. Well, it’s not.” She turned off the hologram. “I’m alone, Helen. I’m the only one who is trying to help Dukat. Damar can’t. Garak won’t. And you’re too busy feeling sorry for yourself to lend a hand.”

She removed another silver cuff and placed it on my left wrist. At the turn of the dial, my own hologram appeared beside me. It was entirely different from gazing into a mirror. As I moved, the hologram did the same thing. I gazed at a woman who wore a

mask of sorrow, with not a shred of confidence I'd once felt on Earth. The face stared at me looked lost, forlorn, and incredibly tired. And here I'd thought I looked good.

"Now image what you would look like after you take charge of your life and spend an hour in Dr. Quirin's lair. A few ridges, black hair, yet still undeniably beautiful."

Sawyer reached over and flipped the switch on my cuff. My hologram altered. A version of myself as a Cardassian appeared. We stared at one another

"Garak does care for you, even if he has a strange way of showing it," she said "He'll supply you with a new name and a background, if you ask him to. As a Cardassian, you'll be treated as equal to men and be entitled to the same rights they have. Hell, you can marry Garak or Gul Vardon and have them adopt your children. Or you can just go to Fort Varnok and wait for Dukat and I to come to you. I suggest you do the latter."

I couldn't take my eyes of my hologram.

"Dukat doesn't love the girl," she said. "He'll lose interest in a few weeks. The one thing we can be sure of is he always loses interest in weak-willed women. Show a little backbone and take charge of your life. Show a bit of Texas spirit. You don't need Dukat to be whole, Helen. You're an independent, strong woman. Start acting like it."

Glancing at Sawyer and then at the hologram, I knew I didn't want to be a Cardassian, not forever. I wanted to resist, a tiny voice said my friend knew Dukat better than I did. If I wanted him back, then I needed to play the game as she did. I crossed my arms and the hologram did the same.

"Can Dr. Quirin make me look as good as you? Mikelya resembled a buzzard. I don't want to appear harsh or hard. More like Madison. She looks like you."

"Quirin will do it," she said. "He doesn't have a choice. If he refuses, I'll report him for selling Cardassian blood to Utherians on the black market. You'll never see an Utherian on the station, for they are hideous to look at. Still, he's made a tidy profit selling them Cardassian blood."

"How do you know that? And how do you know about Utherians? I mean, gross."

"I listen. I eavesdrop. Whenever I use the hologram, I can be in two places at once. The thing is, Helen, I know what I have to do. What about you? Are you in this with me or

are you going to sit on the bench through the entire game?"

"Computer. Honolulu, if you please."

Sawyer, my hologram, and I stood on the beach, watching the waves roll in. It was night and the moon hung overhead like a large orange ball. The water was cast in a green light as plankton moved beneath the surface of the water.

"Why are we on Garak's list of traitors? Why won't he help Dukat?" I asked.

"I don't know. Garak might tell you," she said. "from what I can see, I'm the only one who is willing to go to hell and back for Dukat. Yes, I love him. Do you?"

"More than anything," I said. "Now show me how this stupid thing works. I may need it. Can the hologram stand there while I move around?"

"Turn the dial so the little arrow points upwards. Just mentally tell your hologram to stay beside me and go take a walk along the shore. It will stay here with me if you focus."

Removing my boots, I ran toward the water. It was warm. I waded to my knees. When I turned, my hologram was staring at Sawyer, reflecting on its face what I was thinking. Sawyer could have Dukat if she really wanted him, for some reason she preferred to serve him. I bent low to let my hands submerge in the water, watching the moonlight at play on the waves. When I looked back at Sawyer, Garak had joined her, I was able to hear their conversation and remained in the water, eavesdropping.

"I assure you I did everything I could to convince Dukat to return to Bajor," Garak said. "He is convinced we need to remain here to locate Circle members. You did say you wanted to help him. Just look at you, Yor. You've turned out to be ruthless, resourceful, and loyal. You showed those traits long before I asked you to help me. There's a saying. 'Do not look for the Order. It looks for you.' It's found you and Helen. I'll do what you ask as long as she approves."

"I don't work for the Order," Sawyer said. "I work for the Second Order."

"As long as we are both working together, then be Dukat's spy. The Second Order could benefit from having their own counterintelligence division. Has Helen agreed to be Cardassian? Will she help us track down these traitors?"

“She’s standing right there. Ask her, Garak.”

“Do you think I can’t tell the difference between a hologram and the real woman? How naïve do you think I am, Yor? Don’t answer that,” he said. “Dr. Quirin said he would alter Helen’s appearance. I’ve had the official documents prepared to make her my legal niece. I will ask her myself.”

Sawyer laughed. “Then ask her.”

Walking out of the water, I send my hologram walking along the beach. Garak stared at me, a thoughtful look on his face. I didn’t care how much Sawyer disliked him. He was family to me and I gave him a kiss on the cheek.

“It’s what I want,” I said. “we can have no more secrets between us. We work together to help Dukat and end this war. Afterwards, we’ll figure out what the Prophets want and return to Bajor. Now, I want you two to shake hands on it.”

As Garak extended his hand toward Sawyer, she hesitated, looking at something behind me. I turned, stunned to see Dukat walking after my hologram. The water lapped at his boots. He held a pistol in his hand, unaware we watched him further up on the beach. My hologram turned toward him. The pistol was pointed at my chest. He fired. The beam struck the hologram, which vanished from sight. Dukat dropped the pistol, sinking to his knees.

“Get her out of here,” Sawyer shouted.

Garak grabbed my arm, pulling me toward the exit. I’d just seen Dukat shoot me. I was too stunned to move, unable to walk and crumbled to the sand. Garak knelt beside me.

Somewhere he found a beach towel and wrapped it around me, hiding me as best he could. He remained beside me as Sawyer ran toward Dukat. She kicked him in the back, pushing him into the surf and fell on top of him, striking many blows before he knocked her aside.

“Get out of my way, Yor. This doesn’t involve you. When Garak said he meant to officially make Helen his niece, I had no idea he meant to adopt my children. I have no intention of leaving her with him. If I can’t have Helen, no one will!”

“you gave her to him!”

Sawyer managed to stand, dragging Dukat out of the water. She placed her foot on his chest to keep him on the ground. He let out a roar of pain sent shivers down my spine. I clung to Garak, the need to tell Dukat I was still alive tearing me apart, I didn't go to him.

"I want you to listen to me," Sawyer shouted. "Torell managed to put an implant in your head. If you leave for Cardassia, he may trigger a reaction will ruin any chance of being promoted to Legate. You could lose Bajor and the war. You could be arrested and tried for treason. If you come with me to Fort Varnok, I can help you. All of us can go tonight, cousin."

Dukat groaned. "What have I done? I've killed her."

"That wasn't Helen," she said as she sank into the sand beside him. "There is a plot to prove you have lost control, Dukat. Command Branch supersedes Central Command. An Obsidian Order agent can replace a military officer deemed unfit. Do you want the OO to take charge of Terok Nor? You can't leave. You have to come with me. I'm going to help you and then all of this will make sense."

"She's dead! Nothing else matters!"

Dukat grabbed Sawyer by the neck, strangling her, while she tried to wrench his hands loose. Somehow she managed to wrap her legs around his body. With extreme force, she gave him a head butt. Both toppled over as a wave crashed over them, momentarily vanishing from sight, and they reappearing wrestling in the sand. Throwing sand in his face, Sawyer pushed Dukat aside and crawled away. I started to shout, Garak put his hand over my mouth, drawing me away as Dukat caught Sawyer by the leg. He jerked her toward him as another wave swept over them.

"I did you a favor, Yor. Helen betrayed us both," Dukat snarled. "When she was pregnant, she came to Damar one night. They laid together, but neither of them ever admitted it, did they? What do you think of your friend and your lover now?"

"You're lying."

"I found them together. I am telling you the truth, Yor."

"Then I'm glad they did it. We've been nothing cruel to Damar and Helen. It's why we can't be together. We bring out the worst in each other."

The one thing I'd ever been shamed of doing was now out in the open. Sawyer knew I'd been with Damar, yet she wasn't angry at us. It never occurred to me she was more loyal to me than Dukat. I'd misjudged her terribly.

"We need to leave before Dukat realizes you are not dead," Garak said. "If Yor has any intelligence, she'll let him think he killed you."

"I can't leave her here with him. He's insane."

"She's buying you time to hide, you little fool. Now hurry."

Garak opened the door the door of the holosuite, allowing light from the hallway to spill inside the holosuite. The people seated in a courtyard, having dinner, stared at the door as if they'd been given a view of an alternate universe. Garak dragged me into the hallway. My heart thumped wildly as he dropped me and together, hand in hand, we ran to a nearby turbolift.

"We're going straight to sickbay," Garak insisted. "Dr. Quirin will perform the operation. You'll be a new person before Dukat ever realizes the mistake he make. Don't think. Just move."

The journey to sickbay was a blur in my head. Dr. Quirin was waiting for us. He took me right into a back room, made me undress and lay on a table. Garak stood guard at the door, revealing a pistol he'd been armed with the entire time.

"This won't take long," the doctor said.

A hypo was used to made me sleep. When I opened my eyes, it felt only seconds later. I was still on the same bed, I was covered with a sheet. Garak sat in a chair beside me, holding onto his pistol. He reached out to take hold of my hand.

"It's all right, Helen. You're still beautiful," he said. "The surgery was a success. Would you care to see a mirror?"

"All right," I said though I wasn't sure I wanted to see my Cardassian face.

Garak walked over to a table, removed a mirror, and brought it over to me. He held it before me. The face stared back at me was similar to the hologram, only it was real, not an illusion. My hands trembled as I touched the ridges on my face, surrounded by a mass of black curls. I was a Cardassian, at least on the outside.

"It's better this way. All we need is a new name for you," Garak said.

"Whatever you think best. Make it memorable."

* * *

SAWYER

Against my better judgment, I waited at the transporter room with a small gift, which I intend for Dukat to give to his bride. Eben had insisted on coming with me. I was frightened, I held my ground and waited. Dukat arrived five minutes late, in a hurry, carrying his bags, followed by four guards. Noticing me and Eben, he handed his bags to an officer and approached.

"Eben wanted to see you off. I'm sorry we quarreled," I said.

Dukat ruffled Eben's hair and gave me a sheepish look. I handed him the box with a pretty red bow. It was the same gift Garak had given me, with the blue tunic inside, minus the jewelry. I couldn't re-gift Dukat's present, a common way on Earth to get rid of something you didn't like or in need of a fast present. He gave it a hard shake.

"This is a wedding gift for my bride," Dukat said. "I thought you didn't approve? What is it? A plasma bomb?"

"It's something for Kornica to wear. I hope it fits her. I believe she's tall."

"Quite small. Far smaller than Helen was." Dukat glanced at Eben. He still looked dazed from what had happened in the holosuite. I let him think he'd killed Helen. It's what he wanted, after all. "How thoughtful of you to think of my bride on her wedding night. A very clever move on your part. I'm sorry things happened as they did. I'm sure you agree it's better this way, Yor. Take care of my children while I'm gone."

"I will."

"Do hurry back," Eben said.

"You're his hero. And mine," I said. It hurt to say it.

"Still?" Dukat's eyes gleamed in a disturbing manner. "You are mine, aren't you? To think I ever doubted you. Nothing can part us. All is forgiven. I'll inform Gul Damar you will remain until I say otherwise. Farewell, dear cousin."

"Farewell, Skrain."

A tender look appeared in Dukat's eyes as he kissed my cheek. When he straightened, his expression altered to look more menacing. Crazy crocodile, I thought. Dukat motioned toward his officers, eager to be off. Hadran was accompanying him. They climbed onto the platform to beam onto the Kobrak, vanishing from sight. I grabbed Eben, holding him close.

"I'm glad he's gone," Eben said.

"Me too."

I felt like I was in a daze as I returned with Eben to my suite. Petra arrived to watch him. I left Eben to have dinner with her and headed toward Gul Dukat's office, replaying what had happened on the beach. If I hadn't given Helen the hologram, he would have killed her. I knew she had to be hysterical. Garak waited in the hallway outside Dukat's office. I could see Gul Renalt seated at Dukat's desk, speaking with an officer.

"It's done," Garak said.

"It will be better for her as a Cardassian. I still can't believe Dukat shot her."

"Does he believe he killed her?"

I nodded. "Helen can't send Vardon any messages. She mustn't tell him she's alive. Everyone has to think she's dead. Dukat didn't even say he was sorry."

"You played it well, Yor. You saved her life. I've moved her into my own quarters, Shazel must stay with you from now on. Rowell will help take care of the twins. You have Petra. Since the babies have my last name, it won't look suspicious. People will believe my niece is here for a visit. Visit us when you can."

Garak faded away and I entered the office. I saluted Renalt. He waved me over.

"Dukat is gone then?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Fate has brought us together, Yor. Dukat approved you to join my staff, at least on a temporary basis. I need your help. You know the people on this station far better than I do and I'm not certain who I can trust," Renalt said. "I'd consider it a favor if you took charge of overseeing security and the daily rosters. I've already lifted Dukat's ban on ships to visit Terok Nor. We need supplies. You will keep me apprised of what ships come and go, who comes onto the station, and if you suspect anyone of being in the Circle. I'm well aware Dukat depends on you for practically everything. Between you and I, I've been a soldier all my life, fighting wars on land, not running a station. Again I must ask you to assist me and not object when I receive the credit for your own labors. Is this agreeable?"

"Yes, sir. May I lessen the amount of soldiers on duty and the patrols? People are living here in terror. I think it should be minimized while Dukat is gone," I said. "Odo and Major Kira can handle security. I need to be able to move about freely and talk to folks. They'll think me less of a threat if guards aren't at every corner."

"Do that. You'll join me for dinner each night and brief me," Renalt said. "I know it's been difficult for you since we came to Terok Nor. Dukat was not wrong to feel suspicious of everyone who comes here. I know what the Fifth is capable of, Yor, and a wounded beast is vicious when cornered."

"You can count me, Gul Renalt."

"And Yor? Perform well and I have the power to promote you to glinn."

I left Renalt's office and paid a visit to Odo. Major Kira with him, her soldiers seated monitors. They grew silent and stared at me.

"Gul Renalt had ordered to me to act as his second-in-command," I said. "I require your assistance to keep me updated on any arrests, suspicious guests or any problems. Double-check the identities of everyone on the station, those already here, and anyone coming and going. I want those names compared to the list I gave you, Odo. But leave Garak out of the loop."

"As you wish," Odo replied.

I retired to Damar's old office. I had suddenly found myself second-in-command at Terok Nor. I hailed Damar next, advising him of the situation, he'd already spoken to

Dukat and knew I'd be delayed. His new routine was sleeping for a few hours at intervals and working around the clock, several officers present at most times, and I'd noted how tired he looked and yet an air of confidence suited him. I didn't tell him about Helen. The less he knew the better.

"We'll see each again soon. Tell Eben I'm proud of him. Make me proud as well."

Not a tender conversation as I'd hoped to hear, he'd not been alone.

The next hour I spent on the daily roster. I posted guards at major intersections on each level and altered the amount of patrols. One patrol would make a sweep on each level every three hours. I also ordered all one Cardassian banner removed from the Promenade and lifted curfew. Two non-Cardassian ships had arrived with supplies. Things were quiet. Hours later, I headed to Quark's for a late night drink. There were fewer patrons at the bar, no music played and Quark stood behind the bar, talking with his brother Rom who had recently arrived to assist him. I sat on my favorite stool in the middle of the bar and ordered Irish Coffee. I had to explain to Quark what it was and he placed it in front of me.

"I already see improvement now Gul Renalt is in charge," Quark said. He pointed at a Ferengi beside him. "This is my brother Rom. This is Gil Yor, Dukat's cousin. Don't worry, Rom. She's my friend."

"Nice to meet you, Gil Yor," Rom said. He was not as remarkable as Quark and considerably more nervous.

"You're both going to be paid for working for as informants," I said sliding two bars of latinum across the bar. They were snatched away by Quark. "If you hear anything interesting, come and tell me. I'll make it worth your while."

Rom smiled. "Paid for gossiping? You're right, brother. She is our friend."

SAWYER

Chapter Forty-Six

In the morning, Helen and Garak met me in my new office. We sat at an oval table, a computer monitor placed in the center, while I provided an altered version of the 'Death List.' Garak looked concerned as the names appeared on the screen. I'd caught Garak by surprise since he hadn't known I'd been in his room. Helen appeared nervous, though I had to admit her new face made our lives far easier. She looked every bit a Cardassian, her eyes were filled with sorrow. I couldn't imagine how she felt knowing Dukat had killed her hologram.

"I still don't know why you advised Odo about this list," Garak said. "If you're going to include him, Yor, then why not ask him and Major Kira to sit in on this meeting?"

"A good idea," Helen said. She didn't have much enthusiasm in her voice.

"Right now I want us to know precisely who is on the list of Circle members," I said. "I've taken the liberty of removing three names. Mine, Helen and Dukat. I don't care why we were on the list, Garak. The names come off or your goes on. There are ten officers I'm particular keen to find, as well as Agent Torell and five assassins including Glinn Kieryl. I don't think they'll show their faces here, I've been instructed to locate and arrest any suspected traitors. I've Odo asked to release all prisoners he was holding."

"Well, you are quite the little buy bee," Garak said. "Mind telling me how you broke into my room and found this list of names?"

By breaking your security code and hacking into your computer. As of today, you will no longer send secret messages to the OO. All transmission will come through me first. And don't think you can be clever and go around me, Garak. Dukat has put me in charge of his intelligence division. You now work for him. Any questions?"

"Did he asked about me?" Helen poured cream into her coffee. "Does he realize he

killed me or rather killed my hologram? Doesn't anyone care I'm dead?"

"I care. You refuse to use another name," I said. "What's wrong, Garak? You have a weird look on your face."

"Do I?" Garak pointed a pistol at me. "Once in the Order, always in the Order. You work for me. Is clear?"

"Put it away," I said. "Don't make me hurt you."

"All I have to do is pull the trigger," he replied.

"And then what?" Helen asked in a shrill voice. "Are you going to shoot me as well? I've already been shot once and I didn't like it. If you two are going to squabble every time we're together, then I don't care to spend time with either one of you. I find you both horrible."

"Garak, all you have to do is tell me who placed the implant in Dukat's head. I know Torell is behind it. How did he do it? I know It happened on Bajor. Was it Venna?"

"I could kill you right now," Garak said. He persisted on playing the big bad.

"Yes, you could. I'd rather work together to find the traitors," I said. "I intend to submit this list to Gul Damar. We will find everyone on list and eliminate them."

"I won't be bullied or forced to work for you, Yor."

Garak lifted the weapon. Helen let out a piercing scream, knocking the pistol out of his hand. It fell to the floor as she proceeded to slap him. I drew my own pistol in the chaos, aimed it at Garak, and waited until they both calmed down. While Helen cried, Garak glared at me. I lifted a com-link attached to my wrist to contact Odo. He arrived a minute later with Major Kira.

"They were outside my office," I explained. Kira retrieved Garak's weapon from the floor and set it on the table, out of his reach. "Garak seems to be having a difficult time obeying orders. Explain to Garak what's expected of us, Constable Odo."

"Gul Dukat has left orders for Yor to look for spies on the station. Yor is in charge and asked Major Kira and I to assist her. While I have continued to scan for Romulan implants on every person who sets foot on the station, the only one I found was located on Gul Dukat. I have no reason to suspect you for this, Garak. Not at his time."

"This sounds like blackmail," Garak snarled. "I do not work for Agent Torell. I am loyal to the Cardassian Union. I'm the one who agreed to train Helen and Yor to be field operatives. Now I am told Yor is in charge. I find this unacceptable, Odo."

"It's my understanding we're all on the same side," Odo said. "From what I see, Garak, you have crossed the line. Our purpose is to assist the Second Order. We are to locate Torell and the Circle. Major Kira has agreed to help us, Garak. Will you?"

Kira laughed. "Just look at his face. This is a loyal Cardassian?" She caught hold of Odo's arm. A bit of affection was displayed. "I thought you told me, Odo, these three were like a family. Maybe a family wants to kill each other. If this is your niece, Garak, she hardly looks the type to be a spy. She's crying."

"Leave her alone," I said.

"I seem to have no other choice. Of course you realize I have had years of experience as a field agent," Garak said. "And it is my master list, after all."

"We all recognize your importance, Garak," Odo said. "As this station's security officer, I serve Gul Renalt and he's asked for Gil Yor to personally take charge of protecting and running Terok Nor. If you know who placed the implant on Dukat, then you need to tell us."

Kira took a seat. "Just come clean. Did you do it?" she asked.

"I believe Agent Torell had Glinn Venna place the implant in Dukat's neck. In fact, I'm sure of it. As to Torell's current whereabouts, I don't know where he can be found," Garak said, quite miffed. "Sawyer Kincaid and Helen Monroe have been reported as KIA. I've provided Helen with the identity of my niece, Helen Garak, who I was committed to an undisclosed mental ward five years ago. No one will question her cover story. Dr. Quirin verified the blood work on both Helen and Yor, which I have already submitted as well to the Order. They are Cardassians. And how am I thanked? I am not. I'm abused and accused."

"Thank you," Helen said though it lacked sincerity.

"No hard feelings, Garak," I said. "you will do what I say from now on."

Garak shrugged. "Whatever you say, Ren Yor."

"I have news of my own," Odo said. "Dukat arrived on Cardassia and wed Kornica

Kurson. I anticipate his return in two weeks. He is taking a short pleasure cruise."

"Gul Vardon is taking them on this pleasure cruise?" Helen asked, all color draining from her face. "I thought we were in the middle of a war and he goes on a cruise."

"They are traveling with Gul Toran of the Govatt," Odo said. "Come, Major Kira. We have real work to do. No disrespect meant." He glanced at Kira and they left my office.

"I suppose I have your blood flowing through my veins?" Helen asked.

"A bit, yes. And my DNA. I had to be thorough to make it convincing," Garak said.

"Helen, I've assigned an officer to train you in combat on the holodeck. I'll join you when I have time," I said. "In the meantime, why don't the two of you go to the shop. Helen will now be working with her uncle making clothes. You'll learn more talking to customers than lurking about the station. That's my job. And Garak, don't cause me anymore trouble."

"I wouldn't dream of it...boss."

"You're both dismissed."

Garak left in a huff. Helen stood and gave me a hard look.

"Do you really know what you're doing? You just angered the one person who saved our lives and provided me with a new identity. That's not getting off on the right foot, Yor. Garak felt cornered. That's the only reason he threatened you. He does care of us, well, at least for me and the twins."

"I don't want him to like me, Helen. I want results," I said.

* * *

HELEN

"Uncle Garak, you're starting to annoy me more than a blister. Knock it off."

It was the umpteenth time day he'd snapped at me about something stupid. The first had been because his juice wasn't the right temperature. Now it was because the twins had the audacity to start making baby noises in their baskets. I threw the pile of clothes I'd been folding onto a table in the workroom, standing arms akimbo, glaring at him.

"This was a bad idea. I'd rather be stuck down in the central core, sweating with the workers, than have to pretend we're a family. Why do you have to live with me? Remind

me.”

“You’re supposed to be dead and I’m your cover story,” Garak said. “Other than that, Glinn Yor, the little monster she is, says I have to keep my eye on you at all times. Or maybe that’s the other way around.” He tossed his cutting tools on the table and turned to face me. “You know, having you here isn’t fun for me either. Don’t get me wrong. Despite how Yor has twisted everything around in an attempt to turn me against you, I actually love you, Helen. I haven’t said to anyone in a very long time. I’m not likely to do so again.”

I felt tears well up in my eyes. It happened over the most trifling thing, so in a way it wasn’t a compliment, I was touched by his sentiment.

“Garak, I love you too.”

“Believe or not. I love your children. Now they have the last name of Garak, we are a family. An officially family approved by anyone and everyone who has a seal of approval. You are a Cardassian. I dare say, when Dukat returns and notices you have the same green eyes as his former dead lover, he’s going to be quite upset to learn the truth.”

“I’m not dead? I don’t care what he thinks. If he tries it again, I’m going to shoot him. I don’t love him unconditionally like Gil Yor. Funny how easy it is to call her name, now we’re both Cardassian. I’m sorry she’s not been nice to you.”

“Helen, you touch my heart with your words. You’re not at all like your friend. It’s no wonder Dukat chose to have children with you. Yor would have produced monsters.”

Garak smiled when I laughed.

“They are adorable, aren’t they? it was a mistake,” I said. “I didn’t chose for it to happen. I don’t want Dukat to see the twins again. Not unless Yor happens to remove the implant and he returns to normal.” I felt a lump form in my throat. “Let’s not talk about him anymore. I feel sorry for Shazel. She is a sweet child.”

“I’ve found an excellent tutor for her and Eben,” he said.

“You know the boy looks up to you, Garak. After all, you are family.”

“Just remind Yor now and then I am not the enemy.” Garak smiled. “I realize of course I did point a gun at her. I wasn’t really going to shoot her. Well, I was, the gun was set on stun.”

I shook my head. "I will continue to remind her, Garak, she's worried. I don't mean about you, not entirely. Nor do I expect you to understand her any more than you do me. Both of us love Dukat. She shows her love by serving him as an officer and a spy. Everything she does is for him. Don't be angry with her for trying to do what she thinks is best. You haven't always been forthcoming and she doesn't trust you. If you'd simply told us about the Death List earlier, confided in us, she wouldn't be so hard on you."

"Yes, well, she helped me comprise the list, whether she knows it or not. If she cared much about catching the guilty, she should have made her own list instead of riding about on a horse like a...a cowboy," Garak muttered as he folded a piece of fabric. "She's asked me to modify her uniform. If I didn't know any better, I'd think she still has an implant. She has a flair for drama. I haven't forgotten her opening number on Terok Nor or how she danced on the bar. She's still performing in her own way, trying to impress everyone who sees her."

"Be fair. She's under a great deal of stress. Far more than us, Garak. She has to talk to her commander nearly every day. When he returns, it will be hardest on her."

"If you say so."

I considered opening the store and walked toward the door, staring out the window at the Promenade. The ugly red banners had been removed and there was a nice flow of traffic. People seemed less frightened and the atmosphere had visibly altered where I felt more accepted and didn't have to look over my shoulder every time I took a step. Quark's bar was already open and a crew from a freighter from Orion was seated at the bar, a bit early for drinks, I assumed most people didn't think about the time or whether it was day or night since a sun didn't rule our lives.

"It's nice to have people visiting the station again," I said, turning the light on to show the store was open. "I really like Gul Renalt. He's fair. How are your altering her uniform? Another beret? Plate mail?"

"A Bajoran sand skirt. Something covers her backside and not the front. It has to be soft, tan leather. And, as a matter of fact, she wants plate mail attached to the right shoulder of her cuirass and strips along the front. Her hair? I won't even go there. If I didn't know any better, I'd think she was trying to look like your Joan of Arc. I have to indulge her because

Gul Renalt is breathing down my neck every other second. He's completely wrapped around her little finger. You like him. I don't."

"That's because he's taller than you."

"Nothing of the sort," Garak said, pressing a hand to his heart.

A Cardassian couple walked past, headed toward a Klingon restaurant, one of five restaurants on the Promenade. There were more than twenty shops. Now Renalt was in charge, the 'closed' signs had been turned over. Everyone was open for business.

I smoothed my skirt and approached Garak, wanting to calm him and try to patch the relationship between him and my dearest friend. I helped him place newly arrived material on the shelves. The twins were in separate baskets behind the counter, while Eben and Shazel were with their tutor. Since no one came into the store, I went over to a monitor and started researching the Odor and what was expected of field agents, knowing later I'd train in combat with Gil Toran until every muscle in my body ached. Toran was young, impressionable, and completely devoted to me. I smiled when he approached the counter.

"Am I too early?" Toran asked. "We don't have to use weapons today, Helen. You mentioned surfing before. Perhaps we could try instead?"

"I don't know how you'd look in swim trunks, Toran," I said laughing. Garak gave me a stern look. "Come back in an hour and we'll give it a try. Roxell had a late night. I need her to sit with the children. Have you seen Gil Yor this morning?"

"You mean Glinn Yor? Gul Renalt promoted her this morning. You should see all the medals on her uniform. Every soldier on this station wants to be Glinn Yor. She's a hero on Cardassia. I'd like for her to train with us one afternoon, Helen. Perhaps you could convince her to join us. I seem to be tongue tied whenever she's around."

"Intimidated?" Garak asked, lifting a pair of scissors. He snapped them open and closed.

"Yes, I am, Garak. No one can defeat her with a blade. She doesn't claim to be the best shooter, though she is better than most of us." Toran placed his elbows on the counter and smiled at me. "I wonder why she picked me to train you. Did she say?"

"Well, it's not because you graduated thirteenth in your class at the Cardassian

Military Academy," I said.

"Your father, Gul Toran of the Govatt, is currently touring the star system with Gul Dukat and his wife," Garak said in a sharp tone. "You're also friends with Mikor Dukat. I suppose those are good enough reasons."

I laughed. "You are a very good teacher, Toran. I didn't know you were friends with Dukat's eldest son?"

"It's an honor to train you, Helen," the gil said. "Mikor was a year behind me, yes, we are friends. I'm sorry I missed his graduation. His father was present, as was my own. Mikor actually graduated fifth in his class. He's been chosen to stay on Cardassia Prime to work at Central Command as an intern."

"Why don't you go away?" Garak asked. "Return in an hour. I need to talk to my niece and you're drooling on my new Sheqrell material. That's costly stuff."

The young officer blushed. He gave me a nod and left.

"You far too cranky. Be nice to people," I said.

"And you're flirting. Now I understand why Yor asked Toran to train you. He's young and handsome. I expect she'll be throwing many handsome officers in your path to get your mind off Dukat."

"Toran is far too young for me," I said, suddenly annoyed. "How can I stop thinking about Dukat when you two remind me about every other second? This isn't easy for me. I'm not at all happy to look the way I do and I'm miserable knowing he's married someone else. I didn't like Mikelya. She wasn't a threat. The new wife is one. When he returns, I don't want to see him. He can think I'm dead. I'm your niece now and I can see whoever I want to see."

"I won't mention him again. Go find Roxell. I'll watch the twins in the meantime."

Leaving the shop, I walked through the Promenade, taking in the ambience. There were far less guards milling about and the station reminded me of gentler times when the Federation under Captain Sisko had been present, helping the Bajorans. Major Kira came around the corner, talking to one of her soldiers and paused to stare at me. I was just getting used to the Cardassians nodding me, treating me with the respect I'd never had, Kira glared at me.

“Well, I can’t say it’s much of an improvement. I don’t know why you or Yor thinks this disguise is going to fool anyone,” Kira said. “Folks might think you’re a real Cardassian, I know you’re human.”

“Good for you,” I said. “Why is it any of your business?” I’d always thought her hot-tempered and a bit mean on the TV show. Yor trusted her, I knew she trouble.

“I don’t know where you fit into all of this. You really do love him, don’t you? I understand Yor. She’s become a Cardassian and he represents power. Frankly, I can’t say I like Gul Damar any better than Gul Dukat. He wasn’t very kind to Yor after we killed Gul Parnal. I don’t think Cardassians know how to be kind. And the one you love shot you. If I’m working with you, I want to be sure you can keep it together when the madman returns.”

“Did I ask for your opinion?” My temper flared. I might have black hair, I was still a red head from Texas. “I don’t care what you think, Major Kira. All I know is my friend asked for your help. I think you have ulterior motives for being here. I better not find out you’re still with the Resistance and planning to blow up the station.”

“Come with me, Helen. I want you to get a good look at your friend. She’s had to overcompensate to protect you. While I’m sure Gul Renalt approves, seeing she did save his life, I think you’ll be a little surprised. In the last few days she’s turned herself into an icon. You may wonder why there is less need for guards and less patrols. has crossed your mind?”

“I do think of other things besides Gul Dukat.”

Kira laughed without humor. “That’s what Yor said. And you know what? I don’t believe either one of you,” she said as she led me to the Promenade. “Dukat never really left Terok Nor. Yor has, in a way, taken his place. She’ll be on the balcony now, where you can usually find her at this hour of the day, scowling at everyone .”

Curious, I walked beside Kira along a row of stores and restaurants. The station was usually busy, people coming and going on a daily basis, trading with the Cardassians and civilians who called Terok Nor home. As we approached Quark’s bar, I noticed people walked past us without glancing in our direction. Their faces reflected no emotion, yet I sense there fear. At Kira’s nod, I lifted my eyes to the balcony and gasped.

A lone figure stared out at the Promenade. My friend, Ren Yor, had modified her

appearance since I'd seen her on the previous evening. She'd cut her hair short and dyed it blonde. Silver plate mail was attached to her right. A new sword was strapped to her back. Two pistols hung from a holster. She wore a sand skirt fell below her knees she'd made herself. Not a bad job, I thought, it needed a hem. I could see why she had Garak asked to make a new one. Her studded boots added three inches to her stature, not she needed to be taller, her statuesque form was impossible to miss.

In the past, I'd always seen Dukat and Damar standing in the same place, staring at the crowd like predators. Now it was Glinn Yor. She looked formidable, until she spotted me. She waved like a kid. I waved back, laughing.

"You're wrong about her, Major Kira. Yor is watching over us because she's protecting us. I have no doubt she changed her attire to give people something new to look at instead of dozens of guards on duty and ugly Cardassian banners. I'm the one who named her Joan of Arc. If you knew anything about Earth history, which I'm sure you don't, then you'll know the warrior maiden believed God spoke to her, telling her to defend her country against the enemies of France, and in the end, she sacrificed her life to protect her people and in belief of her faith. I don't think Yor will go far, you should never doubt her loyalty to Cardassia."

"I'm saying she is Dukat's creation. Dukat is her god."

"You don't know anything about us, Major Kira. And you don't know a thing about Dukat. Not the real Dukat."

Kira gave a curt nod. "Let me tell you about your precious Gul Dukat," she hissed. "Five years ago he led his Second Order against us, killing, and enslaving millions of my people. Now perhaps he's made a few recent changes for the betterment of my people, it won't last."

"If you ever fall in love, Major Kira, you'll understand how love can pick you up higher than the clouds or toss you as low as a dark, deep pit. Love can't be measured or controlled. Love has made people mad and given people great joy. No matter what's happened or will happen, there is one thing remains constant and is the love for my children and the devotion of my best friend. We came here together and we'll leave together, and that's how it is, and that's how it will always be."

"I hope you're right, only I don't believe in miracles."

"I do. I don't care what you say. Yor is looking over us. The Prophets have chosen her for something special, Major Kira. That's why she's here. Instead of finding fault with either of us, you might try having a little faith. Good day."

Keeping my head high, I located Roxell, sent her to Garak's shop, and headed to the holodeck to find Gil Toran waiting. I took one look at him and said, "Computer. Honolulu." As Diamond Head and the bright blue sea appeared, I sank into the sand and sobbed uncontrollably, while he knelt beside me and held my hand.

* * *

SAWYER

Seated in a booth at Quark's, I dined with Renalt, Toran, and Dr. Quirin, a regular habit we'd gotten into during the last two weeks. Renalt poured kanar into our glasses. The bar was crowded. With the arrival of four cruisers, I'd arranged for their crews to come on board the station and it was louder than usual. I must have looked melancholy for Renalt reached out and patted my hand.

"This may very well be our last meal together. Gul Toran will be arriving in three days. You've handled things quite well, Glinn Yor. You even found a good use for Major Kira and the Bajorans. Greeting the new arrivals is a noticeable change in policy. However, anyone thinking twice about causing trouble on Terok Nor will think twice when greeted by young woman."

"They're checking everyone for implants," Dr. Quirin said. "A very clever idea on your part, Yor. What better way to catch traitors to catch them the moment they arrive. I seriously doubt any of Torell's assassins will come here. Nor will any Fifth Order ships appear. Not with the Kobrak patrolling this star system."

"I'd like to be assigned to my father's ship someday," Toran said.

"Of course you would, my boy. There's nothing more exciting serving on a Galor class cruiser. I don't recommend serving with your father the first time out. Perhaps Yor here can put in a good word with Gul Vardon," Renalt said. "She knows him quite well. What do you

think of Vardon?"

"He's charming," I said. "I've found him to be quite dependable. He's only on hand whenever there is trouble. I'd think it a coincidence only you know very well I don't believe in them, Renalt. If you want to be assigned to the Kobrak, I'm sure I can arrange it, Toran. Of course I understand if you'd rather serve with your father. I'm certain Gul Dukat will assign you to any ship you want."

"How is your father? Has he spoken with you in the last few weeks?" asked Dr. Quirin. He pushed aside his plate to reach for a glass of kanar. "I'm eager to hear what Madame Dukat looks like. I'm told she's younger than Mikor Dukat."

"My father says it's been an uneventful trip, so I take to mean Gul Dukat and his wife are pleased," Toran said. "He says Kornica is quite lovely. She never goes to the bridge. He's only seen her at dinner and says she doesn't talk very much."

"And Terok Nor? What is your opinion of this station?" Renalt asked.

"I like it here," Toran continued. "I didn't mean to imply I wanted to leave. It's just with how things have been with the Fifth Order, I was hoping to see a little action."

"The real action is on Bajor," I said. "Renalt and I saw our share of bloodshed. So far no Dominion ships have come out of the wormhole. Nor has the Romulan Empire declared war on us. I hope it stays way."

"To the Union," Toran said. We lifted our glasses in a toast.

Renalt leaned back, placed his arm across the seat. Toran sat straight. I watched as Dr. Quirin removed his com-padd, seeing a red light beep. He made his apologies and returned to sickbay.

"Yor, I want you to double security tonight," Renalt said. "I sense trouble. Call it an old soldier's itch. It's been too quiet since Gul Dukat left. We're overdue for trouble."

"I'll see to it, sir."

"Come, Toran," Renalt said. "Yor has already heard my war stories, we'll share a glass of kanar in my office. I'll regale you with tales of my life. Goodnight, Yor. And by the way, I like the new look. Some of the soldiers have cut their hair like yours and have asked for armor to be outfitted on their shoulders. Of course you'd be the one to set the precedence on a

new, improved Cardassia uniform.”

Left alone in the booth, I finished my drink as one of the Lamone twins cleared the table. I started to rise spotted Quark carrying a tray. On it sat a bottle of Romulan ale and two glasses. He joined me in the booth. He filled both glasses and pushed one toward me.

“To Yor the Brave,” the Ferengi said flashing his sharp teeth. “You have the Cardassians eating out of your hand. I suppose you’re quite proud of yourself.”

I drank half the glass. I was starting to understand why Damar drank so much on the station. The stress and responsibility of command felt like a heavy burden on my shoulders.

“Do you have any news for me?” I asked.

“Only you’ve done well. You’ve been promoted. There’s been no incidents of any kind, you know as well as I do Helen can’t continue this charade for much longer. She’s too proud to change her first name. I’m worried about her,” Quark said. “You have noticed she is depressed. She only keeps her head high when she’s with you. Garak slinks around this place, making me feel quite nervous. I keep thinking he’s the one we need to be watching.”

“Helen trusts him. I know she’s hurting, Quark. I tried to get her to go to Fort Varnok, she refuses to leave. Maybe if Vardon would return he might cheer her up.”

“Gil Toran is too young to interest her. Oh, I know what you’re trying to do, Yor. You think she can get over Dukat if she finds someone else. Gul Vardon is the only other Cardassian she seems interested in. I suggest you send him a message and ask him to come here. Arrange a private dinner for them and let nature take its course. Do it before Dukat returns.”

“You don’t think her disguise will fool Dukat.”

“Her eyes give her away. They’re filled with too much sorrow. She lacks your bravado, Yor. She’s not like you. You’re unbreakable. She’s as fragile as this glass.”

Quark threw it on the ground. It shattered into dozens of pieces. He seemed angry with me as he refilled my glass, and then removed a cigar from his sleeve. He handed it to me, lit it, and then settled back, watching me puff away narrowed eyes.

“What is it? You have something else on your mind, Ferengi.”

“Only as the head of Dukat’s counterintelligence division, you’re not utilizing your

sources to their fullest capacity. Take for instance the Dabo girls. They spend a great deal of time with every officer and soldier who comes here, including non-Cardassians. If you paid them, they would certainly be more willing to provide a convenient spy ring for you."

"That's a good idea."

Quark smiled. "Of course it is. It's mine," he replied "As for Helen, it will take more than a new love interest to restore a smile to her face. Dukat broke her, Yor. Now you can try to glue back the pieces or reassembly them into something else."

"You're ideas are already putting a hole in my pocket."

"I'm glad you're entertaining the idea of using the Dabo girls, since they like you, and I'm willing to let them work for you. Entertainment is precisely what I'm talking about, Glinn Yor. Imagine a stage act here at my bar. The opening act is Madame La Belle. She sings and performs for the troops and guests who come and go. She acts as my hostess and as such, she'd be privy to all sorts of interesting tidbits."

"And Helen would be Madame La Belle? You talked to her about this?"

"It was Helen's idea," Quark said. "She needed a new name. Madame La Belle can actually sing, unlike you. She's been rehearsing while you stand guard. You should see the gowns she, Roxell and Petra have made. Let her perform and I think you'll soon see her spirits restored."

"Madame La Belle," I said sipping my ale. "Make it happen, Quark. Put up the sign and tell her she opens tomorrow night. You're paying Helen. I'll pay your girls."

"Pleasure doing business with you, Glinn Yor." Quark finished his drink. "I don't care what folks says. You're not like Dukat. In fact, you've been entertaining us with your own performance. Underneath all those medals is a sensitive soul who yearns to protect the weak, young, old, infirm, and poor."

"Cunning little weasel."

"Thank you. I take as a compliment."

Returning to my quarter's, Eben greeted me with a hug. I pulled him into my arms as I entered, finding Helen seated on the couch. Shazel sat on the floor, reading a book. The twins lay in a crib beside her. I had kept Shazel away from Helen for two weeks. We'd told Shazel

Helen had left Terok Nor, here they were, all together.

"Is this Madame La Belle?" I asked.

Eben laughed. He dashed around me and sat beside Helen. I joined them on the couch, reached for her hand, it passed through her. "It's a hologram," he said.

"Are they all holograms?" I asked.

"Yes," Helen said peering out of the door of the bedroom. She wore a bracelet on her arm, slightly larger than my own and stepped out. She wore a beautiful golden gown, her hair styled on top of her head. "Eben has been planning this surprise for some time. He's modified the Doppelgänger. Not only am I able to be in two places at once, at a switch of a dial, I can be seen with all of the children moving independently of me."

"Eben, you're far too smart for your own good," I said. "Where is Shazel? I thought we agreed you wouldn't come here, Helen. It kinda defeat the purpose of a disguise."

"I'm Madame La Belle. Remember? Shazel? Come out."

The holograms vanished as the girl slid out from around Helen. She wore a lovely gown and her hair in a braid. She ran to me and twirled around.

"Quite lovely," I said.

"My uncle and I made the gown for Dukat's daughter. I helped her dress with the understanding she'll wear it tomorrow when you bring your children to my show. They've been quite charming I can't stay. It's time to go to work."

"Madame La Belle is so beautiful," Shazel said. "Father will like her, don't you think? She's not as plain and ugly as his last mistress."

The girl didn't notice Eben bristle. "You need to shut up," he said.

"And you too need to get to bed. I'll see our guest out," I replied and led Helen into the corridor.

"Relax. Shazel doesn't know who I am. She thinks the real Helen returned to Bajor. If I can fool a child, I can fool a madman. Be sure to bring the children tomorrow. I'm just trying out a few songs tonight. You should know I'll be singing country ballads, Glinn Yor."

"I hate country music."

"I know," Helen said, smiling. "But everyone else will love me."

HELEN

Chapter Forty-Seven

Opening night at Quark's had me feeling nervous. I'd sung a few songs the evening before to a small crowd, this was different. It was a full house. I didn't have a stage, intended to walk between the tables and booths, singing to a full house. I stood behind a curtain, waiting until Quark introduced me. Petra and the Lamone twins were more nervous than me. I wore a red gown evening. Roxell had paint my facial ridges in gold and black, creating a reptilian version of Cleopatra, at least that's what it looked like to me. I felt sexy and confident. A glass of Romulan ale helped calm my nerves.

"It's standing room only," Quark said, twiddling his fingers. "They had to pay to get in. We're going to be rich, Madame La Belle. I do wish you'd sing happier songs."

"If I'm going to sing, the lyrics are going to reflect how I feel."

"Then let the world know, Madame La Belle. Because everyone who is anyone is right beyond curtain. Now give them what they paid for." Quark pulled at his lapel. "It's time for the show, folks."

Closing my eyes, I heard Quark quiet the crowd. When I opened them it was silent. Petra gave a nod and hit a button. The familiar music to 'Crazy' by Patsy Cline, an oldie goodie, played. It was certainly how I felt in moment in time. Singing away my heartache wasn't the only thing I was after. I was creating a new persona.

"Presenting, Madame La Belle!"

The curtain opened and glided forward, a com-link attached to my gown. I didn't concentrate on any particular face, seeing blurs, for my eyes had already turned misty before I opened my mouth to sing.

" Crazy.
I'm crazy for feeling so lonely.
I'm crazy.
Crazy for feeling so blue.
I knew you'd love me as long as you wanted,
And then some day,
You'd leave me for somebody new."

I walked past a table of familiar looking uniforms and realized it was the crew from Kobrak. I tried not to react as I saw Gul Vardon among them. The music changed. I broke into another song by Ms. Cline. Hell, I was going to sing her best charts, the songs my mother had loved, and I sang directly to Gul Vardon. He didn't know who I was, staring at Madame La Belle, mesmerized. I'm sure the Cardassians had never heard this music before and I found I enjoyed this strange new power I had over my audience. Vardon turned as I past, watching me sway past. I let my fingers slide across his shoulder and felt him shudder.

"She sings well," I heard Glinn Bavaron, his first officer, whisper. Vardon waved him silent. A few non-Cardassians wiped away tears. Turning to make my way back to the bar, for space was limited, I spotted Sawyer dressed in a red gown, her yellow hair making her stand among the black heads. She wiped away a tear. If Sawyer cried, I knew I had the crowd in my pocket. She sat beside Eben and Shazel in a booth. Toran was crammed into the seat with her and the children, while Renalt and Dr. Quirin sat across from them. I broke into 'I Fall To Pieces' as I returned to sit on a stool. Garak appeared in the crowd. A spotlight to hit me. I sang three more songs, my throat too tight to continue and motioned for Petra to end the music.

The crowd stood and applauded. I curtsied, overwhelmed as a flood of officers came over to meet me, muttering comments, while Quark attempted to hold back the tide. Dabo girls carried trays with glasses of kanar. I managed to step behind the curtain to regain my composure. A drank a glass of tea with honey. Petra played another song, kept low, while I absorbed the atmosphere and the strange acceptance I'd received as Madame LaBelle.

"You're a hit," Quark said joining me. Gul Vardon pushed the Ferengi aside, took hold of my hand, raising it to his lips. No one had told me he was coming to Terok Nor night. I held my hand over my cleavage,

drawing his attention to what I was doing and he laughed.

“Allow me to introduce myself, Madame La Belle. I am Gul Vardon.” His eyes sparkled as I smiled. “I can’t help feeling we’ve met before. Have we?”

“This is Garak’s niece,” Petra said a bit snottily. I gave her a sharp look and she walked behind the bar to help serve drinks.

Vardon stared into my eyes. “Wait a minute. I do know you,” he said. “Mistress Helen? It is you. I’d recognize those green eyes anywhere. I had no idea you’d become a Cardassian. I admit it suits you quite well. You are magnificent, my dear.”

“In truth, I am legally a Garak. I hope you won’t feel the need to tell anyone I am anyone other than Madame La Belle. I’m incognito for personal reasons. Will you be staying at Terok Nor for a while?”

“A few days. I can’t get over how beautifully you sing, Madame La Belle. I really am quite impressed,” he said. “I came here, hoping to find you needing to be rescued, and instead I find you performing. If you will allow it, I’d enjoy seeing you after the show. You aren’t still with...?” He was polite enough not to mention Dukat’s name, leaving the question hanging in the air for me to answer.

“Many things have changed during your absence, Gul Vardon. I now live in the lifestyle I’m accustomed to and I’m no longer seeing anyone. particular person doesn’t know I even exist.”

“It will be our little secret,” he said.

“I’ll see you after the performance.”

“I’d like very much.”

Vardon returned to his seat. My second set lasted longer. I was tired after the last song, relieved to see the crowd dispersing in an orderly fashion, waiting until only a few people remained before I pushed aside the curtain. Vardon sat a table, alone, waiting for me. I joined him, the seat still warm from Bavaron’s large backside, hold Vardon’s gaze as Petra placed a glass of sparkling wine in front of me. She set one in front of Vardon and vanished.

“How have you been?” I asked.

“Well enough. And you?”

“Believe it or not, Vardon, I’ve actually missed your company. Garak keeps me busy at the shop, at night I am now performing here.”

Vardon placed his hand over mine. “I’d like to know how you came to be Madame La Belle and free from your former duties, let’s discuss more pleasant matters,” he said. “I admit I have missed you as well. Perhaps more than you realize.”

“Oh?” I took a sip of my drink.

“I’ve been on patrol these last few weeks. This is the first opportunity I’ve had to pay you a call. Not a day has gone by I haven’t thought about you, Helen. How are your children?”

“Gabriel and Madison Garak are their names. They’re quite a handful.” My voice dropped to a conspiratorial whisper. “I might let you meet them, if you play your cards right.”

Vardon laughed. “You’re absolutely delightful, Helen,” he said. “I’ll do whatever is necessary to be allowed into the privacy of your quarters to pay homage to your children. I have no doubt they look just like you,” he said. “I do miss the red curls. I thought perhaps I’d see your friend Ren Yor. She is caring for two children now?”

“Her son and Dukat’s daughter. I have no affiliation with him now,” I said letting my eyes rove over his handsome face. “You’ve arrived at the perfect time. Gul Renalt has turned this station into a home for all of us here. It’ll be a shame it won’t last.”

“Pity Dukat will return,” Vardon said. He placed his hand on the back of my seat. “I’d to spend as much time as possible with you while I’m here. I think it’s time we got to know each other a little better. As long as your uncle won’t object, is.”

“Uncle Garak isn’t my boss,” I said, laughing. “you do realize Dukat will return here with his new bride. I believe he’ll take her to Bajor. I hope he does. It’s much nicer with Renalt in command of the station.”

“When one window closes, another opens wide.” Vardon dropped his hand to my neck, his finger caressing my ridges. It was an exquisite feeling. “Allow me to say I have had feelings for you since the first day we met. Now you’re single, I no longer need to

pretend I'm not interested in you. Maybe I can entice you to leave Terok Nor and sing to the troops on the outer colonies. Your talent is wasted here."

I placed my hand on his thigh. "Vardon, I care for you too. You've always been there for me," I said. "I won't forget your kindness in the past."

"it's too soon for more? Yes, I agree. I can still hope you may return my feelings in the future." Vardon placed his hand over mine. "This really isn't what I thought would happen when I arrived this evening. I...I can't get over the new you. Of course if Garak is your uncle," he winked, "I know you don't only sing for your supper."

"I don't work for the OO," I said worried rumors would start.

"No. Of course not." Vardon leaned toward me and placed a soft kiss on the cheek. "too will be our little secret. I will see you tomorrow, Madame La Belle."

Vardon was gone before I could collect my scattered wits.

* * *

SAWYER

Seated in the staff room, Gul Renalt discussed the deployment of the Cardassian fleet in nearby star systems. The Fifth Order's fleet was on the run. The Kobrak was assigned to protect Terok Nor. Gul Vardon came and went from the station. I noticed a change in Helen. She altered her song selection, no longer singing sad songs, her attitude vastly improved. She'd learned a spy was on the station. Major Kira, Garak, Odo, and I had not been able to fit a face to the names of traitors on the Death List. All we had were rumors and try as the Dabo girls might to learn the spy's identity from the personal and civilians visited Terok Nor, it felt like we were chasing after a phantom.

"Did you hear me, Glinn Yor?" Renalt asked. His staff stared at me while the gul smiled, toying with a com-padd placed in front of him on the table.

"I'm sorry, sir," I said. "What did you say?"

"I said Gul Dukat and his wife will arrive tonight. Gul Toran confirmed this an hour ago. The Govatt is needed elsewhere. You know what this means. I'll return to Bajor and given command of a fort. I would like to retain you on my staff."

“Gul Renalt, I consider you a friend as well as my commander. I have nothing the greatest respect for you. However, I intend to return to Fort Varnok,” I said. “Gul Damar would like me to return and continue the hunt for traitors. I’m sure I’ll be calling on Fort Tornok. I will keep you apprised of my progress.”

“Then you will be reassigned to the Alpha Brigade,” Renalt said. “I’m glad to hear it, Glinn Yor. I admit being on a space station lacks the challenge presented on leading patrols into the Bajoran wildness. Gil Toran will be accompanying me at his father’s request.”

“Will you be leaving before Gul Dukat arrives, sir?”

“I’ll greet this evening and leave in the morning on the Kobrak. Gul Vardon will be taking us to Bajor. Hopefully, he will allow you to leave for Fort Varnok. We can have dinner on board the Kobrak one last time before we part company. You’ve been invaluable, Yor. I won’t forget it. You always a place on my staff. We have a few things to discuss about Fort Tornok, so you needn’t stay. I suggest you await Gul Dukat in the transporter room. He should be arriving soon, Yor. You should be there to greet him.”

“Yes, sir.”

“You’re dismissed, Glinn Yor.”

Leaving abruptly wasn’t my style. I went around the table, thanking each officer personally and then approached Renalt. Holding out my hand, he took it in his and then stood to embrace me. I hugged Glinn Toran, saluted the officers and left. Taking a quick detour to Odo’s office, I found him with Kira, standing in front of the monitors.

“Ah, Yor. Good. You’re here. The Govatt has just arrived,” Odo said. He wore his severe black uniform, his attitude calm and self-assured, I noticed Major Kira acted nervous. She wore black as well, while I wore my altered uniform designed by Garak.

“Both of you join me at the transporter room,” I said. “And Odo? I would appreciate it if you would send word to Helen Gul Dukat has arrived. I don’t want any surprises or any trouble. She is to remain in Garak’s shop with her children. Have someone bring Eben and Shazel to the transporter room.”

Major Kira came with me since I’d delayed Odo, smirking as we walked toward a turbolift. I tried to ignore me. Her laughter set me on edge.

“What is so funny?” I asked.

“Only the tyrant has arrived. The day you’ve dreaded since he left is not upon us. You can’t imagine he’s improved since you last saw him. If anything his situation will be far worse. Forget about leaving on the Kobrak with Gul Renalt.”

“What do you mean?”

“If Dukat is sending Renalt to Bajor, then he’s clearly intending to stay here. You had time to have Damar send you the instrument I gave you. You were so certain you could convince Dukat to go to Fort Varnok. Good luck with that.”

I hit the button, taking us to an upper level and disembarked, anxious to reach the transporter room and have time to put on my game face. Kira wasn’t making it easy on me. She kept at my side with a stupid look on her face. I was beginning to see why Helen didn’t like the major. Kira had a way of getting under my skin like no one else. I gave her a stern look as we entered the transporter room. The Bajoran security officers, dressed in black, joined us.

“Let’s hope Dukat remembers you’re on our side,” I said. “He may think you’re rebels and shoot you on the spot.”

“I’m hoping he tries, Yor. My pistol is not set on stun.”

“Don’t even think about it. I’ll handle Dukat.”

Kira laughed. “Oh, I’m sure you will, Yor the Brave.”

Standing at attention, I noticed Odo had arrived, breathless, in time as the chief as the controls gave me a nod. He brought Shazel and Eben with him. Shazel wore her pretty new gold dress, while Eben had his out fitted uniform. They remained with the constable.

Three figures appeared on the platform. Gul Toran looked like an older version of his son, with gray hair and a wide smile. Dukat wore his uniform, dark rings beneath his eyes, a sickly parlor, and a scowl drastically altered his appearance. His wife was a blur of pink frills. I saluted at the same time as Major Kira. My gaze shifted to Kornica Dukat. She hardly looked old enough to marry one of the most powerful Cardassians in the Union. She looked terrified. I felt sorry for the little thing as she clung to Dukat’s arm. It took a moment for Dukat to recognize me. He paid no attention to the children. Shazel looked

disappointed and buried her face against Eben's shoulder. My son held her hand as Dukat walked past them, dragging the pathetic thing on his arm toward me. Gul Toran followed like an obedient dog.

"Cousin," Dukat called out.

"This ought to be good," Kira muttered.

I stepped forward and found myself crushed in Dukat's embrace. He lifted me off the ground and gave me a hard squeeze. I was prepared for anything. He placed me on my feet and then kissed me right on the lips. Embarrassed and slightly disgusted, I tried to keep my emotions from appearing on my face. Dukat motioned for Gul Toran to follow. They walked out of the room. I heard Shazel sniffle. Kira and the Bajorans assumed their posts in the room, while Odo led the children away. Ten officers beamed over, among them Glinn Hadran. He didn't look at me as he walked past. No one was left to greet Dukat's new wife. It seemed she was my responsibility, along with a stack of luggage. I heard a giggle and stared at Kornica.

"Madame Dukat, it is an honor to welcome you to Terok Nor," I said. I didn't know what else to do give her a hug. Her perfume smelled like flowers, overpowering and I released her with a loud sneeze. "I'll take you to your quarters. I've ordered special modifications and added more color. I'm sure you'll like the floral arrangement as well."

"Thank you, cousin," Kornica said in a high-pitched voice.

"Major Kira, see this luggage is brought to Dukat's quarters," I said, pleased to see the Bajoran was annoyed with the task. I held my hand out to Dukat's wife.

Taking long strides, I made her hurry to keep up with me as we left the transporter room, entering a long corridor. Her sickly sweet perfume contaminated the air.

"How is Cardassia?" I asked. "I hope your family did not suffer any hardship during the recent rebellion."

"My father is Legate Kurson. His grandfather was a ship builder and created the Keldon class ship. My father has a Keldon class ship named after him. My family makes it a point to profit from war."

"I've read about your family business," I replied, irritated with her tone. She was

proud and entitled. I knew we weren't going to get along. Nor did I find her a suitable match for my warped cousin. Dukat surely hadn't been able to touch the little thing. I don't know who any male would want to endure her odor or her voice.

"Really? Do you have such spare time on your hands, Gil Yor?" Her eyes were larger than normal and she'd applied gloss to her puckered lips. She meant to mock me.

"I make it a point to know as much as possible about anyone coming to and from Terok Nor. And it's actually Glinn Yor. I was promoted by Gul Renalt. He is leaving for Bajor in the morning on the Kobrak. I'm hoping we will accompany him. I'm eager to return to Fort Varnok."

"Oh, we're not leaving. I doubt you'll remain a glinn for long, cousin. My husband wasn't pleased when he heard you'd been promoted. In fact, he was quite angry. 'Dukat,' I said, 'you shouldn't be angry at your cousin when she's only doing her best.' He said, 'now dear, don't your pretty little head about it.' That's what he says. He says I have a 'pretty little head' and quite often. He absolutely adores me."

"Yes, I imagine he does." I rolled my eyes and guarded her toward the turbolift, she walked on, not taking the hint, going the wrong way. I hurried after her. She was headed toward engineering and had no business there. I wasn't giving her a damn tour.

"My husband dotes on me. He gives me pretty things. He knows I like pink and knows I like cream in my red leaf tea. We've haven't gotten to know each other, if you know what I mean. I suspect he's worried about my age and fragile condition. I'm very small boned and he is quite large." Kornica placed her hand on my arm, bringing me to a halt, so close to a second turbolift and yet so far away. I was in sheer hell. "You're his cousin. Correct?"

"You know I am."

"And you're father was Gul Yor. Your father was a coward and a traitor."

"Whatever," I muttered. She wasn't going to shut up.

"Dukat speaks so often about you. He always says to me, 'Yor is my favorite. Yor is strong and brave. Yor saved my life more than once. I depend on Yor.' And then he says, 'my little one, you should be more like Yor. You should be brave and strong.' I don't like

anything about you. You look like a man. You smell like cigar smoke and I don't approve of your hair or your reputation. My husband said, 'Dear, Yor is a female version of me, so if you love me, you'll love her.' I will try to love you, Yor, if I can't, don't be hurt. I simply don't approve of females in uniform."

"You really have to stop, Kornica. Dukat will be wondering where you are."

"Oh, no he won't," she said batting her lashes at me. "My husband said, 'Gil Yor will take you to see Garak and he'll make you a beautiful new dress. Purchase whatever you want, my little queen.' That's what he said to me. You are to take me there and carry whatever I buy to our suite. You are to do whatever I ask and make sure I am kept happy and entertained, which will be difficult, for I am usually quite bored."

"Only boring people get bored. That's what my cousin says."

"You're teasing," she giggled.

I grabbed the new Madame Dukat by the arm and yanked her toward the turbolift. She tried to resist, I was stronger and had her on the turbolift, blocking her from trying to slip off and snoop around. I didn't know what else to do with her, so I prepared myself for drama by taking her onto the Promenade. Kornica screamed with delight, pushed past me and ran toward Quark's bar. I imagined the colorful glass bottles had caught her attention. I found her behind Quark's bar, disrupting the Ferengi who gave me a dirty look.

"This is Madame Dukat," I said.

"I'll be certain to warn everyone...I mean tell everyone just how lovely you are my dear," Quark said. "Care for a glass of kanar? On the house. Of course."

"Oh, it's one of those little Ferengi. I don't like little people," Kornica said breezing passed the bottles. "Take me to the dress shop, Gil Yor. I want to wear something nice. I heard all about Madame La Belle. My husband said, 'Dearest, you will have dinner with me tonight and will enjoy her music.' That's what he said. I happen to love music."

"Gil Yor? You sunk low fast," Quark said.

"I'm a handmaiden now," I muttered.

I considered grabbing a bottle of Romulan ale and draining it dry. Quark stepped in front of a large portrait of Helen to keep Kornica from seeing it. She pushed him and ran

across the Promenade. I followed with long strides. With a cry of delight, she burst into Garak's shop. I dreaded what would happen next and prepared myself for drama.

* * *

HELEN

Loud voices at the door alerted me to a potential customer. I was trying to sew the finishing edges on a new gown I intended to wear night. I was having dinner with Vardon after the performance, one last night together before Dukat and his bride returned, and I wanted to make the most of it. I'd come to care for Vardon. I wanted to think I could love him and put Dukat out of my mind, forever, as I heard Sawyer's angry voice and the crash of something in the front room, set aside my sewing and walked through the curtains.

"What have you done?" Garak cried.

A broke jar and countless buttons lay on the floor. Sawyer stood beside a child who was sobbing against her chest, with frills and a pink and yellow gown was one of the ugliest I'd ever seen. I couldn't imagine who the child could be. Our children were currently being watched by Roxell, at least I didn't need to worry about them being cut and went to fetch a vacuum to clean the mess.

"Who is this, might I ask? And why is she handling the merchandise with her sticky little fingers?" Garak sounded as furious as he looked.

"My apologies," Sawyer said. "I've been ordered to bring Madame Dukat here to select material and dress patterns. She didn't mean to break the jar of buttons."

"I didn't. You did, Glinn Yor. You're clumsy and quite rude," Kornica said.

"Apologize to this nice gentleman. Tell him, 'I am sorry I was so careless.' Tell him now."

"I'm sorry I was so careless, Garak. It won't happen again."

Sawyer caught my eyes and gave a shake of her head. I handed the vacuum to Garak and remained behind the counter. Dukat's wife looked about fifteen years old. I wondered if she'd finished school or thought about anything more than being a rotten, spoiled brat. Garak stepped forward, knelt, and started to vacuum glass and buttons. The creature in pink spotted me. She let out a squeal of delight.

“Oh, it’s Madame La Belle! I’m so pleased to meet you. My husband said, ‘You must introduce yourself to Quark’s new singer. Everyone is talking about her.’ That’s what he said. I’m Madame Dukat. It’s almost as lovely a name as yours.”

Sawyer bristled. “Cornucopia, this is Garak and his niece.” The young woman stared at her, shocked to hear her name mispronounced. I had to suppress my laughter. “This is his shop, Cornucopia. Those are his buttons. Everything here belongs to Garak, so try not to break anything else. Allow his niece to assist you. I insist.”

“It is Kornica, Gil Yor. Say it right.”

“Right,” Sawyer muttered. “This is Dukat’s new bride, in any case.”

“Madame Dukat is more than welcome here,” I said. With effort, I kept from laughing aloud. “Is there anything I can help with? A new gown, perhaps? May I suggest a color matches your eyes? Puce, are they?” Puce was the color of blood on linen or flea droppings. It suited her perfectly.

“I prefer pink,” Kornica said. “And don’t bother to ask Yor’s opinion. She is from the country and has no sense of taste. She broke jar as sure as I’m standing here. You will make her pay for it, Mr. Garak.”

“Just Garak, if you please.” He lifted the vacuum as if he meant to club the little thing over the head. “My, you’re such a lovely young woman. I had no idea. Why not let my niece and I design you an evening gown? I’m sure we could create something for those intimate dinners on Terok Nor? You are staying here, I assume, and not leaving for Bajor on the Kornak?”

“We’re staying for now,” Kornica said.

Garak was pumping her for information. Listening to him ooze turned my stomach. I pulled Sawyer aside, watching as Garak unrolled material, creating a stack on the counter she rejected. Nothing he showed her pleased her, until she saw a bright pink material and let out a squeal sent a shiver along my spine.

“Oh, this is lovely,” the girl said. “I know it’s way too early yet, I wonder if I should order maternity clothes. My father insists we have children. I know Dukat isn’t quite ready for more children. His late wife gave him a few children. I’ll give him dozens. I said to him,

'Now dearest, I am more than able to have children and my father expects it.' And he said, 'Dearest, don't you worry your pretty little head about it.' That's what he said. That's what he always says."

"Shoot me," Sawyer groaned.

"I'm tempted," I said. "Why did you bring her here? She's perfectly awful." I led Sawyer to the front of the store. I gazed out the window, dreading to see Dukat. "Vardon recognized me the moment he saw me. What if Dukat does the same?"

"Deny it to the end." Sawyer looked over my shoulder and shuddered. "Gul Dukat and his wife are coming to hear you sing tonight. I suggest you pack your bags, get the kids ready, and leave tonight with Vardon for Bajor. We can't risk Dukat recognizing you."

"Leave tonight? So soon?"

"That's precisely what you're going to do. Take your children and go with Vardon. You can stay on his ship or visit Fort Varnok, you can't stay here. Garak must stay. I'm going to need him to help me with Dukat."

Even across the room I could see Garak's dismay. Kornica touched everything and left a mess in her wake. I was disgusted to think Dukat had sex with his child bride. And I was terribly jealous, hurt and in a state of shock. This wasn't the appropriate wife for Dukat. She was far too young. I didn't understand why he'd selected her when he could have had anyone. Sawyer's jaw dropped as Kornica knocked the vacuum over, breaking it and the contents spilled onto the floor.

"Never mind, my dear. Yor obviously knocked it over with her bad breath," Garak said. "I think I know what you like, Madame Dukat. My niece and I will get to work and make you a new wardrobe, one befitting a wife of a Prefect. Now, if you'll come with me, I'll take some measurements, so your new outfits will fit to perfection."

"My husband said, 'Dearest, you have the perfect figure.' Do I not?"

"Oh, indeed. Marvelous. Your selections should be ready in a few weeks, Madam Dukat. I'll get right on it."

"I can't wait long. I won't wait, Mr. Garak. You have three days."

"Please. Just call me Garak," he said. "Three days is impossible to create such an

elegant wardrobe, my dear. I'll need at least six."

"Very well," Kornica said. "make it five days and not a day later."

Sawyer walked to the door, turned, and placed her hands on her hips, looking about ready to scream. I patted her on the arm and walked over to start picking up items she'd thrown on the floor. The girl turned around and let out a shriek deafened us all. She skipped past me and pushed Sawyer aside as the door opened. Dukat entered the shop and caught the child bride in his arms, lifting her into the air to give her a kiss on the cheek and then placed her outside the door. He gave Sawyer a stern look. She glanced at me and left. I could see her herd the repellent child away, yet Dukat remained. He looked horrible. He glanced at me and then did a double take. I turned away, placing material on a shelf, while Garak walked forward.

"Gul Dukat. It's good to see you. Your wife...interesting choice," he said. "This is my niece. Madame La Belle. You will hear her sing tonight."

"Hello, Gul Dukat," I said a false smile plastered on my Cardassian face. "I should have sent your wife out with a few things before she left with Glinn Yor. Young brides love soft things on their skin. Calloused hands belong to older husbands can be so rough and harsh."

"Do I know you?" he asked.

"If she needs anything else, please send additional troops. I don't think Uncle Garak and I can afford to have anything else broken," I said backing toward the counter.

My escape was through the curtains where I could hide in the back room, he caught me. Strong fingers slid over my shoulders and I felt his breath hot on my neck. I had no intention of reacting. He'd hurt me and I didn't want him to hurt me again. Brushing off his hands, I turned and glared at him.

"I'm sure I know you," he insisted.

"People often remark I remind them of a cousin or a niece. If you don't need anything else," I said, "I have work to do. Good day to you, sir."

Turning on my heels, I glided through the curtain, hear Garak gasp and felt Dukat's arm slide around my middle, pulling me against his chest. His touch, his scent, brought

memories rushing back to him, some wonderful, truly wonderful and my heart started to thump. I had to remind myself he had tried to kill me. I wasn't going to melt or do anything foolish to ruin my newfound freedom. Yor was right. I'd pack and leave with Vardon night. I pulled away from him, reached for a bolt of cloth, and held it to my chest.

"I'm always delighted to meet a lovely young woman," Dukat said. "I had no idea Garak had a niece. I can make your life here quite pleasant. Perhaps I'll see you after your performance."

"I'm involved with someone, Gul Dukat."

"With who? Do I know him?" he asked.

"Someone much younger," I said with a laugh. "Sorry. We have nothing here in your size." He was insistent and annoying. I wanted him to leave.

"Your voice is familiar. It reminds me of someone in the past."

I shrugged. I had no intention of saying anything else.

"Gul Dukat," Gil Toran called out.

Relieved to see Dukat storm out of the storage room, I peered out from behind the curtain. Toran had arrived right on time. I hadn't seen him in a few days. He didn't notice me. Even if he had, I doubted he would have given me away. He was my friend.

"Glinn Yor sent me to look for you," the young gil said. "It seems there has been a bit of a mishap at Quark's. Your wife broke quite a few bottles. Quark is quite upset. Yor begs you to come see to the affair before she's forced to arrest the bar owner."

"Now? Can't Gil Yor handle my wife?"

"Well, your wife cracked a bottle over the Ferengi's head. There's a bit of blood," Toran said nervously shuffling his feet.

Dukat left with Toran. I sank to my knees, shivering so hard my teeth chattered. Garak ran to me. He lifted me from the floor and backed me into the storage room. I was a complete wreck. I hadn't expected seeing Dukat again would reduce me to a pile of mush. Not wanting Garak to know I still cared, I said something hateful.

"If I could destroy Dukat, I would."

"Dukat can't touch you, Helen. Not as long as you don't do anything foolish," Garak

said. "The bracelet I had Yor give to him is no longer on his wrist. It means the implant is full activated. You must leave Terok Nor. Contact Vardon and leave immediately."

"I'll perform tonight. One song. And then I'll leave this dreadful place."

Leaving the shop, I walked through the Promenade, curious enough to want to see the damage done by Madame Dukat. Half of Quark's inventory had fallen from the shelves and the bottles lay broken on the floor. Dukat shouted at Sawyer. She was blamed for the trouble, not his wife. Precious Kornica sat on a bar stool, sipping on a drink with an umbrella, not at all troubled by the mess she'd made or the trouble she caused. She actually looked happy.

While I took the nearest turbolift, I gazed over the railing to find Kornica had caused such a disturbance Dukat and Sawyer were kept busy, giving me time to make my escape. I found Roxell in my room with our bags already packed, the twins bundled where they lay in their crib. I went right to my computer, contacted Vardon, taking comfort when his face appeared. I quickly filled him in, not needing to go into today, for he was anxious to have me on board.

"Gul Renalt has also decided to leave early. I'm beaming the gul and his staff on board as we speak. I can beam you right out of your room, Helen. There's no need to perform one last song. It's taking too great a risk."

"I'm leaving forever, Vardon. Allow Madame La Belle to have her last grand exist," I said. "Half a song and then beam me on board. My bag are packed."

"Very well, dearest. Be careful. I'm told Dukat has lost all sense of reason. All you're doing is poking him with a sharp stick. It may have lasting results."

With a shimmer of lights, Roxell and the twins were transported out of my room, along with our luggage. Garak arrived minutes later, holding his ribs as if he'd run the entire way, which I believe he had. I had one gown hanging in my closet. The gold gown. Garak helped me dress and styled my hair. He patted a pistol hidden within his jacket. He led me out of my room toward the Promenade, acting more nervous than I felt, for I had butterflies in my stomach. We talked to the turbolift.

"This is taking a big risk, Helen. You can just leave," he said.

I know and I am. Take care of Yor and the kids. I'm sorry I'm leaving you behind," I said. I kissed his cheek. "Thank you for everything."

"Whatever happens after you leave is no longer your problem. Do ask Vardon not to stray too far away. We might need him."

"She came. She saw. She left with a bang. That's how I want to be remembered."

Taking my arm, Garak led me to Quark's bar. A crowd was already starting to gather. I took my place behind the curtain, giving liquid courage in a glass as I toasted farewell to Garak, Quark, Rom, and the Dabo girls. The shelves of liquor had been restocked. Quark and Rom remained with me, while the girls went out to serve drinks. Garak disappeared without saying goodbye. I clung to Quark's arm as Petra peered out the curtain.

"Gil Yor just arrived with Gul Dukat and his wife," she said.

"I want to thank you all for being my friend. I'll miss you," I said. "Quark, as soon as your patrons are seated, make the announcement this is my last performance. Vardon will beam me out at the first chorus. Petra, you know which song I want. After I leave, you should consider replacing me as Madame La Belle, Petra. The show must go on."

Petra hugged me. She took her place behind the bar, her com-padd in hand, ready to place the song I wanted. Quark and Rom stood side by side. I stood behind them, trying to remain calm as the lights dimmed.

"It's a full house. All Cardassians," Rom said quivering.

"Gil Yor is seated with Dukat and Kornica on the front row," Quark said turning to glare at me. "We're either going to be shot or taken to a slave camp. I hope you're happy, Helen." He turned back, opening the curtains an inch to peer out.

"Have you ever seen so many armed soldiers in one place? I think I may be sick," Rom said. He ran behind the bar, grabbed a bottle of liquor, and took a swig. "Just get it over with. Please. I don't have the courage to be shot."

At Petra's nod, I prepared to make my appearance. An acoustic version of my farewell song started to play. Quark held a com-link to his lips. "To welcome Gul Dukat and his lovely child bride, Quark's is proud to present the one, the only, Madame La

Belle!”

The sound of applause echoed in the Promenade. It silence the moment I walked through the curtains, my gold gown and Egyptian-styled eye makeup causing a few Cardassians to gasp. I remained back dropped by the black curtains under a red light made my gown sparkle. My voice stuck in my throat until I spotted Sawyer. She sat in front with Dukat and his wife. As she raised her glass of Romulan ale to me, I was beamed off the station, right onto the Kobrak to find Gul Vardon waiting. I stood in his quarters, my mouth open as the lyrics evaporated along with unshed tears. He stepped forward and pulled me into his arms.

“I couldn’t take the risk of Dukat arresting you,” Vardon said. “I already have approval to leave and that’s just what we’re doing. It’s time you stopped thinking about Dukat and start thinking about a new life...with me.”

His lips found mine.

What started as a gentle kiss turned passionate. I released all my pent up emotions, putting everything I felt, finding passion ignited fast between us. He led me to his bed, undressing me, and then stripping out of his uniform. We made love as the Kobrak headed toward Bajor at warp speed with the lights on. Vardon made it clear he wanted me to know it was him, doing his best to erase Dukat from my mind and heart. Even as we lay wrapped together, I shivered, afraid for Sawyer and my friends I’d left behind.

SAWYER

Chapter Forty-Eight

“Gul Dukat, I believe my request is appropriate. It’s to both our benefit if I return to Bajor to continue the search for the Circle. I intend to find every name on the Death List. Do I have your permission to leave, sir?”

Standing before Dukat, dressed in my best armor, seven medals attached to the left breast, I felt confident. I wore my sword on my back, actually it was Damar’s father’s sword he’d left behind, I’d come to favor it. I wore my pistols in a gun holster. My sand skirt was annoying as hell without a freeze to lift it away from my legs. I’d painted bright blue stripes on my cheeks. The look was one I’d assumed on the station, to appear intimidating, and that’s what I’d been since Dukat’s return. In fact, I’d become his henchman.

“Why now?” he hissed.

“Because I miss Damar and Eben.”

“Hardly good enough reasons to leave. Why do you really want to go?”

Images played back in my mind to the night Helen had beamed out of Quark’s bar. Dukat had recognized Helen the moment she stepped out from behind the curtain. As soon as she vanished, he went into a rage. Hadran had taken Kornica to her quarters while Dukat proceeded to destroy bar, sending patrons fleeing for safety, striking anyone or anything in his path.

“She’s supposed to be dead. Dead!” Dukat hurled a bottle of ale at the bar, breaking the mirror behind it, sending Quark and Dabo girls running for their lives. “Why didn’t you tell me Helen was alive, Yor? Someone will pay for this deception. Someone will die!”

One lone Dabo girl lingered too long in the bar. Dukat caught hold of Petra’s arm and threw her against the bar. He was on top of her before I could stop him, pounding her face with his fists, her screams deafening. I considered using my pistol to stun him. Instead,

I grabbed hold of his arm, pulling him off Petra, not realizing until later he'd broken her neck.

"Stop this, Dukat! You can't be seen like this!"

Dukat managed to wrench his arm free. He knocked my feet out from under me and straddled my body, his hands closing around my throat. Only Dr. Quirin's timely arrival with a hypo saved me from being killed. In the morning, I'd reported to Dukat's office, he didn't remember what had happened. He never did.

"Your eye is swollen," Dukat said the following day. "I won't tolerate brawling, Yor. Madame La Belle's exist last night caused quite a riot. You'll continue your duties, running this station as you did during Renalt's short tenure here. I have too much on my mind to deal with trivialities."

"About last night, sir?"

"Yes?"

"You don't remember what happened? What you did at Quark's bar?"

"Of course I remember. I returned to my quarters with my wife. From what I gather, you remained behind and destroyed the bar. I won't tolerate this type of behavior, Yor. You have two children to take care of now. Eben and Shazel. I trust you can manage your duties and take care of two children. It's not as if I'm asking you to do much."

had been two weeks ago. Things had not improved, deteriorated fast.

Eleven days ago, Dukat had interrogated Odo and then Garak, demanding they provide him with the names of every traitor in Cardassia. I met with Odo and Garak later. None of us gave Dukat the Death List, he knew it existed, how I didn't know, and he started next to interrogate his officers. One by one Dukat ordered me to arrest officers and soldiers, seeing a traitor in everyone on Terok Nor, and by the end of the week I had escorted dozens of people, including civilians to Odo's office. When I wasn't carrying out Dukat's orders, I stood on the balcony overlooked the Promenade, dressed in my war paint, my swords on my back, looking as menacing as possible. Whenever I was called to his office, I stood with my hands clasped behind my back, scowling to reflect his own appearance.

“Five officers I once trusted are in league against me,” Dukat said, staring at me with reddened eyes. “You will execute them, Yor. Tonight. Is clear?”

“Yes, sir.”

With Major Kira’s help, I hid the five Cardassians inside a large crate, which I had transported onto a freighter leaving for an outpost. I later reported to Dukat I’d killed them and he added their names to a list of death-kills awarded to me. He actually considered their deaths an accomplishment and a service to Cardassia. hadn’t been enough.

Dukat’s reign of terror how people started to turn in their friends and neighbors, reminding me of Nazi Germany. Odo’s cells filled. I had no choice to give an order no ships were to come to Terok Nor, not even our own, shutting down the station and lied to Dukat. I told him the Order sent word a terrible virus had been unleashed in the Alpha Quadrant by the Fifth Order and we had no choice to quarantine Terok Nor. When questioned by Dukat, Garak backed me and so did Odo. The three of us had no choice to band together and lie through our teeth to protect the innocent.

“Kill them all,” Dukat ordered. “Clear the cells today, Yor. I’ll arrest everyone on this station and put them to death if they refuse to swear their undying loyalty to me. Do you see not see I’m surrounded by enemies? You must protect me. Get rid of them. I care not how.”

“Yes, sir.”

I hailed a passing Cardassian cruiser and beamed the prisoners onto the ship. Again, I reported jettisoning those Dukat found guilty into outer space. Only Odo, Garak, and now Major Kira, who we involved in our conspiracy, knew the truth. The looks I received by those who once I believed I was their protector turned to terror. Dabo girls fled when they saw me. Cardassian soldiers failed to meet my gaze. I was as feared as Dukat except by my co-conspirators. Whenever I stood at my post on the balcony, overlooking the Promenade, I no longer saw customers at Quark’s bar. The Ferengi brothers had mysteriously vanished. Odo told me they’d taken a vacation. Not even Odo dared tell me the truth.

Dukat sometimes stood at my side on the balcony. He’d started to wear a black

hooded cloak to add to his menacing presence. In my own comical attire, I felt we made quite the pair. We would have won any Cosplay contest on Earth as the evil villains.

Eight days ago, Dukat had ordered me to arrest three of my own guards, Cardassians I had handpicked, and trusted with my life. This time Dukat remained with me. I had no choice to shoot the soldiers in front of a deranged Dukat. I set my pistol on stun. I had the bodies carried out by Major Kira and her Bajoran guards, crated, placed on a shuttle, and transported onto a passing cruiser. Dukat was suspicious. Someone had talked.

“If you would come to my bed and reassure me you still love me,” Dukat said, “I would not have asked Major Kira watch you. It is a sad day when I must rely on Bajorans to spy on my own second-officer. Have you nothing to say in your defense?”

“You’re married, sir. It would be inappropriate. I have carried out your every order. Those you suspect of plotting against you, I have personally killed.”

“I can trust no one. Not even my wife. You must protect me.”

“Yes, sir.”

Three days ago, Dukat had personally shot and killed the captain and first officer of the Matok, a freighter had ignored my quarantine, needing repairs after a battle with a Romulan war ship. Dukat suspected the Matok crew of being Romulan spies. I ordered the Matok to leave at once, not caring the freighter had a serious reactor leak and might not make it to the next station. Dukat learned of his and ordered the few officers at Ops to destroy the ship. I reported it had been done and another death-kill was added to my official report.

Two days ago, I’d been ordered to kill one of the Bajorans. It was a friend of Major Kira who had dared looked Dukat in the eyes. I shot the man in Dukat’s office. I set my pistol on stung, Dukat suspected I was trying to trick him.

“Use your sword, Yor. Stab him through the heart,” Dukat demanded.

“Yes, sir.”

Major Kira said nothing, I knew she as well as Odo and Garak wondered why I didn’t arrest Dukat and take command of Terok Nor. I used my sword. I’d been swift. Dukat was quite pleased and listed the kill on my record. I was given the credit for killing

more than fifty- three traitors when the final tally was added. I'd become his personal killing machine.

Over breakfast morning, eight hour earlier, Dukat had asked me to murder his wife. I threw up my eggs onto my plate, while he laughed.

"I can't kill her. Kornica is pregnant," I said hoping he'd slept with her.

I prayed the woman's silence was not only due to his rage, from being forced to acquiesce to his sexual demands. I was right. He believed me and spared her life. I didn't know if I'd actually done her a favor or not. She was miserable and afraid. I had to get her off of the station, I didn't want anyone in Central Command to know what was happening, so I hadn't filed an official report myself, doing what I could to protect Dukat and his reputation. And now he wanted to know why I wanted to leave.

"I asked you a question, Gil Yor. I want the truth," Dukat said.

"Anyone can do my job, sir. Hadran can replace me."

"It's not good enough," he shouted. "Are you not the one to sacrifice anything to please me? Do you really think I don't know you talk about me when my back is turned? You conspire against me with the Bajorans. Even Constable Odo will no longer visit me. The only Cardassian who will join me for dinner is Garak."

Dukat placed his pistol on the table in front of him. I needed to convince him I was on his side or I'd never make it out of his office alive. Approaching his desk, I sat on the edge, casually picking at a fingernail as I looked over my shoulder at him.

"Cousin, come now," I said. "I've been gone from Fort Varnok for more than a month. I haven't caught one spy yet and it's not for lack of trying. We need to go to Bajor. That's where we'll find Agent Torell and the Circle. You should come with me."

"To Bajor? My wife does not want to go there."

"Our enemies are on Bajor. Allow me to take Major Kira and her staff to Bajor, sir. I can put them on leashes and have them sniff out the enemy."

"You want to abandon your post and me!" Dukat slammed his fists onto the table. "My wife, Yor! Now with child, I can never be rid of her. What am I to do?"

"Join me on Bajor. Either come with me now or come tomorrow, don't delay another

day. You're needed there, sir. You are the Prefect!" I slid off the desk, pacing before him, playing my role as the thug. "Yes, Bajor. The enemy is there. Waiting. I will find them and kill them. I will not rest until every traitor and rebel are dead. You're only keeping me here to protect me. I know it and you know it. Let me go, sir. Let me go and kill the enemy!"

"Of course," he said. "You're always logical. Always making the right move as if you can read my mind. We share a mental link between us no one can break. I can trust only you, Yor. Yes. I will join you on Bajor. We find and kill every traitor. Eh, cousin?"

"Precisely. I no more trust any of these people than you do. We must keep our plans quiet, sir. I'll take young Yor and your daughter with me. Kornica does not like the girl. Your wife needs to feel she comes first. Her father supports you only as long as she is kept happy. We need her happy until you are promoted to Legate, so be nicer to her, cousin."

"I'm always nice, Yor. Far too nice, if you ask me."

"Yes, sir."

"And you believe you can hunt down the Circle if I sent you to Bajor, Gil Yor?"

"About that, sir. Gul Renalt promoted me to glinn."

Dukat held up his hand. "Only I will promote you, not Renalt. And not Damar."

"Promote me today, sir. Allow me to be Dukat's Sword once more. Wield me as you see fit and we cannot lose. Cardassian justice will be dealt swift and cold on the tip of my sword."

Standing, Dukat approached me. "This is truly what you want? You want to return to Fort Varnok and take my child with you?" he asked. "You will provide for her? You will care for her?" I inclined my head. "If you fail, Yor, I will expect the ultimate sacrifice. You will take your own life and I shall watch."

"means you will follow me there?"

"Tomorrow or the next day, Glinn Yor, I will come to Fort Varnok and join you."

I saluted him. "I am proud to serve you, Gul Dukat!"

"You have my consent to leave. Come. Embrace me, cousin," Dukat said.

Unable to refuse his request and be spared a beating, I spread my arms wide. Dukat placed his gnarled hands upon my shoulders. Dark rings under beneath his reddened eyes.

His kanar-riddled breath blasted me in the face as he kissed me on the mouth. I nearly threw up.

"My dear, sweet cousin. Only you understand me. Only you truly love me. We are of the same mind and the same heart. My blood is your blood. I've see you rise above all others into the ultimate weapon. You do honor to the Second Order. Bring us glory," he said, pausing to bite my neck ridges. I stiffened as his tongue replaced his lips, trailing all the way to my ear and I feared he'd kiss me again. "Ah, if I had the time to mount you one last time. I am in.. need. The bitch does not satisfy."

"We shall be together again. Soon."

"Yes," he crooned. "Yes, it will be your reward, cousin."

Dukat pulled me close and kissed me. His tongue wiggled into my mouth. I was disgusted and did not embrace him, relieved when he pulled away with a dissatisfied grunt.

"You lack the fire we once enjoyed." Dukat tapped me under the chin with his finger. "When I come to the fort, I will count on you greeting me with open...arms."

"Always, cousin. I am yours."

One of us should have cackled.

Turning, I left Dukat's office, hoping never to see Terok Nor again. I found Eben and Shazel waiting in my quarters, their bags packed, anxious to leave. They ran ahead of me, wanting to reach the hangar where a shuttle waited as quickly as possible. To the children it was only a game. A pilot waited for us and one crewman. I strapped the children into their seats, placed their luggage beneath, and sat near Shazel, waiting for the rest of my chosen crew. The Bajorans arrived, Garak did not appear. I wondered why, didn't dare wait for him.

"We're here," Major Kira said. "I don't know how you manufactured our escape, Yor, thank you. One more day living under monster's roof and I would have...."

"Be silent, Major Kira. The children. They don't know what's happened."

"No. I don't imagine you'd want that. Is Garak coming with us?"

"Hopefully, he'll be coming with Dukat tomorrow."

“You’ve asked monster to come to Bajor?”

“That’s always been my plan, Kira. It’s the only way I can save him. You know that. Now don’t say anything else. Please.” I feared Dukat watched us on the monitor in his office.

The Bajorans were relieved to be going, even if they traveled with me. Two of the Bajorans had fresh cuts and bruises. I wasn’t the only brute on Terok Nor. Hadran and his squad enjoyed beating anyone they didn’t like. Odo had nothing to say about it. He did what Dukat told him, while helping me anyway he could. I’d miss the constable.

The shuttle left Terok Nor. We were met by the Kobrak and flew into the hangar. Greeted by two young crewmen, Major Kira and her soldiers were taken to rooms for the short duration of the journey, while the kids and I were shown to Helen’s accommodations. It seemed to take forever to reach her room. My ghosts followed, taunting me, refusing to let me forget what I’d had done in the name of Dukat. Eben and Shazel were spared knowing about my conduct and what Dukat had done, so I didn’t need to worry they’d talk. The children screamed in delight as Helen greeted us, looking happier than I’d seen her in a long time, and I hoped it meant she’d taken Vardon as her lover.

“Must you look like a bounty hunter?” Helen asked.

I removed my sword and the sand skirt, and then entered the bathroom to wash my face. Returning to the front room, I placed my holster in a closet, along with the sword and started to remove my armor. I didn’t have the energy to check on the children and collapsed on a couch, trying to keep from sobbing.

“When we received your distress call, I was quite surprised. We broke every record to reach you in time,” Helen said. “Roxell? Come get these two little monkeys and give them a cup of cocoa. I’m taking Yor into Vardon’s office to talk.”

“Yor is here?”

Roxell appeared in the entrance to the bedroom, dressed in an attractive gown. She had both twins in her arms. I had never seen her looking so lovely and well rested.

“You look exhausted. Is everyone all right?” she asked

“It’s been fourteen days of sheer hell, yes, everyone is fine. I’m glad you are doing

well, Roxell. Quark and the girls send their love." I didn't tell her Petra was dead. I couldn't tell either of them what had happened.

"You two can talk later. Please check on the kids, Roxell," Helen said.

I let Helen pull me off the couch and drag me into the next room. Vardon's office looked like any other gul's office, he didn't have one bottle of kanar on the shelves, mainly books and knickknacks. Helen gave me a hug, not pleased at my lack of enthusiasm and motioned me to sit in a chair.

"How are you? And how is lunatic you serve under?" she asked.

"Dukat is joining me on Bajor in a day or so. It took some effort, he's agreed to join me, and he's bringing his wife," I said. "As soon as Dukat arrives at Fort Varnok, I'm going to remove implant from his head. It's all planned."

"How is Garak? His last message said he's being monitored. By you?"

"By Dukat. All of us were monitored," I said. She stared at me, imploring me with her eyes to fill her in. "Your departure is what started his maniacal tirade. He recognized you, Helen. He went into a rage and it continued. Dr. Quirin is concerned its removal may cause serious neurological damage. He gave me a drug will supposedly help. I'm to give it to Dukat before I remove the implant. You don't need to worry about it."

"I'm sorry. I feel like it's my fault. I shouldn't have made an appearance at Quark's bar. I was being selfish. We tried to find out how you were doing, no messages come in or out of Terok Nor. You've done a good job with security. No one has heard a thing. Not one rumor."

"Oh, someone lived to tell the tale."

"You need a drink," Helen said. She ordered a glass of Romulan ale from the replicator. I shook my head.

"I can't drink one more drop of the nasty stuff. I've already had too many bottles in the last month."

Helen handed me a glass of bourbon and water on the rocks.

"That was my favorite drink on Earth," I said.

"I know," Helen replied. "Frankly, I don't know how you manage to perform your

magic tricks, Sawyer. Damar is ahead of you, Dukat is behind. Again, you have both of your Cardassians right where you want them. And I have Vardon. I'm happy with him. He's kind and loving. He adores the twins. We've discussed something more permanent. He has a villa on Bajor he'd like to take me to one day. Yet someone I feel I must help remove Dukat's fangs before I can entirely let the past go."

"Are you volunteering to be bait?" I took a drink, found it soothing and drank more. "Just wait until I pull off the biggest magic trick yet. You can come to Fort Varnok after I remove Dukat's implant. Decide then whether or not you want to stay with Vardon. Once Dukat is back to his old self, I'm sure it will be easier to pick, Helen."

"Oh, no. I don't want Dukat back. I know you still love him. I'd rather let you decide which Cardassian you want. I'm through playing game, Sawyer. If you want, I will come with you and help set a trap for your big bear."

"I don't think it's a good idea," I said.

"I'm coming with you to Fort Varnok," she said as stubborn as ever. "Now go take a shower and join Vardon and I for dinner. When we arrive at Bajor, you'll be too busy and I want to spent a little time with you while things are halfway normal."

I held her gaze as I downed the bourbon and set the glass aside.

"Fine," I said. "We'll try it your way."

* * *

HELEN

Arriving at Vardon's quarters, I went in first and discovered Vardon had arranged a private, romantic dinner for the two of us. While I played the charming hostess, I wondered why I'd so quickly stepped aside for Sawyer, giving her the opportunity to decide whether she wanted Damar or Dukat. I wasn't in love with Vardon. I still loved Dukat, I'd deny it to the end. Vardon greeted Sawyer with a handshake and then kissed me. Sawyer came in a clean uniform without the frills.

"We'll be at Bajor in the regular amount of time, three hours, we'll be in orbit so there is no reason to rush through dinner," Vardon said. "I hope you haven't convinced

Helen to beam down with you to Fort Varnok, Glinn Yor. I can always tell when Helen is keeping a secret from me. Her cheeks turn pink. Tell me I'm wrong for once."

"Dukat is coming whether Helen is there or not," Sawyer said taking a seat at the table.

Vardon quickly set another plate. "I told her I don't need her at the fort. Damar will help me do what needs to be done. And I have Major Kira. You two can drop me off with my team and be on your way."

"I'm going to help you. I'm not changing my mind," I said.

Vardon gave me a stern look as he poured wine for the three of us. A salad was on the table, which I served onto three plates. Several more courses were served by a crewman who came and went as needed. Sawyer merely picked at her meal, taking little interest in eating.

"Far be it from me to tell the great Glinn Yor how to manage her cousin, I would like to think I have something to say about this, Helen. I don't think it's a good idea. Dukat already tried to kill you once. If for any reason your friend fails to remove the implant, he may try to kill you again. And me. I'm already treading on egg shells."

"Don't be upset, Vardon," I said sipping on my wine. "Let's have a nice meal. Why aren't you eating anything, Sawyer? It's all right. Vardon knows all about us. There's no reason to call you Yor when we're in private. I told you he's on our side."

"Oh? I wasn't aware I was on Yor's infamous list," Vardon said.

"You told him about too?" Sawyer pushed her plate aside. "Let's be honest with one another, Vardon. You were with the Fifth. Dukat doesn't trust anyone in the Fifth. When he's clear headed again, he'll still feel the same way in regard."

"Have I giving you any other reason to suspect me of treason other than formally being with the Fifth? I seem to recall I've come to you and Helen's rescue on more than one occasion," Vardon said. He tossed his napkin aside, his chicken half-finished. "I think I've been more than amiable, Yor. In fact, I've gone out of my way to accommodate your requests."

Sawyer crossed one leg over the other, and then folded her arms in her lap. She had

a smirk on her face, while Vardon tried to retain a friendly smile. This was going to be harder than I thought. She was guarded. He was angry. It was not the happy reunion I'd hoped to share between the two people I considered my dearest friends.

"I'm not asking you to come to Fort Varnok, Gul Vardon. Considering your strained relationship with Dukat, I suggest you remain on the Kobrak. You can't expect the Second Order to greet you with open arms. Gul Renalt was quick to make friends on Terok Nor. He returned to Fort Tornok with a staff who respect him, including Gul Toran's son. He even asked me to be on his staff. I turned him down. I'm returning to Damar. I hope you hear what I said, Helen. What I do for Dukat is out of a sense of duty and loyalty."

"And not love?" Vardon asked. "From what I've been told, there isn't anything you wouldn't do for Gul Dukat. You're the reason he's still in power. Hadran protected him on Cardassia Prime, rather like a viper protecting its young, while you kept a total blackout on Terok Nor, allowing no information in or out."

"I've stood by Dukat out of love and compassion. I believe he will be back to his old self in no time," Sawyer said. "Anything happened on Terok Nor will remain there. I made every effort to protect him, Gul Vardon. If anyone cares to investigate what occurred there in the last fourteen days, all you need is review my own military record."

"I have, Glinn Yor. I most certainly have," he said. "That is why I refuse to allow Helen to join you. She will remain with the twins on the Kobrak with me. I won't put her in danger to satisfy your desire to defend Dukat to the bitter end. It's an obsession with you, and I'm not sure it's healthy. One could even say you've become as sick and twisted as he has."

"That's enough," I said. "I want the two of you to stop chewing on each other like an old bone. Vardon, you are speaking to my best friend. As for you, Sawyer, I love Vardon. I want his name off list and this bickering to stop."

She glared at me.

"My apologies, Glinn Yor. I should not have reviewed your report, it's the only thing that's come out of Terok Nor in the last two weeks. I'm well aware you and Helen come from Earth's past, you're now referred to as Dukat's Sword of Vengeance."

Grabbing the wine bottle, Sawyer refilled her glass. Vardon's apology had created a domino effect, knocking down every one of Sawyer's emotional defenses. I saw her lips quiver, her hand holding the glass shake and the daggers flash in her eyes. Whatever went on inside Sawyer's head went from anger, frustration to tear in a matter of seconds.

"That's right, Vardon. I am Dukat's vengeance. You read the filthy report. You surely saw I was credited with killing over fifty soldiers and civilians accused of treason. That's why I do," Sawyer said. "I kill anyone Dukat orders me to kill. If he pointed his finger at you, I'd shoot you as well." She drained her glass and stood. "Speed up this tin bucket and get me to Bajor. Helen, thanks for the lettuce. Good night."

I jumped to my feet, blocking her path. "Did you? Did you kill them, Sawyer?"

"No," she said. "I did kill one of Major Kira's men."

"Then you disobeyed a direct order," Vardon said.

I glared at Vardon. He had an odd expression on his face. He looked like a little boy who had won a game by cheating, only he hadn't been playing Sawyer, he'd been fishing for information on Dukat. I was furious with him. Sawyer's shoulders sagged as she returned to her seat, looking utterly defeated. I put my arm around her, aware she struggled not to cry.

"Then what happened? If you didn't kill those people, what did you do with them? Vardon isn't going to tell anyone," I said. "If he does, he can get a new girlfriend."

"Helen, I'm not going to tell a soul," he replied.

"The kills are on my official record," Sawyer said. "I might as well have done it. Central Command is pleased. The OO is pleased. That's really all matters."

Vardon cleared his throat. "I'll pretend I didn't hear a word otherwise," he said. "I don't think we need the details, Helen. I have to report to the same people she does."

"Sawyer, I'm so sorry. I had no idea it was this bad. We're going to work this out," I said, giving her a final squeeze. "Vardon will help us. Won't you, dearest? You'll help Sawyer and I save Dukat. We'll both come with her to Fort Varnok."

Vardon stood and walked past me. I wasn't quite sure what he was going to do. He placed his hand on Sawyer's shoulder. She buried her face in her hands, sobbing, while he

knelt beside her to draw her into his arms. She sopped on his shoulder. I'd done it myself many times. It was solid shoulder to cry on.

"There, there," he said. "Your efforts to help Dukat and spare the innocent is commendable. No one ever need know you didn't follow orders. You won't be lined up against a wall and shot, Glinn Yor. It's all right. Never fear."

"Lined up and shot?" Sawyer pushed him away. "I hope you haven't recorded this conversation, Gul Vardon. It seems a lovely way to protect yourself. Blackmail. I protect you and you protect me. Well played."

"Do I seem desperate?" he asked chuckling. "I haven't recorded you. I have no intention of telling anyone one thing. You're a guest on my ship. Helen loves you, so I feel I must do the same. Please. Think of me as a friend."

Vardon returned to his seat. The crewman came in to clear away the table. A triple layer white cake was placed on the table. As soon as the crewman left, I cut a piece of cake in front of Sawyer. She used her finger to eat the icing.

"As your friend, Vardon, let me be perfectly honest with you," Sawyer said. "Once Dukat is back to his old self, I doubt he'll have any memory of what happened these last few weeks. He care for Helen. He'll come after her and means he'll come after you, for personally reasons. I appreciate everything you've done for Helen. She is my friend too. I want her to be happy and if you truly love her, then you'd better be prepared to fight for her."

"Oh, I most certainly will fight Dukat," Vardon said.

"I hope you don't mean literally," she said.

"I'll do whatever it takes, Yor, to be with Helen. I love her." Vardon knelt at my side. He took hold of my hand, barely noticing as Sawyer excused herself and left. "Do you love me, Helen? If what your friend says is true and he says all the right things and asks you to return to him, will you stay with me or not? I need to have your answer."

I felt uncomfortable being forced to give him an answer. To ease his doubts and my own, I kissed him. He gazed into my eyes, trying to read my thoughts. I felt my cheeks grow warm.

“Helen, this would be an ideal time for us to make a fresh start,” he said. “I can arrange to be deployed on the outer fringe of Cardassian space. I can take you with me. I can show wonderful places. I promise to make you happy, for you see, I love you. Very much. And if I thought for a moment you felt the same, I’d put a bel-rath on your wrist and ask you to be mine. I’d even divorce my wife and marry you.”

I drained my wine glass this time.

“I know I’m rushing you, you can see time is against us. Do you love me, Helen? It’s a simply question. The answer should be easy to say if you feel the same.”

“This is our opportunity to be happy,” I said, keeping hold of his hand as I stood. “I do love you, Vardon. I’ll leave with you, only after I help Sawyer complete her task.”

“Then I have the answer I wanted.”

Vardon kissed me. He continued to kiss me as he walked backwards into his bedroom, taking me with him. His kisses were soft, his manner gentle. I felt loved as he undressed me, removed his own clothes, and joined me in bed.

“For the first time in what feels like forever, I feel loved,” I said. I slid my arms around his neck. “I really do love you, Vardon.”

“And I love you.”

I felt safe in his arms. There was no games. No need for him to dominate. He offered only love, kindness, and understanding. Afterwards, I lay in his arms, telling myself this was what I wanted. As he held me tight, he said something brought tears to my eyes.

“I don’t deserve you, Helen.”

Three hours later, Vardon escort us all the transporter room. The Bajorans and Sawyer beamed down to the fort first. Eben and Shazel waited with Roxell and the twins, while I prepared to kiss Vardon farewell. A crewman arrived with a bag and placed it as his feet.

“I going with you to Fort Varnok, we are taking a shuttle. I don’t like transporting babies if it can be avoided,” Vardon said kissing my hand. “Everyone, please come with me to the hangar. I promise the view of the planet is far more lovely seen from a shuttle.”

“Thank you, Vardon. It’s exactly what I was hoping you’d say.”

“Anything for you, my dear.”

SAWYER

Chapter Forty-Nine

I'd never liked transporting. Having my molecules shredded, reassembled, to leave one destination for another was nothing less than a nightmare waiting to happen. The familiar churn in my stomach didn't settle down until my boots touched solid ground. I felt grateful to arrive in one piece. I appeared in the main courtyard. Major Kira and the Bajorans accompanied me. We were greeted by a cold wind. Snow covered the ground and the hills surrounding the fort.

Gul Damar stood with the War Dogs under the awning of Building 1. Korvinus, Torgan, Ravon, Dunatar, Komash, Ikarus, Jenrak, Zolon, and Ravon stood with Damar. I had eyes only for Damar. Dressed in black armor, his hair blowing in the breeze, he'd never looked as handsome or quite as severe. I dropped my bag and ran toward him. Not caring we were watched the entire assembly, I threw my arms around Damar and kissed him. His lips felt warm against my own. The War Dogs surrounded us. The men patted me on the back, jabbering at the same time, glad to have me back.

"Don't mind us, Yor," Dunatar said. "We've missed you, you have your hands full. Gul Damar has been a bur in our backside since you've been gone. Come one, Major Kira. I think Gul Damar has things well in hand." He led Major Kira, the Bajorans, and War Dogs inside Building 1, giving Damar and I a little privacy.

"I've missed you so much. It's been horrible without you, Damar. Did you miss me?"

"Somewhat," he replied. He laughed when I took him serious and gasped. "Get inside before we both freeze to death."

With my arms wrapped tight around Damar, we returned to grab my bag. He slid the strap over his shoulder, laughing when I kissed him again. I didn't mind the cold or the curious stares from the soldiers as four squads marched past us. Guards stood along the

balcony wrapped in cloaks and in the towers, keeping vigilance, I knew they watched us. Damar's blue eyes raked across my face, lowering to my uniform, an amused expression curling the corners of his mouth.

"You've changed your hair," he said. "I prefer it long."

"I haven't changed on the inside. I still love you very much, Damar."

"The sentiment is returned. You still look beautiful to me," he said. He led me toward the glow of the main building. "Where are the children? I thought Eben and Shazel would beam down with you."

"Helen is bringing them. Vardon is coming with her."

"He must be mad to come here. He's not wanted. I don't think it's a good idea, perhaps we it's bet he is here where I can keep my eye on him. Much has happened since you've been gone. I'm eager to tell you about the changes, the soldiers will want to see you this evening. I've only enough time to welcome you home before they'll be begging to see you. Come inside where it is warm and I'll gladly kiss you as many times as you can stand. I have missed you. Very much, in fact."

Entering the lobby, I spotted my buddies leading Major Kira and her men into the Officer's Lounge. Dunatar and Ikarus crunched Major Kira between them. Guards stood at their post. Everything looked orderly and quiet. I meant to comment Damar pulled me into his arms and kissed me again.

"We'll wait here for Eben and Shazel," he said. "I've already heard from Gul Dukat. He will arrive tomorrow evening."

"I intend to go through my plan. I can't talk about it here."

"Yor, I am loyal to Dukat as well. I will help you carry out your plan. If you fail, I will be placed in a difficult position."

"I won't fail," I said.

A shuttle landed in the courtyard. The door opened. Eben bolted out first like a rabbit. He ran into the lobby, straight for Damar, shouting at the top of his lungs.

"Father!"

"Son!" Damar caught hold of the boy, laughing when Eben kissed his cheeks. "I

have presents for you in your room. I'm sure you'll be pleased," he said. "There are more than twenty. I started collecting gifts each day you were gone, I had to stop when I realized I was spoiling you, so I opened an account. You have funds should you ever need them in the future."

"I don't care about those things. I just want to be with you," Eben said.

"That was thoughtful, my love," I said.

"I am a thoughtful man. I have been full of thoughts during your absence, my dear."

Damar set Eben down. "Your friends are here. Shazel has grown since I've seen her. I thought the girl would remain with her father. It does not seem she can be separated from you, Ren. Nor can your friend."

Helen, wearing a hooded cloak, appeared on Vardon's arm. Roxell carried a large crib, covered in blanket. Shazel walked ahead of the group. As soon as she was inside, she ran toward Damar, holding out her arms to him. Damar lifted the girl into his arms, kissing her cheeks, and took hold of Eben's hand. My family, I thought. I'd placed a great weight on Damar's shoulder by asking him to help redeem Dukat's honor and sanity. Loud voices came from the officer's club. Dal Dracalus, Glinns' Dorric, Torgan, and Ravon came walking toward us. They saluted Gul Vardon and he returned the salute.

"Greetings, Gul Vardon," Dracalus said. He did not look pleased with me or with the new arrivals. "I'd stay and visit, I have matters to attend to. Welcome back, Glinn Yor." He put on a cloak and went out the front door with Dorric and Torgan, vanishing in the swirl of snow.

"Well, this is a nice reception. A bit cold for my liking. It's a great deal warmer on the other side of Bajor at this time of year. Funny, the weather here. Where it is winter here, it is springing on the other continents," Vardon said. "The planet's axel is at a tilt, you see."

I hadn't known this, his dribble about the weather told me he was nervous. The way Vardon kept a tight hold of Helen's hand made him appear far too possessive. She seemed slightly embarrassed. I caught Ravon staring at Roxell. She gave him a flirtatious smile. Damar handed Shazel to me and approached Vardon. Eben walked over to Ravon and shook his hand.

"Thank you for bringing my family home, Gul Vardon," Damar said. "Helen. Roxell. It's nice to see you again. Allow me to extend the hospitality of the Second Order." He inclined his head. "Welcome to Fort Varnok."

"Thank you. I'm sorry if we've imposed on you," Helen said.

"And you've brought the twins," Damar said. He didn't have much to say about Dukat's children, I noted. "Gul Vardon, I trust your father is well. He was one of my favorite teacher's at the academy. He should be well into his eighties by now."

"Enjoying his retirement. Quite a few retired veterans returned to their former divisions after the attack on Cardassia Prime. My father is too old to done his armor. Dusting off decrepit old men and rusty battle cruisers isn't the way to defeat our enemies. I'm sure you agree with me, Gul Damar. We need strength in numbers and new, faster ships. I'm told you've only reinforced only thirty-five forts and outposts here on Bajor. Five outposts have been abandoned. Is this true?"

Damar smiled. "I do not care to discuss material matters in front of children, Vardon. Nor do I feel it necessary to brief you. You're not on my staff," he said. "Helen, you have a suite on the third floor. I am sure you are anxious to tend to your children."

"I'd forgotten how some Cardassians believe females are only good barefoot and pregnant in the kitchen," Helen said. She glanced at me, her temper bubbling. "I'm sure you two have a lot to talk about. Why don't I take the children to my suite? I can serve tea and crumpets. Perhaps we'll see you for dinner, *Yor*."

I nodded, trying not to laugh. "I'm sure you will," I said.

"We have replicators as well as a full-staffed kitchen," Damar said, not catching onto her sarcasm. He reached into his pocket and handed Helen a code key. "This is yours. I will place a guard outside your door, just in case."

"Whatever you think best, Gul Damar. Come on children. Let them have a little private time," Helen said taking hold of Eben's hand. Shazel reached for Vardon, making him lift her into his arms. Roxell carried the crib. Ravon grabbed the luggage and escorted the group to the turbolift, talking about the weather, I heard Roxell laugh. They'd hit it off quite well.

“Helen seems quite attached to Gul Vardon,” Damar said as soon as they were gone. “For some reason, I thought she was coming here to wait for Dukat to be restored to his former self. A woman like only wants a man in power. Mark my word. The moment you pull the stinger from Dukat’s head, she will be begging him to take her back.”

“That’s not a particularly kind thing to say about my best friend.”

“I speak the truth. Let’s take the stairs so you can stretch your legs,” he said. “I’ve appropriate Dukat’s former quarters.”

Damar carried my bags. He opened the door to the stairwell. It was frigid in the stairwell. The moment the door closed, he dropped the bag, caught hold me and shoved me against the wall. His lips clamped over mine. He’d missed me as much as I’d missed him. As our kissing grew more passionate, he forced himself to step back and again grabbed my bag.

“I’m eager to hold you” he said chuckling.

We ran up the stairs to the third floor. He held the door open for me. I walked past him, feeling his hand glide across my backside. Guards stood at their posts every ten feet. Two guards stood outside the door to Dukat’s former residence. I hadn’t expected security to be raised to Level 4.

Inside our new quarters, I found Damar had altered the furnishings and decor. Long blue drapes hung at the windows. The couch had fringed pillows, placed on top of a large colorful Bajoran rug and the kitchen had been turned into a small surveillance station, with a circular desk and more than a dozen monitors showed various angles within the outside the fort. He tossed aside the bag and started to unfasten my jacket.

“I’ve waited so long to hold you. I won’t wait another second.”

“You’ve no idea how often I’ve thought about this,” I said.

Eager to get into bed, we left behind a mind field of gear, clothes, and equipment led to the bedroom. Dark red, green, and blue drapes hung over the bed and a mirror faced it from the far wall. More pillows and a thick fur blanket covered the bed. He’d spared no expense, the master quarters in the fort lacked a room for Eben and Shazel. It made me wonder if he’d thought I wasn’t going to return with our son. I pushed the thought aside as

we stood naked on a thick carpet, staring at one another. He had a few new scars on his body.

"I've dreamed about making love to you, Ren. I can't even remember how long it's been since I've lain with you. I am out of practice," Damar said.

"So am I. Let's take care of right now."

I threw my arms around his neck and pulled him onto the bed on top of me. Our lips met, tongues sliding inwards, moving in frenzy. My legs wrapped around his waist, able to feel the nudge of his erection. I wanted no foreplay. I wanted him. He released a loud woof as I reached down and slid his ridged cock inside of me. He found me wet and ready. It was a wild session. He slammed into me, thrusting so hard we moved across the bed, taking the fur blanket with us. The moment he felt my entire body shudder, he withdrew his cock and holding my legs to my chest, went down on me.

Damar's tongue delved into his favorite location, central command of the female variety, stabbing me over and over until I bucked. It had been less than two months since we'd make love. He ravage me with his tongue and fingers, leaving a puddle beneath my backside. He waited until he heard me panting and then stopped once more, flipped me over onto my stomach and jerked my hips against his, doggy-style, and slid his full length inside of me.

"You taste sweeter than I remember," he said.

There was no gradual build up in speed. It wasn't Damar's style. He was in motion and moving from the get-go, his speed increased and so did the force. He was brutish. I came several times. He continued thrusting, until I gave a final shudder, so exhausted after an hour of lovemaking I was no longer able to move. He was 't through. He pulled out of me and pushed me onto my back. He closed his hand around his cock, jerking on it until he splattered my chest with his thick, which essence. I slid one finger across a large spot and stuck it in my mouth, tasting his cum. He'd been over-indulging in kanar and sugar from the taste of it.

"Words can't describe how felt," he said collapsing beside me. He dragged the fur blanket across our bodies, breathing hard, too exhausted to pull me into his arms.

"You've not been with anyone else," I said.

"Why are you surprised? I want only you. And I want you again."

Damar moved fast, pulling me beneath him, already hard again. As he penetrated me, grunting as he thrust against me, I started to panic. Dark thoughts invaded my mind, the past events flashing backwards until I was back in the cave, hearing the men laugh, completely helpless beneath Gul Parnal. I told myself countless times I was with the man I loved. I tried to focus on my body, for it wanted Damar, it was ready for him, when I opened when I opened my eyes I saw only Gul Parnal on top of me.

"Stop. You have to stop!"

I started to struggle, trying to push him off, slapping him several times. Damar rolled to the side, keeping his hands in the air, not touching me. Sobbing, I presented my back to him, curling into a tight ball with the fur blanket pulled close. When he tried to touch me, I whimpered, kicking at him from behind.

"I'm sorry, Ren. I'm not going to hurt you."

"I just...give me a minute. Please."

"I forgot. Forgive me. I didn't even think about what happened when you were here last. When I saw you, you were so full of confidence. I could only think of being with you. Nothing else." His hand brushed across my shoulder. When I flinched, he drew completely away. "You're here with me. You're safe. You don't have to go back there in your mind."

"God, I'm so embarrassed. I didn't mean to pull away from you. I love you."

"Hush, dearest. It's my fault. For some reason I thought Dukat had eased the pain in your heart. I was certain he had after you told me how you defended him. I am a jealous man. I cannot help it when it comes to you."

I grew quiet, listening. My thumped rapidly in my chest.

Damar let out a heavy sigh. "Imagine, I actually begged Dukat to lay with you," he said. "I thought it would help. I thought you wanted to be with him. I know how much you love him. Now I realize I was wrong. You do love me. I know now."

I turned to face Damar, feeling hurt and shocked by his confession. "I told you what's happened to him. He's under Torell's control. He's perfectly evil. If you love me,

how could you have sent me to him? It's the worst possible thing you could have done. What were you thinking?"

"I thought only of you. Only you."

I buried my face into the pillow. It smelled like Damar.

"After you stopped contacting me, I thought for certain you'd become his lover again," he said. "You mean you didn't sleep with him? Not once?"

My head rose from the pillow. "I never slept with him. I didn't want to. Dukat is far more terrifying than Gul Parnal. He tried to kill Helen. How can you think I wanted to be with him? What's wrong with you? I came back here to be with you. If I wanted him, I'd have stayed on Terok Nor."

Damar yanked me into his arms. I tried to push him away, he was too strong. I buried my face against his neck, holding onto his shoulders, sobbing uncontrollably.

"Ren, please. Don't cry. Let me explain," Damar said. I forced myself to be silent. He "After you left, I realized it had taken more than courage for you to march into the fort night, surrounded by thousands of Cardassians. You never once looked scared, only injured and tired. I hoped at Terok Nor you would find solace in the bed of Dukat. He has a way to ignite your fire. I did not know he had changed. Nor did I think you would return. I did what I thought you wanted. What I thought you needed. It's always been Dukat."

"That's not true," I said. "Nor is it true you've only been with me. I don't mean the Dabo girls. I'm talking about Helen. I know you slept with her when she was pregnant. Dukat told me. Do you deny it?"

Damar caught his breath. "That's not fair," he said. "You and Dukat were together. She needed comfort. It meant nothing to me. It did not bring her and I closer together. If anything, Helen has less respect for me now than she did before."

"The point is you never told me about it. Neither of you did."

"I can only speak for myself. Why would I tell you something would hurt you? To be honest? To clear my conscious? Do you think you and Dukat are the only ones who have invested blood, sweat, and tears in Q's game of life and death?" He sat forward, his knees

raised, one arm dangling across his kneecaps. I heard the self-scorn and distinguished it between his frustration with the situation. "Shall I tell you a truth? I knew the moment you returned with Dalin Renalt and Major Kira what had happened. When you wouldn't let me touch you, it confirmed my suspicions. I did what I thought you wanted. I sent you to Dukat. If anyone could heal your heart, it was him. Not me. I have always come in second to Dukat."

"That's not true. I love you, Damar. How can you say that?"

"Because you failed to take the Romulan extractor with you. Had you done so, Dukat would have been grateful to have the implant removed. He would not have sunken further into madness as he has, and he would now be yours."

Damar got out of bed. He found his robe and slid into it. I remained where I was, listening, while he continued to make his well-thought out speech. It was the Cardassian way.

"Let us consider Sawyer's actions further, for part of you controls your emotions. After Parnal's assault, she was distraught, unable to think of anything her injuries. She left the extractor behind. Understandably so. Did she not know Torell's agent had placed an implant into Dukat's skull. She didn't know his wife had been murdered by Torell. The path was clear for her to seize what she wanted. Dukat. He knew why I sent her to him. And I know he tried bed her. He also offered to wed her, she turned down exalted position. Sawyer's failure is she loves Dukat far too much and has placed him on a pedestal, forever keeping him out of reach. She failed to act when she had the chance. Instead, she was so insistent on being a Cardassian she allowed her alter-ego Ren Yor to take charge and play the game. Q's game. And is what I think is the True Way."

Damar walked to the replicator and ordered a glass with kanar. He guzzled it, wiping his hand across his mouth, his eyes holding mine as he pointed his finger at me.

"As for Ren Yor, the obedient officer, the poor cousin who worships Dukat was only too eager to return to Terok Nor. She realized she'd make a tactical mistake by failing to take the extractor with her. She dared not ask me for it for many reasons. Fear of my jealousy. Fear of discovery by Dukat. Nor were ships allowed to visit Terok Nor. So, what

did Yor do? She agreed to be Dukat's spy and saw him off to Cardassia to fetch his new bride whose father could arranged for his rise to Legate. Gul Renalt, unsure of his role on the station, turned to Yor and asked she take over his duties, which she does. She met with Odo, Kira, Garak, and Helen to form a spy ring. Yor seeks to protect all, standing guard in a costume to attract attention, hard to miss, impossible not to see, watching over her flock."

Damar again refilled his glass and moved to the opposite side of the bed, casting his face in shadows. Something moved behind him. A stepped out from behind him, moving to the far side of the wall where it remained. I looked away from it. I knew what it was. Something had followed me out of the valley, Damar wasn't aware we weren't alone. Whatever it was, it inflamed his anger. He swallowed the entire contents of the glass, rolling it between his hands, as he continued.

"Meanwhile, Yor sends fewer messages to her lover on Bajor, failing to send him the infamous Death List, which he later learned about from Garak. Yor hires Quark, Rom and the Dabo girls to spy for her. Helen is turned into a Cardassian nightclub entertainer. The spy ring finds nothing of use, only rumors one spy is on the station, not the name. Yor lowers security, allows ships to come and go, yet still remains reluctant to send for the retractor. She is convinced she must bring Dukat to the fort. Dukat returns with his bride, a much-changed individual. He sends Gul Renalt away, attempted to kill Helen who flees with Vardon, taking the children with her. Even then, Dukat belonged to Yor. All she had to do was remain at his side to rule as two tyrants. He ordered Yor to kill more than fifty soldiers, crewmen, and non-Cardassians, yet Yor fails to do so. Instead, she sent the accused from the station, telling Dukat she'd followed his orders, standing guard at the balcony, the very sight of her causing terror in those who remained, who waited and wondered what she and Dukat would do next.

"Yet, Dukat insisted she prove her loyalty, for Yor will not bed him. She kills a Bajoran in front of the entire assembly and he is pleased. She kills three soldiers and he no longer suspects her of duplicity. Finally, having won him over, she still resists coming to his bed. The way was open for her to be with him, he wanted her, yet she leaves with the Bajorans, her son, and Dukat's daughter. Dukat claims he will follow, to ensure he does so,

she invites Helen, his former mistress, to come to Bajor with his children. It is a cunning move. He tried to kill Helen before. If Yor fails to remove the implant, all she need do is convince Dukat to kill his wife, former mistress, and children and none stand in her way. She can be with her. There is a question. What does Yor really want if it's not Dukat as her life-mate?"

I started to speak, he lifted his hand, motioning me to be silent.

"Let us not forget the other players. Helen. Poor human, a mere slave, forced to bed Dukat and in consequence become pregnant and has twins has no rights. His wife comes first and then Yor. As a result, she fails to secure her position and she is forced to flee or be killed with Vardon. Her new lover, suspected of being a traitor, brings her to Bajor. Then there is Quark. His ambition is to be rich and yet his bar is destroyed, one Dabo girl killed by Dukat and another taken by Helen. Odo. An honest individual who seeks to serve Dukat helps Yor hide the fact Helen murdered Legate Mikor, helped remove the accused from the station, and learns how to lie. Garak, cunning and patient, uses everyone to further his quest to find the Circle. He provides false backgrounds for his new spies and lies to the Order. Yor's family connection to Dukat is legalized, her DNA matches his own, which he provides to the Order. He alters Helen with his blood and DNA as well. Why? To further his own goals.

"And what about Major Kira? One of her soldiers is killed by Yor, yet she returns to Bajor with the murderer. Kira seeks to rid Bajor of Cardassia, ingratiating herself so Yor brings her into her spy ring. Gul Renalt. A former Fifth Order officer who Yor helps so he can join the Second Order and rise in rank. Is he with the Circle or is he loyal? Is Vardon also a member? Both are now on Bajor, yet Yor makes no move against them. And then," he said, hurling the glass across the room, where it shattered against the wall, "there is Gul Damar!

"Damar has been patient, the loyal officer, obeying Dukat's every command. He assumed temporary command of Bajor, rebuilding forts, assigns fresh recruits, promoting new officers, garnering a treaty with Bajor, and seeing a new Kai is installed. Biding his time, he prepared to make his own move to obtain power. Promoted to gul, he also desires

to be a Legate and sit on the Council. His wife is dead and he can remarry. Dukat forbids him to marry his cousin Yor and insists he marry his new wife's sister. And then there is Dukat. He remains in power though he should be removed. He need do nothing more than allow the other players to make their moves. His madness causes him to make careless moves, which the others make certain do not come to light. He is protected, loved, and still in power. Again, the question is, what will Yor do? For it clear it is Yor, not Sawyer, who is in charge. Yor is ambitious as her cousin. All she need do is bide her time, make the right moves, and Dukat will be hers and together they will be able to take control of the Union and rule together. Is this what she wants?"

I would have applauded had I not been caught in a whirlwind of emotion. Damar had analyzed the situation like a chess master, knowing each move made by each game piece, cleverly staying out of harm's way while he merely watched and waited. Anger was there, meshed with my confusion, fear and anxiety. I was at odds with myself. Sawyer wanted Dukat. Yor wanted everything. And then there was Damar, like a lifeboat, just out of reach while I drowned in my emotions.

"Have you nothing to say to me?" he asked.

I merely shook my head.

"Get dressed in full uniform. Have a glass of Romulan ale or kanar, I care not which, and join me on the Level 2 balcony in ten minutes. One way or another, you will decide what you really want!"

Entering the bathroom, he vanished from sight. I dressed in the outfit I'd created for Ren Yor to terrify her enemies at Terok Nor. I armed myself and drank two glasses of kanar. I drank it because I hated it, and at moment, I hated myself.

I saw no one in the hallway and took the stairs, needing time to prepare for what Damar had planned for me. He had every right to be angry. He certainly had a right to pursue his own destiny. It wasn't coincidence all these things had happened. I opened the door and entered the second level, noting soldiers standing guard. I entered the study. It was still night, cloudless, the stars twinkling in the sky. On the balcony, dressed in long black cloaks, stood Damar, Ravon, Torgan, Dorric, and Dracalus. I joined them. No one

spoke. Damar turned and pointed at the courtyard. The entire Alpha Brigade, their ranks having swelled in my absence, stood in formation. Standing on the front line were the thirty-six soldiers I had crated and shipped from Terok Nor to remove them from danger. The soldiers were silent as they saluted me in unison.

“What have you do say now?” Damar asked.

Flight or fight, I thought. was what Helen called it when faced in a perilous situation. Which of my halves was the strongest? What did I really want? Muscle memory decided my course of action. I returned the salute. The soldiers cheered. The officers patted me on the back, while Damar remained apart, watching me in a calculating fashion.

“Glinn Yor, it’s good to have you back,” Dal Dracalus said.

“The Alpha Brigade is yours. So are the soldiers whose lives you saved on Terok Nor,” Ravon said. “You are an inspiration to us all.”

“There will be a celebration this night in your honor,” Torgan said.

“Yor the Brave,” Ravon shouted. Torgan, Dorric, and Dracalus repeated it.

The chant was carried by the brigade. I was overwhelmed with emotion. I realized I could rise in rank much further than anyone had expected, that’s not what I wanted. I didn’t want much power. I did, however, want to be Ren Yor. I’d already known this before I stepped foot onto the balcony.

“Yor the Brave,” Damar shouted until it rang in my ears.

Tapping Eben’s wristband, my hologram appeared at my side. The soldiers cheered even louder. When I finally glanced at Damar, he wore a strange smile on his face.

* * *

HELEN

Sliding my arms around Vardon, I watched my best friend from the window being hailed by thousands of soldiers in the courtyard. Two versions of her, the real woman and the hologram, waved at the soldiers. Damar turned and entered the building. His staff remained at her side. Not quite the reunion I’d anticipated for Sawyer. I doubted she and Damar were going to join us for dinner.

“Mother used my hologram, Aunt Helen.”

“Mother is so clever,” Shazel said.

Of course the girl thought of Sawyer as her mother, I thought. Sawyer was a warrior. As her father’s cousin, Sawyer filled role to perfection. It made me a little jealous.

“Why don’t you two go unpack,” I said. “You’re room is right through the adjoining room. We’ll have dinner in an hour.” I turned to Vardon and slid my arms around his waist. “I need to feed the twins. Will you wait or do you think you need to speak with Gul Damar?”

“As an officer or as a friend?” he asked.

“That’s a funny thing to say. You’re now with the Second Order. I thought you might want to join the others on the balcony.”

“It would not be appropriate,” Vardon said. “Whether you realize it or not, Helen, a choice was made by your friend. She has risen to the most powerful female in the Second Order. And she has returned a hero. You may very well be given command of army.”

I stared into his eyes. “What do you mean? She always wanted to be an officer. If you are talking about Damar, she already chose to be with him. That’s why she came here.”

“Is it?”

“Of course.”

“If you say so, dearest.” Vardon kissed my forehead. “We are both guests here. I am not here in an official role. I am on shore leave.” He paused. “Helen, you are in a danger. We should leave. You do realize what Yor will do next? Oh, there will be a celebration tonight in her honor. She’s devoted to Dukat, not Damar. She’ll do whatever Dukat says. She always has. You cannot trust her.”

“You make her sound pure evil. Stop it. Sawyer loves me. She also loves Dukat, only she chose Damar to be her mate. They have a son, and possibly a daughter now. There is no doubt in my mind Sawyer and Damar love each other. I won’t hear another word about it, Vardon.”

The gul pulled me over to the couch, sitting beside me as Roxell stepped into the room, holding both of the twins in each arm. She handed Vardon my son and gave me

Madison, so I could breast feed her and then disappeared into Eben and Shazel 's room. I had to admit Roxell was a tremendous help. I couldn't do without her. Vardon held Gabriel in the air, laughing with the chubby little babe tried to punch him in the nose. My daughter curled contentedly around my breast, placing her tiny lips around the nipple and gentle sucked.

"Dukat is coming here," he said. "My first officer advises a ship has arrived at Terok Nor."

"That's the plan, Vardon. Everything is going to be fine," I said, wincing when Madison pulled too hard. "You might not like Damar. I believe he's a fair and honest man. He'll help Sawyer remove the implant. I'm merely the bait. We'll leave afterwards."

"Calling her Earth name when you know is not who she is upsets me. You are blind, Helen. Honestly, I don't think you know your friend, not anymore. Are you sure Yor doesn't want Dukat for herself?"

"She already has him. She's his cousin."

"Helen, that's not what I meant and you know it. Could you not see the expression on Damar's face? He knows Dukat comes first. I've felt the same ever since I met you. Knowing you are in second place and seeing it firsthand are equally painful. Those soldiers would follow Glinn Yor anywhere. Damar's position will be weakened if she picks Dukat over him. She may yet surprise you."

I snorted. "And betray me? Never."

"She's Cardassian, Helen, through and through. You only look the part. Yor embraces role. She has become Ren Yor. You insult her by insisting she is Sawyer and place yourself in harm's way by refusing to accept the fact she is not your friend."

"Dearest, must we argue about this? I think I know Sawyer better than anyone else. I'll call her Yor in public, not when we're alone." I found myself holding both babes as Vardon rose, tapped his com-link, and turned to speak to his ship.

"Vardon here. Report."

"*We've picked up a transmission from the fort, sir,*" Glinn Bavaron said. "*It's recorded. Would you like to hear it or should I merely report what we learned?*"

Vardon glanced at me, one hand on his hip and gave a nod. "Play it," he said. He kept his eyes on me while we waited. A few seconds later, I heard Sawyer's voice.

"Gul Dukat, please be advised Helen is at Fort Varnok. She has the twins with her. What would you like me to do, sir? I await your orders."

I started to speak. Vardon waved me silent.

"Glinn Yor. You have done well," Dukat hissed. His nasty tone caused me to shiver in fear. *"You will continue to treat your guest with the utmost courtesy. Gul Toran will bring me and my wife to Fort Varnok. Advise Gul Damar I will arrive tomorrow. And Yor? Do not allow Gul Vardon to leave the fort. He is there, is he not?"*

"Yes, sir."

"Good. I will deal with Vardon when I arrive. Dukat out."

"Thank you, Bavaron," Vardon said. "Continue to monitor all transmissions from this fort. I suggest you take position on the far side of Bajor. If Gul Toran comes with the fleet, you may need to beam me here in the utmost haste. Vardon out."

"What's going on? You can't fight Dukat. It'll make you a traitor, Vardon."

"You heard the transmission. Dukat is coming for us. He means to kill us, Helen. Your friend will do what he ordered. I will most certainly be arrested, tried, and executed. If happens, you will be at Dukat's mercy."

"I can protect myself," I said. I refused to accept what he said as the truth. I knew Sawyer hadn't brought me there to turn me over to Dukat. I was there to help her.

"Who will protect your children when you are dead? Hmm?"

Standing, I placed Madison beside her brother on the couch. Gabriel had already eaten, he ate more frequently, and Roxell had suggested we give him a nutritious protein mix. My breast milk was needed by my daughter who was smaller. The nutrients I produced would help her grow stronger. It struck me if I died, they might die as well. Vardon walked over and slid his arms around me, holding me tight, while I considered what was coming and what I needed to do to protect my children and this Cardassian I'd come to love.

"I trust her, Vardon. And I trust Damar. They'll protect us."

“Damar’s relatives abandoned him when his parents died. Dukat chose him to be his first officer, something Damar will never forget. Damar is loyal to Dukat. Trust me, Helen. Damar will do what Dukat orders him to do. He won’t throw away his career for you or your friend. Damar could gain real power with Dukat out of the way. In Cardassia, none stand too high for too long. Power shifts like the sand on this planet, and ambitious is not handed to the mild or meek. It must be taken in blood.”

“You Cardassians are so grim. Just make sure nothing happens to me,” I said kissing him. “I have faith in you, Vardon. Keep us all safe and alive. Come up with a better backup plan than the one I just heard. If we have to leave, you’d better beam us onto your ship and quickly. You don’t need to fight Dukat. We’ll just depart and go to your next assignment.”

“As I see it, I am all stands between you and certain death. I am the one you truly loves you. Not Ren Yor. And certainly not Gul Dukat.”

This time when he kissed me, I didn’t tingle and I knew then it was over between us.

SAWYER

Chapter Fifty

“Sir, it is confirmed Gul Mukot and his fleet are in route to the wormhole,” I said addressing Dukat on a monitor. “I strongly suggest Gul Vardon join the Cardassian fleet in pursuit. Gul Toran will be needed as well. Come here immediately. There is a second to lose.”

Damar leaned forward, brushing against me. The sun had yet to rise. We’d spent the last hour in Ops, scanning for enemy ships and found them.

“Gul Dukat, we have the enemy where we want them. I suggest you change your course and join the Cardassian fleet as the flag ship and take command of the battle,” Damar said. “We cannot let Mukot slip through the wormhole or he will reach the Dominion. I don’t have to tell you it will be catastrophic if he escapes and later returns with the Dominion at his back. Our sources have confirmed the Romulans have not sided with the Fifth Order renegades and have withdrawn into Romulan territory.”

“I will not Vardon slip away again. When I am close enough, I’ll take a shuttle to Bajor and send Gul Toran to destroy the last of the Fifth Order. Major Kira has provided me with the names of all known traitors. Vardon’s name is on it and so is Renalt’s. I want you to arrest them, is clear? Send the Alpha Brigade to Fort Tornok and take it from Renalt. I want them both executed.”

“Major Kira gave you a list of names? That’s Garak’s original list, sir. It’s inaccurate,” I said, trying to keep my voice steady. “Your name is on list as is mine. My sources say Agent Torell and his assassins are here on Bajor.”

Dukat laughed. *“If Major Kira is your source, then you should know she works for the Bajoran Intelligence division. I thought Gul Damar would have advised you of this,”* he said. *“Perhaps all is not well at Fort Varnok. If my two most trusted officers cannot trust each other, then it is quite obvious I am needed. I will see you soon. Dukat out.”*

I pushed the chair away from the desk. Damar’s office was on the first floor. It was

large and tidy. His staff waited for him in the nearby conference room.

“Why didn’t you tell me Kira was with Bajoran Intelligence? I have confided in her, Damar, among a great many things. Odo also knows about the Death List. I went to great effort to modify the original list to protect Helen, Dukat and myself. Vardon and Renalt are on the list. I don’t think Renalt is a traitor. I know he’s not. I’m not so sure about Vardon.”

“Dukat has lost all sense of reason,” Damar said. “We stand inches away from winning this war and yet he wants only to come here to deal with Vardon and Renalt.” He walked to the window to stare at the hillside. “You heard him. I must arrest and kill Vardon and Renalt.”

“When Dukat arrives, I’ll put my own plan in action. Don’t arrest them yet. Give me a little time, Damar. That’s all I ask.”

“How can I delay in following a direct order? Mad or not, I won’t disobey an order, Yor. I’m not like you. I’m a Cardassian and I am still in command of Bajor.”

Moving swiftly, I stood and came over to him, placing my arms around his waist, my face pressed against his back. We celebrated last night with the soldiers and officers, returning to our room late in the morning for a few hours’ sleep. Damar had slept beside me and not once touched me. I knew he was worried about Dukat. It wasn’t only about removing the implant and helping Dukat regain his senses and reason. He wanted to see which man I would pick as my companion. He’d been waiting all along for this final decision.

“Send someone else to arrest Renalt,” I said. “When Dukat arrives, I’ll find a way to be alone with him. I’ll get implant out of his head one way or another. When he’s thinking clearly, he’ll do the right thing, and then you both can go after Mukot.”

“If you fail, we will all die. The Union will fall.”

“The Prophets won’t let me fail.”

“Believing in Bajoran gods will not help you,” Damar said. “Believe in yourself. You cannot fail, Yor. Do you understand? Or we lose everything.” He turned me around to face him. “I have no desire to marry Kornica’s younger sister. The girl is only thirteen.”

I laughed and kissed him.

“Are you listening to me? I already signed the marriage contract. I agreed to marry this

girl before you arrived. It was a test of my loyalty. I could do nothing else.”

“I don’t care about the girl. I will take care of this matter, Damar.”

“I’ll send Glinn Ravon to Fort Tornok to meet with Gul Renalt. Meet with Major Kira and see what she knows about Agent Torell’s whereabouts. You have less than four hours to capture him. As for Gul Vardon, he is here and this is where I want him. Say nothing to Helen about any of this. It’s obvious Vardon has won her over. She cannot be trusted.”

“Yes, sir.” I turned to leave.

“That’s it? That’s all you have to say?”

“Marry girl and I’ll never forgive you, Corat Damar.”

Turning on my heels, I marched out of his office, passing Ravon in the hallway. He was still in command of the Alpha Brigade. I was a bit annoyed about it and didn’t salute him. Ravon ran after me. He caught hold of my arm, bringing me to a halt.

“So? What are our orders?” Ravon asked.

The door opened. Damar appeared in the corridor.

“Glenn Ravon, you leave with the brigade for Fort Tornok immediately. You are to bring Gul Renalt to here. If he asks why, tell him Gul Dukat ordered him to be here to meet his wife. He will be arriving in a few hours. Take a shuttle and make haste.”

“Yes, sir.” Ravon saluted Damar and quickly walked off.

“Don’t just stand there, Yor. Find Major Kira and locate Agent Torell. He’ll be in direct communication with Gul Murat and I want him here when Dukat arrives.”

Damar headed toward Helen and Vardon’s room. My new office was located on the first level as well. I ran all the way and hailed Kira, asking her to join me. She took only a few minutes to march into my office, a sour look on her face.

“I’m here. What do you want?” Kira asked.

“Take a seat,” I said gesturing at a chair. “I want Torell caught. I need to make it happen in the next few hours. What does Bajoran Intelligence know about his whereabouts?”

“Bajoran Intelligence?” Kira looked uncomfortable.

“I know who you work for. And I know you gave the Death List to Dukat. I’m sure you gave it to your superiors as well. No doubt you did so to keep Dukat from killing you. I’d

probably have done the same thing. I need Torell. Murat and the Fifth Order fleet are headed to the wormhole. I'm sure the Dominion's fleet is coming to join them."

"Agent Torell doesn't work for the Order. He is the leader of the Circle. If they defeat the Union forces, Bajor will be worse off than we already are. Believe me. We want Torell. He vanished a few days ago. Cardassians are as slippery as fresh water eels. That's not a compliment," she said. "I seriously question whether I should help you. You've done terribly things to protect your precious Dukat."

"It was either kill him or you. I chose him. I think arranged to get you and your men off the station, Kira. I'm not proud of what happened. It was the choice I made."

"For Dukat," Kira said, smiling. Her teeth were even and white. It wasn't a friendly smile. "And the man you killed was more than a friend. His name was Sorvan."

"I'm sorry."

Kira leaned forward. "You did me a favor, so I'll do one for you," she said. "My sources say Gul Vardon's ship has moved behind the planet where three Fifth Order cruisers lay in wait. We believe Vardon is a member of the Circle. Gul Renalt isn't suspected. He seems to be loyal to the Union. And for the record. I think you're with Section 31."

"Think what you want. There was a spy on the station we never found. Are there any inside this fort or on Bajor?"

"We've arrested one bounty hunter with an implant," she said. "There were twelve, including you and Helen. Dukat was listed as well. makes thirteen...we know about."

"I assume Odo gave you the original list, which I later modified."

"Garak did," she said. "He doesn't trust you. I'll bring the bounty hunter here so you'll have someone sitting in a cell when Dukat arrives. If we find more, you can have them. I'll return as soon as I can. Don't look for me when Dukat arrives. You won't find me."

I stood and held out my hand to her. Kira stared at it as though I'd grown several more fingers. When I laughed, she grabbed my hand, shaking it hard. I didn't release her when she tried to pull away. Her expression altered, her sneer fading, replaced by confusion.

"Just because I'm helping you doesn't make us friends. Now let go."

My fingers slid out of her grip. "I regret what happened," I said.

"The things we do for love, even if it is misplaced," she retorted.

Major Kira left my office. She didn't know I'd placed a tracker on her hand. It was another one of Eben's inventions. It was small enough to be easily transferred from the oil on my skin to her own, digging into her flesh like the tiniest of thorns. She could wash her hands with sand and it would remain embedded in her flesh, until removed with a needle. Turning to my monitor, I tracked her movements on one side of the screen and watched her leave in a shuttle. She flew to the town of Rallynwye in the north. I watched the blip on the screen for several minutes. I contacted Garak using a secured private channel. Neither of us might trust the other. We still needed each other.

"You're getting good at this," Garak said as he appeared on the monitor.

"Vardon is with the Circle. The Kobrak has joined three Fifth Order cruisers on the far side of Bajor. Bring Dukat here. I have everything ready, Garak. You need to hurry."

"We'll arrive in an hour. How is Helen?" "Scared, willing to help me, if needed."

"If she is harmed, I'll have you sent to the Enfren Spice Mines for a life sentence."

"Good. I like spice."

The transmission ended.

I placed my hologram outside my office window, watching Ravon leave in a shuttle. I placed the Romulan extractor on the table, along with two hyposprays, one to sedate Dukat and the other to repair any cerebral damage. The hypos fit inside my right boot. The extractor was slid under the cuff of my right sleeve. The door opened. Eben slipped inside. He crouched low as he crept toward my desk. He appeared between my legs, smiling wide.

"I've done as you asked, Mother. I've placed trackers on Helen and Vardon. They're modified. It records audio you can listen to or replay. Am I spy now, Mother?"

"Yes, son."

"Uncle Garak said I was his prodigy. I'm your son."

"Is Shazel in bed?"

"Yes, Mother. She sleeps beside my hologram. Now let's listen in."

Eben crawled onto my lap. His fingers flew across my keyboard. He turned, placing a small device into my left ear, tapped a button, and heard Damar's voice, clear as a bell.

"I apologize for upsetting you, Helen. I only wanted you to be aware of the situation," Vardon said. "Dukat will arrive in the morning. I suggest you let me handle him. We can leave as soon as it's done."

"Let Sawyer handle it. I won't let you throw away your career, Vardon. Don't do anything foolish. Please."

I wasn't surprised to hear Vardon admit he meant to kill Dukat. He was the spy I'd been looking for on Terok Nor. I kept my thoughts to myself. Eben put his arms around me. When I glanced at Kira's progress, she'd landed in the city. The red dot was steady. A few minutes later and it was moving again toward Fort Varnok.

"What now, Mother?"

"Wake Shazel. Take her to Damar's quarters and stay there. Things are going to get exciting very fast. Lock the door and stay there until I come for you."

I kissed him on the head and whispered a few things to relay to Helen. He slid off my lap and left the room. I then brought up the Govatt on screen, watching it head toward Bajor, waiting for Dukat to arrive.

* * *

HELEN

Vardon lay beside me, snoring softly. Something touched my arm. I looked over the side of the bed and stared at Eben. He pressed his finger to my lips and motioned for me to follow. Barefoot, dressed in only a nightgown, I followed him into the sitting room. Roxell was still sleeping in the room she shared with the twins. Shazel was asleep as well. I had no idea why Eben was out of bed and fully dressed.

"Come," Eben said. He led me into the living room. "Mother says Dukat will be here very soon. I'm to take Shazel into her room and wait for her signal."

"What does she want me to do?" I asked. "Where is your mother?"

"In her office waiting for Uncle Garak and Dukat to arrive. You're to keep Vardon here." Eben looked toward my bedroom. "Mother knows he's a member of the Circle, Aunt Helen."

Having a child tell me someone I loved was a traitor hit me hard. It was news should have come from Sawyer and not her son. I forced myself not to react. My buddy apparently thought it easier to send her son to me than come herself. I wanted to wake Vardon and ask him to tell me the truth. I held back and remained with Eben.

"You're certain?" I asked.

Eben nodded. "Mother is listening. She hears all."

"This Machiavellian crap is making me nut. Best you follow orders. Hurry."

I pulled him to his feet, marched him into his bedroom, and roused Shazel. Eben turned off the hologram, pulled her from the bed, and pushed her toward me. Shazel looked confused. I gave her a hug and led them from the room to the front door. They entered the hallway and ran to the commander's large suite. I checked on the twins. Madison was awake and alert. I changed her diapers. Gabe was dry. Roxell opened her eyes to find me rocking the large cradle where the babies were kept.

"They sleep more than human babies," I said.

"And they don't cry. Is everything all right?" Roxell asked.

"Dukat will be here soon. At the first sign of trouble, take the twins and go to the basement. I'll join you there."

Roxell's eyes widened as she glanced at the door. "Sorry you had to change the diapers, Mistress Helen. Should I get up and feed them?"

I turned around. Vardon stood in the doorway in his robe.

"Is everything all right?" he asked.

"Everything is fine, dearest. Diaper duty."

I stood, hearing my knees crack. I was aging fast in this world. I took hold of Vardon's arm to guide him into our bedroom. It had felt so right with him. I didn't want to believe he was a traitor. Vardon had been nothing kind. We crawled into bed. He wanted to make love. I closed my eyes, pretending to fall asleep. After several minutes, Vardon stirred. I heard him speaking softly, while my stomach twisted into knots.

"*The Govatt has arrived at Bajor, sir. Dukat is here. What are your orders, sir?*" Bavaron asked.

"That's odd. He's early."

I released soft snores, while remaining perfectly relaxed. Vardon continued.

"Dukat did not take a shuttle?"

"No, sir. He's beamed directly into the fort."

"Remain where you are. At my signal, beam me and Helen on board. Vardon out."

Fearing he suspected I was awake and spying, I start to stretch, yawning and placed my hand between his legs. Vardon laughed and pulled me into his arms. If I'd learned one thing during the months living among Cardassians, it was they couldn't be trusted, no matter how nice they seemed.

"It's time to get dressed, my dear. Dukat has arrived," he said.

"Just a few more minutes," I groaned pulling him close. I knew as soon as we rose the happiness I'd known with Vardon would end. All good things ended, eventually.

Entering the bathroom, I took a quick shower, leaving Vardon to do whatever it was he was doing in the bedroom. Part of me thought he'd wanted me to know the Kobrak waited for him. As I dried my hair, gazing at my reflection, I noticed what appeared to be an outline of a monitor in the mirror. What seemed like a ghostly image of Garak stared back at me, a finger to his lips. He glanced over his shoulder and then met my gaze.

"It's a fine kettle of fish we're in. Be ready for anything," he said.

"I will. I am."

Garak smiled. "Do put something on first," he said.

"I will. Now go away, spy. I'll see you soon." Apparently, I couldn't trust anyone. I tried not to take offense and prepared for battle.

SAWYER

Chapter Fifty-One

I stood in a line with Damar, Dracalus, Dorric, Ravon and Torgan as nine figures appeared in the wintry courtyard like magic. I was neither an engineer or a scientist and all the molecular crap about transportation went over my head. There they were, out in the open, seen by all: Dukat, Kornica, Garak, Hadran, and five Second Order soldiers. Dukat wore a black cape, the hood pulled over his head, looking quite menacing. Hadran and the guards wore black. Dukat's wife wore pink, poor thing, reminding me of square jammed into a hole; she didn't fit in. Three platoons stood in formation as a fanfare played, announcing the arrival of the Prefect of Bajor. I hoped Helen was ready and glanced at the third floor balcony.

On an upper balcony appeared Helen, wearing a white fur cape, her red hair blowing in the wind. Dukat's eyes lifted upwards. The smallest detectable trace of a sneer appeared on his thin, purplish lips. He'd been drinking kanar.

"Attention," Dal Dracalus ordered.

The soldiers stood at attention, while the officers and I saluted. Dukat extended his arm in a regal type bow. His wife giggled. I wanted to mash her pretty little head into a pudding. Torgan was first to step out of formation. He and Hadran were close friends. They greeted each other Cardassian style, hands gripping their forearms and shook. The soldiers were dismissed by Dal Dracalus. Damar and Dorric stepped forward to greet Dukat. Torgan and Ravon tagged along behind as the men entered the building. Garak slunk past me, carrying presents for Helen, and the children in a large bag. He didn't pause to speak to me either. I was left with Kornica.

"Hello, Madame Dukat. Welcome to Fort Varnok," I said.

"I hate the cold," she said sniffing.

Kornica looked terrible. I knew Garak had tried to protect her. She'd not been spared a brutal few weeks of marriage to Dukat. She shrank from me and I knew she did not want my

protection. She'd made it clear she didn't approval of females in the military, it put me off. I felt sorry for her and somehow had to show her a little kindness. I walked with her into the building, aware Dukat, Damar, and the rest of the officers followed.

"Show me to my room. I desire to rest," Kornica said assuming a grand lady's voice didn't suit her. Her gaze lifted. "Why is woman here? Gul Vardon is with her. This is scandalous."

"Glenn Dorric will take you to your suite, Madame Dukat." I turned around and spotted Dorric. I motioned at the aide. He took Kornica's arm and led her toward the turbolift. Dukat walked over to me. His breath was foul.

"Have you arrested the traitors?" Dukat asked.

"Gul Renalt has been taken into custody," Damar said stepping forward. "Gul Vardon is under house arrest, sir. You'll be further pleased to know Glenn Yor has captured one of Torell's agent. A Romulan. Before you join your wife, perhaps you'd care to see the prisoner and interrogate him."

"The Romulan still lives? I thought I made it clear to kill our enemies, Damar," Dukat said. "Sweep this planet clean if you must. Purge. Exterminate. Kill any who resist or would cause us harm. I had hoped Torell had been caught."

"Not yet, sir," I said.

I found Dukat in worse condition than I'd left him. He looked gaunt and thin. His fingers tightened on my arm. He leaned close, offering his cheek and I gave him a quick peck, finding his body odor stronger than usual. It could have been Kornica's perfume gave offense or the stench of kanar. He'd been drinking and I noted he was slightly drunk, which was in my advantage.

"The prisoner can wait. I desire to see my former slave," Dukat said. "You will arrange it at once, Yor. Bring Helen and the brats to the sitting room. I want to see their faces in the sunlight. As for Vardon, I'd prefer to have him made comfortable in a cell, Gul Damar. See to it at once. I'll deal with him later."

Dukat swept past us, followed by Hadran and five guards. Damar cast a swift look at me.

“Do whatever he says,” Damar said. “You’ll get your chance to me with him soon enough.”

Damar, Ravon, and Torgan walked off. I darted to a side door, taking the stairs, reaching the third floor and ran to Helen’s room. Pounding on the door, it was answered by Helen, her face ashen, her hands trembling in front of her. Vardon stood behind her. The usual friendly expression on his face no longer existed. He looked as hard and cold as Dukat. The twins were making a great deal of noise in the back room.

“Gul Dukat has asked to see you and the children. Vardon is to remain here,” I said, entering the room. “You and Vardon should say your farewells now. I’m afraid, Gul Vardon, you’re under house arrest. Remain here.”

Roxell joined us. She carried a large cradle by its handle. Bundled in white, each holding a rubber toy thankfully did not squeak or make noise, were the twins. Eben and Shazel were not in the room. I was glad the boy had done what I asked.

“What’s he going to do to me? I’m terrified,” Helen said.

“I will protect you. Gul Vardon, I will do my best to smooth things over with Gul Dukat. I’m sure he’ll ask to see you. A guard will be posted outside your door in the meantime.”

I saluted Vardon and left the room. I suspected he’d attempt to leave the fort. The moment he beamed onto his ship, he’d be announced as a traitor and killed. I didn’t care about Vardon. I did, however, care about Helen and waited impatiently for her to join me.

* * *

HELEN

“I’ll be all right,” I said holding Vardon tight. It struck me as odd Sawyer hadn’t handcuffed Vardon or placed guards in the room. She’d actually given him a chance to escape. I kissed him one more time. “You won’t let Dukat hurt me. You know she won’t. What about you? If you’re arrested and thrown into a cell, you know they don’t keep prisoners for long.”

“You should come with me. Now, my love. This is our chance. The moment he sees

you, I doubt he'll let you leave this fort. We're both prisoners. It doesn't have to be that way." Vardon took my hands and held them against his chest. "My ship has locked onto us. We can transport onto the Kornak. Dukat only wants the twins. Let him have them."

"Vardon I won't leave my children behind. Nor will I run away."

"This is ridiculous, Helen. We can be away from here before he alerts his ships," Vardon said, taking my hands and placing them on his shoulders. "My love, please. I've planned this well. I have an escort of three cruisers waiting on the far side of Bajor. Central Command is not pleased with Dukat. I've orders of my own. When you come back, I will not be here. I can't be taken prisoner."

"And then what? I come aboard and Dukat sends Gul Toran to pursue us? I don't understand, Vardon. Why can't you come with me and explain to Dukat you are loyal to the Second Order? Explain your ships are here for his use. Tell him you are not with the Fifth Order or the Circle and prove to him you're loyal."

"I am loyal, Helen. I'm loyal to the Cardassia I know and love. Dukat would see himself as dictator. I don't want to see other planets like Bajor forced under the yoke. They were slaves before and they're slaves now. You've seen this fort. It holds fifteen thousand soldiers. They have cannons can blast a starship or cruiser right out of orbit. This fort is far more powerful than Terok Nor, and Dukat has many forts on this planet."

Roxell sat on the couch with the crib, waiting for me. I felt pressured, unsure what to do, for I loved Vardon. I felt compelled to go to Dukat. I wanted to see him. I gave a nod at Roxell. She grabbed the crib and left the room, joining Sawyer in the hallway.

"Helen, I was sent here to confirm whether or not Dukat remains loyal to the Union. From what I see, he is using this civil war to further his own ambition. Mukot always said Dukat was power hungry like his father. Surely you can see it? He nearly killed you. He intends to kill me. Come with me. Now."

"Forgive me, Vardon. I won't come with you," I said firmly. "I'm not taking my children onto your ship. My friend has a plan. I'm going to help her see it through. When Dukat is thinking clearly, things will be better. Wait here for me."

"I can't wait any longer, Helen. I stand with those who would see Dukat die."

"Then you are a member of the Circle." I had expected it. All this time I'd followed myself into thinking Vardon was loyal. Sawyer had known what he was from the start.

"I can explain everything once we're on board the Kornak. I'm not going to leave without you, Helen. You belong to me."

catch phrase was getting old. I felt like yelling at Vardon. I didn't belong to anyone Cardassian male, I was my own person. I held my tongue. I feared Vardon would beam me onto his ship if I didn't leave now.

"I said no, Vardon. Dukat would pursue us to the ends of the universe. I'm staying here to give you time to escape."

"Then you really do love me? You're doing this for me?"

"For both of us. We'll see each other again." I knew it wasn't true.

This time when I kissed him, it felt like he was a stranger. I pushed him away, not wanting to cry, and ran into the hallway. Garak had joined our little party. Two guards stood at the door as it closed on Vardon. I imagined Vardon had transported onto his ship as we walked away. I was glad he'd left. He might be a traitor, I didn't want him to die.

"Be strong," Garak whispered. "I'm armed. I'll defend you, if need be."

"Come. Dukat is waiting," Sawyer said.

More guards arrived. They'd found Eben and Shazel and carried the children. Sawyer looked furious and said nothing. We were escorted by the soldiers to the turbolift. Garak removed Shazel from the arms of a soldier. She still wore her nightgown. Eben was placed on his feet. He pushed his way through the armored me and took hold of Sawyer's hand. The turbolift came to a halt on the second floor and we existed ahead of the soldiers.

"Don't be afraid, Shazel," Garak said. He kissed her cheek.

"Why didn't father marry Mother? Why he is with little girl?"

"It's complicated. Do not refer to Yor as your mother in the presence of your father. He won't be pleased." Garak hugged her tight as the girl pressed her face against his neck, crying softly. "It will be all right. Be brave."

"I'm doing my best," Shazel said putting on a brave face.

Sawyer lead us toward the sitting room. The guards fanned out behind us. Damar

stood with Dorric and Hadran with their backs to the balcony. Eben came to me and took hold of my hand. Roxell stood beside me and Garak, holding the cradle. The two babes were active, cooing at each other. I worried they're deranged father tried to hold them. I didn't want him to toss them over the balcony. I braced myself as I spotted Dukat seated in a chair. His wife sat on the armrest. Sawyer saluted Dukat and stepped aside.

"As requested, sir. I've brought Helen and the children to see you."

Dukat didn't look like I remembered. His eyes had receded into his skull and he looked pale and sickly. He lifted his head a notch and motioned for his wife to slip into an empty chair. Kornica kissed his cheek, ever dutiful, and sat, staring at Shazel, not me, who she perceived to be her competition. She made me want to throw up. Hatred for a child was ridiculous when Shazel had doing wrong to receive such a cruel greeting.

"Gul Vardon has been arrested?" Dukat asked, his first line of business. Sawyer nodded. "Very good. Then let us proceed. Show me my daughter."

Garak placed Shazel in front of Dukat. The little girl took one look at her father and threw her arms around Uncle Garak, wanting him to hold her. I watched, horrified, as Dukat grabbed the little girl's arm, surely bruising her and pulled her against his chest. Shazel started to sob. Sawyer had no fear and knelt beside the girl, placing her hand on Dukat's knee, the sign of affection came as a bit of a shock, until I realized she'd meant to distract him.

"Little girls are immature. Give her time, cousin," Sawyer said.

"Very well. Take her away."

Moving swiftly, Garak collected Shazel into his arms and carried her across the room. He sat in a chair with her, holding her head against his chest. Eben walked up and kicked Dukat in the knee, the same knee Sawyer's hand remained on.

"You made her cry, Uncle Dukat," Eben said.

"Young Yor, take care," Dukat hissed. He brushed the boy aside with his hand and stood. Sawyer turned, remaining at his side, while he peered at me.

"So, this is my former slave. I thought she was dead."

"It is Garak's niece, sir. Helen Garak," Sawyer said.

"I know who she is, Yor. I can only assume I shot a hologram. Pity," he said.

"Prefect Dukat?" I assumed was the right title to use on Bajor. I waited for acknowledgment before continuing. He snarled at me. was certainly a sign of some kind. "I wish to offer my congratulations on your recent marriage and offer best hopes for the future."

Dukat laughed. "Oh, yes. You waited no time at all to secure a position as the mistress of the traitor Gul Vardon," he said returning to his seat.

"I don't like her," Kornica said.

"Now, now, my dear wife," Dukat purred silkily. He crossed one leg over the other, his attention turning to Roxell who held the crib. "Are those my children?"

I felt my face blanch white and my stomach turn over.

"Yes, sir," Roxell replied.

I was grateful she spoke for me. I couldn't find my voice. Dukat didn't order Roxell to bring the children forward. I felt a sense of relief was short lived.

"Sir, if I could interrupt. Perhaps we should visit the prisoner," Damar said.

"In a moment, Gul Damar. I want to get to know my children." Dukat placed a hand to his forehead. I noticed his mood alter in the blink of an eye. "If you were a friend, Damar, you'd rid me of these brats and their mother."

"What do you mean?" I asked, horrified.

"I no longer recognize these children as my own. As far as I know, they are Torell's bastards and not mine," Dukat said, his voice a low growl. He reached out and grabbed Sawyer's hand. "Get woman out of here. I'll decide what to do with her and the children later."

"We're going, Dukat," I said.

I caught hold of Eben and motioned at Roxell to grab the handle of the cradle. Dukat stood. He walked over to me. In the next instant he slapped me across the face, knocking me to the ground, pulling Eben down with me. In moment, I wished I'd left with Vardon and never thought of Dukat again. I'd made a mistake coming to the fort.

"If you hurt my children, I'll kill you," I snarled.

"Be silent," Sawyer said. She pushed Dukat aside and helped me to my feet. She reached for Eben's hand and drew him to her side. "Perhaps it would be best if you went

somewhere safe. Be quick about it.”

Eben looked frightened as Sawyer led us from the sitting room. Garak followed with Shazel. I could hear Dukat laughing as we walked to the stairwell. Sawyer opened the door and waved us inside. She gave me Eben’s hand to hold.

“Go to the lower level. Major Kira is waiting there for you. She’s going to take you some place safe,” Sawyer said. “Don’t return to this fort until you hear from me. Garak, I’m depending you to keep them safe. I’ll contact you as soon as I can.”

“My pleasure,” Garak said.

He carried Shazel into the stairwell. Eben followed him. I waited until Roxell carried the twins inside before I followed. Sawyer watched us from the doorway. My face hurt. I knew Dukat’s handprint would turn into a bruise. She looked as upset as I felt.

“Don’t worry, Helen. I’ll take care of Dukat,” Sawyer said.

“What about Vardon?” I asked.

“His fate is sealed. Now get moving. I must return to Dukat.”

“Save him,” I said. “Save him for both of us.”

Hurrying after the others, we arrived in the basement to find Major Kira and two male Bajorans waiting for us. We were led through a service tunnel beneath the fort. A long walk brought us to a door looked rusted with age.

“There was a Bajoran fort here before the Cardassians built this one on top of it,” Kira said. “This is part of the old fort. I have everything arranged. We’ll stay here and wait to hear from Yor. If we don’t hear from her, I’ll take you to my people. They’ll hide you.”

“Thank you,” I said.

“I’m not doing this for you, Helen. I figure the Order will owe me one in return. Isn’t right, Garak?”

“We can negotiate later, Major. Right now, the children must be protected.”

Garak stroked Shazel’s head as Kira opened the door, releasing a stale odor. I covered the babies’ head with a blanket and took the handle of the cradle, letting Roxell carry Eben who had started to tremble. Kira lit a flare and led us into another dark tunnel. Her two soldiers closed the steel door and I wondered where we were being led and if it was, in fact, safer with the Bajorans than with the Cardassians.

SAWYER

Chapter Fifty-Two

Dukat smiled evilly, that's what it was, pure evil.

"What a fine spy you make, Yor," he said as he me across the snowy courtyard. "Are you truly taking me to see a prisoner or is this a prearranged intimate encounter? There's no need to answer. I know what you want. You are walking quite fast. Are you so eager to have me inside of you?"

"Yes, very eager, my lord and master."

I'd persuaded Dukat to interrogate the Romulan prisoner. I said it would be fun to torture him and he'd agreed. His guards trailed behind us. Hadran and the five soldiers were now Dukat's bodyguards. I had no doubt if he'd ordered it, they would have done to me whatever he said and killing me would have been the easy way out.

Opening the door to Building 3, I waited for Dukat. I felt him right behind me. His hands pressed on top of my shoulders. As we entered the building, darkness surrounded us. It wasn't the lights were off. We were simply no longer in the stockade.

We stood in the same strange place where Helen and I had met the Prophets. The aliens appeared before us, not familiar as they'd once chosen to be, by shapeless, formless entities pulsed with a hot, red light. I counted five entities. When I glanced at Dukat, he no longer looked insane or haggard. He looked exactly as he had when we first met on Terok nor. This was the man I loved and admired.

"What is this place, Yor?" Dukat asked. He almost sounded like his old self. "Are these the aliens you and Helen spoke about before? They're the Prophets, are they not?"

"Yes. And it's about time we got some answers." I took hold of Dukat's hand. "Why have you brought us here? What do you want of us?"

“Much,” the figure in the center said. “Cardassia and Bajor stand at the brink of destruction. If Mukot is allowed through the wormhole, he will make contact with the Dominion and ask for their help. Like both of you, he too is being tested. We have not yet decided to let him through. Much, as I said, depends on both of you.”

“I’ll not stand here and listen to this dribble. Threaten me and I will send the entire Cardassian fleet to this place and destroy the wormhole,” Dukat said. “Perhaps you do not realize who you address. I will not be toyed with any longer. Cease playing this game and withdraw to wherever you come from and I shall be lenient.”

“No. You shall listen,” a female said.

Dukat pulled my arm against his side, keeping me close. I felt a warm breeze on my face, unable to discern the odor, aware we stood in what appeared to be a cave. I didn’t like caves and assumed it was part of the wormhole, where the entities resided. Placing my arm across my chest, I put my hand on Dukat’s shoulder, hoping he’d remain quiet.

“Well, you’ve brought us here. Tell us what you want,” I said.

“The two of you are strong together,” a third entity said. “Dukat does not realize he is under the control of Torell. Here, we are the ones who control all and decide who lives and who dies. If you fail to save Dukat, he will continue to descend into madness and destroy the Union. If you serve the mad Dukat, willingly, doing what he asks, we foresee he will triumph over his enemies and Cardassia will be his to rule.”

“The reign of Dukat will be terrifying and destructive,” the female said. “And it will be short, for his enemies shall combine forces, the Romulans, Klingons, and Federation and they will unite to destroy both of you. You will be his queen and will follow him to your death.”

“Death,” the first male who had spoken stated.

“If the implant is removed will I be free from Torell?” Dukat asked. “Will I triumph over Mukot and the Circle? Tell me. I will do whatever is necessary to protect Cardassian and the Union, and of course, to help Bajor.”

“This is not what you want. You desire to be dictator and with Yor’s help you will achieve and your dark reign will last for years,” the second male said.

“I don’t want to destroy the Union,” I said. “I want the Union to prevail and Bajor and

other planets to become colonies and if possible, citizens of Cardassia.”

“What you want is to see Cardassia unite with the Federation,” the female replied.

“What you want is to marry Dukat and to rule at his side. The evil Dukat will see this happens, Yor. He will keep at his side and only you, for you will be a powerful and dreadful queen!”

Dukat turned toward me, lifting his hand to my face. “It’s what we’ve always known, my warrior queen,” he whispered. “I’d hoped for something else for us, together, with you at my side, we could create a better Cardassia. If we are together and it means the destruction of the Union, my ambition is not so great I would see friends and family destroyed by our unification, Yor.”

“It’s you, isn’t it? The implant doesn’t work here,” I said.

“You were right, Yor. You must remove it, no matter the cost.”

“I love you,” I said.

“And I love you,” he replied holding me close. “I will not let us proceed down a path of darkness and destruction. I’m the one who turned you into a warrior. Had I let you come to me, accepting what you offered without trying to manipulate you, then we could perhaps stand upon a different threshold and I could call you mine.”

“You must make a choice,” the female said. “Sawyer Kincaid. You have chosen the path, to be Dukat’s cousin, to be his Ren Yor. He claims he does not desire to be dictator, though he would have you. What is your will, child? What is in your heart?”

I faced the entities holding Dukat’s hand. “It’s true I love Dukat more than anything else. It’s a love that’s brought us both nothing pain. If I cannot be with him and bring peace to Cardassia, then it is clear what I must do. I must save Dukat and set him free. We cannot be together if Bajor is to be saved.”

The entities floated toward us, surrounding us. The temperature soared, until both Dukat and I sweated, still pressed together, while they flew around us.

“Logic over passion. Sacrifice over yearning,” they chanted. “This is what we brought you both here for. To see if your passion will burn Cardassia or be altered into something pure and whole will unite the Union with potential allies.”

“You give me no other choice,” Dukat said. “I would choose Yor as my mate. You will not allow us to have what we desire most. You want us to do your will. If is what must happen, then why bring us here at all? Why threaten us and why threaten Cardassia?”

“The choice is offered to all who live in your dimension. Not only Cardassia, to all current governments and to those beyond the wormhole. Each individual has the right to make their own choice,” said the female, taking on the face of Helen. “And what of me? Do neither of you love me anymore? Have I not sacrificed? Do I not deserve to be loved?”

“Sorcery,” Dukat hissed.

“Perhaps Yor would have been yours had Helen not had your children. You cannot have both women. Empire or Union. Yor or Helen. Or neither and will see what happens next,” the lead male said. His face turned into Damar’s likeness. “And me? Have you no love for me? Have I not been loyal and true to Cardassia, Dukat? And Yor? Have I not set aside all others to ask you to be my mate? Do I mean so little to you?”

Dukat gave my hand a hard squeeze. “Do not be afraid,” he said.

“Neither of us has forgotten Helen or Damar,” I said.

“You need not stay here. You may still return to Earth, Sawyer Kincaid,” the female said. Her faced altered from Helen to every female I’d met on my adventure. “Yor will cease to exist. Sawyer may return to your life as though none of this every happened. Will continue on this path or return home? What will it be?”

“When will stop testing us? When can we live our own lives?” I asked my temper rising. “It’s not fair what you’ve done. You’re meddling. You have done this to protect the wormhole. You are the ones who are selfish and cruel. You’re not gods. Stop trying to control us and let us be. I’ve made my choice. I’m staying.”

“As?” they screeched.

“As Ren Yor, cousin of Dukat, his friend and.. his savior. As Damar’s woman.” I pulled my hand from Dukat’s, heartsick, knowing there was no other choice.

“Wait,” Dukat said. “Give us a moment to be together, if this is all the time we have. We’ll do what you ask, just give us this moment.”

Dukat reached for me, pulling me close. I melted against him and lifted my head. At

the feel of his lips on mine, I clung to his neck, wanting more, much more. His hand slid into my hair and I felt it growing through his fingers, as a life force entered our bodies, surrounding us in a golden light. No knowing why or caring what it meant, I kissed him, hungrily, not wanting the moment to end. His passion turning to tenderness fused us together, and then it ended.

We again stood in the hallway of Building 3. The evil Dukat held me tight, kissing me with his tongue in my mouth. I tasted his foulness. Without any memory of what had just happened or the Prophets, he reverted back to a possessive, cruel man who sought to control me. In the wormhole, I could have remained in his arms forever. This was not the agreement we had reached. I wouldn't destroy those I loved to cling to what could never be mine. I broke off the kiss and vowed never to hold him again.

"It's time to see the prisoner, cousin," I said.

"Then show me," Dukat said, annoyed.

We entered the security chief's office. Dukat dismissed the chief and his staff. The door was closed and we were again alone, together. He walked over to a wall with eight monitors, laughing when he saw the Romulan, beaten, cowering in his cell. I knew what I had to do. I had to remove the implant at all cost. He tapped his finger on the screen and then turned to me, peering intently with red-rimmed eyes, swollen at the base, filled with an alien darkness.

"Ah, cousin. I did say to greet me with spread arms, you knew precisely what I meant. I knew the moment you left Terok Nor you would find a place for us to be alone. My wife gives me no satisfaction, not like you always have. Not even Helen knows how to drain every drop from me. It's because we are alike. We like a little pain with our pleasure, and cousin with cousin could not be sweeter. Come and remind me why you are my queen."

"I would be more than that. I would be your friend."

"What use have I for a friend? Submit or be punished, Yor."

Dukat turned the chair so he could face me, parting his legs and unzipped his pants. This wasn't what I'd planned, it might work to my advantage, though I wasn't happy about performing fellatio on him. I knelt between his thighs, placed my hands on his knees, and slowly slid them along his thighs. His hand eagerly removed his cock, holding him. I could

smell his pheromones in the air, a toxic scent, strong and alluring, and slightly repugnant. He stroked his erection and motioned for me to pleasure him.

As I neared him, I smelled the fishy odor and I flashed back to Gul Parnal. I nearly gagged. He snarled and grabbed my head, forcing me to take his cock into my mouth. I felt bile rising in the back of my throat as I commenced so suck and slurp. My eyes on his face, I waited for him to close his eyes before I made my move. I didn't need my hands to pleasure him. I unfastened the side of my boot, removing both hypos and laid them on either side of my right boot. On the right side was the tranquilizer and one the left his medicine.

"I need release," Dukat snarled, opening one eye. "Do better. You know very well my wife isn't able to take me into her throat. She cries and says it hurts. I know you can handle it. I've waited for this for so long, my dark mistress. Work your magic."

Saliva dripped from the corner of my mouths as I grabbed his erection with my left hand, giving it a tug, hard, making him groan and close his eye. His hands grabbed my hair, forcing my head to move like a plunger. Taking advantage of the situation, I reached for the sedative and as I slid his ridged cock out of my mouth, I hit it with the hypo, giving him the full injection of the sedative.

"Traitor," Dukat roared.

"I'm trying to save you and the Union," I cried.

Dukat bellowed for the guards and raised his fist. I received a blow sent me clear across the floor. He stood and lunged at me. He grabbed for my throat. As he started to squeeze, he collapsed in my arms. I threw Dukat into the chair, spat onto the floor, and then removed the extractor from my wristband. With a spin of his chair, I stood behind him and felt for the implant, finding it pulsating at the base of his skull. I set the devise over the implant and pushed a button. The devise dug out the implant, clenching with tiny teeth, along with bloody and a small amount of flesh and hair.

There was a great deal of blood. I placed the extractor, which held the implant, noting it had tentacles, onto the counter and then knelt to grab the second hypo. I press the hypo to his neck and gave him the full dose of medicine, and then found a scarf on a shelf, which I used to wrap around his neck, high enough to cover the small hole I'd made.

"I'm sorry, Dukat. Forgive me. It had to be done, my love."

I heard the outer door open. I needed more time to rouse Dukat. I turned on the hologram, set to reflect Dukat and me, and saw our images appear outside the Romulan's cell. Hadran walked past the security room and opened the door, sticking his head inside to say something to Dukat. I lifted my hand and my hologram waved him off. Hadran closed the door. I locked the door to the security room and moved Dukat's chair aside, so when Hadran looked inside, he didn't see anyone. Removing my com-link from my pocket, I hailed Damar.

"Yor? Is it done?" he asked.

"Yes. I've removed the implant. We're in the security room. Hadran and the guards are right outside. They'll think I've killed him. I may have. Dukat is not responding," I said. My throat was dry and I had a nasty taste in my mouth.

"I'm coming. Stay right there."

The com-link cut off.

"Gul Dukat? Are you all right?" Hadran shouted.

Drawing my pistol, I waited at the door, able to see Hadran and the soldiers on the monitors as they entered the detention area and approached Dukat. The moment Hadran touched Dukat's shoulder, the hologram flickered. Hadran turned toward the surveillance camera, a furious look on his face and he pointed right at me.

"Yor! What have you done?" the officer shouted.

I heard a groan from Dukat. He remained unconscious. A flickering red light on the console caught my attention. The Romulan device made a tiny chirp and the red light turned solid. It was set to explode. I'd been tricked. Grabbing Dukat's arm, I pulled his heavy body onto my shoulder and opened the door. I entered the hallway and stumbled toward the main door as a pistol blast hit the controls. I expected the door to remain closed, it opened, and I ran through, carrying Dukat on my back. Hadran's angry shouts were followed by pistol blasts somehow missed me. I stumbled into the sunlight, making it ten yards before a massive explosion sent Dukat and I flying into the air. We struck the ground as a blast of heat rolled over us. I landed with my face in the dirt, able to feel Dukat's arm thrown over me. I rolled

over him, covering his body with my body as the heat was followed by flames, and falling debris.

Glinn Hadran, the guards, and the Romulan prisoner hadn't made it outside. I knew they were dead. I had my own problems. I lay on top of Dukat, unable to move. My body felt numb, perhaps that's why I didn't feel pain. I did smell burning flesh. Voices shouted my name. All at once hands reached for me. Being touched awoke my body to the pain and I screamed until my voice was raw. Somehow I was placed on a stretcher. I felt a stab in my arm, a hypospray, the pain subsiding in an instant. Dukat's stretcher past by my own. I heard him groan and then whisper the name "Helen". As we were carried toward sickbay, I managed with effort to open one eye. Damar walked beside me. His face was covered in soot.

"I'm here. Hold on, Yor. Just hold on," Damar said.

Fading in and out of consciousness, I knew I lay in a hospital, for people stood beside me wearing white lab coats. I had to be injured since I was in terrible pain. It felt like every inch of my body was on fire. I didn't know if I was in Chicago or Fort Varnok, the voices in my head twisted around each other and required my full concentration to single out one. A deep voice, eloquent, with mild sarcasm penetrated my mind.

"I said I'm all right. Cease and desist your poking and prodding," Dukat said.

"You are lucky to be alive, Dukat," a strange male voice said. "Yor sustained serious injuries to protect you. Third degree burns take time to heal."

"Is she dead? I can see chest rise and fall," Dukat said. "She is breathing. Do something for her. Leave me be, Lazlo. You're a brute. Someone send for Quirin!"

I felt hands touching me, smelled chemicals and cologne, and heard voices rumbling and distant laughter. I couldn't tell what was real or not. I couldn't see because my eyes were bandaged, I was certain of it, believing I'd been wrapped like a mummy, a Cardassian corpse, ready to be slipped inside a crypt.

Time past as I lay in pain, unable to see, hearing only voices around me.

"Give me a status report on the fleet and the battle against Gul Mukot?" Dukat asked.

"Are we winning? What are the casualties? And why am I restrained? What is going on?"

"Prefect Dukat. You're awake and rationale. Good," a deeper male voice said. It

sounded like Damar. "Toran and Mukot's fleets have engaged near the wormhole. I regret to inform you Gul Vardon transported onto his ship with your wife prior to your accident. The Kobrak and three more Fifth Order ships race to join Gul Mukot. Without Yor, we would not have been able to pull this off."

"Pull what off?" Dukat asked.

"The Romulan implant in your head was activated to explode," Dr. Lazlo said. His nasally-voice was hard to forget. "Yor removed it and carried you to safety. Several soldiers and a prisoner were killed. You broke your leg. As for Yor, there are complications. Quirin has been sent for. You'll both be bed ridden for a few days. Maybe longer for her."

"Yor will live?" Dukat asked. "Damar, tell me she will live?"

"She'll live, not stop shouting, sir."

I heard everything, yet I could not see. My eyes were wrapped and my hands, fingers unable to move, a clear indicated they too were bound. Not in Chicago, still caught in the future, and I was in serious condition. Dukat was safe. I'd saved him and Cardassia. At what price to myself, I wondered.

"I never should have let you handle this on your own. You were nearly killed," Damar said, his voice in my ears. I felt pressure on my forehead. Perhaps a kiss. "I love you. Stay strong. I'll let Eben visit in a few days."

A few more days, I thought. How long had I been there?

"Someone explain why I am at Fort Varnok? I want answers." It was Dukat again. He was angry and confused, not insane. "I want all reports brought directly to me about the war. I won't be coddled, Dr. Lazlo. I'm not sick, nor am I invalid!"

"Another day or so and you can get up." This time it was Dr. Quirin who spoke. "I've come all this way to take care of you. Remain calm or I'll give you another sedative. Damar, you failed to mention he was irrational."

"I need a point of reference," Dukat said. His tone had changed. "I'm vague on what happened since my return from Bajor. I have no memory of Terok Nor, yet all of you claim was there until I left for Cardassia. Banners. Yes, dozens hung from the Promenade. I do remember. And I remember Yor. Always Yor standing over me, protecting me. How is she? I

want to see her.”

“Wrapped from head to toe,” Quirin said.

“Enough of this. Sedate him. You need to sleep, Dukat,” Damar said with his usual brusqueness. “Just sleep. You both need it. You’re both alive and need rest.”

The temperature altered from hot and cold in the room. I was either sweating in my bandages or shivering. When I moved, I felt pain. When I felt pain, I groaned. Dr. Quirin gave me a drug to ease my discomfort and then I drifted.

“Not only was an implant in your head, Dukat,” Dr. Quirin said. “I detect Retheme in your blood stream. It’s a poisonous plant grows in only one province of Bajor, coincidentally the province where the Fifth Order has been causing so much trouble, near a little town called Lucan. Judging by the levels in your bloodstream, this has been going on for some time. Effects are known to be hallucinations, delusions, violent outbursts, paranoia, memory loss, and eventually, death. It was close, very close.”

“Yes, yes, I understand,” Dukat said. “What happened to Vardon?”

Damar stood next to my bed. Dukat had to be close by since I heard everything. No one ever told me what day it was or how long I’d been there.

“Vardon abducted your wife Kornica Kurson,” Damar said. “I’ve told you this already, Dukat. I suspect he wanted to take Helen. Yor hid her and the children. Vardon transported Kornica right out of her room. I understand you don’t remember her, Dukat. It doesn’t change the fact you did marry her. We didn’t realize until Vardon and his escort of three cruisers left Bajoran space she was on board. Vardon is holding her for ransom. If her father refuses to pay, I suspect Vardon will kill her. I’m sorry there it is.”

“Where is Helen?” Dukat asked, though he sounded sleepy. “I want to see her.”

“Safe. Concerned for you and her friend,” Dr. Quirin said. “His leg is mending well, Damar. I should be able to release him in another day or so. This is temporary amnesia. He’ll be fine. No need to babysit on a daily basis, Damar. They’ll both be fine.”

“Damar, I don’t remember Kornica,” Dukat said. “I was married to Mikelya. Wait. I remember. Mikelya was murdered by Torell. How much of my life have I forgotten? Days? Weeks? Months? All this time under Torell’s control. If not for Yor...?”

"It pains me to look at her lying there when I can do nothing for her," Damar said. I felt his fingers brush across my shoulder. "She may never be able to have surgery to appear Cardassian again."

Apparently I was wrapped head to toe in bandages, burned, in critical condition. Had I been able to open my eyes or speak, I would have told Dukat he was worth saving. It was Damar's voice comforted me. I felt a straw inserted between my parched lips and took a sip of water. It dripped out of the corner of my lips and I felt the cloth wrapped around my neck moisten. .

"Appreciation, acceptance, and affection," Damar said. "This is what Yor deserves, Dukat. I'll have her moved into the next room if you can't stay quiet. I only agreed to let you share a room because you continue to ask about her. You can see how she is."

"I can't see a thing. She's a mummy." Dukat sighed. "These are the things you mention are what she wants all tied up in tidy package. A commander cannot invest time or emotion on the needs of one person, not when I have millions to think about. What does she want of me? What more can I give her? Is my admiration not enough?"

"Oh, do shut up, Dukat," Dr. Quirin said.

Make the spinning stop, I thought, groaning, moving uneasily on the bed.

"I'll come check on you both later. I love you, Ren," Damar said.

"What about me? I don't remember a thing happened and you two fawn over her. Am I not injured as well? A broken leg, fractured vertebrae, and Helen won't visit me."

"It's called a concussion," Dr. Quirin said. "You will remember in time. Helen has good reason not to visit you, Dukat. She has checked on you both several times. Helen knows which of you truly cares about her, and it's not you. I'm going to sedate you again to spare us all your self-pity, you ungrateful brute."

"Let me know when Yor is awake, Dr. Quirin," Damar said. "She means everything to me. I love her no matter how she looks. It's not her skin. It's what's inside I love."

"Gallant to the last. Now get out of my way, Damar. Let me work," Quirin said. After a few minutes, the room grew quiet. I felt a presence beside me. "I know you can hear me, Yor. It is going to be alright. I promise. Now get some rest."

Images of a battle entered my mind. I saw myself, as Yor, not Sawyer, standing on a hill, waving a Cardassian flag. The Alpha Brigade streamed past, firing their lasers, yellow smoke surrounded us, the sounds of shouts, screams, and explosions. I faded off and tasted water in my mouth, the straw tipped to let it dribble into my throat, still too weak to suck it out. A hand slid across my wrapped chest and pressed over my heart. I felt pressure on my forehead, had to be a kiss and then something patting my shoulder, softly, tap-tap-tap.

"It's impossible to live up to your expectations," Dukat groaned. "Stop saving my life. Stop worshiping me, Ren. You say nothing. I can still hear you thinking when it's night. I can't stand it. You're so damn heroic. Just look at what I have done to you. How can I make amends, not only to you, to Helen. I am a man in misery."

I heard Helen's voice, her screams. Voices continued screaming, coming in and out, as someone kept putting their hands on their mouths and then releasing the sound. I felt someone pressing their forehead to mine, the sounds of sobbing, and the soft brush of moist lips against my own. Only my lips were not bandaged. I assumed they were not scarred. The crying ended. It was quiet again. Far too quiet.

"My memory is not bad," Dukat said in a soft voice. "I do remember a few things, Ren. I remember ordering you to jettison a few officers out of the airlock. I took my anger out on the wrong people, including you and Helen. Just give a nod or make a sound. What do you want me to do? Do you want me? Or do you want Damar? Do I wait for you to decide, have you decided, or do I turn to Helen? Tell me. It's dark out. I'm lonely and you can't hold me in your arms."

I wanted to cry.

Another drink of water, something tasted like broth. I heard laughter and the squeal of a female. Perhaps Dukat remained beside me and had pinched a nurse's backside. He was better. He'd be leaving sickbay. I wasn't going anywhere any time soon.

"Playing cards is boring," Dukat grumbled. "I put them on your stomach, ask you to move your hand and you won't. It's intolerable, your silence. How can I gloat over the fact I'm indispensable to you, if you won't answer me, Ren Yor?"

"I...love...." my voiced faded off.

“Ah, I heard you this time,” Dukat said. “What am I do to with you? With us? I remember what happened in the stockade.” He laughed. “While I do enjoy your lips, my dear, I caution you against using a hypo in particularly sensitive area again. The pain you inflicted haunts me still. At least you could do is call me a few names.”

“Am I still a glinn?” I croaked.

“Yes, you’re still a glinn, Yor. If you’re worried about that, then you are feeling better. In the future, don’t risk your life to save mine. Let me die with some pride left.”

“Sorry.”

“And don’t do either. Don’t apologize. I can’t stand you being gracious after the way I’ve treated you. Our room is full of flowers, not for me, for you. You’re loved by thousands, Yor. How can I stand in line to be one of many adoring fans? I can’t. I won’t.” Dukat paused, releasing a heavy sigh. “It’s painful to see you in this deplorable condition. Guilt hangs over my head for I know it was I who nearly destroyed you. I want you to understand you’ll always hold a place in my heart. I will always love you. Perhaps in another life we will meet again, my warrior queen.”

“Perhaps,” I said.

“You do understand what I’m saying?” he asked. “Helen offers love is neither all-consuming or suffocating. She puts herself and the children before me. She is more sensible than you. She would not give her life for mine. Unlike you, she gives only as much love as I give to her. It is a relationship is more suitable to my disposition. However, Damar will always put you first before all others. He loves you unconditionally, Yor. I cannot offer you type of love or commitment. It is not I settle for less. I will not take more than I can give.”

Another day slid past. Dr. Quirin and Dr. Lazlo came and went. One of them told me I’d been in bed for eight days. Dukat was no longer in the bed beside me. Nor had he returned to check on me, as far as I knew. However, Damar came often. He now brought Helen and the children. Bandaged from head to toe, heavily sedated, I found solace in their voices.

“Mother,” Eben said. “Please get well. We miss you.”

“I didn’t know it would take this long for you to heal,” Helen said, her lips close to my

ears. "Dr. Quirin says he is operating again tomorrow. Everything will be good as new. I hope you will get your ridges back. We love you."

At some point I could move my right arm and hand. My fingers worked. I was able to hold a glass and drink from a straw. I'd been told I'd gone through five surgeries. Dukat was no longer in bed beside me. I hadn't heard his voice in a while. Visitors came and went over the next two days, Helen, Eben, Shazel, Roxell, and Garak. I was told Damar and Dukat had fought another battle, destroying the last ground forces of the Fifth Order. Renalt had been there and fought beside Dukat. His name was cleared of all suspicion.

"I'm so excited," Helen said. "The doctors are removing the bandages today, Sawyer. Damar and Dukat wanted to be here. The rest of us are. We're all waiting for your face to be unveiled."

"I'm nervous," I said.

"It'll be fine, Mother. I'm here. So is Uncle Garak and Shazel."

"Everyone stand aside," Dr. Quirin ordered. "You're hovering like an old woman, Garak. I am going to cut away the bandages. Lazlo, assist me. At least this is something you're qualified to do."

"I've done my best, Quirin. There's no need to be insulting."

"Hopefully, you've learned something," Quirin replied. "I am needed at Terok Nor, yet here I am, acting like the staff doctor. It quieter in space."

The doctors started at my toes and worked their way upwards. As one removed the bandages, a sheet was placed over my body. I heard a few gasps from the crowd as bandages were unwound from my torso and arms. Someone helped me onto a robe. I felt a hand slide across my neck and sensed Dr. Quirin beside me. He removed the gauze from my face, while another pair of hands removed padding from my eyes, I couldn't see.

"Yor, I want you to slowly open your eyes," Dr. Quirin said. "Lazlo is going to spray something into them will clear your vision. It won't sting. It will startle you. Get ready. Lazlo, still you're hand. You're shaking."

A spray of mist hit my eyelids. I blinked and opened my eyes to find Dr. Quirin standing in front of me. He smiled at me. Dr. Lazlo appeared satisfied with the results,

gesturing toward where Eben sat on the bed beside me. Shazel lay on Dukat's former bed. Garak and Helen stood at the foot of my bed, holding hands, staring at me as if I'd grown horns. I looked around for a mirror, starting to panic until Eben produced a mirror. He held it up for me.

"You're beautiful, Mother."

I looked into them mirror. Staring back at me was the face of Sawyer Kincaid. I let out a scream and fainted dead away.

HELEN

Chapter Fifty-Three

Dukat stood in the doorway of my room, his legs braced apart, and his hands on his hips. He looked healthy, strong, completely recovered, and far too friendly. I'd been told he didn't remember what had happened on Terok Nor. I wish I could forget.

"Good evening, Helen," Dukat said, offering me a bouquet of flowers. "I do hope you are well this evening. I came by to see you and the twins. I've stopped by several times. This is the first time you've actually opened the door. May I come in?"

"No, you may not," I said, throwing out an arm. "I'll have Garak and Roxell bring the children by your room later tonight. You can coo and cuddle with the twins all you want. I suggest you give the flowers to Sawyer, though I'm sure they'll only make her sneeze."

Dukat lowered the bouquet, hiding it behind his back, looking embarrassed.

"The last thing I ever wanted to do was hurt you, Helen. I know my lack of memory does not excuse my deplorable conduct. I ask for your forgiveness," he said. "It seems you are here to stay at Fort Varnok. It seems only natural you and I would mend the fence between us."

"I'm not sure I want fence repaired," I said.

"Not yet. You will in time," he said, smiling wide.

I shut the door in his face.

"What an arrogant brute," I snarled. "It's going to take a helluva lot more than an apology or flowers to forgive him. The next time you can answer the door Garak."

"Dukat is trying," Garak said. He and Roxell sat on the couch behind me. They each held one of the babies. Eben and Shazel were in Sawyer's room. I hadn't seen Sawyer all day and felt I needed to check on her. I'd baked a chocolate cake, a small token of my appreciation and gratitude for her, but the little shit Garak had eaten the whole thing. While Garak had no

problem being a hog, it was troubling to find my little Madison wasn't eating.

"Maybe Madison would eat if I let her father hold her," I said, plopping onto an array of pillows scattered across the floor. I'd dyed my hair red in protest to all things Cardassian. "Dr. Quirin says it's time to feed the children fish juice and wean them entirely off milk."

"I agree," Garak said. "About the fish juice, is."

"I love Dukat. Don't get me wrong. If I accept his apology, he'll only think he has permission to behave like a tyrant in the future. There is no way to win this scenario. I want to forgive him, I don't think I should. Tell me what to do, Garak. You're older and wiser than I am."

"Not old," Garak said, holding his right index finger in the air. "In matters of the heart, I don't dare give advice. Dukat has lost his seat on the Counsel due to the death of Legate Kurson's daughter. He'll find another way to become a legate."

"I think you should forgive him," Roxell said. "I've talked to Ravon about it. He says Dukat is far kinder than ever before. We both think you'd be a lot happier, Helen, if you came to an arrangement with Dukat. He clearly does regret what happened."

"I hope you get back together," Roxell said. "I know what Dukat did to you was cruel and unkind. He truly doesn't remember. Please, Helen. Reconsider. Give him a chance."

"You're smitten with Ravon. Of course you want romance to triumph," I said. "I don't want my children to suffer. I know they need their father. I know I should forgive Dukat and promise to love him forever. Don't say anything. Don't even nod. I need time to think about what I want. I do want you both to take the twins to see him. While Dr. Quirin remains here, I think he should take a look at them, too."

"I also agree about Dr. Quirin," Garak said. "He'll know what to do for Madison. As soon as he gives his consent, then you may do what you want, Helen. I won't be your emissary. Everyone else has stood in front of you and protected you from Dukat. I will say while he is back to his former self, he is still Dukat. He will always be difficult to live with."

"I know that, Garak. Am I weak if I do so?" I asked.

"You don't want me to answer that," he said. "You've allow Yor to intercede on your behalf far too many times, Helen. She nearly died trying to save Dukat. Dukat never puts

himself in harm's way to save her or you."

"You two have hated each other for the longest time," I said.

"I exposed his father for trying to take control of Central Command, which resulted in his execution. Dukat has never forgiven me. We have an uneasy truce between us."

"I have always relied on Sawyer to protect me, haven't I? I've been unfair to her. I know how she feels about Dukat. She'll always defend him. Always." I threw my hands into the air. "This is about her. She has Damar. He's done his best to take care of her, while I've done nothing feel sorry for myself. I am weak."

"Torgan likes you," Roxell said. "Most of the Alpha Brigade likes you, Helen. You don't have to be with Dukat. It's been almost two weeks since Vardon died. I know you cared for him, I think you should move on. If not Dukat, then you should be with someone else."

"I don't want anyone else. I want Dukat," I said, annoyed to hear myself admit it. "Garak, I know you don't want to do it, I want you to ask Dukat to drop in later tonight. Roxell, you don't have to stay. Go on a date with Ravon. I can handle this. I'm not going to melt into a puddle and forgive Dukat the moment I see him. I'll let him hold the children and then I'll send him away."

"Very well," Garak said. He placed Gabe in Roxell's arms, bowed, and left the room. Springing into action, I showered, styled my hair, and put on one of my less formal gowns.

I started to put on makeup, decided it wasn't necessary and then pulled the pens from my hair and gave it a hard shake. I was trembling when I returned to the front room. Roxell placed the children in their cradles and went to see Ravon.

Nervous, I drank a glass of kanar, hated every bite, and then had a second glass. I then sat on the couch and waited. When I heard the chime at the door, I jumped to my feet and then caught myself. I need to remain calm. I walked to the door and opened it. Dukat stood with his hands clasped behind his back, looking quite serious.

"Good evening. Please come in," I said.

Dukat walked past me. He'd showered. He wore a plain black pullover and slacks with boots. He looked wonderful. He smelled even better. Trying not to blush, I sat on the couch, watching him out the corners of my eyes. Kneeling beside the cradles, he brushed his

hand across Madison's face, took her bottle of fish juice, and placed the nipple in her mouth. She started to suckle, making little noises and he laughed.

"Gabriel and Madison have missed me," he said. "Dr. Quirin said all they needed was to spend a little time with me. She's eating now. Her hair is as red as yours. So is Gabriel's hair. I hadn't expected both of them to look so much like you and so little like me."

"They look like both of us."

"Helen, I need to know whether or not you still care for me? If you do, if you think one day you might forgive me, then please tell me. I want you to give us another chance."

I sighed, not wanting to answer question, not really even wanting to think about it, and tried not to soften when he looked sad.

"For some strange reason, I still love you," I said. His face brightened. I held out my hands. "However I don't know if I can ever forgive you. And without forgiveness, there might as well be no love. I believe your apology to be sincere. I don't think you are capable of true love and does concern me."

"Damar says as long as there is hope, I have not lost you."

"Damar said that, did he? I'll have to have a little chat with Damar about giving you ideas." I stood and walked into the kitchen, going straight to the replicator and ordered two kanar. "Of course, there's always hope, Dukat."

He joined me on the couch. I handed him the glass.

"They are adorable. Madison is fierce and Gabe is gentle."

"I was told I disowned them. I even went so far as to try to hurt them. And I know I did hurt you, Helen," Dukat said, setting the drink aside. "I never meant to do so. The truth is I can't remember what happened on Terok Nor, only bits and pieces. I'd return to Terok Nor, only Odo says it's too soon. The gul I left in charge is well-liked and I'm content to leave him in charge, for now."

"I don't know if it would help if you did remember," I said. "There is something I need to tell you. Torell activated my implant. I killed Legate Mikor. It took a while for me to remember what happened. Once the implant was removed I was able to remember what happened. It will probably be the same for you. We both did things we regret because of the

implants. If you can forgive me, then I think I should forgive you."

Dukat raised an eye ridge. "I perfectly agree, my dear. Never speak of Legate Mikor again," he said. "It will remain our secret. Gul Raynor took the blame. Let it rest with him."

"Thank you."

"Would it help if I told you I loved you? I'll do whatever is necessary to protect you and the children from now on? I'll devote myself to making you happy."

"Can you do that?" I asked. When he placed his hand on my knee, I nearly jumped out of my seat. I tingled from head to toe. "Do you really want to be with me? I need to be sure about this, Dukat. I know Sawyer loves you. Would you rather be with her?"

"No. I want to be with you and she has chosen Damar. There is no reason to doubt again or to doubt my feelings for you. I do love you, Helen," he said. "And I do want to make you happy, if you will let me. Anything worth having should never come easy."

"I've heard you say before," I said.

"Let us start over as friends."

"We were never friends before, Dukat. We were lovers from the moment we met and that's where we went wrong. I will try if you will, no promises."

"Very well, my dear. I can certainly be your friend. Who knows? Things may blossom and we will again be more to each other one day. You have given me hope. If either of our children stop eating again, please let me know. I'll be more than happy to return. The children need their father. And Helen? I do need your...friendship. Thank you for allowing me to visit. I shall do so again. Goodnight."

"Goodnight, Dukat."

Dukat stood and walked to the door. Giving a shake of his head, he left taking my heart with him. It was going to be difficult trying to be only friends. I wanted to sleep with him. I wouldn't do it, not until I was sure Dukat loved me.

* * *

SAWYER

The hologram of Ren Yor stood at the window, gazing out at the night, while I lay in my bed, thinking about the last few days since I'd left sickbay. I was all out of sorts. Quirin had advised me he could not perform another surgery for several months. My new flesh needed time to heal from third degree burns would killed me had I been on Earth, and while I still had Dukat's blood in my veins, and felt him in my heart, there wasn't enough to make me look like a Cardassian. I was only human, after all.

Damar held me in his arms each night, gentle if and when he made love to me, showing me in countless ways it didn't matter to him if I looked human. It mattered to me and it certainly mattered to Dukat since he hadn't come to visit and I'd been relieved of all duties. I was still a glinn in the Second Order, and the flowers kept arriving each day with little cards from soldiers or officers. I honestly didn't have the guts to leave my room since I'd recovered from my injuries.

"Aren't you two bored playing nurse maids?" I asked.

"Nope," two little voices said.

Eben lay beside me, playing with a small hand-held game, shooting at tiny ships on the screen. Shazel, sprawled across the end of my bed, drew pictures on a notepad. I don't know when they stopped playing and turned to watch the hologram of Yor, pacing in front of the window. I couldn't help it. Maybe it was something in the air. I felt an ominous feeling and brought the children into my room, wanting to keep an eye on them.

"I sense trouble," I said.

"Mother, I feel it too," Eben said. "The moons are in alignment. Garak says it effects things when they're like that. Why don't you sit in on the meeting tonight? Damar is with Dukat and all the officers. You should join them."

"I wasn't asked. They don't want to listen to me anyway. What do I know about war?"

"You're smart and pretty. Father should be with you and not Aunt Helen," Shazel said. "I want us to be a family. I've seen the way Father looks at you. He loves you, Mother."

"Be quiet," Eben said, knocking her notepad onto the ground. "Why do girls always

talk about love? Yuk. Mother, you are an officer. If you won't go to the meeting, I think you should at least watch it on the monitor. They won't even know you're eavesdropping."

"You shouldn't have done that, Eben. That's espionage and considered treason."

"I want to watch. Can I, mama?" Shazel asked.

"I have told you before not to call me mother or mama, Shazel. It's only a matter of time before your father marries again. It won't be me. I'm with Damar," I said.

"One day Eben and I will marry and then you'll be mother for real."

"Not if you keep irritating Eben every chance you get," I said, sliding off the bed. "I'm going to listen in on the meeting. I don't want to hear one peep from either of you."

I wore a soft blue sweater and slacks, nothing fancy, and certainly not military issued. Hearing the children whispering, I went into the front room, sat at Damar's desk and turned on the monitor to watch the meeting. Dukat, Damar, Dracalus, Ravon, Torgan, and Dorric were visible. There were more officers in the room with their backs to me.

"The ship commanders in Mukot's fleet are disgruntled. Mukot has failed to secure the support of the Dominion. He has managed to acquire Marquis ships and hired mercenaries. They've already destroyed three outposts in outlying star systems," Damar said. *"Mukot continues to out maneuver us. He must have a spy in this fort."*

"Mukot has spread his forces too thin across the quadrant," Dracalus said.

"It's a bloody business," Dukat said. *"Cardassians killing Cardassian. This is the bloodiest of all civil wars we've ever experienced. If I remained on the Council, I believe I could obtain more ships and soldiers. I'm denied. I'm told to focus my attention on Bajor and provide a friendly face to the Bajoran people."*

"Does Mukot actually think he can win? Scattering his fleet to the four winds is a serious tactical error," Ravon replied. *"They continue to counter-attack with small fighters, attacking our flotilla. Gul Toran no longer believes Mukot is on his own flagship and the Marquis were surely hired by Agent Torell. means the Circle is behind this war."*

"Yes, Ravon, it does," Dukat said, snappishly.

"Sir, I have Gul Toran on the comm," Nardo said. He turned his monitor toward Dukat. I recognized Toran's voice coming across the garbled channel, it was difficult to tell what he

was saying.

"Clean up," Dukat snapped. "I want this on the view screen."

Nardo did as he was told. The audio blared. A battle was in progress. A scramble of bodies and a flurry of fingers flying across the controls and Toran and his bridge, engulfed in flames, appeared on the large view screen behind them.

"Report," Dukat said.

"We have taken heavy casualties, Prefect Dukat. The fleet has been split apart. My own ship has been cut off and reinforcements are not expected anytime soon. I do not anticipate our survival, therefore, I have ordered all remaining ships to rejoin in the Aldarik System under the command of Gul Dyhurst."

A loud explosion came from somewhere on the warship, rocking the ship and those remaining officers on the bridge. Toran remained on his feet. I wondered where his son was and feared the young Toran was dead. His father's face was cut and his uniform torn. Fires were burning all around him and his few officers still at their posts were all wounded.

"Can I do anything for you, Gul Toran? Any last request?" Dukat asked. His voice was smooth and cool. Gul Toran and his son were going to die. Nothing could be done to save them.

"Yes. Send word to my wife that...."

The moment the words were out of Gul Toran's mouth, the entire bridge went up in flames and he was blocked from view. I lowered the volume on the monitor as I heard screams and then another explosion. The transmission ended. No one moved or said a word. More garbled messages started to flood the meeting room. Dukat snapped his fingers, pointed at Nardo and the noise was muted. They children appeared beside me. I pointed back at the bedroom and they quickly scampered away.

"Will you be leaving with the auxiliary ships, Prefect Dukat? I only ask, sir, because your presence would restore our sense of duty and patriotism," Dracalus said.

"I've yet to decide. Glinn Nardo, signal Gul Dyhurst of the Trident. I want to speak with him directly." Dukat glanced at Ravon. "As the commander of Alpha Brigade, you should know Cardassia, true Cardassia, will never lose heart. We will live and die as patriots." He turned back to

face the view screen. *"Patch him in, Nardo."*

"I can't raise Gul Dyhurst sir," Nardo replied, his voice low.

"Someone with thinner fingers can do so," Dukat said, irritated. He pointed at Torgan. Nardo rolled his chair out of the way. Torgan slid in behind the monitor and adjusted a few dials. *"Well? Do you have him or not?"*

"It's the signal. It's not patching through. I can't raise Gul Dyhurst, sir. Nor can I raise any of the ships in the Aldarik System," Torgan said.

An argument ensued, every man speaking out of turn, offering opinions. Eben appeared behind me again. He gave me a knowing look and hit a button. Over the speakers came a loud squawk. The majority of officers placed their hands over his ears. Eben tapped another button and the noise faded. I leaned forward to speak into the microphone.

"Gul Dukat, my apologies for interrupting, sir. I suggest you take the Trident. It's the fastest ship in the fleet," I said. The officers stared upwards, unable to see me. My voice was coming through loud and clear. *"Gather all reserve warships stationed near the closed wormhole and come to Gul Dyhurst's aid. You know very well the mines placed by Gul Toran outside the wormhole will destroy any Dominion ships cross off. If you leave now, you can reach Dyhurst in five hours, provided you travel at maximum velocity and do not encounter trouble. You must go to his aid."*

"I hope is not your voice I am hearing, Glinn Yor. I do not recall giving you permission to monitor this meeting." Dukat snapped his fingers at Ravon, not Nardo, or Torgan. Ravon had his own monitor and was a bit of a computer whiz; he spent time with Eben working on inventions, and Dukat knew it too. *"Now our mighty heroine has joined us, bring her up on the monitor, so we all see her, Ravon."*

"Is this necessary?" Damar asked.

"Of course it. Let her worshipers behold the new Ren Yor."

Ravon turned his monitor to Dukat. He stared right at me. Damar looked embarrassed, while everyone else stared at me in shock. Dukat displayed his legendary temper. He threw out his hands, acting about as cavalier as he could get.

"Will no seasoned officer offer an opinion or must I rely on Glinn Yor to dictate what should be

done to counter Gul Mukot's strategy?" Dukat looked around, no one spoke, not even Damar. "Get me someone on one of our ships who knows what in the seven hells is going on and do it now! Nardo! Make yourself useful and find out what is going on! You're my communication's officer. Communicate with someone, if you please."

A face suddenly appeared on the side of my monitor. It was Gul Mukot. I remembered him from Terok Nor, a handsome Cardassian in his late forties. He stood with his officers on the bridge of his ship, drinking what appeared to be champagne or something quite similar. He laughed as he lifted his glass in a toast.

"This is a great day, Dukat. It seems your ships have withdrawn or deserted. It matters little, for we will pick them off one by one, the same as I did your precious Gul Toran. I hope you enjoyed watching his death. It was my ship fired last. You have no idea how much pleasure it gave me."

"Bastard," I hissed under my breath.

"What can I do for you, Gul Mukot?" Dukat asked. "I'm a little busy at the moment. Make it brief."

"Only it appears I have won the war, Dukat. Oh, I know Toran sent his stragglers off to Dyhurst before he died. I have a little surprise waiting for them." Mukot smiled wide as his own officers laughed. "Go ahead and warn them, if you can, Dukat. I think you'll have difficulty doing so. There is a hyper-density ion storm is blocking all signals in the quadrant where Dyhurst is located, so you see, there is no way to warn him. Not until the storm abates. By then, I'll have time to pick of Toran's scraps, and then it's Dyhurst's time to die."

"Pity about Vardon. I assume he was your Ghost. And now he's dead."

"Oh, he was always wishy washy," Mukot said. "Who cares about him?"

"My, you are arrogant," Dukat said. "Come now, Mukot. You didn't think I send the entire fleet to fight you? I have not lost this war yet. Central Command has raised a second fleet. They are already in route. Everyone is coming to say hello."

"I certainly hope is an invitation. I've been waiting to see you, old friend. Don't vacillate too long over what to do. Need incentive? Torell isn't through with you or your little family. Heard he nearly killed you. Pity Yor got in the way. Speaking of your pretty cousin, where is she, Dukat? Why not send Yor after me? She killed Gul Tycheke, Gul Parnal, Gul Raynor, more or less, and quite a few of

Torell's spies. In fact, she was one of Torell's spies, now I hear Garak's claims her. No, wait. How do you and Damar divide her? Down the middle or does what take the top and the other the bottom? I prefer the lower half." Mukot started to laugh and put his arm around a very attractive female glinn. *"Best hurry, Dukat. We're already celebrating our victory. If you have anything left to send after me, then I suggest you do so."*

Dukat motioned for the message to be cut off. The screen went blank. He turned to the monitor, glaring at me. *"Yor, join us in the transporter room. Dracalus, you have command of Fort Varnok. Torgan, you're second in command. Do not make any mistakes or it will mean your heads. Damar, get ready. You're coming with me. Ravon, would you please cut off Glinn Yor, so I can speak without her hearing us."*

"Yes, sir."

My screen went blank. I let out a snarl.

"Mother, are you going with them?" Eben asked. He dropped my armor on the floor.

"I don't know. Help me get dressed. Shazel, tell Helen what's happened. The two of you will stay with her and do what she says. No ifs, ands, or butts."

Dressed as the Yor of old, I hurried to the top floor of Building 1, hoping I was to join Dukat and Damar. A soldier on his way somewhere stopped to salute me. I saluted back and continued to the transporter room located on the roof under a glass dome. Dukat, Damar, and Dracalus stood with the officers. I knew Dracalus, Ravon, and Torgan would remain at the fort. I hoped Nardo wasn't coming with us. I didn't like him. Dukat noticed me first.

"You are most efficient," Dukat said. *"You're not coming with us, cousin. I wanted to see you before we left. If Torell has more surprises in store for us, then it is up to you to deal with him. Damar will accompany me on the Trident. Dracalus is in command of the army at the fort. If Ravon or Torgan are both killed, then you will be in command of your brigade once more. Should put a smile on your rather plain human face."*

"Torgan? Not Ravon?" I asked.

"Not Ravon," Dukat said.

Sweeping past me, Dukat made no explanation for placing Torgan ahead of Ravon as second-in-command. Dracalus remained silent. Damar paused beside me, placed two fingers

over my lips he then pressed to his own. It was a simple gesture and quite romantic, I thought. He stood beside Dukat on the round platform, his eyes held straight ahead. Dracalus, Torgan, Dorric, and Ravon saluted. I clasped my hands together, worried I'd never see either one of them again. An officer at the controls waited for Dukat's signal. He delayed long enough to give me a final order.

"Glinn Yor. Take care of Helen and the children. They're your top priority above all else." Dukat gave a nod at an officer. "We're ready. Beam us onto the Trident."

Both men vanished from the platform.

Dracalus started shouting orders and disappeared with Ravon and Torgan. I past Nardo, noticed he was eating something and walked on after he called my name. I found Eben waiting for me on the turbolift. He held a wristband in his hand. He placed it on my wrist and removed the older model, which he tucked into his pocket.

"What's this?" I asked.

"Something special, Mother. You will be Ren Yor again."

Eben tapped a blue button on the wristband. I waited to see a hologram appeared beside me. Nothing happened. The look on Eben's face suggested otherwise. As we descended to the first floor, I glanced at a glass wall ran the length of a large conference room. As I gazed at my reflection, I saw ridges on my face, my blue war paint, and ridges on my neck. Lifting my hand to touch those beloved ridges on my neck, I saw a flicker as my fingers past through and touched only skin.

"The hologram gives you a new face, Mother. Anyone looking at you will see a Cardassian. Touch the red button and it will vanish. The green one allows your hologram to appear at your side. I made it for you so you wouldn't have to go through all the pain again. I don't want you to have surgery. It makes me cry when you're in pain."

"I love you, do you know that?" I knelt beside Eben and pulled him against me. "I love you more than anyone else, son."

"I know and I love you best of all, too."

The boy gave me a kiss on my cheek. He slipped out of my arms, waved and ran to the stairwell, vanishing. I hoped he'd returned to our room. As I stood, my eyes riveted to my

reflection, I heard someone gasp behind me. Garak's appearance stood behind me, his hand pressed to his chest. As if compelled he touched my neck. His fingers past through, the hologram remained intact.

"This is unique. Your own personal mask," Garak said.

"My son is a genius." Turning to Garak, I stepped close, not wanting passing soldier or officers to overhear. "As much as I respect Dracalus, there are other things we need to do to prepare for Torell's next strike against us. I think we should involve Bajor in defending their planet. I know they have ships, either in dry dock or hiding in another solar system, which they can use in case the Marquis decide to come here. After all, we're virtually defenseless from an attack from space."

"Yes, that's a good idea. You're not in command. Dal Dracalus has privilege. I suggest you stay out of it. If Dukat wanted the Bajorans helped, he'd have asked Major Kira."

"I also think we need Gul Renalt. He's the highest-ranking officer in this quadrant. He can use Fort Varnok as the planet's headquarters, coordinating attacks with every fort and outpost, while Dracalus defends the fort. There's an ion storm coming this way. It could cut off all communications. We need to act now if we're going to be ready for Torell."

Garak snorted. "You seem quite certain Torell will strike against us," he said. "Let Dracalus handle things, Yor."

"Then I'll ask Renalt to come here. He was with the Fifth. He knows how they think. I'll also ask Major Kira to join us. Renalt and Kira helped before. They're precisely who we need, Garak. This isn't just a matter of defending a fort. This thing has gone global."

"I'll contact both to come here. You made advice Dal Dracalus the Obsidian Order has made this request. He won't be able to argue if he thinks the OO is stepping in. This is the last favor I'll do for you."

Within the hour, Gul Renalt and two of his officers arrived. He called the officers into a meeting in the conference room. Dal Dracalus looked angry. Torgan and Ravon were worried. Major Kira and Garak also joined us. I'd Helen asked to join us. Since the children were threatened, I thought she needed to know what was going on and Renalt agreed.

"What is this about? Why is the OO interfering, Garak?" asked Dracalus, sitting at the

head of the table. "I am perfectly able to command this fort. I'm sorry you were brought here, Gul Renalt. You have your own fort to command. This is highly irregular."

"Mind your tone, Dracalus. Neither of us dare challenge the OO," Renalt said. "I've already been in contact with every gul on Bajor. I've advised them Gul Dukat is in pursuit of Gul Mukot and communications will be cut off once the ion storm arrives. Enemy ships have been spotted near the Prodigal moon was before the scanners went off line due to the ion interference. It's impossible to predict where Torell still strike first. Therefore, I've placed every fort and outpost on Bajor at Level 1 security. We are prepared for an airstrike."

"The OO also believes the Bajor government should be informed what is going on," Garak said. "Major Kira, I believe we will need the Bajorans help. Ambassador Sorvan is meeting with Kai Lucan at this moment. We've been asked to join them in Bajor City."

"If the Bajorans are allowed to take command of our abandoned forts, they can help defend our Cardassian forts if and when Torell attacks us," I said.

"And just how do you know anything about this, Glinn Yor? Are you working with Garak and the Order?" asked Dracalus. He glanced at Dorric who gave a nod. "I should have been apprised of this before Dukat and Damar left. It's enough Bajorans have been allowed to join our troops. Now we're handing over installations and weapons to them?"

Garak gave a nod. "It seems we do need their help, Dal Dracalus."

"Major Kira, you are with the Bajoran Intelligence," Renalt said. "You are also in contact with every Bajoran leader. Your status as a colony allows you the right to bear arms and fight beside us, as an auxiliary fighting force. We can place Cardassians officers at every fort to aide your people to defend against an attack. We must act now."

"Funny how you now need us for more than slaves," Kira said. "What's in it for Bajor? What do we get besides a few forts with outdated equipment?"

"A great deal," I said, before anyone else could answer. "If you want true unification with Cardassia and to be our allies, then we'll need more than two Cardassians meeting with Kai Lucan. I suggest Mistress Helen joins Garak as a good will ambassador. Take them with you to Bajor City and let them speak with the Kai. If we can reassure the Bajorans we won't confiscate their ships, this is merely an attempt to protect their cities from terrorist attacks

from the Marquis, and they may be willing to help. We need to be ready for anything.”

Dracalus let out a whistle. “Yor, I had no idea you were this ambitious,” he said. “This is taking on a great without Dukat’s guidance. Sending his mistress to Bajor City will mean you will need to go with her. He did order you to protect her and the children.”

“Yor needs to stay here. We may have need of her. A squad of your best from the Alpha Brigade will be sent with them,” Renalt said. “Major Kira, we are not in a position to make promises to Bajor, you do have a right to defend your homes. Since we can neither contact Gul Dukat or Central Command, I’ll take full responsibility. You need to leave at once.”

“Agreed,” Dracalus said. “Perhaps you can oil the wheel, Garak. You seem to ooze enough of it through your pores.” He stood. “Torgan, see to your brigade. Ravon, you’ll stay with Gul Renalt and assist him. Dorric, come with me. There is a great deal to do to prepare for an attack. If they’re coming for us, then it will be from land as well as space.” He saluted and left the room with both officers.

“I have a shuttle. Let’s get moving,” Kira said.

Ravon with Renalt walked out with Kira and Garak, while I joined Helen. She kept glancing at me. I wasn’t sure if she was angry or liked the idea. I’d found a way to get her out of the fort, which seemed the smartest move to make considering the situation.

“I’m taking the twins and Roxell with me,” Helen said. “You should take care of Shazel and Eben. They’ll only think this is a game. I rather think you do too, Sawyer.”

“Dukat doesn’t think Torell will attack Bajor,” I said. “You heard Renalt. There are enemy ships headed toward us. The safest place for all of you is away from any military installation.”

“I hope you’re right about sending us to see the Kai. He’s a religion leader forced to play the part of a puppet politician,” Helen said. “You can call this a diplomatic mission. I don’t think Dukat or Damar would approve. Now stop following. I’ll bring the children outside. You other things to do. I’ll contact you when we arrive.”

Heading to the courtyard, I found a squad of Alpha Brigade soldiers waiting in their black capes. It was frigid as hell outside. Torgan stood with them. The soldiers came to an

abrupt halt and with a quick tap of their heels, they brought their rifles up and across their chests, Each wore swords strapped to their backs and each one saluted me. Korvinus, Zolon, and Jenrak had been chosen to go with Helen. I knew they'd protect her. Torgan had chosen well.

"We'll see Helen and Garak reach Bajor City," Korvinus said.

"Remain in contact with me as long as you can," I said. "I'm sorry I'm not coming with you. I know you'll do your best to get them to the city."

Ravon appeared in the swirl of snow. He walked over to me, a sour look on his face.

"Well," he said, "since I'm now demoted to second-in-command of the Alpha Brigade, it doesn't look like either of us will be escorting Mistress Helen. You have a direct order to remain here and protect Shazel. Wait for me. I want to see Roxell off."

Helen was already boarding the shuttle, carrying a crib. Roxell paused to embrace Ravon, kissing him farewell before she and Garak entered the shuttle. The door was closed by Major Kira. I turned to find Shazel and Eben standing behind me. Ravon picked up Eben, while I lifted Shazel on my ship, watching the shuttle lift up and fly over the wall. Torgan walked toward the barracks, while Ravon and I entered the lobby.

"Sending Helen and the twins might be the smartest thing you ever did, Yor. I'm glad Roxell went with them. I've come to care for her a great deal," Ravon said.

I smiled. "I know," I said. "We need the Bajorans help. It seems like the right thing to do. I'm sure Roxell will be fine. Helen depends on her."

Ravon placed Eben on his feet, while Shazel wiggled out of my arms. They stood together, holding hands, watching soldiers setting up barriers outside the building. Tanks were moved into formation and large lights from the towers shined into the night sky.

"You should be in command of the brigade, not Torgan," Ravon said. "The only reason he took my position is because of Roxell. Damar doesn't approve of our relationship. Don't tell him I said anything. I don't want to cause any trouble between you two."

"I guess I'll take the kids into my office. I'll keep tabs on Kira's shuttle as long as I can. I put a tracker on Helen and Kira. It works independently of the scanners. You still need a com-link. I'm sure nothing will work when the storm hits. If you need me, you know where

to find me.”

I felt Ravon’s hand close around my forearm. “night on Terok Nor when I was ordered to select twenty prisoners to execute, you pulled a Bajoran out of line and beat him pretty hard,” he said. “I was supposed to throw the Bajoran out of the airlock. I didn’t do it. Garak smuggled the Bajoran off the station. I guess that’s why Garak does best. He helped you do it later when Dukat went a little crazy.”

“I’m glad you didn’t kill him.”

“The thing is, Yor. man’s name was Sorvan. I think it means something to you.”

“That’s the Bajoran I later killed on Terok Nor,” I said, groaning. “I don’t believe in coincidences, Torgan. I never have. It does seem like he was meant to die there.”

“My point is this. Do you think Major Kira be trusted?”

“I hope so or Dukat will never forgive me if something happens to Helen and the twins.”

HELEN

Chapter Fifty-Four

The closer we came to Bajor City, the more nervous I felt. I kept the cradle beside me, while the shuttle flew through an atmospheric electric storm. Kira sat in one of the pilot's chairs, her skill flying the shuttle impressive as we were tossed about, the view from the window obscured by flying dust and sand. The storm couldn't have been more perfectly planned, and here I'd been worried about ambush, was the least of our worries. Another hard slam from a wind shear, sent the shuttle spiraling upwards. I heard Roxell scream.

"It's all right. Stay calm," I said.

"A sensor sweep shows this is the same ion storm that's spread through the Alpha Quadrant. I wouldn't be surprised to learn it came from the wormhole. It's interfering with the controls. Try to adjust, Gil Dorn," Kira said, her voice tense. She glanced at the Cardassian seated next to her.

"Communications are out. I'm unable to hail Bajoran Security. Your code is correct?" "It's an ion storm. A signal can't get through," she said, adjusting the course and leveling the shuttle. "If this storm doesn't lessen up and soon, we may have to land."

I flashed back to the plane ride to Chicago and wondered if the Prophets were about to abduct me and send me home. Frightened, I pulled the cradle under my legs, holding tight onto the handle, wishing I was at the fort and not on a fool's errand. A loud noise like the tearing of metal opened the backside of the shuttle. Five seated soldiers were yanked out by a gush of wind, screaming as they vanished into the maelstrom. The cover on the cradle wasn't enough security for my liking and with Garak's help, we placed it between us. Using the upper safety harness, we secured the cradle, as the shuttle started a

descent. I kept my eyes on the hole in the tail end, praying no more soldiers were sucked out into the storm. We'd started with ten and were already down to half, wasn't a good sign, and I cringed as the babies started to cry, holding Garak's hand. Roxell was sobbing.

"We're going down!"

Kira didn't need to shout. I could see what was happening. The shuttle ploughed into a hillside, shattering the windshield, spraying us with shards of glass, dirt, and snow. The soldiers were protected in their armor. I felt tiny pieces strike my hands and turned my head aside, jarred in my seat until I feared it would unhinge. When it came to a halt, dirt started filling in the front of the shuttle, causing Kira to remove her belt. The Cardassian beside her hung to the side, not moving.

"Roxell?" I turned toward my friend. A large piece of metal was embedded in her forehead. Blood covered her face and her dress. She didn't move when I touched her.

"Let's get out of here. The girl is dead. Come on. Move it," Kira shouted.

The major ran to Garak, pulling him out of the way and stopped to help me unfastened the crib. The soldiers climbed out the back end. Kira kept her arm around me, helping me through the tangled metal and onto the snow, while I clutched the handle of the cradle, hearing Garak swearing angrily as he tumbled to the ground as the shuttle was crushed under the pressure of the collapsed hillside. The wind pelted us, pushing us toward the hillside. An older gil with gray hair came to provide assistance. He took hold of my arm, guiding me along a path, while Kira helped Garak to his feet. Four soldiers walked ahead of us, shining small lights fastened to their rifles on the path.

Red lightening crackled overhead and I felt droplets of rain.

"We're not going to last long in this storm. We need to find shelter," I said worried about my children more than anyone else.

"I estimate it's more than thirty miles to Bajor City." The officer bowed his head. "I am Gil Korvinus. Zolon and Jenrak are good men. Yor calls us her War Dogs. You can count on us, Mistress Helen."

Either Zolon or Jenrak had a tricoder. I couldn't tell them apart. After thirty minutes of swallowing snow, battered by high winds and a hard, stinging sleet, we reached a small

house. There were no lights and it looked abandoned. The soldiers opened the door, two went in, and helped me inside. Korvinus waited at the door. Kira and Garak entered. He closed the door, shutting out the storm.

The lights from the rifles were aimed at a fireplace. It was a farmer's home, a table and chairs, a bed with dusty blankets. There was no sign of why no one lived there anymore. Korvinus helped me to the bed, placed the cradle beside me, and remained, watching as I opened the cover, making sure both babies weren't covered with dirt.

"Wish they had these on Earth. They're fine," I said. "Not a speck of dust." I smoothed my hand over Gabriel's forehead and the Madison. "I should have left them at the fort. In fact, I shouldn't have come with you. I knew it was a bad idea moment Yor brought it up."

"Get a fire started," Zolon ordered. "It's cold and the mistress can't be cold. Major Kira, where do you think we are? Are we close to a town?"

"We're in the middle of the Dania Desert," Kira said, coming over to kneel beside me. "I didn't know ion storm would hit us. We couldn't get a ship up there even if we wanted to. I've no doubt its effecting both fleets. It'll slow their progress, make it nearly impossible to fight, so maybe it's a blessing in disguise."

"How long can a storm like this last?" I asked. I'd prepared bottles for each child, only half-empty, and managed to get Gabriel to take his rubber nipple. Madison whimpered as I lifted her from the crib, holding against my chest. "We have rations and water, right?"

"We always carry canteens and field rations," Korvinus said.

"I've never seen anything like this storm. It's supernatural," Kira said.

Garak sat on a crate and removed his com-link. He gave it a try, calling for help from Fort Varnok and then tried Bajor City, to no success. He was shivering. We were all cold and I worried about the twins. In this weather, they wouldn't survive long.

"I can't understand why this storm hit us now, at this time," Garak said. "Divine providence?"

"or the supernatural and I don't believe that's the case," Kira said. "The last thing I

want to hear is a bunch of religious crap, Garak. What do you know about our Bajoran faith anyway?"

"Only it's terrifying and the less said the better. I completely agree."

Wood was quickly gathered for a small fire, a broken chair sufficed. One of the soldiers provided water for the group. The other three stood guard at the windows and door, using their backs to keep the wind from blowing them open. I glanced at Kira when Madison started to cry, wanting to breast-feed her. The major gave the soldier a push.

"Go stand by the fire. We need a bit of privacy."

Trying not to wake the children, I opened my cloak, nestling Madison within the folds and made a nipple available. Kira sat in front of me, holding Gabriel. It wasn't necessary, he's been content. I assumed she found a little half-breed fascinating and he seemed content to be held by her. As soon as Madison was full, I heard her do her business and glancing at Kira, she placed Gabriel in the crib and removed her knife. She cut a piece of my cloak off, making diapers for both children and assisted me changing them.

"I have younger siblings," Kira said. "I've changed diapers lots of times. Never with Cardassians looking over my shoulder."

The storm showed no sign of moving on, the wind lessened, while occasional cracks of thunder were followed by lightning created a reddish glow in the dark. I placed the children in the crib, kept it beside me, and made myself comfortable on the bed. Kira found an old blanket to lay over me, it smelled like horses. I didn't care. I was cold. She remained seated on the edge of the bed, watching the Cardassians.

After an hour or so, Korvinus sat on the floor on the opposite side of the bed, close to a closet we hadn't looked in. He had managed to retrieve two swords from the shuttle, one was shorter than the other, the style I'm sure he'd adopted from Sawyer who had at one time carried two. He placed both swords within reach, one a bit further back than the other. When he saw my curious expression, he answered without my asking.

"You set your weapons this way so if you are forced to move," he said, "you have another weapon within easy reach."

I nodded my understanding of battle tactics. "Where I'm from, we use whatever we

have to make weapons. The dirt on the floor. Thrown into your opponent's eyes will blind them for a moment." I spied a thick log several feet away and pointed it out. "This would make an excellent club, if you needed one. Drive a few nails through one end and it becomes lethal. One hit from it would rip open half of your face. A stick, too. Burnt end gets hardened and given a quick shove, it would pierce a soldier's eye."

I guess I sounded a little too enthusiastic in my explanations because Korvinus motioned for me to stop. Kira snorted, not commenting. She laid across the end of my bed, reminding me of a guard dog, her arms crossed under her head and her pistol beside her.

"I didn't think it possible. You sound more inventive than Ren Yor, and her imagination has no bounds," Korvinus said. There was pride in his voice. "Why did you not alter your appearance months ago to appear Cardassian, Helen?"

I had to stop to think a minute it.

"I'm human and I'm proud of fact. I can also fight, Korvinus. Gil Toran trained me. I can fight. I've never been a good follower, I guess. Just ask Garak."

My friend Garak was asleep beside the fire. Two soldiers stood on guard, while the other two lay together on the far side of the room. No blankets covered them. Knowing I wouldn't sleep, I closed the lid on the crib, wanting the twin to remain warm and found Major Kira lying at my side. It wasn't the bedmate I wanted. I was glad she shared her body warm. I tried to relax, watching the flame start to dim, aware the wind had picked up and howled outside the shack. Talking helped keep me from falling prey to my fears and I answered him.

"Truth be told, my battles are more private. Not wars like you fight, personal tests or goals I set for myself. I graduated from a university with two masters in criminology and psychology. I wanted to be a cop and ended up as a dispatcher at the police station. That's what I did on Earth. I think by coming here I want to prove I can do anything I put my mind to. I'm not quite so independent as Yor. She wanted to join the Cardassian military, not the Federation, and be Dukat's equal. I had his children."

"I have served for thirty-six years. I was promoted recently by Gul Damar. He would not have noticed me if it hadn't been for Ren Yor. I'd heard the gossip she was

human, that's not what I saw in her, a leader unlike any other. She inspired all of us to be more, to take pride in Cardassia and fight to keep dream alive, the Union, branching out, including other races and new worlds. It's why Dukat chose her to be an officer, and why Damar has fallen for her. We all have."

"I guess what I really want is to be loved for me. I could no more find on Earth than I can here. I can still hope for it."

"And I hope we win this war." Korvinus fell quiet for a long time. I guessed he hadn't meant to make friends, just idle chat; I liked him, regardless. "Helen, we may not reach Bajor City. I'm not sure we can trust our guide. Yor may have been wrong."

"No, Kira means well. I trust her."

"You seem to trust too easily. Did Vardon desire to marry you?"

"I don't think so," I said. "How do Cardassians marry? Is there a ceremony or is signing a legal document? I'm curious."

Korvinus laughed. "Almost all marriages on Cardassia are arranged by parents when children are still at home," he said. "The fortunate may meet their intended before the wedding, not often. Even the poorest citizen goes through the same steps. We marry to improve our situation, seldom for love. For most though, the first time they see their intended is in front of the Richtor, who performs such services or joining."

"Not different than some countries on Earth. There a marriage can be annulled, if it's not consummated or the Catholic church, for one agree, or you can always divorce."

"I wish I'd had a return policy on my bride, once married, it is forever. No Cardassian of high station would marry a non-Cardassian, not if they are ambitious and desire to obtain a higher station," he said.

"So I've been told."

"Do you desire more? Do you require our assistance to obtain the affection of Gul Dukat? You have to ask. We will help you."

Korvinus' voice altered. It held a creepiness that sent a chill along my spine. As I stared at the old veteran, trying to figure him out, and from every direction shadows seemed to come out try try obscure his face from view. A drop in the temperature was

followed by an inky blackness surrounded by bed, blocking the fire and I felt Kira moved. She felt cold as ice. Backing against the wall, holding the crib on my lap, six pale, demonic faces loomed before me made visible by an eerie silver light that seemed to rise from the crib itself.

“Gabe. Madison!”

Opening the lid, I found two demonic babies glaring at me with red eyes, their tiny cheeks blemished by black patches oozed into their mouths. With a shriek, their mouths opened, black as night, pulling in the silver light surrounded the demonic faces in front of me.

“What do you want from me? Leave me alone!”

“Much,” a male voice said in the dark. “Everything. What you would give to the Prophets in the Wormhole, you can give to the Pah-Wraith of Bajor. This is the True Way. Our way.”

“I don’t understand. Give me back my babies!”

“Continue your true mission. Kill Dukat,” the demons chanted. “Kill Damar. Kill Ren Yor. Purge the planet clean of all Cardassians. It’s the True Way. The only way.”

The demons and shadow retreated into the walls of the shack. The golden glow of the fire returned, steady snores of a few guards, and Kira felt warm, stirring in her sleep and muttered, “Go back to bed,” and then fell silent.

Gasping, I peered into the crib. Both Gabriel and Madison were healthy, normal, and asleep. A yawn came from Korvinus and I turned on him, finding him as he had been. His eyelids fluttered open, blue eyes, normal. I tried to force myself to calm down.

“Legally, Yor is Dukat’s cousin and you are Garak’s niece. Cardassian justice,” Korvinus said. He’d found a tarp and had pulled it under his head. I’d clearly missed a few minutes of time in my life. “Not all Cardassians are bad, Helen. Ren Yor desires to lead troops one day. And I would follow her into battle. I believe you can find happiness here, on Bajor, if you are willing to accept the gul as he is and not try to change him.”

Or kill him, I thought.

“Korvinus, what can you tell me about the Pah-Wraiths? Are they demons haunt

this world? Can they come and go at will?" I asked. I didn't tell him what had just happened. I didn't think he would believe me.

"Major Kira is the one to ask," he replied.

"Major Kira is trying to sleep and since when did you care about our myths or religion, Helen," Kira said, flipping over to face me. "Must you hold the crib? No one is going to hurt you. Seriously? You want to talk about this now."

I nodded, unable to speak, for the wind howled outside, battering the shack and I imagined demons floating through the air.

"I'll sum it up fast. The Prophets are gods of light and goodness and protect Bajor. There are those who believe the Shadow Dwellers, demons, will join with the Pah-Wraiths, also gods, and open the gates of hell. As long as you pray to the Prophets and not the Pah-Wraiths you'll be fine." She turned her back on me. "If the storm does not let up by morning, we'll have to reach Bajor City on foot."

"The storm effects all electrical and mechanical devices," Korvinus said. "I doubt anyone knows we crashed or where we are. Don't worry. We'll get there you, Mistress Helen."

Something caught my ears, a rustling, and as I listened it sounded like the Shadow Dwellers had returned. With a yell would have made my Confederate ancestors proud, I woke the rest of the soldiers. Kira drew her pistol.

"certainly told them we're here," she said, furious.

Korvinus sprang to his feet, a sword in either hand, he leapt over the bed and stood at the door at it swung open with a crash, hitting the wall hard enough to rebound. Several bodies poured in through the opening. Korvinus tossed one blade to another soldier, perhaps Zolon, and they charged forward. My new friend swung his long sword in an arc cut the body closest to him in half. Even as one fell, he was already turning, stabbing at the throat of the next intruder, while Kira, armed with her pistol, shot out the door, into the dark.

Seeing a glint of metal in the pale light, I found a knife on the bed and stood before the crib, protecting my children. I had no idea who attacked, watching as five males from

Alpha Brigade defended me, and Major Kira kept me from entering, shooting out the door. I wasn't aware of noises inside the closet. The door opened and before I could turn, I felt the cold muzzle of a pistol pressed against the back of my head.

"Drop your weapons or the human dies." I didn't recognize the voice behind me. It was female. I was so frightened, I didn't dare move.

Korvinus stopped grappling with the last renegade soldier left standing in the room. He simply opened his arms, letting the Fifth Order traitor fall dead to the floor. One of the five lay dead as well.

"Glinn Kieryl, we were not expecting you," Korvinus said.

"Apparently not. Throw down your swords and pistols."

I heard the muffled thud they made as they hit the dirt.

"Now, step away from the bed. All of you," Kieryl shouted.

"Very well," Major Kira said. "You should know a Bajoran patrol will be out looking for me. I didn't return when I said I would. My friends will be worried."

"We've been tracking the human and OO agent," the woman said. "Someone put trackers on them, crude, effective. It wasn't hard to pick up the signal."

I stiffened, thinking of Eben and Sawyer. "If that's true," I said, "then Fort Varnok will be a platoon out to find us. I'm sure they're already looking for us."

In my hand, I still held Kira's knife. I had one knee on the bed and one hand on top of the closed carrier. The pistol was pressed against the back of my head, which meant Glinn Kieryl was within arm's length. I took a chance, turned the blade backwards in my hand and with all my might, prayed I was on target and swung my arm backwards. The knife slammed into a hard surface broke under the tip. I felt the knife skin into what felt like a container full jelly stood on legs. Blood spurted hot across my back and arm, drenching me. I turned, staring at the knife in Kieryl's head, as Kira ran toward me, grabbing the crib before the body hit the ground.

"Everybody out," Kira shouted.

Korvinus had me in his arms, pulling me out the door and into the storm. Frantic for my children, I turned, fighting him, fighting Kira with the crib right behind us. The four

soldiers ran out the cottage, motioning to keep moving. Knowing what had happened to Sawyer, I slowed my gate until Kira ran past with the crib and then followed. It wouldn't matter much to me, life is, if the babies died and I survived.

The explosion knocked me off my feet. Kira slammed to ground, holding the crib in the air, only for Korvinus to grab it. I sailed past, oddly able to watch as the veteran fighter wrapped his arms around the crib and nearly at the same time, we hit the ground. The soldier landed on his back several yards away from me, while I sprawled into a soft patch of sand. A gust of wind blew the fire in the opposite direction, the only thing saved us. I crawled toward Korvinus and took the crib out of his arms, hunched over it and opened the lid, finding both children crying undamaged.

"It'll be okay," Kira said. She knelt beside me, her hand on my shoulder. "I guess you didn't know Glinn Kieryl was one of Torell's agents. I don't know how she found us. You forgot those modified implants are rigged to blow. I guess you and Ren Yor had the good old-fashioned kind just turn you into killing machines."

"I guess so." I wasn't thinking about the implants.

A supernatural storm. Kira had said a mouthful, and she was right. The ion storm had been sent by either the Prophets or Pah-Wraiths, and they weren't through with me yet. I seemed I'd picked by the scary guys to kill Dukat and my friends. wasn't going to happen. If Kira said praying to the Prophets would help, then that's what I was going to do.

The sound of running feet brought the four Alpha Brigade soldiers to our sides. None were seriously injured. The house burned fast in the wind. Determined to stay a while longer and walk to Bajor City, we went a short distance and came onto a road. A vehicle reminded me of an RV had slammed into a Bajoran tank, not as large as a Cardassian, stripped of its metal sides it appeared like a skeleton, it provided stability. Korvinus opened the door, spoke to someone, and waved us inside. I let Kira go first, fearing it was Torell and his agents. She waved me inside and I followed. A Bajoran couple and their children were huddled inside. Korvinus and the soldiers entered, closing the door and turned toward the family.

"It's all right," Kira said. She helped me onto a seat.

"Who are these people?" I asked.

"Citizens of Bajor City, caught in a storm, like us. They were visiting family in a village not far from here. Get comfortable. They'll let us stay here for the night. In the morning, if the storm lets up, we can get this junk moving and reach the city."

"Praise the Prophets. Major Kira has been brought to us to help us reach Bajor City," the man said. "Please. Accept our humble shelter for the night. We have provisions, there, in the cabinet. Water, food, spring wine. Take what you need. We welcome your company, Major Kira and those of your friends."

"Well, they're not really my friends," Kira said. She sat beside me and offered me a canteen. "You look as pale as a ghost, Helen. We're safe. Relax. It's not the end of the world. Not yet."

Garak came over and sat in front of me on the floor. He was exhausted and half of his face had been burned from the explosion. He was exhausted and in pain.

"Let's hope your Prophets can keep us safe from the Pah-Wraiths," I said, taking a drink. Kira and Garak stared at me. I lowered the canteen. "Maybe you didn't know Ren Yor and I were brought here by the Prophets to stop this war, at least that's what they told us. I've a feeling the Pah-Wraiths have an invested interest in us as well. I've seen both types of gods. Good and evil. I've decided they're nothing more than aliens and demons."

"That's all?" Garak asked.

"Well, in case," Kira said, scoffing, "you're more than just a good will ambassador. There may be someone in Bajor City who can help answer some of your questions. And mine."

"I hope so. Because I think it's time I learned more about your gods," I said.

SAWYER

Chapter Fifty-Five

The storm hit the fort, bringing huge clouds of snow, obscuring the view from my office window. Eben and Shazel were with me. Dracalus had tanks lined up in the courtyard, facing the front gates, along with every soldier. I'd contact with Kira's shuttle minutes before the storm hit. The trackers on Helen and Garak also didn't work. I wasn't sure if they'd made it to Bajor City or not. Nor did I know if Renalt had managed to talk to the Kai or the Cardassian fort commanders. I'd not seen him, Torgan or Ravon since I'd entered my office.

"Uh oh," Eben said.

"You don't come into someone's office, crawl under their desk and say 'uh oh'." I pushed my chair back. Eben and Shazel lay shoulder to shoulder, gazing at a device in my son's hands looked like a game to me. The screen was bright green and a large red dot was moving toward him. "What's red light? Is a game?"

"No, Mother. It's a Marquis bird-of-pray."

I hit the claxon button beneath my desk. It wasn't working. The lights went off throughout the entire fort. Grabbing my sword harness, I slipped into it as I ran to the door and found it locked. Nothing worked. We couldn't get out the door or warn the fort we were under attack. I faced the window, drew my pistol, and shot out the glass. The kids put on their coats, as we'd planned in case of an emergency, only Shazel screamed.

"Move your asses. Climb outside," I shouted.

Running toward the window, I scooped the little girl into my arms, broke a section of glass with my right shoulder covered with plate mail and stepped onto a cement sidewalk. Eben came after us, still watching the screen on the small device. An explosion

leveled Building 5. Green laser fire swept across the courtyard, taking out tanks and sending soldiers scattering in every direction. Another blast hit engineering and the barracks. The Marquis ship appeared hovering above the fort. Two more direct hits took out the gate and the front section of the wall. As the enemy ship lifted upwards, it commenced a heavy barrage on every building inside the fort. Through the gates came hired mercenaries, Klingons, Romulan, and Fifth Order troops, firing at everything moved.

Dal Dracalus led our troops forward. I saw Glinn Dorric with the Alpha Brigade. The enemy fired on the front ranks. I saw Dracalus fall in the snow. He was dead. Dorric was struck next and vanished in a ball of fire. This wasn't a situation where I could lead the troops or protect two terrified children. I tapped my wristband and my hologram appeared beside me. Together, we ran toward the garden. Pulsar beams continue to pound the fort from the air. The four crossed beams twisted and collapsed with a thunderous roar and struck troops on the ground. Building 1 exploded, breathing fire on our backs as we ducked behind the garden fountain. Pandemonium ensued beyond the garden walls. The ship rained hell fire on the fort, while enemy troops advanced, cutting down the Second Order and our allies, among them, the Alpha Brigade. I dragged the children behind the storage shed, trying to think how to gain entrance to the lower level and make our way into the hills to the north.

"Gul Renalt!" Glinn Nardo's voice tore through the noise.

"We must find cover. The fort has fallen," Ravon shouted.

Figures moved along the garden path. Hunkered behind the storage shed, I shouted at Glinn Ravon, trying not to reflect my shock he wasn't leading the Alpha Brigade. Renalt, Torgan, and a dozen officers were with him. Ravon spotted me. He the group over, using the shed for cover as the battle turned into a retreat. The Marquis ship continued to fire on our soldiers. Enemy ground troops crawled through the burning rubble.

"We need to find a safe place to regroup," Ravon said. "If we could find a way into the old Bajoran fort, we might have a chance. Yor, where is the entrance?"

"There's a hatch close by. Come on," I said.

As explosions continued to rumble, filling the night with black smoke and flames, I

spotted a hatch outside the ruins the barracks. The snow was melting fast and the hatch was exposed. Bodies lay everywhere. Another direct hit took out another section of the wall. The Marquis ship turned, it's exhaust sending clouds of dirt and snow into the air, lighting plants on fire. Across the yard, sparks exploded as the armory burst into flame. Keeping Shazel close, I gave Eben my pistol and grabbed his other hand, running toward the hatch. The gul and his staff followed, firing at enemy soldiers on the move. Eben shot a Klingon tried to stop us. Ravon ran past me and knelt beside the hatch.

"Get it open," I said.

One guard tower remained, using pulsar cannon to fire at the bird-of-prey, it jammed, and the ship turned, firing its disrupter beam. The tower went up like a Christmas tree and burned. Ravon reached the hatch, opened it, and started waving soldiers inside. He turned and fired at four Romulans shouted as they ran toward us, swords in their hands. The Romulans dropped to the ground and Shazel screamed in my ear. Torgan jumped through the hatch and soldiers scrambled ahead of us. It was every man for himself and I busted through the armored bodies, taking the kids with me. Renalt grabbed hold of Eben and carried him down the stairs. I reserved my comments about his cowardice.

Live to fight another day, I thought, as we entered a tunnel. Another blast of green lasers struck outside the hatch. More of our soldiers were outside, screaming, demanding they be allowed inside as Renalt shut the door.

"We need to keep moving. The Bajoran fort is under the northern hill. We need to reach it and find a way into the hills," I said, holding Shazel tight.

"Mother? Wait," Eben said. He wrenched free of Ravon and came to me. "I have a hologram in place. A larger one. I can make a Cardassian cruiser appear. It might be enough to square them off."

"If you can turn it on from here, do it, son. If not, forget and keep moving."

The soldiers used the lights from their rifles, Torgan in the lead, heading away from us. Renalt and Ravon remained, waiting while Eben removed a wristband from his right arm, pushed a button, and placed it on the floor. Whether it worked or not and something

appeared, we couldn't wait to find out and Renalt motioned for us to follow him. We went in the same direction of the soldiers, while the ground over our heads shook and trembled. Pipes burst, spraying the soldiers with hot steam and water. The service tunnel was Cardassian, running the length of the fort. I could already hear sections collapsing.

"How far is the Bajoran fort?" Gul Renalt asked.

"Helen said it's past Marker 45 you turn right and will come to a blast door. The Bajoran fort is behind it," I said.

Ravon ran forward, following a trail of flares, to join Torgan and direct the march to safety. The light off Renalt's rifle struck the walls. I read the numbers, 39, 40, and 41 and knew we were going the right way. I also smelled smoke coming from behind us. We'd not been the only ones to seek sanctuary inside the service tunnel. At Marker 40, another large group of Cardassians from Shadow Company arrived, joining us, making me feel the attack was a complete loss. Some had lived.

"I'm scared, Mother," Shazel cried. Her face was buried against my neck, disrupting my hologram, I'm sure, making me appear half Cardassian and half human.

"Don't worry, child. Yor is taking us to safety," Renalt said. His voice was gentle. He grabbed Eben and lifted him onto his back.

Two guards stood at a rusty blast door, not far past Marker 45, lights from within visible like a pale gold halo as I entered with Shazel. Renalt with Eben were close behind. We continued forward through a dingy smelling hallway, old furniture stacked against the walls, movement stirred the dust as more soldiers straggled inside and the blast doors were finally shut with a heavy clank.

"We have no way of knowing if the Marquis have moved on," Renalt said, placing Eben on the ground. He kept hold of the boy's hand. His silver hair was plastered to his blood, most covered in blood from a head wound. "What are the schematics of Bethlan 2? Does anyone remember? Was anyone here ten years ago when it fell into our hands?"

No officers volunteered information. Renalt was disgusted.

"Let's see how far it goes and if we can get above ground or not," I said. I needed a break from Shazel, she clung to me too hard, and so I handed her to Renalt in exchange for

Eben. I wasn't about to let either child get out of my sigh, and Renalt seemed determined to remain with me.

"Make way," a soldier shouted.

Set with thick pipes and empty offices filled with ghostly members, a destroyed control room and little else, hearing excitement in the soldier's voice listed heads. Soldiers moved aside, allowing a veteran with white hair and an eyepatch reach Gul Renalt. He was from the Fourth Order, probably still in service for the lack of having any home to return to Cardassia was always at war with someone, and saluting Renalt, he paused to catch his breath. Both Shazel and Eben now stood beside me, holding onto my gun belt.

"Report, Glinn Lonak. What have you found? A way out, I hope," Renalt said.

"Much better," said the older glinn. "The Fourth arrived here earlier, at the first strike, since I knew precisely where to go. I was with Gul Navar when he took Bethlan 2. There's an upper level we can reach from the stairs and there the transporter room is still intact, and sir, it's working."

"In an ion storm, it can't be done," Renalt said.

Ravon was furious. "The Marquis found a way to operate. They had no problem destroy Fort Varnok. The instruments work fine. More Romulan ingenuity, no doubt," he said. "If we don't try, you might as well consider this our tome."

"Try to transport onto their ship, Raven, and we could beam into the hill itself," Torgan said, pressing his hand to a cut on his cheek. "We'll stay here until the ship leaves. We're safe here."

"Not necessarily," I said. "Whatever technology that Marquis ship possesses which allowed them to fly in this storm also means Gul Mukot's ships were not affected. Dukat might have led the Cardassian fleet into an ambush. We can't expect him to return and help us. Chances are whoever command Marquis bird-of-prey knows about this place. If the transporter works, can't you connect with the Marquis ship's transporter, isn't enough to bean an elite squad on board? The Alpha Brigade is trained to handle this type of situation. There's enough here to get onto ship. If you can secure their transporter room, you can keep beaming soldiers on board until they figure it out."

“Do you think it’s Agent Torell?” Renalt asked.

“Most likely,” I replied. “We have to try. Lonak, if there is a way out of here, get the rest of the Orders out. If they head north, they’ll come to the Fifth Order’s old hiding place in the hills. There are caves we can hide in.”

“Get me every engineer of command grade. I want options,” Renalt said. “Show us the transporter room Glinn Lonak. And someone find a door out of this place. There’s far too many soldiers in here. Start moving them out of the exit. Yor is right.” He caught my gaze. “Don’t leave quite yet. I may need you.”

“This way, sir,” the glinn said.

Glinn Lonak led us to the upper level through a stairwell. Another veteran waited, in fact, most already on the upper level were in older than fifty years old. The Fourth’s Defiant Company, remnants of the legendary Gul Navar, who I’d read about, started to lead the soldiers into another area where I hoped an outside door existed. Gul Renalt, his staff and Dukat’s staff remained, gathering outside the transporter room. Two engineers had survived and joined us.

“I can get a squad beamed onto the ship. Maybe more. This transporter relies on anti-matter fusion, which had been stored all these years, and while the system it outdated it is most effective,” a bald Cardassian with an eyepatch said. Silver staples were still clasped to an ugly scar traveled the length of his skull. He wore the Fourth’s insignia. I liked him at once.

“How safe is that?” I asked.

“I can lock onto the Marquis ship, provided it’s still above us, and keeping sending soldiers until they shut down their own transporter. There’s only ten padds, Glinn Yor, which means only ten soldiers at a time can go. I’m sure the Alpha Brigade is eager for the honor to destroy the enemy. I will transport you to fame and glory. Or,” he said, lifting one corner of his mouth, “I might transport you scale-backs into the walls of their ship.”

“I want ten volunteers,” Renalt said. “Glinn Ravon, I’d like you to come with me and reclaim your honor. Glinn Torgan too. We will kill Agent Torell for you, Yor.”

“Mother? I can help them,” Eben said. He entered the transporter room with the two

engineers. The two males looked surprised when he knelt in front of the controls, opened the panel, and shined a small light. "I can rewire a few things. The A Compactor needs to be replaced, we can bypass it. As long as the reactor doesn't overload, I can give you all the power you need."

"Who are you?" the scarred officer asked.

"I am Young Yor," he said, proudly.

"Call me, Fornax. This boy is a genius. I assure you, Gul Renalt, I cannot accurately set coordinates, and beam up the first squad," said the engineer. He remained beside Eben, working with him, while the second engineer stood at the controls, adjusting switches and knobs, at least that's what it looked like to me. I had no idea how anything worked and assumed they knew what they were doing, and Eben, so cool and calm, reminded me of a young Wesley Crusher.

"Gul Renalt," I said, "I want to come with you, sir. Dukat gave me orders to protect his child. I'll lead the survivors here. We can hold up in the EK-1 and offer suitable resistance holed up in the caves if they come calling."

Renalt placed his hand on my arm. "Glory awaits us all, Yor," he said. "You're not coming with us. You have the children to look after, and the rest of these men. It's up to you to get them to safety."

I nodded. "Very well, sir."

"Mother," Eben said, not looking up from his work. His fingers worked like magic and lights appeared the length of the room and the padds turned bright yellow as energy was fed into the circuits. "The shuttle Major Kira was on didn't make it to Bajor City. I was going to tell you. I was tracking the shuttle when it went down thirty miles to the south of Bajor City."

"Something else for me to do, Gul Renalt," I said. "We'll find the shuttle, sir."

"Why don't we rig the Marquis ship to explode and beam down to the planet?" Ravon asked stepping forward. "If we die, we die. For Cardassia and glory."

Eight Alpha Brigade soldiers appeared with Glinn Ravon. It hadn't taken him long to find volunteers. Some wore borrowed cuirasses and each was armed. Whatever I'd said

had flipped a switch in Torgan's brain. He joined the volunteers, which meant I'd suddenly become the highest-ranking officer among those remained behind.

"As you said, it's the only way to be sure." Renalt patted me on the shoulder. "Find Mistress Helen and Dukat's twins. Get them to safety, Yor. And then do what you can to rally the Bajorans to our cause and launch a counter-attack. I'll do the rest."

It wasn't like I didn't have a lot of my plate already, I thought.

"I have locked onto the Marquis," the second engineer said. "Sir, if you're going with a squad, it's not or never. I can't hold this for long. The ship is on the move. It's up there. I doubt the fort remains intact or anyone survived the attack. They'll move onto their next target if they get away."

Eben ran to me, throwing his arms around me. Fornax and the second engineer remained at the controls, not they had another choice. I'd have to leave them behind. Lonak remained with them, standing guard.

In a twinkle of lights, Renal, Torgan, Ravon, and the Alpha Brigade squad vanished from the Bajoran transporter room. Ten more of soldiers stepped forward, stood on the platform, and vanished. The next ten were not so fortunate. A sputter in the controls caused an electrical fire and as the figures on the padds screamed as their forms mutated, turning inside out and I took the children and fled from the transporter room.

"Lonak, lead the way," I said. "Fornax! Get away from console and get your butt out here. There's nothing else you can do. We've leaving."

I had to admit the Cardassian engineer was impressive. He was patched together with stitches and metal clasps, each scar told a story, and IW as sorry I wasn't going to get to know him better, for he said, "There is more I can do, Yor the Brave. I can rig this place to explode. The hill will cover Fort Varnok and kill any remaining Marquis troops. Better die for honor than to lives a coward's life." He saluted me.

I wanted to kiss the arrogant bastard. I saluted him and the second engineer. They'd never see the light of day again.

With Gil Lonak in front of me, we moved through the soldiers, finding a door open to the outside, troops already in position, waiting for us. Lonak lifted Eben into his arms. I

carried Shazel. Two hundred soldiers came with us. I took the familiar path away from the burning fort into the snow-covered hills, while the wind blew burning hot embers toward us. We thread our way through scorched trees and slush beneath our feet into the box canyon called EK-1.

“Scout the area. Make sure there are no Fifth Order troops waiting for us,” I said. “Make use of the caves, until morning. Be prepared for another ground assault. Stay away and stay sharp.”

A small cave was located near the place where I’d encountered Gul Parnal. I led the children inside, finding the rocks covered in ice. Glinn Lonak and Glinn Nardo joined us. The rest of the troops moved on, vanishing into the storm, and we waited, hearing distant explosions caused the ground to rumble beneath our feet. I placed Eben and Shazel behind me. They huddled together for warmth. The boy comforted the girl, while I stood between Lonak and Nardo, staring at the swirl of embers and snow block our view of the canyon.

“We’re no more than three miles from the fort,” Lonak said. “This is probably the first place the Marquis will look for us. We should keep moving.”

“This is where we’ll make our stand,” I said.

Both officers turned toward me. Nardo wanted to argue.

“We’ll lost half the men in the storm. I’d rather take our chances here. The caves offer some protection. The Marquis ship will move on to hit another fort or attack the Bajoran capital. Enemy soldiers we can handle. They’ll have to enter the same way we did and come out of those trees ahead of us. Our soldiers are in position. They’ll have the same view we do.”

“You think this Agent Torell is desperate enough to come after us?” asked Lonak.

“Yeah, I do. He’s certifiably insane. If he’s coming, this is where he’ll look.”

“And if it’s the Marquis ship? A few blasts and the sides of this canyon will collapse on top of us,” Nardo said. “You should not be in command. She doesn’t have the experience.”

“Gul Renalt will take out the Marquis ship. Now shut up, Nardo,” I said.

An hour or more past, while we waited. No explosion had been heard or seen in the

sky. It seemed unlikely Renalt had been successful and his death and those of Ravon and Torgan saddened me more than I'd realized. Shazel slept with her head on Eben's shoulder. The boy held his devise, continuing to scan. I glanced toward the boy. He gave a little nod.

"Got something, son?" I asked.

"Yes," Eben said. His words brought Nardo to his feet. "Multiple life forms have entered the canyon, moving this way. Mother, I think it's the Marquis assault troops."

"The enemy killed everyone else in the fort and now they're coming for us," Nardo said. He drew his sidearm and moved beside me. He was fat enough his body blocked the children, and for that, I was glad he was with us.

I moved to the side of the cave, drawing my pistol and wiped my hand across my mouth. Lonak lifted his rifle to his shoulder, standing close to my side.

"We'll wait to fire until they're right under us. If Torell is among them, I'll recognize him. He's mine," I said.

"We die for the glory of Cardassia," Lonak said in a firm voice.

Crouching against the wall, I drew my second pistol, holding it in front of me, and then drew Damar's father's sword. Eben knelt beside him, holding a pistol.

"Stay here and protect Shazel. You have a pistol, son. Use it."

The wind swept a cloud of snow across our line of vision. Fifth Order renegades, Klingons, Romulans, and Marquis mercenaries stepped out of the trees, using lights on their laser rifles to shine at the network of caves, taking their time. I didn't see Agent Torell. As soon as I saw the whites of the enemies' eyes, I opened fire. Lonak and Nardo started blasting and as bodies dropped, the mercenaries spread out, hammered on all sides by my brave soldiers. There was nowhere for the enemy to retreat. They moved forward, dropping onto the ground, running for cover didn't exist. Their ambush had turned in our favor. From the north came a large number of my soldiers, setting the trees on fire, giving the enemy something plausible to attack. As the Marquis and their allies moved away from us, I emerged from the cave with Lonak and Nardo, standing together as we fired at stragglers entering the box canyon. A fallen tree provided reasonable cover. As we knelt in

the snow, I heard a voice shout from the darkness.

"Surrender, Glinn Yor! We have you surrounded." It was Agent Torell.

"I'm not going to do that, Torell. I'll never surrender. You must be desperate to come after us. I won't be your hostage. Why don't you just leave? Where is your ship?"

"Clever girl. My ship was taken by the Alpha Brigade. Fortunately, I was already on the ground, looking for you and Helen."

"Stop talking. Kill him," Nardo snarled.

"When I can see him. Make sure no one comes up on our left flank, Nardo," I said, keeping my eyes on the trees as another dust cloud swept past. The fat Cardassian crawled on his belly, watching the left, while Lonak focused on our right flank.

Six forms moved out of the trees, crunching the snow beneath their boots. Torell stood with his bounty hunters, the ones with implants, and another Cardassian with the rank of gul, Fifth Order, a desperate look in his eyes. Something compelled me to stand, though I felt Lonak's hand brushed across my leg, trying to convince me to resume my covered position.

"Torell, this is between us," I said.

"You expect me to fight you, Yor?"

"I expect you to die."

I fired at Torell and ducked behind the log, while Lonak and Nardo shot at the bounty hunters. Lifting my head, I found three bounty hunters on the ground, one after the other exploded. The gul shouted a war cry and ran toward us, blocking Torell, who favored his right arm, hanging at his side, useless. I'd hit him. Nardo and Lonak continued firing as the remaining bounty hunters sought cover, only to be struck by my soldiers. Lonak shot the gul, spinning him around and he vaporized with a scream. Torell held his pistol as he advanced toward me. I pulled the trigger and nothing happened.

Leaping to my feet, I ran toward him, swinging my sword, able to see dark shadows moving beside me had no real form or shape. I heard strange screeches as I swung the sword, finding everything around me slow, impossible, and unreal. No Prophets appeared yet I sensed them as my sword swung in an arch, cutting Torell's head from his shoulders,

and watched as seemed to hang in mid-air like a gruesome painting. It felt like minutes before the head hit the ground and then the world returned to normal motion, his body slumped to the ground and kicked the head as far as I could, fearing it would explode.

“We’ve won,” a Second Order Cardassian shouted.

I stared at Torell’s headless body, wondering where the shadows had come from and just as quickly vanished to, feeling my heart thumping in my chest. The entire experience left me shaken and as I heard my name cheered, from out of the caves crawled my soldiers, quickly dispatching the remaining enemy troops.

“Secure the canyon, Glinn Nardo.” I sounded stern when I gave the order. I was terrified I’d vanish and reappear in the wormhole. I didn’t want to talk to the Prophets again, I wanted them to leave me alone and stop toying with me.

“Yes, Glinn Yor.”

Nardo led a squad toward the mouth of the box canyon, taking Lonak with him, securing the area. On unsteady legs, I returned to my son and Dukat’s daughter. The children crawled out of the cave and ran to me. I put away my pistol and held the bloody sword high in the air, while Eben and Shazel held onto my legs. Still cheering, the remains of the Second Order and Fourth Order gathered around us. There was no way to take a head count or know how many of the mercenaries had entered the canyon. Bodies covered the ground. Blood covered the snow.

“The northern section of the canyon is secure, Glinn Yor. Guards are posted,” Ikarus said, stepping forward. I was relieved to see him. “There’s not one mercenary left standing. What are your orders, Yor?”

I heard a loud rumble overhead, able to see through the clouds the lights of the Marquis bird-of-prey. The noise echoed through the canyon. I sheathed my sword, able to put my arms around the children. Four figures appeared in front of me. Ravon, Torgan, Dunatar, and Komash took solid form. They saluted me and approached.

“I see you’ve been busy,” Dunatar said. Ikarus and Komash stood with him. My faithful War Dogs had survived. I felt less worried with them at my side.

“We’ve taken the ship,” Ravon said, excited. “All enemy troops on the ground are

reported dead. There's no one left at Fort Varnok. Gil Fornax destroyed the Bajoran hill fort. Fort Varnok is covered by rubble. Our Alpha Brigade, I'm sorry to report, no longer exists."

"Have you contacted Gul Dukat? What about our fleet?" I asked. I didn't ask about the death count. Eben or Shazel didn't need to know. They'd seen enough of battle. I feared they'd be ruined for life from what they'd seen.

"The ion storm past, enabling Dukat to engage Mukot. We are victorious, Glinn Yor," Torgan said. "Now, if you're ready to transport aboard, we can locate Mistress Helen. It was Gul Dukat's request we find her. He and Gul Damar will return as soon as he can."

"Then make it so," I said, smiling.

HELEN

Chapter Fifty-Six

A knock on the vehicle brought my head lifting off Major Kira's shoulder. Korvinus and the four Cardassian soldiers stood, raising their weapons as the door was forced open. My mouth fell open as Sawyer, looking every bit a Cardassian, stuck her head in, and grinned.

"Can offer you a lift to Bajor City?" she asked.

"It's about time you arrive," Garak said, standing.

"Sorry about that. I was a little busy. Do these people need assistance?" Sawyer asked, moving side so Korvinus and the soldiers could exist. "We can transport you directly into the city. You can return later for your vehicle. The storm seems to be abating, the road is out."

Major Kira approached the couple and their children, speaking to them softly, and then, turned, nodding. Garak offered his hand, pulling me to my feet. I grabbed the crib, the babies fed and diapers changed yet again, eager to leave.

"What do you mean transport?" I asked.

Walking out of the RV with the crib tucked under my arm, I was surprised to see the snowy landscape had altered. The snow had melted. The morning sun was cresting over the hills and it felt warmer. In the distance, I saw lightning in thick clouds, moving north. The drastic change in the weather wasn't the most amazing then greeted me. I stared at a Marquis bird-of-prey, hovering no more than one hundred feet above us.

"Where did you get a ship?"

"Long story. Fifteen to beam up," Sawyer said, tapping her com-link. She was covered in dust and blood, obvious signs she'd been in a battle. "We'll have to go in two trips.

You're going first with me. Seems Dukat has a major victory on his hands. He's in route to Bajor and will meet you there."

I was excited to hear the news. Sawyer placed the children on the mud. About to protest as she stood beside me, I felt my entire body tingle as we were transported onto the vessel. I grabbed Gabe, while Sawyer lifted Madison into her arms. Glinn Ravon stood with several officers.

"Welcome aboard," he said.

The rest of our party were transported onto the vessel seconds later. Korvinus and his soldiers saluted Ravon. Sawyer fell in beside Ravon. She gave a nod and I followed with Garak and Major Kira, while the soldiers remained with their commander, no doubt to brief Ravon on what had happened after our shuttle crashed. I listened to Sawyer give an account of the Battle of Fort Varnok as she led us onto the bridge.

The Marquis ship showed signs of a battle. A few consoles were blackened remains and I noticed a great deal of blood on the floor. Sawyer led me to Gul Renalt, seated in the commander's chair, a view of the Bajoran desert visible in the large view screen and the walls of Bajor City. Renalt stood and offered me his seat. I placed the crib on my lap.

"Are we still to meet with the Kai and Vedek Assembly?" I asked.

"Gul Dukat will handle the meeting," Renalt said. "We've suffered major casualties on Bajor. Only seven forts remains and they're not in any shape to provide the comfort you require at this time. We'll leave you with Major Kira. You'll be the guests of Kai Lucia at the city, Mistress Helen."

Sawyer gave a nod and Eben and Shazel appeared, running toward me. They threw their arms around me, mauling me with hugs and kisses, and then eagerly waited for me to open the lid from the crib and show them the twin. Gabriel and Madison cooed as the children stared into the crib, tickling them with eager, little, dirty fingers. I shooed the older children away, laughing when they knelt at my feet, holding onto my legs as if they were starved for attention. I doubted was the case. Their tattered clothes and smudged faces made it obvious they'd been in the battle. Somehow, by some miracle, my best friend had managed yet again to pull off a victory and kill Agent Torell in the process, and I'd killed Glinn Kieryl

and I told her.

“Well done,” Sawyer said. “I think we’ve eliminated the last of Torell’s assassins. Dukat will be pleased. I know he’s anxious to be reunited with you and the children. Don’t worry. I’ll be accompanying you to Bajor City. I’m not letting you out of my sight again.”

Arriving over the large metropolis, Sawyer led us to the transporter room. She brought the older children and Glinn Torgan. Garak and Major Kira accompanied us, as I know they would and we beamed into a large palace, with slender pillars, a view of the city with its domes and steeples.

“Welcome, welcome,” Kai Lucan said. He wore a blue robe and a long gold vest matched a number of necklaces around his neck. On every finger he wore a jeweled ring. The leader of Bajor didn’t mind showing off his wealth and I assumed he was one of the Bajorans selected by the Cardassians, and made him questionable as to his real loyalties.

Kira bowed. “Kia Lucan, may I present Garak, his niece Helen, Glinn Yor, and Glinn Torgan of the Second Order. The children are Eben Yor and Shazel Dukat,” she said. “The babies are Helen’s and surely need their rest. Our shuttle crashed in route. We were sent by Gul Renalt who requests aid for the Cardassians. They’ve suffered heavy casualties, sir, and most of their forts and troops have been destroyed.”

“A fact I am well aware of,” Lucan replied. “I have already spoken to Prefect Dukat. He is coming here and asks I provide our guests with rooms and refreshments. There will be a meeting later this evening.” He motioned at a servant who led us from the grand hall. Kira remained behind with Sawyer and Torgan.

“So much for being an ambassador,” I said. “What do you think of the Kai?”

Garak glanced at me. “I’ve seen rats with friendlier faces,” he remarked, dryly. “It’s obvious our peace mission has turned into a military venture. I doubt we will be called upon since Dukat is coming here. Fortunately, we seem to have landed on our feet, Helen.”

“What do you mean?” I felt Shazel grab hold of my gown, keeping close, while Eben used a scanner, not in the least bit discreet.

“Had we remained at Fort Varnok and not left with Major Kira, I have no doubt we would not be alive to see this day. Agent Torell attacked not soon after we departed. Most

fortuitous as I said. Perhaps the Prophets do protect you and your children.”

“I want answers, Garak. When aliens are involved who claim to be gods it can’t be good for anyone,” I said. “I don’t like it. Not at all.”

Arriving at a large, grand door, the servant opened it and showed us inside. The servant was male, wearing a beautiful gold covering on his right ear with dangles. His robe was a soft pink and he wore his brown hair in a braid. The room was big and open to the fresh air, not a sign of dust on the furniture or drapes at the window. Refreshments were placed on a table, along with a stack of folded garments and soft towels I could use as diapers. The servant bowed without introducing himself and left us without a word.

“These people are rather strange,” I said, placing the crib on an ornate bed with delicate white sheers hanging on two sides. Shazel crawled onto the bed in her dirty clothes. “Garak, the children need to wash. And I need to bath the twins and change and feed them.”

“I’ll tend to Eben and Shazel. There is a washroom to your right. Take the twin in there, wash, and I’ll bring in fresh clothes for you. We’ll wait and give you a little privacy.”

“I can go with her if I want to,” Shazel said. “I’m a girl!” “Come on then,” I said.

Entering a luxurious bathroom fit for a queen, I found a large tub and a counter with an oval sink deep enough to wash the babies. While Shazel filled the tub, undressed and climbed inside, pouring enough bath salts to make me sneeze, I slid out of my cloak and then one by one, washed the twins. Garak arrived and placed towels and clothes on the counter, backing out when Shazel started to scream. The girl fell silent when he left, sinking in the bubbles, and started to splash about like a duck.

“Not done yet,” Garak said, returning with a gold crib, lined with soft pink material. “This is to replace damaged Cardassian crib. If they want to shower you with gifts, Helen, then let them. It seems your twins have aroused their curiosity. Finish bathing, dress and join me for refreshment.”

“My turn,” Eben shouted. He ran in naked and jumped into the tub with Shazel. Oh, these two were going to make quite the couple in the future.

Garak laughed. “You can always use the shower,” he said, gesturing behind me. “I’ll watch the children while you do. Hurry! Gabriel has wrinkled his face at me in disgust and

no doubt is eager to be fed. He is never full. Madison knows to be patient.”

Garak helped put on Madison’s diapers, wrapped her in a pink shawl, and placed her inside the crib. Gabriel fussed as I dried him off, put on diapers, and placed a blue shawl around his body. He fit nicely beside Madison. Garak lifted the crib and left the room.

Entering the shower with a towel I left outside the glass door, I stripped inside, tossed my clothes out, and closed the door. The water was warm and I remained under the nozzle, washing my hair and scrubbing my body, while the children in the tub screamed and splashed, dousing the floor with water. Trying to be discreet, when I’d finished, I grabbed the towel to dry inside the shower, wrapped it around my body, and stepped out.

“You two finish up and get dressed. You’ll be prunes,” I said.

Two naked bodies covered in suds stepped out of the tub. Eben handed Shazel a towel and then wrapped one around his body. They sat on the edge of the tub, while I had to dress in front of them. It wasn’t as embarrassing as I imagined, since they gazed out the window when I pulled my dress over my head. The Bajorans had a sense of fashion I liked. The gown fit me and had an overlay vest fell to the floor, gold with a dash of green. I towel dried my red hair and left it long. It took less time to dress the older children. They scrambled for clothes. An outfit of a boy and a girl were provided and slippers. My own slippers were comfortable and I decided then and there I’d never wear Cardassian clothing again.

I entered the main room and found Garak seated on a couch, a glass of spring wine in hand, his shoes off and his feet on the table, nibbling on a sugary baked treat. Eben and Shazel sat on the floor in front of him, feeding like little pigs off a tray cheeses, flat bread, and fruit. Crumbs covered the table and their clean clothes were covered with the juice of an exotic red fruit likewise stained their lips and fingers. As I removed Madison from the golden crib, prepared feed her first, Garak waggled his finger at me, produced two bottles of what appeared to be milk and stuck a nipple into Gabriel’s mouth. The boy clung to the bottle, sucking hard, while the second bottle, shaken not stirred, was tossed to me. I barely caught it, managed to turn it around and found Madison greedily sucking on the nipple, actually growling.

“What is this they’re eating, Garak?” I asked.

“Gu’slov...an elaborate name for a nutritious protein shake, in short, fish mush. It’s good for Cardassian babies. Don’t look so revolted, Helen. They’re perfectly happy.”

A rap on the door produced the male servant who bowed and moved aside. Three regal Bajoran women entered. I was only a little bit taller the trio. The woman in the lead was blonde, wearing light blue and it was she who motioned for me to seat. Her two companions were dark haired, considerably less attractive and wore matching red suits. The continually bobbed their heads as if in agreement, reminding me of birds.

“I’m Dame Laralyn,” she said. “And my sisters are Tresla and Gesette. We are Kia Lucan’s sisters, and where one goes, we all follow.”

“Please. Make yourselves comfortable,” I said watching them as they approached. Laralyn glided along, while her sisters took short, fast steps. Each seemed as eager as the next to take a closer look at the twins. When Gabriel let the nipple slip from his mouth, he burped and they laughed in a musical chorus.

“The male enjoys the gu’slov,” Tresla said.

“A good appetite,” Gesette said.

“We’ve not seen had the pleasure of seeing half-human, half-Cardassian children before,” Laralyn said. She reached out to touch Madison. My daughter snarled. She wrenched her hand away. “The female is quite aggressive. Like her father.”

“Agreed,” her sisters said in unison.

“You know who the father is?” I asked, confused.

“Don’t you?” Laralyn retorted. She laughed first and her sisters cackled. “Of course we know it is Prefect Dukat, as Major Kira has informed of your situation. We were told the children’s mother was human. You’re Cardassian. Have you adopted these orphans?”

“They’re mine. Excuse. I’m not sure I understand why you’re here. Did you merely come to see the children or was there something else?”

“She’s irritated with us,” Tresla said.

“Quite so,” Gesette said.

Laralyn glanced at Eben and Shazel, wrinkling her ridged nose in disapproval. “It was my understanding the older children are not yours and belong to Glinn Yor,” she said. “I do

not believe Glinn Yor is married or Major Kira would have mentioned it. Are these also Prefect Dukat's children? He's known to have quite a few orphaned children on Bajor."

"Quite a few," Tresla said. Gesette nodded in agreement.

"The girl is Prefect Dukat's daughter, yes, by his first wife Mikelya Dukat. She recently passed on," I said, not wanting to upset the child. "The boy was adopted by Glinn Yor. Why are you asking? I don't mean to seem rude, however, we have had a difficult past few days, and I'd like to remove any additional stress from their lives."

"She means us," Gesette said.

"She's not as pleasant as Major Kira portrayed her to be," Tresla said.

I couldn't wait for Laralyn to speak, handed Madison to Garak to hold, as well as Gabriel, stood, and took pleasure in the fact I was taller than the three sisters. While I wasn't one for fairy tales, they did remind me of the godmothers of Sleeping Beauty, unless I wanted to compare them to the Fates in ancient Greek myth, which meant I need to remain on guard.

"I'd rather hoped you might here to discuss your religion with me. I'm quite interest in the Prophets and Pah-Wraiths in so much as how and why they're worshiped. I was told the Pah-Wraiths...." I paused as the sisters visibly shuddered, "....are proceeded by Shadow Dwellers. If you cannot answer my questions is there a priest I might talk with?"

"She wants to talk to a vedek," Gesette said.

"It is our understanding the Prefect Dukat has lost his second wife in a relatively short time," Laralyn said, walking around the table. Her attention was now on Garak. "A vedek certainly could marry you two, if is your desire."

"Garak? He's my uncle."

"Does your request for a priest concern Prefect Dukat? We certainly would not intercede in regard," Laralyn said.

"Why are we talking about marriage? I want to see a priest to learn more about your faith. Perhaps I should ask Major Kira. Where is she?"

"In a meeting with our brother and the two Cardassian officers," Tresla said, peering at the twins. "We merely desired to see the twins. They don't a thing alike."

"They're fraternal, not identical," I said. "And why is this any of your business?"

I didn't care if I sounded rude. I hadn't asked for their company, curiosity or to be judged and I certainly didn't want to talk about marriage to either Garak, which was legally impossible, or Dukat, who I had yet to forgive and believed such a union would bring me only sorrow. Curiously, it also excited me to think other people were talking about it.

"We came to see the children, thinking they may have something to do with Trakon the Wise prediction." Gesette received a stern look from her older sister, Laralyn, and Tesla lowered her eyes, visible shaken. "I meant no harm. I merely...."

"You have said enough," Tesla said.

"We shall ask our brother about introducing you to a priest. Evonya could have answered all your questions. He was killed by Glinn Yor," Laralyn said.

This wasn't what had happened, not what I'd been told, at least and I wanted to clear up the misunderstanding. She was already on the move and headed toward the door, gliding along. Nor did they seem willing to talk about Trakon the Wise and his prediction. I glanced at Garak and he motioned for me to remain silent.

"Come, sisters. We have over stayed our welcome. If you need any else, please do not hesitate to ring for Nimbus," Laralyn said. She pointed at the servant. Nimbus bowed as the sisters filed out the door. I was on him in an instant, grabbing his arm and he flinched, half expecting it seems for me to strike him.

"I'm sorry. I only wanted to know what prediction they were talking about," I said. "I haven't heard of Trakon the Wise. Who is he? Is he a priest? A vedek?"

"A poet and magi born three thousand years ago, mistress." Nimbus peeled my fingers from his arms, unwilling to meet my gaze. "This is all I can tell you."

"Three thousand years ago? What does this prediction have to do with me or my babies? I want to know," I said, blocking his path. "Please. Why were the Kai's sisters sent her, unless to warn us about this prediction? Tell me something. Anything, Nimbus."

"Three snakes shall come to a fertile land. One shall feed, one shall starve, and one shall devour all. Blood will flow. Shadows arise. And a great fire shall burn the land."

The servant jerked free and ran from the while. I watched from the entrance until he vanished around, shaken by his words and closed the door. Goose bumps appeared on my

arms and my breasts, still laden with milk, ached.

“What kind of crazy prediction is that? What is Nimbus talking about? The battle at Fort Varnok? And who are the three snakes?”

“These people have thousands of prophecies never come true. I told you before, Helen, the Bajorans are quite difficult and secretive. Being secretive is what makes them difficult,” Garak said. “They will not freely discuss their religion with outsiders. And you, my dear, are an outsider.”

“Why did Sawyer and Renalt think we could accomplish anything by coming here? It’s no wonder these sheep ended up occupied by the Cardassians. If they can’t come right out and say what they mean, it makes negotiations quite impossible. Predictions and synchronicity.”

“What do you mean?” he asked.

“It’s something Sawyer and I discussed on the plane to Chicago. Synchronicity is something she believes in. She a Jungist. He was a doctor and philosopher on Earth. Jung claimed there are no coincidences. Anything you think or dream will later come to pass, rather like a prediction, only the general theory is all ideas are floating around in space and we can snatch them down at the same time. That’s what it means to me, anyway. I don’t think I like their nosing around and I certainly don’t like being stuck in a room and not included in a meeting we were originally meant to intend.”

“The Bajorans are a superstitious people. It seems humans are theorists.” Garak gave a heavy sigh. “I thought you were upset they mentioned marriage and Dukat in the same breath. The prediction mostly likely refers to him, in any case, and not you or the children.”

“They came here to see the children. That’s when they started acting funny,” I argued. ““If they try to harm my babies, they’re going to see blood flow. Why are you looking at me way? Do you actually think I want to marry Dukat? Would he consider marrying me?”

Garak laughed. “Not at all. You’re not truly a Cardassian,” he said. “Why? Would you like him to marry you? After seeing what happened to his last two wives, Helen, I should think that’s the last thing you would want.”

“Father will marry Mama and not Aunt Helen,” Shazel said. She’d been listening far

too intently to us. "It's not a prediction. I often dream about them. I've seen their wedding under the stars." She let out a scream. "Stop it, Eben. Don't pull my hair."

"You need to be quiet," the boy said, angrily.

"You're not the boss of me. I can say whatever I want. Father is the prefect and he I know he loves Mama because I've seen them kissing. They always kiss when they see greet each other and when they say goodbye."

"That's because they're cousins." I tried to keep my tone soft and soothing. The child's impudence and description of Dukat and Sawyer kissing had upset me. "Ren Yor is not your mother. She's also your cousin and she loves Damar. They will marry one day. That's my prediction."

"No, they won't," the little girl said.

"Damar is my father," Eben snapped. "I can't have two fathers and you're eating all the flat bread. Stop it." He turned to the girl and pinched her. She threw a handful of dates into his face, screamed and ran to the bed, flopping on it and dove under the pillows, still screaming.

"I didn't sign up for this, Garak. She treats me like I'm the evil stepmother."

"Really, Helen," Garak said, standing. He brushed his hands on his coat. "Yor has tried countless times to get the child to stop calling her Mama. I'll explain things to Shazel once more. Do try not to agitate her further. I suggest you eat something. You're quite grumpy when you're tired and hungry and I've had about all I can handle."

Sitting on the couch beside Eben, the boy crawled beside me and threw his arm around neck to rest his head on my breast. His affection for me was equally returned.

"If I was older, I'd marry you, Helen."

"Thank you, Eben. You'll make someone a wonderful husband one day."

"And if mother does marry Dukat, then I want you to marry Damar."

I rolled my eyes, not wanting to talk about Dukat anymore and having failed to learn more about the Bajoran religion, finding it easier to quiet my nerves by stuffing my face. The last piece of flat bread was dry. Chewing without tasting, too angry to cry, I found I was unable to swallow the bread without draining the glass. I kept eating, aware Garak comforted

the little girl on the bed, disliking her a great deal at moment and noticed Eben staring at me.

"What is it?" I asked.

"It's something my father once told me. In a cave he found ancient writing on the walls, which I saw, in his journal. 'The fire will burn, the land will bleed. Legions will wither and die.' There might have been more. He came in and I pretended I didn't see it."

I felt frightened. "What do you think it means?"

"Fire has to do with the Pah-Wraiths. My father told me these evil demons are imprisoned in the Fire Caves. The Shadow Dwellers who care for them. They are evil, Aunt Helen. They haunt the weak-minded in their dreams, showing them bad things, trying to convince them to do horrible things," Eben said. He sounded so troubled I felt compelled to hold him tight. "There was a secret cult my father found in a village. They took their own lives to avoid capture by drinking poison. My father said they'd gone to join the Pah- Wraiths and would burn forever. I'm scared, Aunt Helen. What if these demons come for us?"

"Do you dream about them, Eben?" The boy shook his head and pointed at Shazel, cradled in Garak's arms. "Do these demons talk to her? What did she tell you?"

"She said they have only faces. They tell her to do things. Mean things. She steals and she lies," Eben whispered.

"And I suppose they told her Yor is her true mother, and she'll marry her father and rule Bajor as king and queen." I was being sarcastic. It was also a bit cruel, for I knew Eben loved Sawyer with all his heart and he admired Dukat to a fault.

"Do you dream about demons?" he asked.

I gave a quick nod. "They tell me to do bad things, too."

"Well, don't do it. Not matter what they say to you. I love you, Aunt Helen. I don't want you to burn in hell. Pray to your Earth god for protection. Maybe your god will hear and answer. My gods heard me and brought Yor and Damar to me. Mother must not marry Dukat or the things Shazel dreams about will come true and bad things will come."

I hugged the boy tighter, wanting to squeeze out the horrible images in his mind, knowing he'd been through far too much. His childhood had to improve and Sawyer and Damar needed to get him away from Bajor or I feared what would become of him and the rest

of us if Shazel's dream came true.

Eben fell asleep in my arms. I kept hoping Nimbus would return or Sawyer, the little shit, keeping secrets from me. I was sure Dukat had arrived, only he didn't call on us. I ate dinner with Garak and the children in our room. A pallet was made for him near the windows, where Eben and Shazel joined him. I slept in the bed with the twins, a gentle breeze rustling the drapes, drifting off to sleep and dreamed something troubled me. In the morning when I awoke, I couldn't remember what I dreamed.

"We're to have a tour of the city today," Eben said, climbing onto the bed beside me. "Major Kira will be our guide. Mother came in late last night to check on me. She says Damar and Dukat have arrived. I guess she hasn't seen them yet. She seems quite sad."

"Are we returning to Terok Nor?" I asked.

"Mother is going to Fort Galdrak today. I'll join her there," Eben said. "I dreamed about it last night. We are happy by the sea."

With the sunshine bright in our eyes, I had a feeling it was going to be a good day, at least I intended to make it one. I wanted to spoil the older children, buy them whatever they wanted, with Garak's money of course and enjoy the time part from the Cardassian military and learn as much as I could about Bajor.

SAWYER

Chapter Fifty-Seven

Under a drum roll, Gul Renalt and Glinn Torgan, dressed in their finest armor, crossed the courtyard to where the newly appointed Legate Dukat stood with his fleet officers. They'd returned victorious after defeating Gul Mukot. We'd left winter behind us to be greeted by spring on the opposite side of the planet.

Fort Galdrak, located on the southern shore of the Caspian Sea, had remained in pristine condition, never taken in battle, built into the cliffs; it looked every bit like a medieval castle from Earth. The Cardassian flag and the Second Order battle banner waved from a tower. It was a beautiful place. As Renalt and Torgan reached the steps led to a massive porch overlooked the entire compound, the wind shifted and a shadow fell over the courtyard. A briny odor struck my nose. I stood on a platform to the right of the castle. Guards were positioned every ten feet on the battlements. Lonak, Korvinus, Jenrak, Zolon, and Nardo stood with me, watching the two officers as they were led forward.

The entire company of Fort Galdrak, Second Order was under command of Gul Gulch. They had gathered to watch, including two hundred soldiers from Fort Varnok. Somewhere in the throng stood the rest of my War Dogs. It was a miracle they had survived, considering fifteen thousand soldiers stationed there had died. No one needed to tell me Renalt and Torgan were blamed. I didn't know why Ravon wasn't with them. I was glad he would be spared and not executed. No matter how I looked at it, I didn't agree with the order. It was wrong to execute these two officers. Despite their heroic efforts in taking the Marquis ship, Renalt and Torgan had been accused and found guilty of the worst military disaster ever recorded on Bajoran soil. I was one of their accusers, a blunder on my part, for I had not realized on the prior evening each question I answered, offering only the truth as I knew it, added to the marks against two men I'd come to admire and respect.

My thoughts flashed back to the previous evening. I'd been led under guard to a room with a light hung over my head. It was an interrogation room. Dukat's voice drifted into the room as he asked me what had happened at the fall of Fort Varnok, the details of the death of Agent Torell, and the reason why I'd sent Helen with her children and Garak to Bajor City.

"You sent for Gul Renalt and asked him to take command of Fort Varnok. Dal Dracalus, who died in the battle, was left in charge by me. Yet, you insisted Renalt take command and the officers listened to you. Without quoting military regulations, tell me your personal reasons for doing this, Glinn Yor."

"I believed Dal Dracalus needed assistance. His staff was young and inexperienced. As Gul Renalt was the highest-ranking officer in close approximation to Fort Varnok, I suggested he take command. Fort Varnok was the largest fort on Bajor. We had the most soldiers and largest cache of weapons. It seemed the right thing to do."

"You did not think Gul Renalt, as a former Fifth Order soldier, might open the gate to Agent Torell and the Marquis?"

"No, sir. Gul Renalt proved his loyalty when he helped me kill Gul Parnal. I had no reason to believe him disloyal."

"Then what happened?" Dukat asked.

"The Marquis ship attacked. Dal Dracalus led the army. I saw him and Glinn Dorric fall in the first wave. Glinn Torgan had seniority over me, due to my brief demotion to gil, and ordered me to protect the children and stay out of the fight. I took Shazel and Eben and fled into the garden. By then the enemy troops were already inside the fort. It was in the garden where I was found by Gul Renalt, Glinn Torgan, and Glinn Ravon. They asked me to find a way into the tunnels beneath the fort. I led them to a hatch near Building 2 and we escaped."

"More than I asked. Let us continue. At any time did Gul Renalt, Glinn Ravon or Glinn Torgan attempt to rally the ten battalions stationed at Fort Varnok against the attackers? Did they offer to help Dal Dracalus? I do not want any excuses or opinions, Glinn Yor. Did your commanding officers act as true Cardassians and give battle to the enemy?"

"Not at the fort, as far as I know. Glinn Ravon did take charge of the officers he was

with. He was trying to get the gul and officers out of the fort when he found me. He asked for my help and I gave it, sir."

Dukat sighed. "At any point did you see these same officers attempt to fight the enemy? Did they offer resistance or did they merely retreat? Think carefully before you answer," he said.

"Yes, sir. Gul Renalt, Glinn's Torgan, and Ravon transported onto the Marquis ship. I'm not sure whose idea it was, sir. We had sought refuge inside the remains of the old Bajoran fort beneath the hill. Glinn Fornax from the Fourth Order had discovered the old transporter still worked. He was able to lock onto the Marquis ship. It was at a great risk the command staff transported onto the ship. Two squads of Alpha soldiers accompanied them. The third squad died on the platform when it malfunctioned."

"And what happened then?"

"Gul Renalt successfully took possession of the Marquis ship."

"Where were you when this occurred, Glinn Yor?"

"Pinned down in the caves in EK-1, along with the soldiers escaped from the fort. Agent Torell and enemy troops attacked. We defeated them and I killed Torell, sir."

"You took command then? Is correct?"

"Yes, sir."

"Not at the fort?"

"Sir, I was not in command of Alpha Brigade or Fort Varnok. I was under orders by Gul Renalt and Glinn Torgan to protect the children, which it what I did. However, I took command in the old Bajoran fort and led the survivors to safety."

"Then it was your idea to capture the Marquis ship?" Dukat asked.

"I really don't remember, sir. I can't take the credit for that."

"From what I gather, you asked for Gul Renalt's assistance and yet your superior officer failed to take charge of the situation. Through his cowardice and inability to take command, he is responsible for the annihilation of Fort Varnok and fifteen thousand soldiers. He also failed to coordinate with the guls' in the other Cardassian forts. You said earlier Gul Renalt was going to contact the commanders and then the Kai in order to defend Bajor."

"It was the ion storm caused a malfunction. Glinn Nardo attempted to assist Glinn Ravon in raising the other commanders. Communication was out before the Marquis ship attacked Fort Varnok. I can only assume...."

"Don't assume," Dukat said. "You called the ion storm 'one of supernatural force.' I'm reading your report, Glinn Yor. Is a scientific explanation, a hunch, or an excuse for the failure of Gul Renalt, Glinn Ravon, and Glinn Torgan to defend the fort against the enemy?"

"They did their best, sir. They were inside Building 1 when the attack occurred. I had to break a window to get the children out."

Dukat cleared his throat. I fell silent.

"Glinn Ravon failed to take command of the Alpha Brigade," he said. "His brigade. Instead, Ravon fled with you, the command staff, and a handful of soldiers into the tunnels. Did Glinn Ravon ever take command of his brigade and offer resistance? Or did he desert his post and flee when the fort was overrun? is a yes or no question, Glinn Yor."

"No, sir. He did get the other officers and more than two hundred soldiers out of the fort before it was completely destroyed. He did save lives."

"That is not what I asked," he snapped. "Gul Damar, do you care to ask any questions of this officer? No? Then I will continue. Your report says, 'After the command staff beamed on board the enemy vessel, I left Glinn Fornax and a second engineer to detonate the Bajoran reactor beneath the hill. They sacrificed their lives to prevent the enemy from breaching the Bajoran fort and gave us time to escape. I led the remaining troops into EK-1 where we took position in caves. Anticipating enemy forces would find us, we dug in and waited. Upon the arrival of Agent Torell, I led the attack. The Second and Fourth Order showed bravery and slaughtered the enemy. I decapitated Agent Torell. After the battle was won, the Marquis ship under command of Gul Renalt transported the survivors onto the ship.' Is this a fair accurate statement?"

"Yes, sir. It's what happened. I should have mentioned Agent Torell's agents accompanied him. They were killed by Gil Lonak and Glinn Nardo. Both officers remained at my side at all times and showed bravery against overwhelming odds."

"Very well," Dukat said. He paused to whisper to Damar and whoever else watched

me in the dark. "It is decided Glinn Ravon will be stripped of his command, demoted to the rank of garresh, and sent to Cardassia for disciplinary measures. As he managed to save as many soldiers from the Alpha Brigade as possible and led them into the tunnel, and then assisted Gul Renalt and Glinn Torgan in capturing the enemy ship, his life will be spared. As for Gul Renalt and Glinn Torgan, for cowardice unbecoming commanding officers of the Cardassian Union, their lives are forfeit. They will be executed at dawn. Any last words, Glinn Yor?"

"I was ordered to protect your child. I considered the life of Shazel Dukat my top priority. Had Shazel and Eben not been at the fort, I would have led the Alpha Brigade into battle."

"Therefore, you did your duty to the best of your ability?"

"Yes, sir."

"Be glad you didn't lead your precious brigade into battle or you wouldn't be here to answer questions," Dukat said. "You're dismissed."

The buzzing in my head faded.

Gul Renalt and Glinn Torgan reached the steps. Legate Dukat stood in front of them, glowering at the pair. They bowed their heads. A squad armed with laser rifles trotted around the side of the massive stone building. A glinn descended the stairs, motioned the two officers to follow, and led them to a wall.

"There goes the last of the Fifth," Gil Lonak whispered.

I watched a sea hawk soaring through the clouds. There was no drum roll. No officer shouted orders. I held my breath. Ten rifles fired, followed by the sound of bodies hitting the ground, and I finally lowered my gaze. My dead friends were dragged off by their legs. The glinn walked over and motioned for me, Lonak and Nardo to approach the stairs. I walked behind the two men, wondering if the same fate waited for us. Dukat motioned us forward. Together, we climbed the stairs and stood before the legate, our heads bowed.

"For bravery and valor, Cardassia favors these chosen three with the Badge of Valor." Dukat pinned a blue triangular medal on Nardo's uniform. "Thank you for your service." He approached Lonak. "You have hereby been promoted to the rank of glinn. Your service to

Cardassia is appreciated and as of this day, Glinn Lonak, you are officially retired. Thank you for your long years of service.”

Gil Lonak was the only soldier from the Fourth Order to receive a medal. The soldiers in his battalion, ten gray haired veterans, stood tall across the yard where I could see them in front of the troops from the Second Order. Dukat’s blue eyes narrowed as he faced me. He pinned the medal onto my chest, above the other five medals he’d given me in the past.

“Glenn Yor, you have distinguished yourself in the service of Cardassia. Due to your valor at the Battle of Fort Varnok and the skirmish in EK-1, Cardassia offers her appreciation, as do I. Thank you for your service.”

I heard an officer dismiss the troops. Dukat turned and entered the keep with his officers, leaving me with Nardo and Lonak. We retired to veranda overlooked the ocean, joined by fellow soldiers to be congratulated. Lonak was greeted by the older Cardassians. I think he would have wept if he’d been alone, for his eyes were watery. Nardo, however, grabbed a glass of kanar and lifted it high, toasting with his brother-at-arms.

The War Dogs I’d sent with Helen had returned to the fort. Korvinus, Zolon, and Jenrak had survived. The rest of the squad had been killed. I’d already heard they’d been attacked by Glinn Kieryl. She was dead. Helen had stabbed Kieryl with a dagger. I knew Helen was fully capable of defending the lives of her children. I was impressed by what she’d done. She was truly a survivor. There was no reason to celebrate. My War Dogs and I were disheartened by the loss of thousands of Cardassian lives.

“It is a sad day, Yor,” Korvinus said.

Zolon and Jenrak looked as downhearted as he sounded. Neither said a word. I noticed they each wore a new medal on their chests. Dukat had apparently given medals for bravery in Bajor City for saving Helen and the twins. We drank Romulan ale, each time lifting our glasses, our way of toasting to those who had died at Fort Varnok and the other twenty-five forts on Bajor. None of us wore our trademark berets, sand skirts, or plate mail on our right shoulders. Nor did we wear our swords. No one mentioned Torgan or Renalt, or what had happened to Ravon. We offered a silent toast three times, lifting our glasses high.

“To the Alpha Brigade,” I said.

We drank and fell silent. The waves crashed against the rocks beneath us. Nardo wasn't a War Dog; he'd earned his place among us. So had Lonak who joined us, bringing a few of his friends from the Fourth Order.

"Will we be sent to Terok Nor?" Korvinus asked. He gazed at a fishing town further along the coast, visible from where we stood. "We've asked to be posted here. The War Dogs would prefer to remain with you and Gul Damar."

"We should have died with our brigade," Zolon said.

"Korvinus, you saved Helen and the twins. is worth of a medal of honor. I don't know if Damar will take command of Terok Nor or stay here. Dunatar, Ikarus, and Komash survived. I'm sure they'll join us soon."

I swallowed my Romulan ale in three large gulps. Each time I lifted my glass to my lips, my hologram glimmered just a little. Korvinus didn't say anything, nor did the others.

"I'm told Mistress Helen would like to return to Terok Nor," Jenrak said.

"She will remain here," Zolon said. "Legate Dukat has been given an estate not far from here. There is greater honor ruling Bajor than a space station. I'm sure we'll all remain here. I like this fort. It's warm and faces the sea."

Nardo grumbled. "I'll be sent elsewhere. No one likes me," he said.

"They say Damar is Dukat's shadow. If Dukat stays here, so will Damar," Korvinus said. "They also say, 'where Yor goes, honor follows.' I'm sure they'll let us remain here if you want to, Yor."

"They also say, 'drink kanar with Damar and you'll have a good night'," I replied. The men chuckled. "If you all want to stay here, then I'll make it happen. I like this place, too."

I spotted Dunatar, Ikarus and Komash headed toward us with several bottles of liquor. Korvinus, Zolon, and Jenrak let out a cheer. Lonak came with them and patted Nardo on the back. Together again, the War Dogs drank straight from the bottles, laughing and trading stories. I noticed a garresh with big ears, under twenty years of age, glancing at me in the crowd. I excused myself and approached him.

"You're Garresh Broc, fresh from the academy. Come join us. We're friendly."

"Actually, my family name is Brocalus."

"Like broccoli," I said laughing.

"You may address me as Broc if you prefer, Glinn Yor." The young officer's smile seemed unable to remain on his face. I made him nervous. "Legate Dukat is asking for you. You are to report to him. Now."

"No, no," Dunatar said. He threw his arm around me. "The celebration has just started, Garresh Broc. Tell Legate Dukat Yor is ours tonight. He may see her later."

"Don't leave," Lonak said nudging in beside me. "It's due to you we received medals and I a much coveted promotion. I've been in many battles, Yor. More than I care to recant. I took pleasure watching you behead the traitor Torell. Everyone is talking about it. You stood in the middle of heavy fire and remained untouched. They say you can't be killed."

"Legate Dukat waits for no one. Not even his cousin," I said. "Know I am honored to have served with you both. Nardo, you are right. You will be sent to Fort Gleeson. Serve your gul well." I saluted and followed the young garresh.

We entered the main building. It resembled a castle. The entire fort was made of stone, not steel, too far away from any Bajoran city to be a threat. I assumed this was why Agent Torell had failed to destroy it. Fort Galdrak was the oldest Cardassian fort on Bajor. I hoped Damar would be given command of the fort and meant to ask Dukat about it. Garresh Broc escorted me through a hallway, decorated with shields and banners from another time period. He saluted a glinn stationed outside a closed door that was arched and made from thick wood. I didn't know this particular glinn. With a rap on the door, the glinn gave a bob as a shout was heard from within.

"Come in, Yor!"

Dukat's voice sounded cheery despite the somberness of the day. The glinn opened the door, a wooden masterpiece with iron bolts, nothing-modern sturdy. I entered the fort commander's office, feeling like I'd walked in to a museum. Artifacts and weapons filled the room, hides of animals and a clutter of wall hangings delayed my eye contact with Dukat for I was in my element. This was how I imagine a fort commander's office to be. There was a collection of the ancient and new armor and weapons. A monitor was attached to the wall with a view of an elegant mansion in the country. I also noticed the rug on the floor was red

and embroidered with images of animals.

“Well, we have achieved a great victory! I am now a legate and you wear yet another bauble on your uniform. I’m quite pleased. You will share a drink with me and we will talk before I leave for Milea, my new estate. Come. Sit beside me.”

Dukat sat on a couch covered with the pelt of some spotted animal reminded me of a leopard, under an arched window with a view of the courtyard. I stood before him and came to attention. A gemmed bottle filled kanar and two glasses waited on a black wooden table with clawed feet. I don’t know why I was being so formal, I couldn’t help it.

“This day has long been awaited by both of us. I’m in a particularly good mood,” he said, filling both glasses. He motioned for me to sit. I remained standing while he took a sip of his drink and gazed intently at me. “You hesitate to kiss me in greeting. Very well. You have something on your mind. Out with it.”

“This fort is unlike any other I’ve ever seen. I’m impressed.”

“Yes, it is reminiscent of the old days.” Dukat sipped on his kanar, crossing one leg over the other and spread one arm across the back of the couch. He glanced at the space remained on the couch. I was frozen in place. I couldn’t budge. He uncrossed his legs and leaned forward, eyeing me sternly. “You will not sit down, cousin?”

Dukat held out a glass to me. I took it and drained it dry. My hands were shaking hard. I nearly dropped the glass. Dukat moved fast and caught it before it hit the ground.

“What is wrong with you, Yor? Sit. That’s an order.”

I did as ordered and sat beside him, keeping my eyes forward. I heard him sigh. He sat closer to me, his arm returned across the back of the couch, his head crooked, watching me. In the past, we’d always greeted each other with an embrace and kiss. I was glad he refrained from doing so, able to feel a strange electrical current between us and felt the breeze entered the room, jingly chimes hung at a window. It made me nervous.

“Ah, I know what is wrong. You’re upset Renalt and Torgan were executed. I understand. They were your friends. An example had to be made. I will not tolerate cowardice.”

“They took the ship. They saved the day.”

“And had they died with their soldiers at the fort, they would have been awarded the highest honors. I cannot have commanders who flee from battle. I admit what they accomplished on the Marquis ship was quite impressive. You must understand, they should have fought with Dal Dracalus. He died defending the fort, he and every last man. After what happened to Gul Yor, I’d think you’d agree exiling them would only make them future enemies. Gil Ravon will find another post at some point. He is not fit to command. I’m sorry if you don’t agree with me. This is what we call Cardassian justice.”

“I can’t help feeling like it’s my fault.” I held the glass between my hands, staring at the reddish color, finding it reminded me of blood. I drank it anyway. “Last night, I wanted to say all the right things. I knew what would happen. I’d hoped the capture of the Marquis was enough to exonerate my friends. I can’t help mourn them.”

“You have your War Dogs back.”

“Yes, I do have them. Saja was executed, too. I won’t ever forget him, and I won’t forget Torgan or Renalt. I’ve disobeyed you many times and I’m still standing.”

“You object to favoritism?”

“No,” I said. “I’d rather be alive than dead.”

“You told the truth. You could do no less. Relax, Yor. Stop acting as though I’m about to order you to fall onto your sword. You’re one of a few who behaved honorably last night. I expected no less from you. I admit it was a strange battle, the strangest I’ve ever been in. The storm was irregular in its nature and scope, unlike any we’ve ever experienced in this quadrant. I can’t feeling it was supernatural. You described it the same way in your report.”

“I think the ion storm was created by the Prophets,” I said. “It was their way of balancing good and evil. It could have gone either way last night. Had the storm not arrived when it did, your fleet would have been destroyed. I may not have made it out of the fort with our children.”

“From the stars, a savior shall come, armed with sword of justice.” Dukat laughed when I dropped my jaw. “I’ve read this a long ago. The Bajorans have many prophecies and legends. If you believe them, you’ll find they dictate your every move. I do not believe in such things, Yor. Nor should you.”

“Well, I should be gracious and congratulates you your promotion. Things turned out just the way you wanted them to. You play the game well.”

“That was my plan all along. We both play the game well,” Dukat said. He reached out to caress my cheek with his fingers. His touch burned, making me flinch. I noticed the hologram covering my face flicker. He did too. “This is new. It must be Eben’s invention. Curious. I’d assumed you had a surgery. The hologram provides the necessary illusion.” He removed his hand. “Ah. The magic has returned as it was. I have no doubt if I kissed your cheek I’d be given a shock.”

I gave him a sharp look. He laughed. “One day I will have another surgery.”

“You know what they are saying about you. The soldiers say that, ‘Where Yor goes, good fortune follows.’” Dukat took another sip of his drink. “I’m very proud of you, cousin.”

“I’m proud of you too, Dukat. We’ve come a long way since we left Terok Nor.” I stretched out my leg, glancing at a sword hung on the wall. It was rusty. “The storm vanished last night without a trace. They’re calling it ‘the storm of the century’. You mock the Bajoran prophecies. I think there might be something to it. Do you have a book on these prophecies? I want to read it.”

“Travok the Wise is his name. I’m sure there is a book here on the topic.”

Dukat patted my knee. He laughed when a spark past between us. I wasn’t sure if he remembered our meeting with the Prophets, if he didn’t, I thought it best not to remind him. He knew me too well. He already knew what I was thinking.

“When the Cardassian fleet entered the storm, all systems failed and Murat’s fleet advanced. We had no shields, no weapons to fire. When he hailed us, gloating at his easy victory, the Trident came alive. So did the rest of the fleet. Damar ordered every Cardassian ship to fire on the enemy. They didn’t have a chance. Like you, I think the Prophets had something to do with it.”

“When is Damar getting back?”

“You will see him soon enough. He remained in Bajor City. I assure you Damar is proud of you.” Dukat leaned toward me. “There were actually six Marquis ships attacked our forts. Had you managed to raise the Bajoran fleet, which remains grounded, they would have

been destroyed. The Bajorans are years behind us in technology. Their ships are hardly inadequate in battle. Yet, Agent Torell and his allies relied on Romulan technology. It is better than ours and the Bajorans. Their ships shouldn't have been effected by the storm, they were, and we won."

"Because we were meant to win."

Dukat stared at me. "I should be angry at you for sending Helen and the twins to Bajor City. I did not give you approval to send ambassadors to Kia Lucan to ask for Bajor's help, yet, in doing so, you saved them from certain death," he said. "It was the right move to make. Garak and Helen have impressed the Kai and his sisters. I was able to negotiate further with the Bajoran leaders and will remain as the Prefect. You wanted peace. That's what we have. You wanted Bajor to be a colony and they are. All is exactly as we planned. You still do not seem pleased."

"I want Damar to be given command of Fort Galdrak and what's left of all the forts on Bajor. You'll need help on Bajor. I want to stay here."

"So be it," he said. "Let us toast to victory and to the future."

Dukat set his glass on the table refilled it, as well as my own. We tapped glasses. I leaned against the pillows, gazing across the white-walled room, a portrait of a gul hanging on the wall. There was a large desk covered with books and monitor. A basket of seashells in the corner, a rack of spears, and vase filled with dried flowers. My eyes sought the blue water outside an arched window.

"Do ever dream, Yor? I ask because I had the strangest dream not long ago," Dukat said, pressing his shoulder against mine. I again felt the static energy between us and wasn't surprise when he broke by the connection by sitting forward. "I'd meant to ask you about it and never found the time."

"My dream life is as vivid as my real life."

"Indeed," Dukat said. "I dreamed you and I spoke to the Prophets. We made a bargain with them to keep the wormhole closed and the Dominion out of our space. I cannot remember the particulars. I have a feeling you had the same dream."

I'd wanted to discuss it. He'd brought it up first, so I confided in him.

“It wasn’t a dream. It was real. This is the third time I’ve met with the Prophets, twice with Helen, once with you,” I said. “Each time with Helen the Prophets asked if we wanted to stay here or return to Earth. They also mentioned something about Helen and I helping them. They play Q’s game too. You and I met them right before I removed the implant from your head. We made a choice and it’s one we must keep if we are to have peace.”

“I’m unclear about the bargain we struck. I was hoping you could clear this up for me. I want to know the details, Yor.”

Dukat sipped on kanar, staring at me intently. I still loved him and the memory of the wormhole and a dark destiny haunted me. I looked away, fearing if he touched me I might give in to the strong impulse and kiss him. Shadows lurked in the corners of the room. I wondered if he’d noticed them as well.

“The Prophets made it clear if we want peace, then you and I can never be together. You saw what happened on Terok Nor. Our reign was dark and terrifying. To walk the path of light, we promised not to be lovers for peace and harmony. I thought you might have remembered. When I was in sickbay, you made it clear we must part. I believe the Prophets want me with Damar and you to be with Helen. They didn’t say. I was left with this impression because the alternative means war.”

“So is the missing piece of the puzzle. One dream lost. Another gained.”

“Allow Damar and I to wed. He hasn’t formally asked. He wouldn’t since you ordered us not to and wanted him to marry Kornica’s little sister. Eben needs a father.”

“Did I? I don’t remember giving such an order.”

“It was the implant. I think Venna tricked you in the garden. I saw her jab something into the back of your neck. Your implant was different,” I said. “It was set to explode upon removal. It also drove you mad. It’s no wonder you don’t remember much of what happened.”

Dukat refilled our glasses. The shadows slid out the window. He didn’t notice, I did. The atmosphere had changed. It already felt healthier, more positive and I took a deep breath of the fresh air.

“Perhaps I should mention I’m well aware you saved those I ordered executed on the

station. I have deleted the death entries from your official military record. I'm not proud of what I did. I am proud you did everything you could to save me. I will never forget what you did for me, Yor. Damar will return soon with Helen and our children. You are free to marry him and live here at Fort Galdrak."

"And Helen?"

"Even with the operation and legal documents, I cannot wed her. The Garak family is not held in high esteem with Central Command or the Counsel. What I can do is ask her to live with me at Milea, as my mistress. Six months is a long time, Yor I will mourn my wives during period, I won't rush to marry. is something can wait."

Something clicked in my mind. Milea. I'd heard name before, an estate of Bajor where Gul Vardon had kept a mistress, though I thought if Dukat had taken possession of it, then I doubted Vardon's mistress remained. To the victor goes the spoils, I thought. I couldn't very well share this information with Helen or she'd refuse to remain with Dukat. Keeping our bargain with the Prophets was now my top priority and I had to make certain Dukat and Helen remained together. I also needed to know how he'd obtained Milea from Vardon.

"You are not pleased. I cannot marry Helen, you know this."

"Milea. You did say Milea didn't you?"

Dukat nodded. "An estate I acquired from Kia Lucan. It was owned by a Cardassian, now dead, and as Prefect, I automatically inherited it as my own. It is mine to do with as I wish," he said. "The estate is large. It is a vineyard with a large villa and quite beautiful. I thought it the perfect place for Helen and I to raise our children. I mean to keep Shazel with me, though I know she wants to be with you."

I didn't answer right away. I was confused and considered if Vardon had actually been a traitor or Dukat had found a way to remove him in order to obtain Helen and Milea. Vardon had abducted Kornica. He'd known Dukat had abused her. Vardon hadn't been able to save Helen. It was possible he'd rescued Kornica, hoping to return her to her father, only to be killed by Gul Toran on Dukat's order. Why Vardon had kept three ships behind Bajor would require a bit of digging. Garak would know. Dukat had the implant when he'd given the order, a ready excuse for his actions. Helen would never forgive him if Vardon had been a

true patriot.

“Milea produces the best Bajoran spring wine in the region. Your friend is going to live in luxury. She will be treated like a Cardassian lady, expected to host parties and socialize with upper class Cardassians and Bajorans alike. I will give her everything she desires and the twins will be raised in the lifestyle they deserve.”

“Who owned Milea before you?” I knew the answer. I wanted him to tell me. His eyes widened and a sly look appeared on his face. “Helen is no fool. Any Bajorans who worked for Vardon and remains employed will tell her the truth. She won’t be happy about it.”

Dukat laughed. “Vardon was an enemy of Cardassia. I have every right to claim Milea as my own. However, I already released Vardon’s slaves,” he said. “Most had been with him for many years. I will hire Bajoran workers. I do not want her to know Vardon owned Milea. Not until I have won her back. I will give Terok Nor to Gul Dyhurst as a reward for his loyalty. I can see I need to keep you close, Yor. You will be my aide.”

I heard the chimes tinkle in the breeze. It sounded like a warning. “Helen won’t like me being your aide. She’s jealous. You know this.”

“You will do as I ask, cousin,” Dukat said. The smile faded. “The estate is no more than ten miles from here. You can easily come and go. Can I count on you, Yor? Will you help me win back Helen?”

Dukat reached for my hand. It was a bold move. I felt an electrical current exchange between us and caused him to straighten, aware of it, too. If he had any doubt our love was forbidden, dark shadows rose from behind the furniture, an eerie screech penetrated the stillness in the chamber. His fingers slid from mine, his eyes cast about as the dark retreated and the sun shined bright through the windows. Frightened by the intensity of the moment, I placed my hands in my lap, trying to calm my heartbeat, knowing the darkness watched.

“You must tell her the truth, Dukat. If you hope to win her forgiveness, do not brush this under the carpet. As for being your aide, I am honored. However, you should choose someone else. Perhaps Broc. I need to spend my time researching more about the Prophets. The game isn’t over. You asked me before to serve as the head of your counter-intelligence division. I will continue to do so with Garak’s help.”

“Helen is not to be involved in your research. I forbid it.”

“She’s involved in this too, Dukat. She has a right to know.”

“Cousin, if you desire to wed Damar, then you will keep the matter of Milea between us and not involve her in your research. I want your word of honor you will remain silent.”

A knock on the door was followed by shuffling feet, giggles and then it opened and Shazel ran toward her father, screaming in piercing voices of hers. She threw herself into his arms. As he kissed her, his eyes were on me, waiting for me to give my word of honor. I gave a nod, hoping it sufficed and turned to his child, pressing his forehead against hers.

“I have missed you child,” Dukat said. “From now on, we shall be together. I will consider bringing your older brother, Mikor, here when he graduates and assign him to Gul Damar. We will be a family once more.”

The little girl sniffed and wrapped her arms around his neck. I was shocked to hear Dukat’s eldest son was named Mikor. It was more than a little ironic. I had no doubt his late wife Mikelya had insisted on the name. Dukat surely thought about Legate Mikor every time he thought of his eldest son.

“Mother!”

Eben darted into the office. He wore a bright blue tunic, carrying a package in his arms, and boots seemed too large for his feet. He placed the package in a chair and ran toward me. I pulled the boy close, kissing his cheeks and tasted sugar.

“You’ve been stuffing your face with treats,” I said, tapping him on the nose. He crawled onto my lap and pointed at the gift. “Oh, is for me? You’re so sweet. I suppose Uncle Garak paid for that, unless you convinced Damar to give you coins.”

“Damar has taken Garak and Helen to a beautiful villa in the country. We spent all day shopping in Bajor City. I bought quite a few things, Mother. I hope you don’t mind. Damar paid for a few gifts for you and he says we’ll be staying here. You will teach me how to swim in the real ocean and Damar says I will have a new tutor.”

“Mother,” Shazel said, reaching for me. “Mother and Father.”

“Shazel, this is your cousin. Ren Yor. She is not my wife. Nor do I have any intention of marrying her.” Dukat received a slap across the face. He nearly threw Shazel across the room

and instead placed her on the couch beside me. "This type of behavior will not be tolerated. You will address Ren Yor as your cousin, young lady, and is final!"

The girl stuck out her tongue. I tapped the end of it and she sucked it into her mouth, laughing and threw her arms around me. Dukat stroked the girl's back, while I held both children in my arms and for a second in time, it felt like we were a real family. This was what might have been had the Prophets not interfered in our lives. It didn't last long. Dukat pulled the girl away from me and stood, holding her in his arms, the master of his own destiny.

"It's time we went to our new home, child," Dukat said. "There's no need to accompany us to the shuttle, cousin. A nod will not suffice for an answer to my last question. I want your word of honor, Yor. I want it to hear it. Now."

"You have it. Tell her the truth, soon. Do not put me in the middle."

"Funny," Dukat said. "That's where you've always been, my dear."

HELEN

Chapter Fifty-Eight

"I'm pleased to see you, Helen. You look quite lovely," Dukat said rising as I entered a spacious living room in his new estate called Milea. Everything about the mansion was grand and luxurious, and yet I arrived in my Bajoran cloak, carrying a modest basket held the twins "Please make yourself comfortable. Dinner will be served soon. I would like for you to join me this evening. You and Garak. It will be informal."

"As you wish, Dukat."

I placed the basket on a table and turned to admire the large window framed by pillars looked out a garden. Garak had passed me in the hall with a wink. I took it to mean Dukat was in a good mood and the meeting with him would go well. One look at his face and I felt my knees turn to rubber. I was grateful when he gestured to a nearby chair. I sat and placed the crib at my feet, watching the twins staring about the room, mesmerized by all the wonderful things collected by each gul who had commanded the fort.

"I'm surprised you Garak asked and I to join you here. We were treated with the utmost courtesy by Kia Lucan. The children are quite safe. Major Kira and Gil Korvinus saw to that. I didn't have time to thank them. I hope I'll see them again."

"Perhaps," he replied. "Be glad Glinn Yor had the presence of mind to send you and the children away from Fort Varnok. Nothing remains. The expensive of rebuilding the network of forts destroyed by Agent Torell is too costly. Instead, we will rely on the Cardassian fleet to keep Bajoran protected and I will remain here to assist Kia Lucan. As legate, I'm more of a politician than a military capacity. I think we can be happy here, Helen."

I felt my throat grow dry. A myriad of emotions filled my head, befuddling my thoughts and without realizing I'd done so, I found Dukat kneeling beside the crib. Shazel

sat in front of a marble fireplace, placing seashells on the tiled floor in a row. She didn't greet me. She didn't scream either. I leaned over to reach for Madison, as Dukat placed his hand over Gabriel, and fingers momentarily touched and I felt a shiver of excitement. Madison grasped hold of my finger with her tiny fingers and suckled on the tip, as Dukat removed our son and held him.

"They are hungry," Dukat said. He glanced at Shazel, then back at me. "Would like me to show you to your room? Milea is far more comfortable than a fort. Damar and Yor will remain at Galdrak. You may visit them any time you desire. Here you may enjoy the life of a lady of leisure and have everything you and the twins could ever want or need. Here you are free to spread your wings and share in my own prosperity."

I heard his ambition and it had always rankled my nerves. He cared more about his position on the Counsel than he did about me and the children. He needed a hostess and that's all I was to him. We couldn't very well argue in front of his daughter, so I said the first thing came to mind.

"Separating Eben and Shazel may cause a problem."

"I don't like Eben anymore," said the girl. "Eben pulled my hair and called me names. He said I can't have his mother. She belongs to him. You're not my mother! No one can tell me to call you mother. I won't do it." She threw a seashell out the window. "I don't want to be here. I want to go home."

"Shazel!" Dukat's voice was a rumble. He placed Gabriel in the crib and stood, glaring at his daughter as she chucked out another seashell. "You will cease this childish demonstration and apologize to Helen this minute."

"No," the girl shouted. "I hate her. I hate both of you!"

A shadow entered the room belonging to Garak who approached the precocious girl with uncommonly fast steps, caught hold of her arm while she screamed. He leaned over, speaking to her quietly to her and she grew silent. Another whisper into her ear and he persuaded her to leave with him. As they walked past us, Shazel glared at me. I wondered what I'd done to make her hate me so. We'd taken a tour with Damar of Bajor City, shopped all day and she'd held my hand. The moment we arrived at the palatial estate, she

ran from the shuttle and disappeared inside the house.

“My daughter has been through an ordeal,” Dukat said, leaving it at that.

“Garak tells me we are free to come and go from Milea. I think I will enjoy this newfound freedom. I’d like to say here, Dukat. I want you to be able to spend time with your children. It’s what I always wanted.”

Dukat took hold of the handle of the crib, lifting it and extended his hand to me. I avoided his gaze, fearing he could read my thoughts, such was the power of the great Legate Dukat who had returned in triumph in the war against Murat and the traitors in the Circle. In the old days, I imagined pleasure slaves would have thrown themselves at his feet when he returned, triumphant as a Roman general after defeating a horde of barbarians. He had no such perverse look of superiority in his eyes, which held mine, tender, and kind. We walked through a corridor, the furnishings, and decorations reminding me of a Tuscan villa in Italy. I glanced out of the corner of my eyes, smiling at the sight of Dukat carrying the basket. It was the first time he’d held the twins or shown them any kindness.

“I’m glad you are here, Helen. Truthfully, I hadn’t planned on remaining at Bajor. It seems a quiet life in the country is precisely what you and the children need, and I am weary of war,” Dukat said. “I hope you like your room. I have not had time to change the former owner’s furnishings. You may do so at your leisure, of course. There’s even a whole collection of loud music you enjoy on your personal computer, and a kitchen fully stocked, so you need not rely on a replicator. I know how you like to cook. I hope you will treat my home as your own. You will want for nothing. You have to ask and I will provide anything you want for you and the children.”

“You’ve thought of everything,” I said, as he opened the door. I stepped into a beautiful room, the colors gold, purple and green, my favorite colors. I took the basket from his arms and blocked his entry. “These quarters are my own. As I have not invited you in. I am here as your guest, nothing more.”

“I thought we might talk about what happened on Terok Nor. I owe you an apology and an explanation. I can hardly do so standing in the hallway.”

"Perhaps later," I said. "I need to feed the children and would prefer dining alone in my room tonight. I'm very tired, Dukat. If I need anything, I'll be sure to let you know." I noticed the pained look on his face. "Don't think I don't appreciate your generosity. You are normally quite generous...when you want something."

"This is a peace offering, Helen. I thought you would be pleased to have a home in the country. I only want what is in your and our children's best interest. I had also hoped you might take greater pleasure in seeing me alive and well."

"I am. Certainly. Vardon has been dead less than a week. Maybe you didn't grieve for your dead wives. I mourn the loss of a Cardassian who truly loved me. To you, I've always been a slave. I think you'll find I've changed. You have my thanks. I'm sure it will suffice for now. Goodnight."

I surprised him by shutting the door in his face. When it was shut, I leaned against the door, wanting to be able to walk through it and throw my arms around him. I wondered if Dukat was on the other side, waiting for it to open, like me, hoping one of us would say the right thing so we could put the past behind us and move forward. I was fresh out of ideas and knowing Dukat as well as I did, I knew he had something up his sleeve. He'd been almost too polite. meant he was hiding something. I knew Sawyer knew his plans. When she visited Milea, I knew she'd divulge them to me. It would have to wait until morning.

Carrying the basket to a large bed, I wondered if Dukat had assigned a nanny to assist me with the children. I heard a knock, assumed was precisely who had arrived, and found Garak peeking his head inside my room. He gasped at the opulence of the room. There were gold chairs, a marble statue of a huntress with a doe at her feet, and an open closet filled with clothes for a lady of wealth.

"My own room is quite nice. I'm in the east tower," Garak said. "I do hope you'll consider staying here a while, Helen. I could get used to living the life of a rich, country gent. We are to join Dukat for dinner this evening. I'm dying to see what's in your wardrobe."

"Fine. Then you wear a dress. I'm staying here."

"I've ordered us a pot of red leaf tea. Your new nanny will bring it to us. A country girl named Oona. She's quite simple and nice." Garak sat in a chair in a space arranged for a setting room near a fireplace. "This is a lovely room. I'm envious of your drapes."

"Don't get too comfortable. I don't plan on staying here long. All he has done is offered charity. It's another way to control me and I won't be controlled by any man."

"Dukat has brought you here because he cares for you, Helen. I'm sure do whatever he can to make amends for his past regressions. As my niece, you will find things will be quite different from what you are used to. You will lack for nothing and enjoy the lifestyle of a rich Cardassian lady. I will as well."

"Yes, I always thought you were secretly a woman," I snapped. "It's all so easy for the two of you, isn't it? I have been hurt and tossed aside, treated like property and now I'm expected to forgive all and accept my new role as his...his hostess."

Garak sighed. "We could have died in shuttle crash, Helen. Yet, we somehow survived against all odds. Dukat defeated Mukot. Yor killed Torell. It is more than luck when event unfold in our favor on such a grand scale," he said. "Apparently the gods gave us a victory. Don't you think it's time we started to enjoy life, Helen? I see no reason to be hasty and dismiss what has landed in our laps, simply because you had an argument with Dukat. No, no. I don't need to hear the particulars all over again. Vardon is dead. There is no one else who offered to take us in and we need a home. I think we should stay for a while."

"We haven't sorted anything out. This is presumptuous on his part."

"For the sake of the children, reconsider."

"Just whose side are you on, Uncle Garak? If we're truly going to have a new start here, then I don't want my girlfriend anywhere near Dukat. They have a history together and it makes me uncomfortable. For whatever reason, they are drawn together. They can't seem to help it and I'm sick and tired of coming in last place.""

"You're ungrateful. Yor has done everything for you and Dukat. I'm beginning to think you have a jealous streak is permanently inked to your body, Helen. You should learn to be thankful for what you friends do for you and includes me. I deserve a vacation

and I'd like to stay here. I did put my neck out for you. Do something for me for once."

I threw my hands up in the air and stormed across the room. I turned this way and that, feeling trapped. Fight or flight. It was true, I was angry. Dukat couldn't leave Sawyer alone and she was enraptured by him, even though she had Damar who loved her and he intended to marry her. That's what he'd told me while we shopped in the open-air market. I'd helped him select a ring, telling him this was an Earth custom. If Sawyer was only going to keep chasing after Dukat, then I did not want her at Milea. If she was ungrateful, then that's what I was, I wasn't going to share Dukat with anyone.

"I have no doubt Sawyer jumped at the offer," I said. "She's the darling of the Second Order and can have whatever she wants. I know she wants her cake and eat it to. She has Damar and she wants Dukat, and if she's here, they'll be together all the time. If you want us to stay here, Garak, then make sure Yor is assigned to Damar and not Dukat."

"If you're through being unpleasant, Helen, then I can already tell you Yor has not agreed to be Dukat's aide. You have no faith in your friend," Garak said, firmly. "Clearly, Yor has more sense than you do. Honestly, Helen, I find your temper tantrum similar to Shazel's and I'm not at all pleased. Oona is taking care of the girl. You have all the help you need here."

"I do appreciate."

"Yet, you don't take into account Yor could have died last night or she killed Torell and his assassins. I'm beginning to think I don't know you at all. This isn't like you, Helen. You've never been this, well, selfish comes to mind."

did it. Garak pushed my buttons and I was livid.

"Then I'm selfish. You get it sorted out or I'll make Dukat's life a living hell and force him to get rid of us. I mean it, Garak." I went over to the replicator and ordered myself a tall class of spring wine. "I'm not waiting for Oona and red leaf tea won't cut it."

"I'll do as you ask," he said. "I consider this an agreement. Yor will be Damar's aide and you will agree to stay here with me. We are family, after all." Garak stood and walked to the door. He was not happy with me. I felt guilty for having upset him and hurried toward him, catching his arm. "What is it now, ungrateful girl?"

“Don’t be angry, Garak. I just need time to process the loss of Vardon and how my life is changing again so rapidly. I’m tired of being passed around from man to man. I want a home and my family. doesn’t mean I’m ready for Dukat to assume the role of father or as my mate. I don’t care if he is a legate, until I’m ready to forgive, he’ll just have to wait.”

“Then you do want him back.” Garak hugged me. “I have a new mission. I will do my best to steer Dukat in the right direction. I will tell him the way to your heart is to woo the girl. Yes, he can do quite well.”

“Dukat can start with a heartfelt apology,” I said, taking a sip of wine. “Don’t go yet. I’ll be nice, both to you and Oona, when she arrives. Do you know anything else about Oona? Was she a slave here? I don’t see many Bajorans. This is a vineyard. Where are all the workers?”

“Most likely they fled when the prior owner died. Any estate owned by a Cardassian who dies is automatically turned over to the Prefect of Bajor. Since Bajor is not a colony, any former slaves would have been released by Dukat and returned to their homes. I’m sure he’ll hire new workers and pay them. This estate will soon be bustling with activity.”

“I admit I find this place beautiful. The twins would be safe and it’s only ten miles to the ocean. Provided Dukat does woo me, and he’s sincere, then I might even find happiness here.”

Madison started to cry. I walked to the bed to hold her, Garak shushed me and picked up the child. He sat on the bed and looked at Gabriel, smiling when the babe snarled.

“Very Cardassian,” Garak said. “Gabe will make a fine officer one day. Why don’t you go for a walk? I’ll change our little angels, feed them gu’slov, and then put them to bed. If Oona arrives soon, I’ll have her help me. I’d like nothing better than to be of service to you, Helen. I have always appreciated you. You’ve been a true friend to me.”

“And you to me, Garak. Thank you.” I walked into the closet, wanting a cloak to wear for it was chilly in the evening. “What else can you tell me about this place?”

“Milea has an estate of approximately two hundred hectares. This is the Luan

Province, known for fine wines and farming industry. It's also of strategic importance, for it's at the southern tip of the continent and faces the Caspian Sea. I suppose one day Dukat will leave the estate to his eldest son Mikor. I'm surprised you didn't know his son had the same name of the late legate."

I found a dark green cloak with a hood and a pair of boots. I removed my slippers, put on the boots, and placed the cloak around my shoulders, entering the room. Knowing I'd killed Legate Mikor made me feel even more guilty Dukat's son whom I'd never met had the same name. As I glanced in the mirror at my appearance, I saw a shadow pass behind me and shivered, thinking of the shack and the demonic faces I'd seen. If I was staying on Bajor, I needed to learn more about their gods, both evil and good. I'd killed Legate Mikor. I didn't want to kill Dukat and I needed to find out more about what was going on with the Bajoran gods. When I walked out of the closet and turned, Garak smiled wide.

"Very lovely," he said.

"Why didn't I ever put together the fact his son's name is Mikor? I hope it doesn't mean Legate Mikor was the young man's father and not Dukat."

"I believe the boy was named in honor of the late legate. You should ask Dukat. In fact, try to be a little nicer to him. If you are to live here, it would be better if we had a little peace. Talk to him. Learn about his past, his family, and show an interest in who he is, not what he can do for you, or how good he is in bed."

"You're absolutely wretched. That's not the only reason I care for him."

"Then why don't you prove it, my dear. Because from where I'm sitting, I'm holding the living proof of your lust. It is love keeps a couple together, my dear. Go out and find it."

* * *

SAWYER

"As Legate Dukat's aid, you would be required to schedule his meetings with Bajor

diplomats, Cardassian officers and be present at all meetings,” Damar said, as he pulled me into his arms. “Are you sure you don’t want to take the assignment?”

We lay on his bed, naked, the stars twinkling beyond the windows, able to hear the crash of the waves on the shoreline one hundred feet below. He kissed my belly button. There was no reason for the hologram. I lay before him in all my human glory. I’d noticed he preferred my stomach without ridges and continued to plant kisses there, making it feel like I had butterflies in my stomach.

“I am sure. I want to stay here with you.”

“pleases me for I’d rather have you be my aide. Dorric is dead. The position is open,” he said. “This fort has stood for more than one hundred years. It has never been taken in battle. It is a good place for us to have a life together. My professional ambition to be legate can wait. I want to stay here with you and Eben. I hope you want the same thing.”

“If you keep kissing me like that, all do whatever you want,” I said, sliding a lock of his hair behind his ear. “Pick someone else you trust to be your aide. I suggest Korvinus.”

“Very well. I can tell you have something else in mind for yourself.”

“This ion storm has peaked my interest in Bajoran religion and their beliefs. It’s somehow tied to why Helen are here. I already told Dukat I intend to spend a lot of my time researching the local prophecies. The Prophets have intervened far too many times in our lives. It’s time I found out what they wanted.”

“You should leave well enough alone,” Damar said.

“Why?” I asked, sliding my hand across his back. I felt him shiver and I snuggled against him, nibbling at his ear.

“What you suggest would require hours of research, meeting with priests, and a few may blame you for the death of Evonya. You’d also be visiting temples and tombs to read ancient scriptures. There is no easy answer for what you seek. I know the Bajorans and they are difficult. They will not want to tell you their secrets.”

“You make it sound so mysterious. I can’t refuse this challenge. Or you.”

His large hand caught hold of my shoulder, his erection growing against my stomach. I slid on top of him and brushed my breasts over his muscular chest, rubbing

them over his ridges for I knew how he loved the friction and the feel of my softness against his scales. He groaned as he pushed me back so he could lean down and seized hold of a nipple with his lips. My hand slid in his thick black hair, ruffling it, holding him as he suckled, then moved to the other breast, lavishing kisses upon it and biting softly at the taut nipple. He slid on down, kneeling in front of me, kissing my stomach, then he was parting the folds of my nether lips, lavishing me with hot strokes of his tongue.

I swayed above him, grinding my hips against his face as he continued to ravage me with his tongue. I watched him as he gazed at me. I stroked his cheek. I nodded at him and indicated I wanted him to lay back on the cold, hard floor. I remembered when he'd made love to me in the maintenance room at Fort Varnok. I also found this a strange location for our interlude quite exciting. He grimaced as his buttocks touched the floor. He laid back, eager as I was for me to join with him. I sank down, straddling his body and taking his cock in my hands as I impaled myself on it, sinking down so the full length slid within, then placing my hands on his chest, I was lifted up as he started to buck beneath me. I rode him hard, wanting it rough, enjoying myself like a glutton as I watched him with his eyes closed, his teeth gritted, while I bounced on top of him, being as vocal I wanted as I felt an orgasm hit me.

As I leaned down over his chest, he opened his eyes and surprised me by jerking me down against him and rolling over on top of me. My hands gripped his shoulders. He slid away from me, sinking down so he was positioned again between my legs, his face dipping down so he could breathe in my scent and lap up the slickness there. I groaned as I pulled at his hair, wanting him on top of me and inside of me, withering under the strokes of his tongue. His chuckle made me smile and he moved over me, sliding his cock back inside of me, positioning himself with his hands planted to the floor, his arms holding him up while his flanks bucked against me. I wrapped my legs around his waist and clung to his shoulders. Each thrust was forceful and deep, the way I liked it, the way Damar knew I needed it, until he was groaning under the strain and effort, perspiration glistening on his tiny scales, his odor filling my nostrils, driving me wild.

He came with a shudder, his outcry louder than my own and he collapsed on top of

me, letting his full weight crush me against the floor. We lay like this for a few minutes, then his lips found mine, his kisses stealing my breath away. I moaned when he eased out of me, wishing we could remain connected a while longer. He slid to the side, keeping our bodies pressed together, for I needed his warmth as much as he needed mine on the cold floor. His eyes lock with mine and I sighed as he stroked my cheek with the back of his knuckles.

“I love you,” Damar said.

“I love you, too.”

“In the morning, I will be leaving. I must visit every fort and attempt to salvage materials and see to funeral arrangements. As you requested, I have asked Glinn Lonak to remain here as Eben’s tutor. He was honored to be asked and grateful to remain here. You will see Dukat tomorrow and give him an answer.”

“I’m sure he’ll enjoying hearing no.”

We both laughed and snuggled together. Listening to the wave crash on the rocks, in our castle by the sea, I soon fell asleep, held tight in my lover’s arms.

HELEN

Chapter Fifty-Nine

My evening walk took me to the edge of a vineyard. Finding a small village on a hill, I assumed this was where the Bajoran slaves had lived and would soon house Dukat's new employees. As I turned, the light from the moons appeared from behind a cloud and shined upon the mansion. It, reminding me of an Italian villa, with three smaller villas shared an elegant courtyard with a large fountain. Four slender towers were placed in each direction. I had been given the west tower faced the garden.

The light in the tower was on. Oona was with the twins. As I head toward the villa, I heard something moving in the bushes and heard a snarl. I lifted my skirts and fled through the vineyard, stumbled on a rock, twisting my ankle. With a cry, I landed on my side, able to see glowing red eyes. I was too frightened to scream for help, fearing the creature would attack and attempted to rise to my feet.

"Hold still," Dukat shouted.

A laser blast struck the beast, evaporating it on the spot. Dukat stood over me, wearing a robe open to reveal his hairless chest, his boots covered in mud. He handed me the pistol and bent to scoop me into his arms. In relief, I threw my arms around his neck, crying against his neck and heard him chuckle.

"How did you know where to find me? What was thing?"

"Don't leave the house again without an escort," Dukat said. He carried me across the courtyard toward the main house. "I spotted you walking in the vineyard. You didn't even bother to take a weapon. This place is known for its wild dogs. They're called vethrals. Never leave the children unattended. They run in packs and they kill indiscriminately."

"Like coyotes or wolves?" I asked.

"Similar in size to coyotes. In temperament, they are like rabid wolves."

Dukat carried me onto the porch and a light came on inside. He placed me on a cushioned chair and knelt to examine my ankle. I winched when he touched my ankle, not from pain, from the thrill of his hands on my body.

“Does it hurt? I believe it is only a sprain. Oona can wrap it for you and put ice on it. You know, it could have been much worse.”

“Leave it to you to bring me to a dangerous place,” I said, catching my breath when his eyes lifted and held my gaze. He took hold of my hand. I didn’t pull away and exhaled when he lifted it to his lips for a kiss. “Don’t do that. My hands are dirty.”

“No, they’re not. No one as beautiful as you needs to worry about a little dirt. The moonlight becomes you, Helen. Do you know their names? Endalla, Derna, Penraddo, Jeraddo, and the Prodigal.”

“Don’t do either. Don’t try to charm me.”

“What do I say to you then?” he asked, pressing my hand against his bare chest. His heart pounded beneath my palm. “Let me apology once more. I regret what happened in the garden at Fort Varnok. Had Venna not placed the implant in my neck night, I never would have done anything to hurt you. I regret what happened, then and later on Terok Nor. My behavior was callous and cruel. I’ve not been spared those memories. I remembered later what happened. I ask for your forgiveness, Helen. Do you forgive me?”

Dukat's eyes traveled to his lips. I knew he wanted to kiss me.

“Not yet. Please, Dukat. Don’t kiss me in the moonlight.”

“Then where should I kiss you, Helen? I want to kiss every inch of your body. Every place I bruised and those places I miss the most, I am eager to touch and give you more pleasant things to think about.”

Chuckling, he released my hands and took hold of my injured leg. He bent low as he lifted my ankle and brushed his lips across my injury. I grabbed hold of the armrests, keeping my body from melting onto the porch. I felt spared from doing something disastrous and giving in to him when he carefully released my leg and turned to sit on the porch. He leaned against the edge of the chair, placing my muddy

shoes on his lap, removed them, and started to rub my feet.

“I should be getting back inside. I need to check on the children,” I said, feeling light headed and close to swooning.

“Oona is with the twins. I’ll carry you inside in a minute, Helen. Let us enjoy this moment. I’d not realized Milea was this lovely. I’m glad we came here. Tomorrow, I’ll show you another path, through the garden and we can have a picnic with the children. Any work I need do can be done in my office here. In fact, I intend to stay here a few days to relax. I want you to be happy here, Helen, with me.”

I bit my bottom lip. His hands were warm and his touch gave me goose bumps. It was far too easy to forgive him and I needed to remember I hated him for what he’d done. Unsure of what I wanted to say, knowing only I didn’t want the massage to end, I sighed and stared at the vineyard where only moments ago a vethral had tried to eat me.

“I haven’t had opportunity to show you another side of my personality. I am a family man, Helen. Family means more to me than anything else. I’d hoped to ask my son, Mikor, to join us here. My son will be graduating from the academy soon. If Yor turns down the offer to be my aide, then I’d like my son to have position when he’s able to come here.”

“Of course you may do what you like. This is your home. Not mine.”

Dukat turned toward me. I didn’t know where he’d obtained a single white rose. He placed it on my lap.

“I should have given you flowers long ago. I intend to give you far more, if you will allow it. I can only say I am sorry for the past, Helen. From now on, you will see another side of me. I will never hurt you like again. I intend to make you fall in and out of love with me every day for the rest of your life.”

“Just slow down a little. Okay? I need time to think. Time to heal.”

“Of course,” Dukat said. His hands stilled on my feet, keeping them on his lap where I felt the heat of his body warming my toes. “I would not have insisted on bringing you here if I didn’t think it was the safest place for us to raise a family

together.”

“That’s not taking it slow, Dukat. I mean, what am I do you? What am I to be? Your mistress? A hostess? What do you expect from me?”

“As I said, I want you to be happy here with me.”

Before I had a chance to respond, he stood and gathered me into his arms. He carried me into the house. The lights were too bright and his eyes too blue. I hid my face against his neck, wondering if he carried me to the north tower or to my own, keeping my eyes closed as I slid my fingers along the base of his neck. I felt the scar where Sawyer had removed the implant and he responded by holding me tighter. He ascended the stairs, carrying me as if I weighed nothing at all and walked along a meandering corridor brought us to the west tower . As he climbed another staircase, I actually felt disappointed he hadn’t taken me to his room and demanded I forgive him and made love to me. I wasn’t used to this side of his personality, as he’d called it, his gentleness, respect, or his kindness.

“We’re here,” he whispered.

The door was opened by a beautiful young woman, with long brown hair, wearing a scarlet robe. This had to be Oona. I hadn’t expected her to be so stunning. Garak had called her a simple country girl. I found her to be a complication, for she bowed before Dukat, acting shy. I didn’t buy it, for she lifted her head as he carried me to my bed and I noted how she stared at him. I was far too jealous of the girl, of any girl, I knew this and tried not to look at her as Dukat removed my cloak, fearing it was revealed in my green eyes.

“I’m sure Oona can help me undress,” I said, rather playfully.

“Pity,” he replied. I had no chance to protest when he leaned over and kissed my forehead. He turned toward the woman. “Oona, this is Helen Garak. She is my guest and you will do whatever she asks. She has sprained her ankle. It will require wrapping and ice to lessen the swelling. Do this before you retire. If you need me, I will be in the north tower.” He glanced at me. “Anything at all, my dear, please ask.”

Dukat walked over to the golden crib where the babies had been placed, set on a trunk at the end of my bed. He leaned over to kiss both of our children, smiled at me again,

and walked over the room, not paying Oona any attention. seemed promising. The young woman approached the bed and curtsied.

“I worked here for the prior master,” she said. “Prefect Dukat has asked me to tend to you and the children. It is late, mistress. Let’s get you undressed and then I will tend to your ankle. You shouldn’t walk alone at night in the vineyard. Vethrals are known to attack at night. Be glad you were not bitten. Their bite is poisonous.”

“I hope yours isn’t,” I said giving her a stern look.

Oona laughed. It was a warm, rich sound. I hoped she didn’t laugh often around Dukat, for it made her far too beautiful. Her special power, I realized, was her laughter. I felt grateful when she helped me into bed, placed an ice pack on my ankle. No one seemed to have a med-kit so ice it was, I thought, watching her bow. She retired to her own room across the hall, while I lay awake, thinking about vethrals.

* * *

SAWYER

The next day I had breakfast on a terrace with Damar and Eben. A shuttle waited to take Damar on a tour of the destroyed forts. Damar was dressed in his armor. I thought it best since enemy troops might still be at Fort Varnok. I’d nearly changed my mind and offered to accompany him. He kissed me and then Eben, leaving us at the table to join Korvinus, Zolon, and Jenrak who waited at the shuttle.

“Who is to be Father’s new aide?” Eben asked sipping on juice.

“Korvinus. He should be rewarded for saving Helen’s life. I’ll be visiting her today. Garresh Broc will accompany me. I think Broc will make a fine aide for Dukat.”

I buttered a roll and tore off a piece to stuff into my mouth. Sea gulls flew over the fort, unimpressed by the soldiers marching across the courtyard or standing at their posts along the battlements.

“Eat the rest of your eggs, dear. Don’t let them go to waste.”

“You do not want to be an aide for either Dukat or Damar. Why not? It is a great honor, Mother.”

“It’s the post for a secretary. I don’t want to fetch and carry. Besides, I’m eager to

explore this province with the War Dogs. There are quite a few Bajoran temples here I'd like to get a look at. Maybe I'll meet a few priests and attend one of the religious ceremonies. Glinn Lonak's father was a professor at the university on Bajor. I think Lonak will make a fine tutor for you, Eben. Do you prefer to stay with him today or would you like to come with me to see Helen, Shazel and the twins? And Uncle Garak, of course."

"I don't care to see ugly girl."

"Shazel?" I laughed. "What's wrong, darling? Would you rather I stay here with you today? We can collect seashells and test the water. I don't know if it's warm or not. I see quite a few fishing boats on the water."

Eben pushed his plate aside and stood. He left his wristband on the seat. His hologram appeared in his place, smiling at me. He hurried over to kiss me on the cheek.

"I'd prefer to study with Glinn Lonak today. I like the old man. I think he will make a fine tutor," he said. "I'll see you and Damar tonight. Please give Helen my love."

"You're a strange and wonderful boy."

"Tell Shazel you are my mother, not hers."

The boy snatched the roll off my plate and ran down the stairs, shouting for Lonak, and causing the soldiers marching past to lose their step. I laughed and gazed at his hologram. It was far too disturbing to look at an image and I rose, snatching the wristband and turning it off, and then remembered I'd not turned on my own and had eaten breakfast with my two men as a human, not as a Cardassian.

Dressing in civilian attire, I chose a long blue tunic and tan slacks, along with a soft pair of brown boots. My hair had started to grow, curling at the ends, an inch from my shoulders. It had to be the fish juice made my hair grow faster than it had on Earth. I stared at my human face in the mirror and turned on my wristband. The Cardassian face reappeared and I grabbed my pistol, placing it in a pocket in my pants, and then slid a dagger into the sheath on the inside of my boot. It was all the weapons I need for a short journey to Milea.

I found Garresh Broc waiting beside a small, armored land rover. Two guards from the Second Order sat inside, one behind the wheel, one as a guard. Broc opened the door

for me and I climbed into the back seat and he joined me. As we headed toward the front gate, I noticed Glinn Kendor, an attractive older officer from the Fourth Order who had fought with me at the Valley of Shadows. Damar had selected him to be on his staff. Kendor has seniority over me and was second in command of the fort. I came in third didn't mind and waved as we drove out the gate, excited to see the countryside and enjoy the drive to Dukat's estate.

We went past several Bajorans herding sheep into the hills and a wagon pulled by oxen filled with barrels of wine. The town of Lithgo was six miles to the northeast of the fort. We headed to northwest, into the hills, following a paved road and several large vineyards. Trees bordered one side of the road and whenever the hills dripped, I could still see the Caspian Sea, until we turned, heading deeper into the interior.

"Thank you for asking me to accompany you, Glinn Yor," Broc said. "My father said I should aspire to be brave and heroic as you. You're quite famous on Cardassia Prime.

Everyone knows who you are. My father is a legate. I don't know if you were aware of this or not. Dukat's son, Mikor, is a friend of mine. Mikor is quite popular at the academy. He is as confident as his father and at the head of his class. I graduated last summer. I served briefly as an aide for my father. He thought it best I seek service elsewhere."

"It's because of your training I think you'd be ideal as Prefect Dukat's aide," I replied. "When we're on Bajor, call Dukat Prefect. In space, we call him Legate. I'm sure you know this. Your father states you are intelligent, enthusiastic, and eager to learn. All fine qualities in a young soldier."

"Thank you for the opportunity," he said.

As we drove past a line of thatched roof houses along the road, I noticed barefoot children playing in a stream, a corral of horses and sheep grazing in a meadow. A loud thud slammed into the windshield and the vehicle came to a screeching halt. The guard stood, aiming his rifle toward a house where I noticed a boy hiding behind a wagon. The mother and father sat on the porch, with a small child and a dog at their feet.

"Sit down, Skold. Lower your rifle." I leaned forward and tapped the driver on the

shoulder. "Drive on. It's just a boy."

When the guard remained standing, I stood, put my hand on his shoulder, and shoved him into his seat. I glanced at the parents who had opened the door of their house to enter. The boy who had thrown the dirt clod ran for the door. He glanced at me, thumbing his nose, I waved.

"Move on." I plopped into my seat as the vehicle moved forward. "I want these people to think we're friendly, not tyrants. Unless someone takes a shot at us, don't do again, Skold."

"You are far too trusting, Glinn Yor."

"No, I'm not. I'm aware there could be rebels in these hills. I don't know how Gul Gulch ran things around here. We're going to change their attitude toward us. I want the Bajorans to think we're here to protect them, not shoot innocent children."

Broc smiled at me. He reminded me a little of Gil Toran, so eager to please, so anxious to be of service. I noticed a box at his feet tied with a bow. I'd not realized Damar had purchased something for Dukat. I turned over a card tied with a string to the ribbon. It was addressed to Helen.

"Is this from Damar?" I asked.

"Yes," Broc said. "The gul thought a house warming gift from you both would be appreciated. I believe he mentioned it was a hairbrush and combs for her hair. He said Mistress Helen has the most beautiful red hair he's ever seen."

"Did he?"

"Oh, you need not feel jealous, Glinn Yor. I happen to know the gul purchased quite a few things for you as well. They're in my room." Broc blushed. "I wasn't supposed to mention that. Please don't tell Gul Damar I said anything about it. I'm sure he wants to surprise you and I'm always talking out of turn. My mouth got me into trouble quite often at the academy. It's why my father had me work for him after I graduated. You learn not to talk when you're at the Council Hall."

"Then practice skill now."

Skold laughed. I laughed as well and kept a smile on my face for the rest of the

drive. As we approached Milea, I stared at hectares of land, covered with grape vines and on a hill spotted the villa. It was here Vardon had lived with his mistress. I wondered what had become of the woman and if Dukat had yet told Helen the truth. I doubted Dukat had even broached the subject. The driveway was a mile long, curving like a snake through tall trees with white bark and yellow leaves, reminding me of birch trees on Earth, though I was sure on Bajor they had another name.

I needed to familiarize myself with the flora and fauna on the planet, as well as the culture. Lonak had been on Bajor for decades and I had a feeling I should sit in on a few of his classes with Eben. I had much to learn.

Komash drove us to Milea. I needed to keep at least one War Dog with me and he'd volunteered for the job. He drove around a circular drive with a fountain had a maiden holding a pitcher that poured water into the pool. There were several smaller houses adjoined to the villa by the lush gardens. A gate opposite from the villa led to the vineyard and far in the distance a tiny village was built at the base of a hill.

With Broc at my side, I left Komash and Skold in the shade on the porch and knocked on the door. It was painted a bright shade of blue. At my rap, it opened, left unlocked, though no one greeted us. I glanced at Broc. Instead of entering without an invitation, I turned, noting a number of Bajoran workers worked in the vineyard. There were no Cardassian guards posted. Dukat was taking a risk. Broc read my mind and made a note on his com-padd.

"You are far worse than Hegra," I heard Dukat saying. "Hegra was a nanny I had as a child. She is what you would call a gorgon. She always meddled in my affairs. Don't presume you can do the same, Garak, or I'll toss you out with the garbage."

I gave a push on the door, opening it wider.

"Good morning," I said trying not to laugh.

Dukat spun at the sound on my voice, opened the door wider and glared at me and then at Broc. The young soldier flinched and lowered his eyes.

"Why are you out of uniform, Yor? And who is trembling child trying to hide behind you? Is Garresh Broc? Why did you bring him here?"

“To be your aide, of course. Should I had have him bring his luggage?” This time I laughed. Broc turned and ran over to Komash and Skold. “What he lacks for in backbone he makes up for with good credentials. Domestic troubles, cousin?”

“This really is too much. First Garak lectures me about the danger of the wild life and now you arrive with my new butler,” snarled Dukat. He walked outside, slammed the door shut, and joined me on the porch. In a loose white shirt, pants tucked into boots, he reminded me of a plantation owner. All he needed was a wide brimmed hat. “Come with me, Yor. The rest of you remain seated. Guard the door. I don’t want Garak following us.”

Komash remained seated, laughing. Broc and Skold stood at the door. They drew their weapons. I doubted Garak would be able to set one toe outside the door.

“It’s a lovely morning,” I said falling into step beside Dukat. “Must you bellow? This isn’t a battle cruiser or a garrison. You’ll scare your new workers.”

“Don’t tell me what to do,” he growled. “I want to take a look at the vineyard and see what damage occurred last night after your frivolous female friend decided to trample through the plants trying to escape the teeth of a vethral. You do know what is?”

“I can’t even repeat what you just said.”

“A vethral is a distant relative of a wolf,” he said. “I hired hunters to set traps to clear out the pack. Maybe it’s a job for you. Now, tell me why you bring me an untried soldier to serve as my aide? I said I wanted you. Must I be challenged at every turn?”

Dukat climbed over the fence, not bothering to go through the gate. I swung my leg over the fence. He seemed pleased I did the same. Apparently the gate was meant to remain closed. I easily matched his long strikes. As we put distance between us and the villa, he looked visibly more relaxed.

“Broc’s father is quite popular on the Counsel. With his support, I’m sure a vote could be put to sending me more aid to rebuild the forts in exchange for spring wine and harvested crops,” I said.

“Good thinking, Yor.”

“People do need grain to make bread.”

“Kindly remove smirk from your face. It’s just as well you are not my aide. Helen is

against the idea. She seems to think we continue to rut like animals in the field." Dukat smiled a devil's smile. "Not an entirely intolerable idea."

"Careful, old man."

"Is what I am? Old? Perhaps I'm losing my charm. Helen twisted her ankle. I carried her to her room and...."

"Dukat, I don't need the details."

I slid my hand across the top of the grapes, wrapped around stakes and pulled off a single grape. He had a sly look in his eyes, so I dropped it instead of eating it, assuming it had been bitter.

"She really objected to me being your aide?" I asked.

"For some reason she seems as angry with you as she is with me. I asked her to join me for a picnic this afternoon. She's accepted. With you here, I'm sure she'll change her mind. I suspect she blames you for sending her into a storm. I should be mad as well, only I realize in doing so you saved their lives. Wooing her is going to be more difficult than I thought."

"Marry her."

Dukat opened his mouth. "You know I can't." He paused. "Do you actually think would improve the situation when my other children arrive?"

"Now I am intrigued. How many brats are there?" I asked, kicking the white stones arranged neatly between the lines of vines. We stood in the middle of the field. Workers continued snipping, tidying the plants which looked ready to be harvest.

"I have twelve children to be exact. A few are half Bajoran. The rest are Cardassian. The couple I hired to look after the children on Cardassian no longer care to do so. They are being sent here. As soon as the Bajoran mothers' learned I was here, they decided to bring my children to Milea. Had you cared to be my aide, I would have you handle the arrangements. Now I see I must utilize Broc."

"Keep breeding, cousin, and you'll soon have a full platoon."

"I did not bring you out here to be the center of your amusement, Yor. Garak is aware of the situation. I had hoped you would be the one to break it to Helen. Seeing she's

pleased with neither of us, I don't dare invite you into the house to talk to her."

We meandered through the vines and reached a small village. Families were moving in. It was quaint. It reminded me of Italy, how it could not, and a vacation I'd taken, touring through the Tuscan countryside. I breathed in deeply, enjoying the scent in the air and sat on a bench beneath a tree. Dukat joined me and stretched out his legs, his hands pressed against the bench, shoulders slumped. I gave him a nudge, felt a crackle of electricity between us, and leaned far away from him.

"I want advice on how to handle the situation," he said.

"Continue to apologize until she forgives you. Explain you want her to look after your children. Give her a bel-rath and make nice. If she loves you, and she does, she'll soften. Make this a home for all of you, Dukat. If it was easy, then it wouldn't be worth it."

"Don't use my own words against me. Are you settling in at Fort Galdrak?"

"Yes," I said. "Damar is visiting a few of the other forts today. Korvinus is his new aide. He'll be handling the funeral arrangements. I decided I didn't want to be an aide for either of you. I didn't want to play favorites. I'd rather spend my time exploring the area. In fact, I spotted two temples on the way here. It feels like we're supposed to be here. You'll laugh, it feels like I've been here before. Last night I dreamed about us."

"Really? Tell me." Dukat looked far too pleased with himself.

"We stood on a beach, the sea moved away from us, leaving behind the dead. The bodies littered the ground like fish as far as the eye could see. When we turned our backs, I heard a rumble and a shadow past over us. It was a tidal wave and that's when I woke up."

"I dreamed we walked in a graveyard," he said. "They'd buried the living instead. They cried to us, begging us to dig them out of their graves. I do not dream often, Yor. It has troubled me all morning. Be rational. I believe we both suffer from guilt at having lost so many soldiers. One of the voices I heard belonged to Saja. I'd recognize it anywhere. I blame myself for his death. I know Damar does as well."

"Does Helen have dreams too?" I asked.

"I wouldn't know. I haven't shared her bed in some time and we are not yet at the point where are confiding in each other. You seem to be my only friend. Find out what you

can about what our dreams mean. I'd prefer you not discuss it with Damar or anyone else. I'm sure you've found a book on Travok the Wise. There might be a prophesy he wrote that mentions what we dreamed. If you talk to a Bajoran priest, I suggest you appear as a human. Let Sawyer Kincaid rise from the grave. Let it be Sawyer who seeks answers."

"Very well," I said.

Dukat stood, cast his eyes toward me, and walked toward the vineyard. I didn't follow. I remained on the bench, considering what he'd said and turned off the hologram. The feeling I was being watched made me look toward the village. Several men tending the vines stared at me. I waved at them. When one of the men lifted his hand, I wondered if Dukat was right, and being human had its advantages.

PART FOUR

SHADOW GAMES

HELEN

Chapter Sixty

Seated on the veranda on the west side of the house faced a lovely garden, I nursed Madison. Gabriel sat beside me, quietly reading a book about Bajoran legends. Oona walked with Shazel through the garden. The girl held Oona's hand, content to be in her company, not mine.

"Good afternoon," Dukat said. He appeared behind us and I smiled at him. "I'm afraid I haven't had time to arrange for a picnic, Helen. If your ankle is better, I suggest we take a walk when you're through feeding our daughter. I'm sure Uncle Garak wouldn't mind watching the twins. I'd like to talk to you about a certain matter. In private."

"Was that Yor I heard earlier? Has she left?" Garak asked, not looking up from his book. "She seems to have left something for you, Helen. A lovely package with a red ribbon. Isn't nice?"

"Presents?" I was so delighted at the news I pulled Madison from my nipple. She was already fast asleep. I closed my blouse, aware Dukat watched and placed her in the crib next to her brother. "You're on guard duty, Garak. Dukat, let's go for a walk."

"Then come," Dukat said. He offered his hand and pulled me from the chair.

As I tested my ankle, confirming it was only tender, not sprained, I felt light-headed when he slid my arm through his and led me into the garden. I didn't dare look at Shazel or Oona. One, I knew the girl would be glaring at us and two, I didn't want to see Oona gazing at Dukat with desire in her eyes.

The garden was larger than I realized and workers pulled weeds, tossing them into baskets, a quiet life for the Bajorans, I thought, and a happy one, surely. As we past under an archway made from the same stones walled in the garden, I missed my footing on a cobblestone and bumped into Dukat. He caught me, sliding one arm around my waist, his

fingers spreading around my rib cage beneath my breast. I felt every one of his fingers on my body. We stood for a minute, toe to toe, neither one looking away, when Dukat bent his head to mine, capturing my mouth in a kiss sucked the air from my lungs and left my knees weak and trembling. By the time it ended, I was clinging to him shamelessly as my legs wouldn't hold me up any longer.

"I do believe I have discovered the solution to our problems," Dukat whispered in my ear. "I need to kiss you more often among the rose bushes."

Not trusting my voice, I could only nod, admitting to myself whatever hold he had on me, it hadn't lessened with either absence or the passage of time. We continued to walk through the garden and I realized our shadows moved ahead of us on the ground. Both seemed to be of the same size and shape, didn't seem possible. There they were, turning on the path when we did, and then they were gone and I stared at a gazebo.

"Let's sit in the shade," Dukat said. "I'm sure my new aide will notice and send someone to us with a pitcher of lemonade. I believe that's what you like, Quark might have mentioned it, and we do have our own small lemon grove."

"A lemon by any other name," I said laughing.

I sat on the bench, turned to face the hills to the east, able to see a flock of sheep and a dog herding them. Dukat sat next to me and casually took hold of my hand and held a beautiful white bloom beneath my nose. The scent was intoxicating and I marveled the flower didn't make me sneeze. I'd had horribly allergies on Earth, not on Bajor. Different kind of pollen, I thought.

"You're going to spoil me if you give me flowers every day."

"That is the idea," he said. "Feel free to plant whatever you like, Helen. What is mine is yours. We will plant roots and watch them grow."

Every imaginable type of blossom and color filled the walled in garden, creeping over statutes, ivy as thick as a blanket, beds of lavender and a rose bush dominated an entire corner. There were so many species I had never seen before, let alone imagined could exist and I leaned against him, sighing when he placed his arm around me, enjoying the moment and the magical garden. It seemed only natural for Dukat to seize the moment and draw me

into his arms. Beneath the eaves of the gazebo, surrounded by flowers, he caught me against him and dipped his head, meeting my waiting lips in a kiss lingered. My lips seared against Dukat's as his tongue slid into my mouth. His breath as quickened, as heated as my own, and I clung to him with one arm around his shoulder. I wove my other hand wove into his thick, black hair, grasped a handful and pressed against him, wanting closer contact, needing to feel his love. As came up for air, his lips traced a path along my throat and I felt his tongue lick the length of the border of my blouse

"Oh, Dukat. It's been so long."

"You're starved for my attention. I mean to make up for lost time, Helen."

His hand moved over my breast, squeezing it softly and I lolled my head onto his shoulder, watching as he pulled the material away from my nipple. He bent his head and I gasped as his lips closed around the nipple, sucking hard, drawing milk from my body into his mouth. It was erotic and left him wanting to do more. There no longer seemed a reason to forgive him for past misdeeds, not at moment, for as he suckled, he took my hand and placed it between his legs. His erection was hot beneath my hand, nor could I resist rubbing the length of him, aroused to feel it respond to my touch.

"Helen," he sighed.

Somehow I found myself removed from the bench and laid on the floor of the gazebo. Dukat joined me, lying at my side and lifted my skirt, sliding his hand between my legs. I should have resisted, he sensed my weakening and eased two fingers inside of me. As his hand moved, causing me to catch my breath, with a sly smile he paused, watching me. His pheromones hung thick in the air. His fingers left within me moved, slightly, and I groaned and caught at his write.

"I hope no guards or servants watch."

"I'll kill them if they do," he said.

In one tug, he jerked my underpants from my body and tossed them aside. His fingers returned to slide between my legs, delving deep and I involuntarily closed my legs as I felt an orgasm rip through my body. My breath came in short, little gasps, causing his hand to stop its skillful movements and then start over, until I cried out his name.

“Father?”

I slammed my legs on Dukat’s hands. He removed it, sucked my juice from his fingers, and then yanked my skirt over my legs.

“Father? Where are you?”

The little voice was barely a whisper, coming from across the garden. Dukat pulled me to my feet, showing no signs of embarrassment, left me on the bench and turned in the direction of the voice. Shazel saw him and waved. She turned as Garak appeared on the path, holding the hands of two little girls. They were half-Bajoran, half-Cardassian. One looked three years of age and the other merely a toddler. The older girl ran toward Dukat and launched herself into his arms, while Shazel stalked the perimeter of the gazebo, looking like a wounded animal. Dukat lifted the half-breed into his arms and kissed her cheek.

“Jewel and Amber insisted they see you the moment they arrived,” Garak said. “The children arrived on a shuttle. There are six more children. I’ve already forgotten their names. The oldest one is ten and can’t speak. I left her with Broc. Oona is with the others. Of course Shazel knew right where to find you both. She likes to spy.”

“You have twelve children, including my own?” I asked in shock.

“Fifteen in all. Mikor isn’t here,” Dukat said. “Nor are Mikelya’s three boys. Their father was Legate Mikor, as you know. They remain with their grandparents. You don’t have to worry about them.”

“Just nine others not my own,” I gasped.

Dukat laughed as he led me out of the gazebo. My mouth fell open. I hadn’t been prepared for the arrival of Dukat’s entire family. They children raced into the garden and surrounded us. Dukat embraced each child and called out their names.

“This is Jewel. The toddler is Amber. Llyana is the eldest of my children and does not speak. Her sister, Yoan, speaks for her. The boys are Franco and Rigelus. You met Jewell and Amber. These two are Pursilla and Aysla. I meant to tell you earlier they were arriving today. You are a natural at motherhood. I’m sure a few more children won’t cause a burden, not if you are to be my life-mate.”

“This one is wet,” I said. I handed Jewel to Garak, still not certain I’d heard Dukat

correctly. "Life-mate? What is exactly?"

"Precisely as it sounds, my dear. I mean to live here with you as my companion. We will be together from now on as friends, lovers, and parents."

My mouth dropped open. He lifted my hand to his lips, chuckling. His humor faded when something hit my back felt like a wet clump. Mud fell to the ground. Shazel stood beside a pool of water, digging into the mud for another mud ball to hurl at me. I gave Garak a deadly look and slid past Dukat, prepared to drown Mikelya's daughter.

"This is my job now?" Garak asked, outraged. "I brought these little bundles of joy to you both. A guard Yor left behind named Skuld told me where to find you. I cannot find my way around this enormous house. Some monstrosity of a nanny chased me off the second landing. I was trying to find the nursery. I believe her name is Blythe and she is a terrifying Cardassian from the town of Guvalt. The females there are as large as the men. Did she actually work for your late wife? I wonder she didn't eat a free babies when they were born."

"Yes," Dukat said. "It's a package deal."

Shazel ran from me. Covered in mud, she entered the house, screaming blood murder. I returned to Dukat, about to complain stopped when Amber lifted her arms. I picked her up and placed her on my hip, thinking at least one of the children liked me.

"It sounds like a life sentence," I said glaring at Dukat.

"They're orphans, Helen. Garak will help take care of them," Dukat said, hiding a smile behind his hand. "Come now. How can you tell me you're not pleased at the idea of running my household? We are going to grow old together." He put his arm around me, giving a kiss to Amber and then me. "Amber, this is your new mother, Helen. You will be good to her and always smile at her each morning. You have a very lovely smile."

Jewell at moment smacked Garak. She refused to stop. I had no idea why she felt the need to behave like a little devil. Nor did he.

"Keep one, Garak. She needs her diaper changed," Dukat said. "Their own mothers' have been neglectful. I'm sure you two can come up with a plan. If not, Blythe will certainly explain the rules."

Dukat hurried toward the house. Garak and I carried the two little ones, able to hear

screaming from inside the house. I spotted two shuttles in the courtyard and a number of guards on the porch as we entered the house, I said nothing about them. Garak and I took the pair to the west tower, which I discovered was a nursery. Blythe greeted us, took Jewell from me and the child settled right down in her massive arms. Through the door came the rest of the children, including Shazel, covered in mud. I had no idea which name went to which child and wanted to flee as much as Garak.

“This was your idea to come here,” I said. “

These aren’t my children,” Garak said angrily.

“I’ll take care of the little ones,” Blythe said. As terrifying as she look, her voice was kind and her manner gentle. “I was nanny to Mikor and Shazel and the three boys whose names will not be mentioned. No, they won’t ever be mentioned again. A sign of power, as you know, my dear, is for Cardassian men to have as many children as possible.”

“Well, he needs to stop. I don’t plan to be pregnant for a long time.”

Blythe took charge of the children and led them into the nursery. Curious to see what the rest of the village looked like I walked along with Garak. He darted into a sitting room, I’m sure to have a drink and I continued to my room in the west tower . I assumed Oona had taken the twin to my room. Assumptions were not wise in the world I lived in.

“Helen!”

Dukat stepped out of a doorway and caught my arm. He pulled me into a library and tried to kiss me. I stomped on his foot, pushing him away and shook my fist.

“This wasn’t anything we agreed upon!”

“I said I was sorry countless times.”

“Not about this! What am I going to do with all these children?”

“Love them. Love me. Surely you can see I need you, Helen.”

“I’m your only hope. Yeah, heard it before. Not happy.”

“Helen, do you love me or not?” Dukat pulled me into his arms, refusing to let me go. He forced a kiss onto my lips and I stomped on his foot. He let me go. “I demand you forgive me and love me again. I won’t tolerate this type of behavior.”

“What did you just say?”

"I said I love you. I have said it before."

"You don't know the first thing about love, Dukat."

"Then teach me, my dear."

I let him pull me into his arms and cupped his face in my hands.

"You never asked for my help before. It's always been Yor. Yor this and Yor that. Can you see her with all these children? She'd put them in armor and march every morning in the courtyard." I paused when he laughed. "It's not funny, Dukat. Can our relationship be any more complicated than it already is? Don't answer. I haven't even accepted your apology and you've found a way to trick me into staying with you. You really want me as a life-mate?"

Dukat grinned. "Yes, that's what I said. Blythe can manage the children, and Oona will help with the twins. There's really nothing for you to do other than take care of me," he said. "I suggest you have dinner with me tonight. Afterwards, perhaps you'd like to see the north tower instead. It's much than any of the others and you're clothes have been taken there."

"Oh, no. What happened in the gazebo was a mistake. I'm not about to return to your bed and end up pregnant again. For now, I'll help settle your children into a county life, with a father they probably see as a stranger. Garak and I will help. I'm not about to agree to be your life-mate or the mother of your children. Not until I've had adequate time to adjust to this enormous change in my life. If you love me as you say you do, then you'll wait for my decision."

"I'm waiting," he said.

"I don't even know where to start!" Walking out the door, I glanced at him, satisfied to see he looked concerned. "I'll think about it, Dukat. In the meantime, enjoy your children. I intend to have a quiet dinner in my own room. If you need help, ask Broc or one of the dozen guards Yor left behind on the porch. And don't knock on my door in the dead of night or you'll find a dagger in my hand."

"That's not particularly very kind of you to bring up, Helen. You scarred my hand and my heart. I'm being completely honest and sincere. Give me something in return."

"Prefect Dukat, I think I've been quite generous. And don't get friendly with Oona or Blythe. If one more child crawls out of the woodwork, I'll never talk to you again. I'll leave

Milea and take the nearest starship back to Earth.”

“I’d have to be dead to have sex with Blythe.”

“Not Oona? She’s quite young and attractive.”

“Helen, I’d never think of....”

I held up my hand to silence him and stormed off. As soon as I turned a corner, I held my hand over my lips to keep Dukat from hearing my laughter. What had I gotten myself into? I wasn’t sure what I thought about everything. It seemed like one little kiss in the past had led to heavy petting with the Lizard King and somehow I’d ended up in a zoo.

* * *

SAWYER

Standing inside the ancient temple as the sun sunk behind the hills created shadows moved along the walls and behind an altar. The temple was no longer in use. It hadn’t been for some time. Gil Komash stood beside me, holding his laser rifle. Glinn Lonak and Eben, armed with a tricorder, scanned the chamber. My hologram paced in front of the altar. I’d only brought two more guards with us, Ikarus and Dunatar, who had been with the Alpha Brigade. In residence at Fort Galdrak were thirty-six of my former soldiers and I preferred to use them whenever possible. Ikarus and Dunatar remained beside our transport. For this night venture, I’d worn my armor and my Cardassian face, wanting to look fearsome in case we ran into trouble, for I always anticipated running into Bajor rebels or Fifth Order renegades, even if the latter were supposedly exterminated.

“I shouldn’t have brought you along,” I said glancing at Eben. It felt colder in the temple than it had on the drive over. I’d dressed Eben in a padded jacket and pants. He didn’t look half as cold as I felt. “This was a bad idea. We need lights, better equipment, and more help.”

“Yes, I’m the one who found this temple, Mother. I told you the ancient temples each have traces of silathen, an ingredient used in the paint on the walls. It’s similar to lead and it easy to track, if you know what you’re looking for. And I do.”

Lonak kept close to the boy. “I know what this place, Yor. This is a temple of the Pah-

Wraiths," he whispered. "We shouldn't be here and certainly not at night. They say demons haunt the temples of the Shadow Dwellers. This is an evil place. Why this place? There are temples in the villages may hold the answers you seek."

"I have to start somewhere. This temple was the closest. The sun early tonight. I know you don't understand what I'm after, Lonak. All I can tell you is the Prophets have taken an particular interest in me and I want to know why. You're right. This place gives me the creeps. Let's get back to the transport. I can return tomorrow without you and Eben. I'll bring a full squad. Come on."

My son ran over to Gil Komash, pushed him aside, and knelt in front of the altar. Komash shined the light attached to his rifle on the altar, revealing bloodstains looked recent. Eben removed a scarf tied around his neck and rubbed the dried blood away, revealing symbols carved into the stone. He put away his tricorder, removed his padd, and took a photo of the writing.

"You're better than any science officer," I said. "Remind me tomorrow, Lonak. I want a science officer to be sent to Galdrak. We don't have any and I want one. I also need an expert on the Bajoran religion."

In the distance, a strange animal screeched. I walked over to Eben and picked him up by one arm.

"Let's got," I said. "If that's a vethral, I don't want to meet the whole damn pack. They'll eat a boy like you alive, Eben."

"Move out," Komash ordered. He lifted his rifle to his shoulder, waiting for us to leave the temple, and then turned around, backing toward the transport.

Tossing Eben inside the vehicle, I climbed over it. Lonak opened the door and joined us in the backseat. The driver and guard sat in the front seat. The engine started at the lights turned on, revealing a pack of high-backed stripped dogs. Komash sidestepped to the vehicle, keeping his rifle aimed at the back as they started to snarl. A hand pulled him inside and slammed the door shut as Lonak reacted quickly. He drew his pistol and fired at the largest of the pack, sending it tumbling onto its back. The driver moved forward as the pack charged the transport, barking and snarling as they chased us along the road.

“What do they think we’re doing? It’s not like we’re going to have a flat tire,” I said, drawing my pistol and turning toward the pack. They moved faster than I anticipated and they jumped as they ran, gaining an altitude of at least six feet. “What are these things? Vethrals? How can they jump high? It’s unnatural?”

I shot two of the creatures before I heard someone answer my question.

“These aren’t vethrals. They’re jakars, the guardians of the dead,” Lonak said. He turned at the sound of a growl and shot a creature as it attempted to crawl into the vehicle.

The pack ran beside the transport, springing into the air. One landed on the hood of the vehicle and snarled through the glass at the driver. Komash hit a button and a metal roof started to fold over the top of the transport, bringing two of the devil dogs inside. Eben screamed as a dog tried to take a bite out of his face and I jammed my pistol inside its mouth. A blast from Lonak’s pistol killed the second beast and he grabbed the one had swallowed my pistol and with Komash’s help through it out the window before the hood closed over us and the side windows raised, keeping the jakars from getting inside.

Howling, the creatures vanished into the dark. I pulled Eben onto my lap, checking him for bite marks; he wasn’t injured. Komash, however, had not been as fortunate. One of the creatures had bitten his hand. Lonak shined a small light on the wound. The side of Komash’s hand was open to the bone, bleeding onto his lap, and around the fringes it had started to turn black. Spider veins appeared on his hand and wrist and blood oozed from the corner of his mouth as he sagged against the old veteran, shuddering and with a heavy sigh, he died on the spot. Lonak opened the door and tossed Komash’s body out, grunting with effort and closed the door, visibly terrified and shaken to the core.

“What the hell did you do for?” I asked.

“The Guardians of the Dead chose him. They must be given their chosen or they’ll pursue us back to the fort. I thought it only a legend. These creatures are real. His body will feed them. They will not follow.”

“That was Komash. He’s my friend.”

“I’m sorry,” Lonak said. “You need to understand what we’re dealing with, Yor. There are many stories about the jakars. They keep the Shadow Dwellers in their graves, feeding on

those who escape and in a way protect the living. Had Komash's body been taken to the fort, they'd have come for it before dawn and more might have perished. They say to be bitten by one is to be cursed. You saw you happened. The black was a poison and it spread fast. There is no cure I know of or have ever heard about, and I have been stationed on Bajor for more than twenty years."

"You think you could have mentioned this before? What kind of tutor are you? I had my son with us tonight, Lonak. My son! Eben could have been bitten, instead it was Komash, one of my War Dogs."

"Had you told me what you looked for, Yor, I would have taken the time to tell you the legends about the guardians. You did not ask," Lonak said in a firm voice.

The old soldier ran a hand through his white hair. In moment he reminded me of a mad scientist or an obsessed archeologist, for he knew more than I realized and it seemed I'd chosen precisely the right tutor, not for my son, for me. And was no coincidence.

"Entering a Pah-Wraith temple is dangerous or I would have warned you not to disturb it," Lonak said. "The boy said it was a Temple of Light. I should have double-checked. We can never venture to a Shadow Dwelling at night. Even in the daylight, Yor, we must wear full body armor, gloves, and helmets. The guardians always stand guard. Always."

"The pistols have little effect on them," I said. "My pistol was on the last setting. Death."

"They are already dead, Yor. To kill them requires certain rituals and blessed weapons and we lacked either. This was careless of you. It is not the boy's fault, your own."

"I wanted to help," Eben said. "It was the nearest dwelling I could find on the old map in the Gul Gulch's personal archives. I didn't know it was a bad place."

Eben laid his hand against my chest, trembling in my arms. Sometimes I forget he was only eight years old. He was the most intelligent, cleverest, and bravest person I'd ever met, Cardassian, Bajoran or human. And I loved him more than anyone else. Eben meant everything to me and I'd nearly gambled his life away with the toss of the dice.

"I'm a bad mother. I'm so sorry, Eben. You'll have nightmares over this."

The boy shook his head, sobbing as he clutched me. We'd miss Komash and I still had to explain to Damar what had happened. It wasn't only my commander I had to face, the male I'd chosen to be his adopted father as well as my lover. This would certainly cause an argument and I deserved whatever Damar dished out.

"I give you my blood oath Eben will never be placed in this type of danger again, Yor, for he will never go with us again." Lonak pointed his finger at Eben. "My clever little night fox. You are far too eager to prove yourself to your mother and to Gul Damar. Tomorrow we study twice as hard and you will not leave the fort."

"Not without body armor and freaking platoon," I replied. I slid my fingers into Eben's thick, black hair, massaging his scalp, already fretting over Damar's reaction when he heard what I'd done. I kissed the boy countless times, finally growing aware Lonak watched, as did my driver and guard in the rear view mirrors. "I don't want to hear any gossiping about what happened. Ikarus. Dunatar. You just became my permanent bodyguards. One word of this and I'll toss you both over the wall into the ocean. I know neither of you can swim."

Spotlights hit the vehicle as we pulled into the drive. Soldiers pointed rifles at us as the gate opened. Ikarus drove through a tunnel and into the wide, open courtyard. Torches flickered on tall iron stands and a squad stood at the front doors to the castle keep. Two shuttles occupied the north side of the courtyard and a number of crates stacked outside. Guards stood beside the shuttles. After the loss of Fort Varnok, Galdrak remained on high alert, adding to my guilt for having led soldiers beyond the walls after nightfall.

"Thank you for your coming with us," I said as Lonak opened the door. "Komash was a friend of mine. His death is my fault. I'll advice Gul Damar of the situation. All of you are dismissed." I tugged on Eben's arm. "Come on, kiddo. Lonak, I'll speak to you in the morning. If you can't find me, I'll be in the dungeon."

"I'll spend the rest of the night researching," Lonak said. "We'll have a great deal to go over tomorrow. I'll be in the library if you need me. Goodnight, Eben."

Letting Eben run ahead of me, he eagerly climbed the stairs as the large arched door opened and Damar appeared, still dressed in his armor. The boy fled past Damar, not bothering to greet him. Damar glanced at me, concerned. He held a pistol in his hand and

looked over my head to take a closer look at the vehicle and then held my gaze, a look of shock on his face. He holstered the gun and caught hold of my arm, turning me to face the vehicle. Long gashes covered the sides and the back door where Lonak had tossed out Komash was covered with a strange black resin.

“Where is Gil Komash? I was told he went with you as a guard,” Damar said. I gave a shrug, not wanting to talk in the open, for our voices would carry on the wind. I pushed forward, making Damar take a step backwards and stepped inside. He released me and followed me through the hall to his office. “Yor? What happened? I can tell you were attacked. By what? What could make marks like I heavy Cardassian metal?”

“Ever hear of jakars?” I asked entering his office.

“A Bajoran legend. They are devil dogs guard Shadow Temples. What were you doing such an evil place at this time of night and with my son?”

I went straight to the bar, the stuffed head of what looked like a water buffalo hung over it, poured Federation confiscated whiskey into a tall glass. From an ice bucket, the sides obviously chilled, I opened it and used bare hand to grab two ice cubes to drop into the glass. I took a large gulp, reconsidered my situation, took another, and filled the glass to the top.

“Yor, I’m talking to you. I want an explanation.”

Damar came up behind me and slid his hand across my back. He remained silent as I took another drink and then commenced unbuckling my cuirass. It dropped to the floor, along with my gun belt and pistol, he worked fast, and he spun me around, causing me to spill half my drink on my hand. His eyes were hard and his lip curled into a snarl.

“That is exactly what a jakar looks before it bites. They were vethrals before they died and return. It is certain Komash is dead.”

“And?”

“Two of the creatures entered the car when Dunatar closed the roof. Lonak killed one. Komash killed the other, not before it bit him instead of Eben. Apparently the damn things have a poisonous bite, so Lonak threw his body out for the hell hounds so they wouldn’t follow us back home.”

The drink was knocked from my hand in one swipe. It crashed to the floor, shattering.

In the next instant, Damar slammed me against the wall, his fist raised. I stared at his hand. He seemed to snap out of his rage and looked upwards. His hand fell to his side.

“Go to bed, Yor. It’s been a bad day. I’m in no mood to talk.”

Damar grabbed a bottle of kanar and took a seat behind his desk. He didn’t use a glass. He took a swig from the bottle, wiping his hand across his mouth, staring at me. I filled another glass with whiskey and tossed in two ice cubes. Sitting on the couch, I opened the book I’d been reading earlier, the Bajoran Celestial Bible, finding my marked page. I’d been reading about the ‘Guardians of the Dead’. On the very page where I’d left off, a drop of blood appeared. I raised my hand to my nose. It came away damp with blood. A kerchief was pressed beneath my nose. Damar crowded in beside me on the couch.

“I don’t ever get nose bleeds,” I said.

“Why would you go to a Pah-Wraith temple? What possessed you? You know better than to enter a dark place with proper reconnaissance and without a squad. The last time you entered a cave...don’t do it again. Ever. I suppose Eben moved in front of the jakar to save you?”

“Komash moved faster. I made a mistake. A terrible mistake. It won’t happen again.” I tapped at the page. “There is a map of the temples in this area. We went to Temple Akar. It’s a shadow dwelling. I’ll hire a scout in the village before I go out again.”

Damar placed his arm around me, still holding the kerchief beneath my nose. I sniffed, closing my eyes and tilted my head back. In a few minutes, the blood stopped trickling. His sigh brought his lips pressing against my cheek. I wanted another drink. It helped chase the shadows in my head into their dark little corner. Opening my eyes, I reached for my glass. Damar pushed it away from me.

“Don’t get yourself killed trying to find out what the Prophets or Pah-Wraiths want with you. We’ve both already lost so much, Yor. If you look in the place of the dead, you will join them soon enough,” Damar said. “I don’t need to look in some bible or hear some priest tell me about prophecies to know Bajor is filled with demons and ghosts. You’re going to get yourself killed and possibly crazy boy who worships the ground you walk on.”

“I’ll be more careful, dearest. It won’t happen again.”

My arms slid around his body as I buried my head against his neck. He'd recently showered and smelled good. I suspected I smelled less pleasant. Damar grabbed my jaw in his hands as he lifted his head and kissed me. It was a hard, forceful kiss. I felt his teeth sink into my bottom lip and knew he had to taste my nose blood as his tongue slid into my mouth and then he was pushing me onto the couch, half lying over me. His hand buried in my hair, he lifted my head, our lips separated, linked by a line of saliva snapped and vanished.

"You rouse my temper like no other. Pull another stunt like again while you are with the boy, I will forget for a moment we are lovers and treat you with the same brutish force I would with any other soldier. Ravon is still sitting in a military prison cell. Let's not forget thousands of Cardassians who died last night have been shipped home in a box."

Damar grew silent, unable to speak. I kissed him. This time I tasted his tears. My arms tightened around his body as he pressed his head against my shoulder. Crushed under his weight on the couch, I held this proud Cardassian commander while he sobbed.

"Let's go to bed. Things will get better. They always do," I said.

Cardassians are not humans. Their culture is nothing like what I knew on Earth, and I assumed my gul wanted to be comforted. He moved faster than I was prepared for and unfastened my pants, jerking them to my knees, over my boots. His big body hovered over mine, one knee on the couch as he unbuckled his belt, unzipped his pants, and reached into the open fly to removed his engorged cock. It was inside me in a second. He grunted, angrily, thrusting so hard I thought he'd break the damn couch. In less time than usual, he came, I didn't, and he moved away to adjust his clothes. I swung my legs off the couch, pulled my pants up and stood as Damar turned his back to me, his head lowered.

"Don't be angry with me for being upset with you," he said.

"I'm not angry. You have a right to be upset, Damar."

"I should not have lost control of my emotions."

"Forget about it," I said, sliding my arms around him. He stiffened at my touch. "I love you more than I've ever loved anyone. I know you have lost your friends, you still have me. At the academy, your younger version told me you felt like no one understood you. I know that's why you built a wall around your emotions. It's why you so often turn to kanar for

solace. I understand you better than you think.”

Damar turned toward me, hesitant to meet my gaze and when he did at last, I kissed him and then opened the door, sliding out of the office without looking back. I didn't want him to see I cried as well for our friends. I'd held him the night Marna had died on the practice field, and though it had only been a hologram, I remembered her death and his grief as vividly as if it had happened day. Damar wasn't broken, he was sensitive and did his best to shield his sentimental nature behind his gruffness and I didn't want my own tears to upset him further.

Showering in the candle light, I watched shadows play on the wall beyond the glass doors and heard Damar enter the bathroom. Already naked, he entered the shower and stood beneath the water, letting it pound directly into his face. Each of his hands was closed in a fist. I came up behind him, sliding my hands around his middle, fingers splayed over his muscular, taut stomach. With a shake of his head, he spat water and turned, his blue eyes reddened and touched my cheek with his left hand. His right fist raised, slowly, receiving my gaze as his fingers opened and on his palm was a gold ring with Cardassian symbols. A half smile appeared on his face as he grasped my left wrist, lifting my hands against his chest and then he took the ring, placing it on my fourth finger.

“With this ring, I claim you as my companion. Let all who see if know you are mine and I am yours,” he said in a husky voice. He didn't ask me to marry him. He didn't have to, I knew what it meant to both of us, and so did he.

We made love in the shower, staying under the water until it turned cold. He dried me off with a towel and while I brushed my teeth, he used the same towel to wipe the water from his body and across his head. His hair in disarray, he slid his fingers across my arm, clasped my hand and I dropped my toothbrush near the sink, following him into the bedroom. The candles I'd lit on a heavy wooden dresser bounced shadows across the wall.

Damar blew out the flames and we crawled under the blankets, his arms wrapped around my body, his chest pressed against my back. I heard his heavy sigh, felt his head sink into the pillow.

“I love you and you are mine,” I said.

Seconds later, he was snoring and I drifted off to sleep, comforted by this brutish, sensitive Cardassian who'd fought so hard to win me. Cardassians didn't give rings when they became engaged, it was an Earth custom, and the romantic gesture meant more to me than he'd ever know. He loved me despite my flaws and human frailty, and in his arms it felt like home.

HELEN

Chapter Sixty-One

Roused from my bed by shrill screams, I rang the bell for Oona. I put on my robe and slippers as the young woman entered. I opened the veranda doors and stepped onto the balcony. The screams came from the garden. Dukat and five soldiers stood amongst the rose bushes, trampling the delicate blooms under their boots. A soldier lifted his rifle to his shoulder, firing at something fled through the garden. Dukat lift his pistol, pointing in another direction, his face a mask of fury as he fired and then I heard strange howls coming the hills, able to see dark forms gathered in a pack vanish over the crest.

“What’s happened?” I asked glancing at the crib where my twins fussed.

“It is the vethral pack. Since Gul Vardon has been gone and the prior servants dismissed, they’ve started gathering again. They frequently attack the sheep. They don’t only eat mutton. Sometimes they drag off a worker and they are never seen again.”

“Gul Vardon? What do you mean? He owned this place?” I asked.

The woman gazed me, rather slyly and flipped her long, brown curls across her shoulders. She turned, gazing at the room with the look of ownership and pointed at the large bed, a sudden sigh turning into a savage growl.

“Milea was once owned by Gul Vardon. He was a good man, honorable and true to Cardassia. He was not a traitor, he was killed like one and his estate stolen by Prefect Dukat. This vineyard is profitable and coveted by every gul who ever came to Cardassia. Vardon’s father owned it before him and his grandfather before that, and it should have gone to his heir and not the prefect. It belongs to my son. Not to Dukat.”

Her statement sent me into a tailspin. I caught hold of the window frame to steady myself and met her gaze, aware of a deep hatred lay within. I didn’t know if Oona was

aware I'd been Vardon's lover or her hate was directed at me. I felt protective of my children and moved toward the crib, pushing it toward the bed and sat, staring at her.

"Of course you looked surprised. None of you asked who I was or whether or not Vardon's mistress had a child. When I learned of his death, I took what property I wanted to my parent's home in the village, including my child. Stefon. I am still nursing him, which is why Dukat thought I would make a fine nurse for our own children. His whelps have fed on my milk and I hope it sours in their bellies and kills them."

"Get out!" I shouted.

Oona drew a knife, hidden in her pocket and lunged toward me. I caught hold of her wrist, keeping the blade from my face as we tumbled across the bed, screaming and tearing at each other's hair. Yanking a handful of her hair from her scalp, I screamed for Garak as she scratched my cheek and drove the knife into the mattress near my head. My fingers slid around her wrist once more as I tried to keep her from stabbing me. She straddled my chest, heavier than I realized, her weight pinned me to the mattress as she went wild, her madness giving her strength and she wrenched her arm loose. Lifting her arm in front of her chest, the side of the blade slashed across my left arm and I screamed, matching the tiny voices aroused in the crib, crying for anyone near enough to help us.

"Vardon was my friend! I mourn him as well," I sobbed.

"It is true then," Oona said. "You are the one who replaced me. The human. The one called Helen of Terok Nor. You took my love from me. Now I will take your life."

With both hands closed around the knife, Oona lifted it above my head. Her knees on my forearms, pinning them to the mattress, I was unable to move my arms to protect myself. Fear seized me and I froze, watching the knife descend. As the tip neared my chest, a streak of red slammed into Oona, knocking her into the far wall, the knife falling from her hand as she slumped forward. A second blast evaporated her and left a hole in the wall.

"There, there," Blythe said. "All is well, mistress. I am here."

The gruff Cardassian kissed the pistol and placed it in the pocket of her apron. She didn't come to me, instead knelt beside the crib, lifted it into her brawny arms, and gave me a stern look.

“Wash your face. Bandage your arm. Dukat is asking for you in the garden,” Blythe said. “I’ll tend to these little birds. Two have flown the nest and will not return. This pair cannot yet fly and will be safer in the nursery with the rest of the girls.”

“I don’t understand.” Holding my hand to my arm, blood seeped through my fingers and I sat on the bed, one slipper off my foot. I noticed it clear across the room. “What do you mean to birds have flown the nest? The two Cardassian boys? Rigelus and.. and...I can’t remember the other boy’s name.”

“Franco,” she replied. “They didn’t sleep in the nursery, as they were aged thirteen and eleven, taking rooms in the north tower near their father. Rigelus was always precocious and getting Franco to go on adventures. Apparently, the rose before anyone awoke this morning. Both were found mauled to death in the garden.”

“What? You said they’d flown the nest! means they ran away!”

“Perhaps were you come from.” Blythe peered into the crib. “You’re children are fine, Mistress Helen,” she said. “I’ll take care of them. As for Oona, I suspected she was a traitor the moment I laid eyes on the pretty little thing. If she hadn’t tried to kill you now, she would have later or perhaps harmed one of the twins. She lost Gul Vardon. She wanted another male in power. Dukat. From now on, we will only have Cardassians working in this house, not Bajorans. I’ve Garak asked to send for my two sisters. They will arrive tomorrow.”

“Three of you,” I muttered, still in shock. “Three sisters.”

“Does mean something you? Is the number three of importance?”

“The Kai had three sisters. Laralyn. Tresla. And Gesette. They said something to me, about a prophesy...a servant told me ‘Three snakes shall come to a fertile land. One shall feed, one shall starve, and one shall devour all. Blood will flow. Shadows arise. And a great fire shall burn the land.’ I by no means mean to insult you or your sisters. You asked and yes, the number three has meaning. I don’t know what it means. I tried to look it up in a fable book in the library. I couldn’t find anything on Trakon, the author who supposedly predicted this three thousand years ago. Again, the number three.”

Blythe returned, placed the crib on the bed, and took hold of my injured arm. She

led me into the bathroom, removed my robe and used as med-kit, holding a small devise sealed the wound. Patting my head like a little child, she left me to get dressed, took my children, and left the room without saying anything further.

Dressed, I hurried to the lower level, finding Garak standing on the small veranda, biting his nails. He took one look at me and walked over, pulling me into his arms. Over his shoulder I could see Dukat and the soldiers bagging the remains of the two Cardassian boys. Pressing my head against his shoulder, I let Garak hold me, too distraught and terrified to enter the garden and see for myself what had happened.

“Oona is dead. Blythe killed her,” I whispered into his ear. My throat was dry and I had to force the rest to be heard. “Oona was Vardon’s mistress. They had a child named Stefon. He owned Milea, Garak. Vardon owned this vineyard and when he was killed, Dukat took it from him. Was Vardon a traitor or not? Or did Dukat...did he murder him to get this place and to get me?”

I closed my eyes, seeing Vardon’s face, young, confident, and kind. He’d loved me and we might have lived at Milea together, though Oona would have been a problem and she has been before Blythe killed her. I didn’t expect Garak to answer. I’m sure he knew whether or not Vardon has betrayed his country, after all, he’s created the Death List. No one had told me, not even Yor, if the names on the list had been crossed off or a few traitors remained. I’d failed so miserably as a spy I was no longer privy to the inner circle, the irony not lost on me, and I laughed, close to hysteria.

“All I can tell you is Vardon’s name was on the list. He was Fifth Order, Helen, not Second Order. He switched his allegiance to serve Dukat, and while I can’t say if Kornica was kipped or not, he did take the prefect’s wife and was treasonous. It doesn’t matter why Vardon took Kornica. It was a clear violation of Cardassian laws. Had he been a civilian and not an officer, he would have been sent to life out his life at some mining prison.”

“And he was guilty for loving me,” I said, wiping my fingers under my eyes. “Dukat loves you as well or he wouldn’t have brought you here, Helen. I’m sure he means to speak with you about Vardon. He’s lost two sons. They were Cardassian. There can be no doubt it was vethrals killed the boys. I saw the bodies.”

“You say like someone could have murdered the boys and then left them to be eaten by those wild beasts. Do you think Oona killed the boys? Did anyone examine the boys?”

“Nothing was left to examine, Helen.”

Easing me onto a chair, Garak spoke to a guard, asking for red leaf tea and sat beside me. Two small bags were carried out of the garden. Garresh Broc and Gil Skuld remained beside Dukat. The younger Cardassian frantically tapped his fingers on a padd, taking notes as Dukat spoke to him, while Skuld, his rifle raised to his shoulder, scanned the hillside.

“What will happen to us now, Garak? Do we stay? Return to Terok Nor? There are no wild creatures at the space station. My children would be safe.”

My friend had no time to answer as Dukat turned abruptly, accompanied by the two Cardassians, and approached the veranda. His hands were covered in blood, as well as the front of his jacket and pants. A nod from Broc and the younger aide entered the house and disappeared, while Skuld remained at his post in the garden. Seeing the distress on Dukat’s face, the visible twitch in his cheek, I went to him and placed my arms around him. He held his arms to the side, not wanting to bloody my dress and then crushed me in a powerful hug.

“Rigelus and Franco. I’ve lost my boys.”

“Can we go to Terok Nor now?” I asked.

Dukat caught hold of my shoulders, staring deeply into my eyes. “Why would I flee in the face of danger? No, Helen. I will stay here and see every mongrel in these hills is destroyed. The nearby village, Cottage Row, where my employees live suffered losses as well in the night. Three children were dragged into the hills. While I’m sure Vardon kept the creatures at bay, in his absence, they have multiplied and...” he paused as he realized what he’d said.

“I’m aware Vardon owned Milea, Dukat. Oona, his former mistress, just tried to kill me and the twins,” I said, keeping my voice firm. “Blythe saved my life. Listen, Dukat. This is a dangerous place, beautiful, deadly. It could have just as easily been one of the girls or the twins. Did you know Oona was Vardon’s mistress and they had a son?”

"I know nothing of Vardon's personal history. Nor do I care. Vardon was a traitor and by law the prefect inherits all lands owned by Cardassian traitors. I won't discuss Vardon any further with you, Helen. My boys are dead and I must now send for soldiers from Fort Galdrak to scour these hills. I'll be gone most of the day. Stay in the house. Garak, see my life-mate and the children do not go outside. Guards will be posted here and at Cottage Row. There will be no more walks or privileges until I have restored order."

A brief kiss landed on my forehead. Dukat set me aside and entered the house. I sank onto the chair as a Bajoran house servant appeared with a tray laden with a tea post and two cups, cream and sugar. I stared at the red tea as it was poured into a cup, finding it reminded me of blood, and considered whether or not the servant had added poison to give it flavor.

"Did you send for Blythe's sisters?" I asked after the servant withdrew.

"Breena and Burta. Yes, I've sent for those formidable matrons. I would not look for them for another two days. They're arrival is not a top priority." Garak added sugar to his tea and took a sip. "I know what you were thinking. We'll be fine here."

"It's just I wished I looked human," I muttered.

Garak leaned back in his chair, eyeing me with curiosity. I knew he had an idea hatching his brain and waited for his lips to move and the words to come out. The house was roused by Dukat's bellows, followed by heavy boots stomping to the front door. Turning to Garak, wanting to hear what was on his mind, Broc appeared, nervous and shaken.

"Prefect Dukat has sent for Glinn Yor," he said. "She should arrive within the hour. He's placed in command of the hunting party. While the sky is clear and it's an otherwise lovely day, the prefect has asked you both come into the house and stay inside. We will be closing the windows and barricading the doors."

"Yes, a good idea," Garak said, rising. "I was just going to tell Helen Glinn Yor is the very one who should attend to this unpleasantness. She rounded up assassins and killed them. I'm sure she can handle a few mongrels."

"I want to see her when she arrives," I said. My voice sounded meek. It wasn't how I

wanted to be known. My anger was bundled inside of me, unable to break free. I relied on my anger whenever I was in danger and my fists.

After the attack by Oona, I realized motherhood had weakened me. I was no lioness, from now on, I intended to carry a weapon.

* * *

SAWYER

Riding on horseback, we followed a Bajoran tracker Lonak had hired earlier morning. Lonak seemed to know which of the Bajoran would be the most useful. The tracker was middle-aged, gray haired, no adornments on his ears. He wore a vethral pelt like a cape and a hat had seen better days. His name was Lothar and he'd brought the horses and his son, Uther, who appeared as unwashed and hardened, and looked to be a few years older than me. I'd brought ten soldiers from the old brigade with us and Lonak, whose advice I had begun to rely on. Damar would be gone for three days, reviewing the forts on the opposite side of the planet, hit hardest by the attack of the Marquis ships. I'd left Eben under the care of Ikarus who turned out to have been accepted to the science academy on Cardassia and had chosen to join the military to follow in his father's footsteps.

"How different are vethrals from jakars?" Dunatar asked. He rode ahead of me at the side of the tracker. His voice drifted to me on a warm breeze.

"Jakars? We do not hunt jakars," Lothar said. "Answer the question, tracker."

"Vethrals are wild dogs, nothing more. Jakars were vethrals before they died and returned to become guardians of the ancient shadow dwellings. We will not go anywhere near a Pah Wraith temple. They are outlawed and most are in such a state of disrepair it only the evil within keeps them standing. I lost my eldest born to a jakar. The boy was young, curious and when he didn't return home, I found his bones, picked clean, outside one of these temples. No, we will not need to go to such a place. The vethrals live in holes in the ground. They hunt at night."

His son, Uther, galloped up to me. He smiled with yellowed teeth. His body odor was strong and I tried not to react. The hologram hid my human features, yet he peered at

me intently, as if he found me to be a new type of animal.

"We're not use to seeing female commanders," Uther said. "I am told you command these soldiers. Your hair is golden and you paint your face. What manner of female are you who hunts the vethrals and rides astride a horse with such skill?"

"I grew up around horses. I can ride," I said, hot in my cuirass. I'd insisted each soldier wear full armor, gloves and a helmet. We were baking in the sun. I wasn't about to lose another soldier by being careless. "I'm told you and your father make a living hunting vethrals and selling their pelts. How many have you killed?"

"How many Bajorans have you killed?" Uther asked.

The tracker's son meant to intimidate me or poke me to get a hostile response. He was judging me, trying to decide if I had mettle or merely provided amusement for the soldiers. Lonak and the rest of the squad rode behind us.

"I've killed more Cardassians from the Fifth Order than Bajorans."

"Ah, you are the one foretold who would come to the fertile land," he said.

Kicking his horse in the sides, Uther rode to the front, ahead of his father and Dunatar. He's provided a clue to the very prophesy I was after. I intended to question him after the hunt and learn more. Foretold was a word I found intriguing. Fertile land was obvious, for we rode through another vineyard, not far from Milea. Over the rise of a hill, I could see Dukat's estate and his banner waving from each of the four towers.

At Lothar's sharp click, a sound he made when he'd located a hole, we reined in beside a large mound. Among the weeds I could see an opening in the ground. The tracker and his son dismounted with Dunatar. Lothar and Dunatar stood at the hole, while Uther searched for the exit. Not finding his pulse rifle of much use, I went two soldiers to where Uther crouched. The soldiers dismounted and raised their laser rifles to their shoulders, aiming at the hole.

"Fire," I shouted.

The two groups fired their weapons into the holes. Within I could hear sharp cries and snarls, and then only silence. The Bajoran trackers placed poison, a white powder they carried in bags strapped to their shoulder into the holes and then the soldiers used their

trench shovels to close the entrance and exist. We continued in this same pattern, going to each vineyard and when we arrived at Milea it was late in the afternoon. Leaving the horses in the courtyard with one of Dukat's guards to be watered, we set out on foot. I went with Uther, Lonak and six soldiers, while Dunatar and the rest went with the older tracker.

"The Prefect's two sons were devoured in the early morning," Lonak said trudging beside me along a path led through the hills. "Vethrals do not attack in the day. I fear you may have awoken something last night, Yor. A dark evil haunts this place."

Uther pointed at a hole. My soldiers knew how to handle vethral dens by now and fired into two separate holes, baited the entrances with poison and covered them with dirt. We paused to drink water, necessary every thirty minutes in our overheated armor, and I removed my helmet to pour water over my forehead. I thought about the hologram at the last second. It was not affected by water or the dust swirled around us and held firm.

"When shadows arise, death shall come and consume the living," Uther said.

The tracker aimed his rifle at the bushes and fired. A female vethral rushed out, snarling and he shot her between the eyes. I heard the cries of pups and couldn't watch when three soldiers moved into the bushes, firing their pistols. Uther hurried forward, crouching and stuffed the dead pups into another bag worn on his back. When he drew his knife to skin the dead female, I turned my back, not caring if my soldiers found my squeamish cowardly or not.

"Eben showed me the picture he took of the altar last night. Most of the ancient writing had worn off. After I scanned it, the computer translated the symbols. It said, 'Blood will flow, shadows arise, and a great fire shall burn the land, bringing death shall consume the living.' I want to know what the full prophesy says, Lonak."

"Let's ask Uther," the veteran said. Logan approached the tracker's son, speaking to him softly. I stiffened when Uther stared at me with unforgiving eyes.

"You know what the prophesy is, don't you?" I asked. Hemet held under my arm, the breeze tossing my hair in my face, I approached the Bajoran. "Well? Tell me, Uther."

"It is an old saying in these parts. It means nothing to a Cardassian."

Lonak caught hold of the tracker's arm, jerking Uther told me. "You will tell the glinn what you told me, Bajoran," he growled. "It will save us a great deal of time visiting shadow dwellings."

"You went to such a temple?" Uther removed Lonak's hand. "It was foolish for you to venture into a temple of darkness. Very foolish. The vethrals are the living version of jakars. Now I know why my village was attacked last night. An old man was killed along with his flock and dog. This is your fault, Golden Hair. You have brought the shadows out of the dark."

"Tell her the prophesy as you told me," Lonak said, his tone threatening.

Clouds blocked the sun at moment and in the distance I heard laser fire. The temperature dropped, enough I felt chilled, and a shadow was cast over Uther's face. He stared through me, his arms hanging at his sides, fingers loosely holding his pulse rifle.

"From the stars, a savior shall come, armed with a sword of justice to battle the one called Devourer. From the dark, a dagger will strike, poisoned with vengeance and disdain, and savior and shadow will wage war."

The clouds moved on and waning sunlight shined on Uther's face. His eyes were filled with fear as he looked away from me, placing his rifle on his shoulder and waved us off as he hastened toward a worn path in the brush. Lonak turned toward me, concern written on his weathered features and pointed at the villa to our right. Uther vanished from sight and I used my com-link, contacting Dunatar.

"It's getting late," I said. "You have fifteen minutes to wrap it up and meet us at Milea."

"Lothar and his son are headed your way now. They're taking their horses and leaving," Dunatar replied. *"Wait for us. We're no more than a half mile from your position."*

"Hold your position," I called out. "Don't lower your guard, either. I have no doubt there are more than vethrals in these hills. Lonak, I want to know if there is another Temple of Shadows nearby. If we can't enter, then perhaps we can cover them with soil and mark each one as restricted."

Two forms ran past us, Lothar and Uther, headed straight for the villa. Dunatar and

his soldiers arrived and together we followed the trackers, arriving right as the Bajorans took their horses and headed out at a fast gait. We'd need to call for a shuttle to pick us up, since walking was out of the question, not at night. Another hunting party came from the north led by Dukat. Two soldiers pulled a cart filled with dead vethrals.

"Should they be bringing them here?" I asked Lonak. "The packs will smell the blood. They seem to be intelligent. I wonder if they feel the need for revenge as we do. If so, then we need to be told to burn those carcasses. They're not trophies."

"I'll leave for you to discuss with your cousin."

Lonak and the soldiers sat on the fountain, using the water to wash their hands and faces. Two Bajorans came out of the house, carrying trays with cups of water. I took two cups as I approached Dukat, catching his attention. He dismissed his soldiers and walked toward me. His eyes were reddened and he wore a look of pure disdain.

"Drink," I said, handing him a cup. It was cold and tasted good. I washed Dukat drain his cup and then he threw it aside, breaking it on the cobblestones. "We cleared at least fifteen dens. Each had vethrals inside. It must be the season for vethrals to have their young. We've killed as many pups as adults. And you?"

"They're everywhere. We went into the nearby Bajoran village. They were burying their dead and salted the graves. I've never seen anything like it. I wanted Helen to see what we killed. You fared better than us and hired trackers. I'll need them again. I won't stop until I've wiped out the last of these devil dogs."

"That's an Earth term. Helen must have called them that," I said, walking with him to the house. "I think you should burn the bodies and then salt them. I don't know why the Bajorans are doing that, we should as well. I've learned a bit about the prophesy, Dukat. I'd like to spend some time in your library tonight. Maybe Vardon has a journal can provide more insight. I'll make a full report when I know the entire prophesy and what it means."

"My sons were killed this morning, Yor. I hardly think it has anything to do with Bajoran gods and superstitions. They were killed by vethrals."

"I'm sorry," I said. "Vethrals are the living version of the Guardians of the Dead. It's easy to kill vethrals. However, jakars' have a poisonous bite. There is no cure for it. I lost

Komash to one of them last night. Lonak left his body on the road. You must leave those they bite behind or they'll follow you home. It's gruesome, I know."

"Spoken like a true Cardassian." Dukat grabbed my arm as we stood on the porch. "Why are they attacking, Yor? I have my children here. This morning Oona tried to kill Helen." He covered his face with his hands, rubbed his eyes. "The female was Vardon's prior mistress. Her child Stefon was found this afternoon in a ditch, half eaten by vethrals. I can't be sure. I think her parent's tossed the child out, since it was a half-breed, when Oona's body was delivered to their doorstep."

I sat on the steps. Dukat sank beside me.

"Dismiss the Bajorans from your household. Rely on only Cardassians to take care of Helen and your children. How many children do you have, Dukat?"

"Not as many as before," Dukat said. He gazed at my squad, left hungry and tired at the fountain. "There's no shuttle available. The one I had lost power to the east of here. We left it on a hill and set out on foot. Your squad can sleep in the barn tonight. I'll provide food and drink for your men. I'd appreciate the extra guards."

"Did you know this land was haunted by demons, Dukat?"

He stared at me. "What do you mean?"

"'Shadows will rule in the Land of the Dead.' It's something the tracker's son told me. part I learned from Dunatar, told to him by Lothar this afternoon. There's more of this country folklore. I'm only hearing bits and pieces. I think directly involves you, Helen and me. That's why I want to spend time in your library tonight. I'll need Lonak. Is all right with you and Helen? I'm told she doesn't want to see me. If I'm imposing...."

"Cousin, by all means, search the library. That's an order," Dukat ordered.

HELEN

Chapter Sixty-Two

Peering out the window, I saw Dukat with Sawyer on the front porch. A stack of dead vethrals filled a wagon. Horses were led to the barn by two Bajorans. Dukat and Sawyer whispered together, a reminder how close they were, and I experienced a tinge of jealousy. The sun was starting to set. I stood with Madison in my arms. Garak held Gabriel behind me and looked out the window. I heard him sigh.

“Our heroes have returned,” he said.

Dukat patted Sawyer on the shoulder. She approached a group of soldiers who waited at a fountain, while Dukat entered the house. I hoped he’d come into the sitting room and tell me what just happened. He took the stairs, three at a time, in a rush, and vanished. Garak glanced at me, his fingers at the edge of the curtain to pull it aside. We both saw Sawyer approach an older Cardassian with white hair. After a brief discussion, the squad headed toward the barn.

“What do you think this means?” I asked.

“We have guests for the night,” Garak said. “I for one welcome Yor’s protection. I suggest you have a chat with her, Helen. I’ll have a meal brought to her and the glinn. That’s Lonak. He’s older than Dukat by at least fifteen years. The Fourth Order had a company of seasoned soldiers stationed at the fort. She’s headed toward the house. Shall I take Madison from you? Blythe can feed the children in the nursery.”

“Where is Shazel? I don’t want her near the twins.”

“Helen, what’s come over you?”

“I’m being cautious, Garak. I don’t trust little girl. She hates me.”

“I’ll speak with Blythe and tell her of your concern. I’m sure old battle axe intends to

keep Shazel separated from the illegitimate offspring of the Prefect.”

I gave him a sharp look, finding his words hurt since he was also talking about my children. Madison fussed when I handed her to Garak. The slam of the door and stomping boots on the foyer carpet announced the arrival of Sawyer and the veteran. As I emerged from the sitting room, I spotted the pair brushing dirt of their sand skirts onto the floor. Both were covered with blood and stickers, leaving a trail as they walked to the library. Neither noticed me as I stood in the doorway. Two helmets were placed on a chair, along with laser rifles. The old Cardassian was in the process of removing his cuirass when I entered the library. He gave me a nod.

Sawyer stood in front of a bookshelf, her back to me. She spoke softly to someone on her com-link. “I’ll be home in the morning. Stay with Ikarus tonight. Don’t you dare leave your room. Promise.” She laughed. “Okay. Yes, I love you, too. Good night, Eben.”

As I cleared my throat, Sawyer spun around, her hand dropped to her sidearm. She winced when she saw me. I felt a surge of guilt for not inviting her over the evening before to meet Dukat’s children. She’d never know the two boys killed by the vethral. I hadn’t known them either. I should have mourned their deaths. It was awful of me to think two less children in the house felt like less of a burden. I guessed made me a bad person and a bad friend.

At her sudden smile, I caught my breath. Sawyer walked toward me in long strides. She caught hold of me in a fierce embrace. I didn’t mind the dirt and blood. I did mind the smell.

“I’m so sorry,” she said. “You’re trembling. Are you all right?”

“No, not at all,” I replied.

She set me back. I hadn’t hugged her in return. I couldn’t tell if I’d offended her. The smile remained in place along with the hologram made her appear Cardassian. I’d have given anything to be able to push the button to make her appear human. She hid her humanity behind radiant lizard smile and I hated her for it.

“This is Glinn Lonak,” Sawyer said. “He’ll be tutoring Eben when he’s not working with me. You seem to be settled in, Helen. We’d love to have something to eat, if it’s not

too much trouble. We've been scouring the countryside all day hunting wild dogs."

"You smell like one," I said trying to form a smile on my face. "Can't you at least remove your sand skirts before you sit in the chairs? You're both filthy. I don't want horse hair and sweat staining the cushions."

Sawyer laughed. "Fetch us some kanar, woman."

"Is that supposed me to be funny, Glinn Yor?" I pointed at a table. A bottle of kanar and glasses sat in the center. On impulse, I said, "Please tell Damar I appreciate the brush and combs for my hair. He's very thoughtful. How is he? Why isn't he here?"

"Burying the dead at the forts," she said, a questioning look on her brow. "It will take all week. He has more than twenty-five forts to review. Four of those were abandoned prior to the attack by Torell. He will make them ready for the Bajorans to occupy. Is something else on your mind, Helen? You're a bit...distant."

"You might have told me Vardon owned Milea and had a mistress," I snapped. I glanced at the old veteran. He'd removed his boots and placed them on a carpet. He silently filled two glasses with kanar. "Oona tried to kill me this morning. She was Vardon's mistress. I suppose you know about that, too. You seem to know quite a few secrets you aren't willing to tell me. Is because Dukat ordered your silence or did you simply think I'd fall into his arms and all would be well?"

"Orders," she muttered.

"I noticed you didn't kiss each other. Shazel says you always kiss when you say hello and goodbye." I shrugged. "Well, I'm glad that's a custom that's stopped. Or has it?"

"I'm with Damar, Helen. You need to calm down."

"I beg your pardon? Did you just tell me to calm down? I'm Dukat's life-mate and the mother to his brood of children. I now run this house and I say who comes and goes. If you're hungry, I'll send Broc in with field rations and a canteen of well water. I don't see why you should benefit from a tasty roasted children or wine from our vineyards."

Sawyer's eyebrows lifted. She didn't respond with harsh word. She stared at me as she lifted her glass and swallowed the kanar. The old white haired crocodile walked to the row of bookshelves. He traced the titles with his finger before he started pulling random

books off the shelves. He stacked the books on a table in front of a couch. Sawyer refilled her glass and toasted me. I felt my temper rise and felt compelled to shake my fist.

"I want the two of you to stop whatever you're doing and get out!"

"Sorry. Orders." Sawyer finished the second glass of kanar. She licked her lips. I noticed she left behind a clean line above her upper lip. She placed the glass on Vardon's desk. Her fingers brushed against a journal. She seized hold of it and laughed. "I think I just found what we're after, Lonak. It's the traitor's journal."

"I hate you, Sawyer! I hate you!" I shouted.

"Vardon was a traitor," Sawyer said. "I told you so."

I looked around, frantic to find something to throw at her. My eyes settled on the laser rifles, it wasn't my initial thought to shoot her. The impulse was strong. As I stepped toward the weapons, I felt a strong arm wrap around my waist. I struggled violently as another arm wrapped across my forearms. Pinned, I let out a scream of bloody murder. My assailant, however, refused to release me.

"Helen," Dukat said, his tone fierce. He gave me a squeeze. I quieted down. "This is my cousin and an honored officer. I won't have you conducting yourself like a Bajoran fishwife. Calm yourself and stop acting this way. We've all had a difficult day."

Something brushed against my legs. I spotted Shazel run to Sawyer. The girl threw herself into Sawyer's arms, sobbing. My so-called friend pulled the little brat close. I finally turned my head to glare at Dukat. He was not amused.

"Difficult? You call this difficult?" I shouted. "She comes marching in here like she's Joan of Arc, leading her soldiers through our vineyard, bringing those dead dogs to our house. Now she's drinking our kanar and acting like she owns the place."

"What is wrong with you, Helen?" Sawyer asked. "We're here to protect you."

"I don't need protection! Damn you! I'm a Texan!"

Dukat carried me out of the library, kicking and screaming, not releasing me until he entered the kitchen. The door was on double hinges. At his gentle push, it opened and closed behind us. He pushed me my stomach against a wooden counter, pressing behind me. When I reached for a butcher knife, he jerked me around and kissed me.

All anger and hatred faded away at his kiss. With a little sob, I threw my arms around his neck. I didn't want him to stop kissing me, least the shadows close around me once more. It had to be the house, I thought. Since we'd arrived, sometimes my head with dark, malicious thoughts. I felt certain I was going mad. I was unable to stop thinking about Oona, the remains of the boys, and a wagon filled with carcasses.

"I'm sorry you had to see the dead dogs," Dukat said.

"I don't know what's wrong. I've seen dead animals before."

"Whenever I was a boy and lost my temper, my father would hold me until I grew quiet. He told me, 'clear your head of all thoughts, find a happy place in your mind, then take a deep breath and relax.'" Dukat's lips brushed across my forehead. "If I didn't know any better, Helen, I'd say you still had an implant. You act like you have murderous intentions toward me and my cousin."

"She's not your cousin!"

"Yes, she is, Helen. And you're Garak's niece. It's legal and means is real."

"You love her more than me," I groaned.

I closed my eyes, unable to find a happy place. All I saw was Sawyer kissing Dukat. My eyes flickered open. He still held me in his arms. I tried to break his hold, only my struggles caused him to tighten his embrace.

"I know it's true," I said with a gasp. He held me too tight. "I've always known it. Can you imagine her taking care of a household of children? I'm the one who had your children. Not her. Why don't I come first in your heart? Why must I share the little place I hold with another? I don't want her here. I want her to leave, Dukat."

"Jealous is a dark and ugly master, Helen. I'll tell you this only once. Ren Yor is not my lover. She will never be my mistress. I will never marry her. We, in a way, are polar opposites must never meet or much harm will come of such a union. I have chosen you to be my life-mate. I am not opposed to marrying you. I cannot to do or it would cause further scrutiny by the Obsidian Order."

"What bunch of horse manure," I snarled.

His eye ridges slammed together. He lifted me off the floor and placed me on the

counter. His hand fell flat onto my thighs to hold me in place. The urge to strike him was strong. I would have only the look in his eyes stopped me.

“Had I not been turned into one of Torell’s puppets,” he continued, “I would never have given you to Garak. Nor would I have allowed him to legalize you as his niece or give our children his family name. As it is, you are a Garak. My children will not have the name of Dukat. Nor will I marry Garak. I will not be tied legally to a family associated with the OO or I would never be trusted by Central Command or the Union. It is a matter of honor, Helen. Nothing more.”

“Honor? Can you hear yourself? You care nothing about my honor or my reputation.”

“I do, my love,” Dukat said. He took hold of my hands. “That’s why I’m here with you now and not making mad, passionate love to Yor in a barn. She belongs to Damar, wears his ring, and you are mine. Attached to your wrist is my bel-rath, given to you months ago.”

“It’s not a bel-rath. You said so yourself.”

Dukat hissed as he jerked my arms behind my back, forcing me off the counter and onto my feed. I had to stand on my tiptoes. The maneuver was painful and distracted me.

“Whatever is inside your head, subdue it, woman. This jealousy, this sense of betrayal and hatred you have for me and Yor must come to an end. I cannot fight vethrals, renegades, demons, and you at the same time. Let us have peace. Let there be love between us.”

I caught my breath as he kissed me, almost savagely and felt his hand pulled my skirts to my waist. When I tried to resist, to ask him to wait, he turned me over the table and bared my backside to his hand. His boot knocked my legs apart. I heard his pants unzip and felt the slap of his hot flesh on my ass. With a snarl, I tried to break free. He grabbed my wrists and held them in one hand, pulling my arms over my head and then unceremoniously slid his cock deep inside, finding me moist and ready.

With a growl, he thrust against me, slamming me into the table each time he withdrew and sunk deep into my flesh. My eyes felt like they rolled into the back of my

head. My body wanted this, needed him to ravage me, until there was nothing inside an overwhelming since of passion and love for Dukat. I gasped each time he thrust. He wouldn't allow me to silent and continued to ram me until I drooled on the table, felt a rush between my legs and realized we'd come at the same time. I felt him slide out of my body. His fingers returned, dipping inside. He spun me around, jammed his moist fingers into my mouth, watching. I sucked our combined essence, gasped when he did it again, dipping inside me as though his fingers had become a spoon. This time I watched as he licked his fingers clean.

"Fix for dinner for Yor and Lonak. Be sure you don't poison them," Dukat said. He had a smile on his handsome face. "Yor likes Romulan ale, so bring her a bottle. And Helen?" His smile widened as he flashed his teeth. "Don't ever behave like again in front of my soldiers or I'll fuck you with everyone watching. Is clear?"

"What? What did you say to me?"

"I said you taste delicious and I love you." Dukat gave a tug on my skirt, lowering it and turned me to give a pat to my backside. "I shall consider penetrating other parts of your body, I assure you, if you do play the part of hostess. Sex seems to keep you sane. I must exact this type of therapy whenever you're out of line, and trust me, Helen, I shall enjoy it. Need help in here?"

"Wash your hands," I muttered.

He laughed and went to the sink. He turned on the water and did as I asked. I joined him. Dukat washed my hands for me. He dried them on a towel and pulled me into his arms. He kissed me until I couldn't think of anything else.

"Join me in the north tower tonight," Dukat said.

"The north tower? Your room?"

"It's a request, not an order, my love. You'll sleep better in my room. Bring the twins with you. No harm will come to any of you. Not on my watch."

The request was just what I wanted to hear. I already felt better.

* * *

SAWYER

"Tasper eggs, yamok sauce, and green purtin root." Lonak lifted his fork, a delighted look on my face, grateful for what Helen had provided. She'd placed the tray, a bit haughtily. He didn't see her flip me off. "And a tall glass of fish juice. Your friend is a thoughtful hostess, Yor."

"She's trying to poison me," I said. I was annoyed by the way Helen had entered the room, slammed the tray onto the table, and left without saying a word.

"There is plenty for us both. Will you not eat?"

"No, thank you. I'd rather starve to death."

We ate in the library. Cardassian food was less than satisfactory, in fact, apart from a few types of cooked fish, I didn't eat the stuff. One whiff of the eggs made me lose my appetite. The color of yamok sauce and consistency of purtin root reminded me of vomit. It was God's little reminder I was not a real Cardassian. I wanted a hamburger and fries. Helen had her revenge, I thought. I sat on the couch, my stomach grumbling as I read Vardon's journal, telling Lonak what I discovered.

"There are numerous entries about the Vardon meeting with Marquis traders in a ravine, not far from his property. Twenty separate occurrences in the last year. Vardon was involved in the slave trade. Four months ago, he sold eighteen female slaves under the age of sixteen to an Orion for thirty thousand latinum bars. Add prostitution to his list." I lifted my eyes to glance at Lonak. "Now Dukat had pleasures slaves. I was one for a night. And there were plenty of Dabo girls on Terok Nor. After I set down the law, I sent the pleasures slaves home to their parents and Dabo girls were paid for their services."

"Doesn't make you a procurer?" he asked.

"No, Quark was. I just looked after the girls. I kept them from harm." I squirmed as Lonak lifted an eye ridge. "It's where I acquired the nickname of Joan of Arc. Why am I explaining this to you, if you're only going to mock me?"

He chuckled. "Only one night as a pleasure slave?"

"Listen here, you old crocodile. If you were my lover," I said as I stabbed an egg with a fork, "I'd certainly be the death of you. Stop smiling at me. Didn't you hear what I

said? Vardon was dealing with the Marquis. That's proof he was a traitor. If Helen had stuck around, I'd have shown her the entries in his journal. She still think the best of him. He was a snake."

Lonak laughed. "I'm surprised Dukat did not notice the journal. He is a stickler for details," he said smacking his lips. "Something doesn't smell right, Yor."

"...the eggs." I set aside my fork. "Why do you say that?"

"If Dukat had seen journal, he would have discussed what he found with you. Every true Cardassian hates the Marquis." Lonak wiped his mouth with his napkin and dropped it onto the table. "I have a feeling journal was planted right here, right where you could find it and not by Dukat. Someone else has taken an interest in Vardon. Granted, the Marquis are a clear sign Vardon was guilty. As for the slave trade, it became a crime only after the Occupation ended, Yor, so double-check your dates. Vardon did what many Cardassians did to make a profit."

"The Marquis are terrorists. Vardon had a mistress here," I said, "and he had a wife and kids on Cardassia. I suppose they're still there, left without funds."

"Like many guls, he did what was the norm. Vardon is dead. The Marquis ships were destroyed," he said. "And that's now why we're here, Yor. Keep researching what we came here for. You said Trakon wrote a specific prophesy pertains to you. Well, he wrote thousands of prophesies. Why do you insist Trakon foretold your arrival? It's no wonder your friend is annoyed at you. I would be as well."

"I'm not conceited," I said. "The Prophets did pick me for a job. I want to know why, Lonak."

"Considering how many Bajoran sages and priests saw visions and wrote about them, Trakon is not special. It would take you a lifetime to find a prophesy pertains to just you. What did Dukat call it? You might as well be looking for a needle in a haystack."

I snapped my fingers. "Exactly," I said, "yet someone put this journal out in plain sight for me to find. If it wasn't Dukat or Helen, then who was it? One of the household staff, you think? Maybe a few of these Bajorans want to help us out."

"Dukat also mentioned you have a great need for taking the credit for the smallest

things," Lonak said. "It is not an attractive trait, Yor."

"Bull crap," I muttered. "I'm not taking any credit here. I freely admit someone is helping us out, wants to remain anonymous. All this cloak and dagger crap makes me think of Constable Odo. He'd love to solve this one. And I'm not just talking about the prophesy, Lonak. I'm talking about Vardon's involvement with the Marquis and his slave ring. The locals wouldn't look favorably upon him. Again, must be someone who worked for him placed this journal out for us to find."

"Or they're feeding your ego. If that's the case, this could be an elaborate trap."

His chuckling brought a smile to my face. Odo would have liked Lonak. The truth was I missed Odo and considered contacting him to see what he had learned about the True Way. My interest in Vardon, Milea, and the gods and demons of Bajor wasn't merely for my own benefit. I wanted to help my friends and the Bajorans. I drank more kanar, not minding it so much after the second class and found my thoughts slipping toward Damar.

"In the morning, Lonak, I want to visit the Bajoran town. The former slaves of Vardon might shed more light on what happened here. You will think I am crazy. Somehow this all leads to the Shadow Dwellers. All those jakars and vethrals, stirred up like they are, have a purpose, and it's not guarding one little temple."

"I wonder why the girl Oona attacked Helen," Lonak said.

"Oona's father fed Vardon's infant son to the vethrals. Maybe the girl found out Helen was involved with Vardon and blamed her. In any case, it's something else I'd rather not tell Helen. She's upset the way it is. The death of Dukat's sons has us all a little raddled. I'm sorry they didn't send for us sooner."

Lonak nodded. "It's not uncommon for cultures to have both good and evil gods. One cannot exist without the other," he said. "Legend says the Pah-Wraiths are imprisoned in the Fire Caves. The Prophets are bound in a way to the wormhole, which is called the Celestial Temple, yet both continue to wage war on each other in an astral dimension."

"On Earth, Lucifer rules Hell," I replied. "He's called the Devil or Satan. He can come and go from hell, and so can his legend of demons. People pray to Lucifer. They Satanic cults on Earth are just as frightening as the Shadow Dwellers."

"Yor, Shadow Dwellers are demons, not the people who worship them," Lonak said. "I have not heard anything in journal to suggest Vardon promoted the worship of the Pah-Wraiths. Keep to facts. Not speculation."

Standing, I took a turn around the room to stretch my legs. "People have used religion throughout the ages to promote war and to do vial crimes against other people, races, planets, you name it. Why could Vardon strike fear in the hearts of the Luan province by stirring up stories about the Pah-Wraiths? He could use any prophesy he wants. The only problem is I have met the Prophets more than once, Lonak. I've bargained with them before to keep the peace. I suspect they are not through with me. Yet, if they had an interest, then didn't the Pah- Wraiths as well? There's must always be a balance. How can I be sure I am not here because the Pah- Wraiths mean to meet with me and likewise entreat me to bargain with them?"

"Damar said you were as conceited as Dukat," said Lonak. "Oh, Damar loves you. He thinks the world of you. This does not change the fact you have an inflated sense of self-worth just like your illustrious cousin."

"And that's precisely why Dukat is meant to be with Helen and not with me. I need a grounding stone. Like Damar. I also need to see the map of the province hanging in Damar's office. Eben had marked every Temple of Shadows and there are quite a few in this area. Vardon was onto something. He knew more than I'm actually telling you about me or Helen. I'm keeping you in the dark for your own good."

I heard a great deal of grumbling from the old glinn. When Lonak quieted, I knew he was eating the last of the eggs and dipping bread in the yellow yamok sauce.

"What if Vardon was using the Shadow temples to meet the Marquis? No one in their sane mind would think looking for the Marquis there," I said. "Seven Marquis ships attacked Bajor. We captured one. Six vanished. The storm didn't affect their ships. Not at all. They suddenly vanished when the storm passed without a trace. Think the Shadow Dwellers could be hiding those ships and their crews on Bajor? They didn't slip out the wormhole because the Prophets aren't letting anyone use it...it's part of the deal I struck them."

“Pity you can’t talk to Helen. She seems quite nice, Yor. If I was here, I’d feel intimidated by you. I might just dye my hair bright red to counter your golden curls.”

“Lonak, talking to Helen about the Prophets and Pah-Wraiths is not an option. She hates me right now. It would help to know if she’s been having nightmares. Shazel and Eben have since we came here. It’s the same for Dukat and me. And this isn’t like the visits with the Prophets. These dreams can get downright demonic and that’s why I’m spending all night trying to figure out what they want with me!”

Lonak wasn’t listening to me. He was tired as well and still on our prior topic.

“Little intimidate talks about your dreams with Dukat would certainly upset me,” he said. “I wouldn’t trust you around him. I couldn’t trust him around pretty females. All I’d do is worry some pretty girl would catch his eyes and he’d be off, having yet another bastard, while I’d be at home changing their diapers. What did you say about demonic dreams? The children are having them, too. Eben?”

“Yes, he’s been having them, too. Not Damar. Damar doesn’t dream. As much as I love Fort Galdrak, this place, not so much. I feel like we’re being watched right now.”

“No more kanar. Switch to something else, Yor. I mean it.”

Sighing, I stepped into the hallway. The night guard had sat in a chair, his eyes starting to close and I walked over and slapped him in the face. He was on his feet in an instant.

“Apologies, Glinn Yor.”

“Better soldiers than you have been executed for sleeping at their post. Go rouse Broc and tell him to come here,” I said, angrily. “Tell him bring me a pot of Bajoran coffee and slice some bread and cheese. And then get back here and have a cup yourself, you idiot.”

I needed coffee to stay away. I needed food if I was going to have enough energy to stay awake and review the books Lonak had pulled from the shelves. Returning to the library, I found Lonak back at work, reading a scroll. As I waited for Broc, I stood at the window, watching the moonlight at play in the fountain, turning the water silver and used my com-link to hail Damar. I woke him. Hearing his voice settled my nerves.

"Where are you? Eben said you're not back yet." Damar sounded upset.

"I'm still at Milea. This morning, Dukat's two sons were killed by vethrals. Maybe I'm being paranoid, this feels like murder, not an accident. This place gives me the creeps. I know you're busy. I need either Odo or Major Kira to come here and help me. I'd ask Dukat, only he's got his hands full."

"I can send Major Kira to you. You haven't slept, have you?"

"No. I'm up to my neck in manuscripts and yamok sauce. I did find evidence Vardon sold Bajoran female slaves to the Marquis. I think he was meeting the Marquis at the Temples of Shadows in this area and that's why these demon dogs are stirred up. I'm going to check out a nearby village tomorrow and talk to Vardon's former slaves. They might know something whether Vardon has a member of a demonic cult or merely spreading rumors about a prophesy to control the Bajorans. In any case, I'm grasping at straws and Garak is too busy with the children to be of any use."

"I'll arrange it and have here at Milea by morning. Yor, what you are suggesting is troubling. Entering a Shadow temple nearly got you killed. If Vardon used the temples to meet his Marquis friends, then you're dealing with forces beyond your control."

"I still have two Bajoran assassins to catch, Damar. The ones on the Death List," I said. "The list might not be accurate. It might not have anything to do with Vardon's skullduggery in Milea, though I think it does."

"Summoning demons to do their evil bidding? Take a break and regroup. You're making this more difficult than it needs to be and I won't be able to return to the fort any time soon. I won't bore you with details. By the way, Korvinus is an ideal aide."

"Yeah? Well, he doesn't kiss half as good as I do. Goodnight."

The transmission ended.

I found Lonak dosing in his chair, his fork still in his hand and left him there, knowing the old soldier needed to sleep. Broc arrived, brining me coffee and a basket of bread, along with slices of fruit from the garden. He placed it on the table and sat beside me, wearing a robe and socks. His hair was tousled and made him look boyish.

"Sorry I made you get out of bed. Is the rest of the household is asleep?" I asked.

“The prefect and his mistress are in the north tower,” Broc said rubbing sleep from his eyes. “The children are in the nursery. All is quiet. I assumed you might need a little help. In times like this, younger minds prevail.”

“I’m not old,” I grumbled.

Smiling, Broc poured me a cup of coffee and handed it to me. He gazed at a book I’d open on the ancient poet and sage Trakon and pulled it onto his lap. It was a large book and filled with far too many drawings, symbols, and bullshit for me to get through and maintain some semblance of sanity. And now I was onto Vardon’s misdeeds, I needed to find a connection between him and the Shadow Dwellers, and of course, how Helen, Dukat, and I fit into it.

“I read about Trakon at the academy. My father thought I’d be stationed here one day and thought it a good idea I do so. Trakon wrote thousands of prophesies the Bajorans have believed through the ages. Quite a few have come true.”

“Well, on Earth, they had Nostradamus. Close to the same thing.”

“Did you study the Terran culture at the academy? I was not aware they had a course on the Terrans.”

“I know a little about a lot of things, Broc. There are similarities in the religions on Bajor and Earth. I’m sure it’s the same on most planets throughout every quadrant. Evil and good always fight for dominance, one can’t exist without the other, and people do atrocious things in the name of their gods. Sometimes gods or demons do atrocious things. I want to see if Vardon had demons working for him. You follow this, kiddo?”

“You believe Gul Vardon summoned Shadow Dwellers to do his evil bidding and these demons remain in this province. You believe they continue to do evil things. What’s more, you also believe these demons are focused on you and want you to do evil things. Are you possessed?”

“I’m motivated. Go on. Humor me,” I said.

“If you were able to summon a Shadow Dweller who serves the Pah-Wraiths, you would need to be able to control them. Vardon is dead. No one is left to control them. Uncontrolled they seek out others who are susceptible to demonic persuasion. Or there are

still those who attempt to control them by ritual or sacrifice. You would need a high priest who worships the Pah-Wraiths. You need helpers to perform the rituals or sacrifices. Vardon had slaves. This province is filled with Shadow temples."

"And the Marquis were involved. Slave trade. Destroying forts."

Broc scratched his forehead. "Very involved for a gul to be doing and for what reason, Yor? To be rich?" he asked. "Vardon had this vineyard and he was a gul. He had wealth. To influence others to do his bidding? Again, he was a gul and he owned slaves. He had the power. The Marquis were merely his business partners and later his co-conspirators to bring down Cardassia. If you are implying Vardon wanted to bring down Cardassia by releasing the Pah- Wraiths?"

"And used a prophesy to scare the locals and me."

"Then you continue to be a player in the game. why?"

"Precisely what I want to know, and now you're on the same page as me, come up with answers and help me find the evidence I need to prove it. And then tell me how to put these demons back into whatever astral dimension they come from and I'll be content. Promise."

Taking a small sip of coffee, I burnt my tongue, set it aside, and angrily pointed at the journal on the table. Broc reached for it. He held my gaze, looking worrier than he should have, for he hadn't looked inside yet.

"I'm giving you a new assignment. You are to keep journal and study it. Chart out how many times Vardon contacted the Marquis and see if you can find out where they met on in this province. It's possible the Marquis are still here. I have two names on my Death List, traitors I need to find. I'm not merely a glinn, Broc. The list had names of members of the Circle. Mostly Fifth Order officers who joined Gul Vardon, Gul Mukot, and Legate Mikor. We lost thousands of men on Bajor only a few days ago, during one of the worst storm in the century and the Marquis ships vanished into thin air, all one, the one Gul Renalt captured and he were executed."

"You've a lot on your mind, Yor. My brain is yours to use," Broc said.

"I know this all sounds crazy. I put Lonak to see with my rambling. What if my last

two Circle members to kill include Pah-Wraith priests? They are Bajoran, supposedly. If you want, bring Cardassia to its knees, why wouldn't you employ a couple of sorcerers and use evil magic to topple an empire? You would if you could. Well, you wouldn't. Vardon might have. And the Circle did try to use me to help them. They could be trying to use me and I don't want to wake up possessed and kill my lover."

"Who are the two Bajorans you are looking for? I can try to cross-reference them with Bajorans who live in their area, warrants, land purchases, well, anything you can think of. I can find them. Let me help."

"Talos and Dovvos. I think they're phony names since I haven't been able to find them, nor has Bajoran Intelligence," I said.

A loud snore from Lonak made the young officer nearly jump from the couch. I placed my hand on his shoulder, felt him trembling, and wondered what had sent him off. He'd been frightened when he entered the library.

"Calm down. I'm going to look around. Something has spooked you and I need to take a break," I said. "I'll return and you can help sort me out. This needs to be made simple and not as difficult as I've made it. I need it to make sense if I'm going to present this to Dukat and Damar or they're going to lock me in a padded cell."

"Walk softly and carry a sword. That's what my grandfather used to say. He was with the Third Order and they used swords in battle. They're quiet, Yor. And you don't need to shoot your pistol at shadows. Pick one of Vardon's swords over there in the large pot."

I'd not brought Damar's sword with me. I had hung it in our bedroom, thinking it deserved a place of honor. It had seen enough blood. Vardon had a collection of swords in a pot Broc pointed out to me. The handle of a sword had caught my attention the moment I'd entered the library, for the hilt was the head of a snake, its coiled body offering grooves for fingers. I stood and approached the pot, listening to the quiet filled the library, apart from Lonak's snores. My hand curled around the hilt. Maybe I was tired, yet it felt like it tingled in my grasp.

"Nice choice," Broc said.

I drew the sword from his scabbard, finding the silver polished. It was lighter than it

looked and it fit well in my grip. I brandished it over my head and lowered it to my side.

“Did you bring a pistol, kiddo?”

“You have several in the chair over there. I’m sure I won’t need one.”

“Well, I’m taking one with me. Vethrals hunt at night,” I said.

Pausing at the chair where Lonak and I had left our weapons, I drew one of my pistols, a bit overly armed for a walk through. Broc appeared behind me, took one of my pistols, and returned to the couch. He closed the door after me. I gazed in either direction, unable to see the guard and wondered why he’d left his post. Thinking of Helen and the disgusting dinner she’d served me, I felt compelled to venture into the kitchen, finding the hallways dimly lit and the serious lack of guards at their posts.

My nose led me to the kitchen. I opened the door with a nudge from my right shoulder, the sword held tight in my grip and lifted the pistol as I entered the dark chamber. A few tiny lights on kitchen appliances and the replicator provided hardly enough light to see where I was going. At the touch of a breeze on my face, I glanced at a large window over what appeared to be a sink, hearing the drip of water and took a moment for my eyes to adjust to the limited light from the hallway to see inside the kitchen.

A pair of boots poked out from behind a wooden counter in the middle of the room, pooled beneath the heels the unmistakable tinge of blood. On closer inspection, I noticed droplets of blood led from the door into the kitchen. Whoever lay on the floor had been killed when they’d entered and now lay behind the counter. A butcher knife was left embedded deep into the wood. I could hear Odo’s voice in my head saying, "It would require great strength to thrust a blade an inch into counter. It was obviously a male, unless by chance the woman is of access size and possessed the strength of a Cardassian."

My hand lifted to my com-link and I stroked it once. “Dunatar? Can you hear me? Are you alive?” I heard the soldier mutter in response. “Rouse the squad. Come to the kitchen. I’m here and there’s a dead body with me.”

Backing out of the kitchen, my curiosity not the time to require me to enter a dark room with no working lights, for in this house they flickered on when entering a room,

with no visible switch or button. I retraced my steps, able to see the blood led into the library, curious it would for I'd been there only moments earlier. I holstered my pistol, already able to hear shouts outside the villa and opened the door. Lonak's face was on his plate and the yamok sauce had mingled with his blood. Neither Broc or the journal was where I had left them. They had vanished.

"Glinn Yor," Dunatar shouted. "Someone rouse Prefect Dukat. Yor!"

"She's over here, sir."

"Yor! Are you wounded? Answer me!"

I heard my name, though it sounded far away. The lights dimmed, I didn't know why and I felt the sword slide from my fingers. Figures appeared in the hallway, large, lumpish forms. The strength left my legs and I collapsed to the ground, able only to say one word, "Coffee," before I lost unconsciousness.

HELEN

Chapter Sixty-Three

"Please, wake up. You have to wake up. Can you hear me?" I patted Sawyer's cheek and the hologram faded, leaving her human and extremely pale. I feared she was on the verge of death. "Yor, don't you dare leave me here alone. Do something, Major Kira? Please. She's my best friend and I need to tell her when she wakes up."

"I have, Helen," Kira said. "I have given her the anecdote to a rather toxic poison used in these parts to kill vethrals. Fortunately, Yor took only a small sip of coffee. Had she drunk the entire cup, you'd now be speaking to a corpse."

"Spare me what you like and don't like. Who would give Yor vethral poison? Surely, one of those trackers didn't return to kill her? Kira, did you find the trackers? Did they tell you anything? What about Glinn Lonak?" I asked.

"Helen doesn't know what happened, Major Kira. I spared her the gory details," Garak said. "The moment Yor was brought to the west tower by Gil Dunatar, she remained at Yor's side the entire time. I've fed, burped, and changed the twins' diapers eight times."

"What happened?" I asked.

"Lonak's throat was sliced from ear to ear. He won't be answering any questions," Major Kira said. "Garresh Broc is missing. The guard found in the kitchen was stabbed through the heart. Broc may be the killer, then again, Yor might have seen the killer before she collapsed." The major walked over to a sword lying on a table. "Gil Dunatar said Yor was armed with a Bajoran Shadow Blade. The blood on the blade is old. Nor does it belong to Lonak. I figure Garresh Broc waited in the kitchen. He killed the guard and poisoned the coffee. Once he saw Yor drink it, he returned to the library and murdered Lonak. Yor goes into the kitchen, finds the dead person, contacts Dunatar, and then returns to the library. By

then, Broc had already made his escape.”

“Oh, you’re good at this,” I said rolling my eyes.

“Thank you.”

“Good at fabricating a story, I meant. We can’t be sure Broc is the killer.”

“I work with what I have, Helen,” Kira said. “Unless your friend wakes up and sheds light on this mystery, then Broc remains our main suspect.”

Seated on the bed beside Sawyer, I held my friend’s hand. Garak stood at the window, peering out behind the drapes at the courtyard. Major Kira had arrived no more than an hour after Sawyer started frothing at the mouth. A local doctor had arrived, been uncertain what to give Sawyer. As soon as Major Kira transported onto the porch of Milea, she’d taken one look at the cart filled with dead wild dogs, guessed the nature of the poison and advised the doctor which anecdote to give to Sawyer. had been two hours ago. Sawyer had yet to regain consciousness.

“Garak? What do you think happened?” I asked, wanting answers. Dukat and the soldiers were scouring the vineyard and nearby town, looking for Broc. He’d also contacted Damar who was on the other side of Bajor, bagging dead bodies and remained on standby. I feared Sawyer would never open her eyes and Damar would return in time for another funeral.

“Gul Damar confirmed Yor contacted him earlier in the evening and requested Constable Odo be sent to Milea to help solve a mystery concerning Gul Vardon,” Garak said. “Apparently Yor found a book, I assume it was a journal, with entries made by Vardon proved he was selling Bajoran females to the Marquis. Any question on whether Vardon’s honorable intentions now seemed solidified he was not a gentleman. In fact, it would seem Vardon was a traitor and arranged for the Marquis ships to attack the Cardassian fort on Bajor. After all, he was dealing with the Marquis.” He sat on a large trunk near the window. “Damar also said Yor believed Vardon was involved with the Shadow Dwellers. She was going to visit a nearby village tomorrow where Vardon’s former slaves live. I’m not sure who Yor expressly meant to speak with. I am annoyed she chose to give the journal to Broc instead of me.”

“Yor brought Broc here to be Dukat’s aide,” I said. “Who are his people? Is his family wealthy or poor? Politicians or officers or merchants?”

“Broc? Legate Brocalus’s son?” Major Kira put her hands on her hips and laughed. “You really don’t know a damn thing about Cardassia, do you? Legate Brocalus was instrumental in making sure Dukat took command of the Cardassian fleet to pursue after Gul Mukot. Broc also garnered enough votes, despite resistance by Legate Kurson, Kornica’s pissed papa, and to make certain Dukat had enough votes to be accepted on the Counsel, whereby he was appointed as a legate. Anything else you want to know about Dukat, Helen?”

“Not really. Yor would know what to ask.”

“Honey, your friend, Joan of Arc, here, isn’t going to spring back to action overnight. I’ve given her something, Sethral will slow the effects of the poison. It’s up to her own body to do the rest. Take another tricorder reading and check her pulse if you’re worried. She’ll open her eyes in a few more hours. I’ve seen this before.”

“Because you probably use the dog poison on someone else,” I snapped.

“Well, certainly not to the two boys found in the garden.” Kira wore her orange Bajoran uniform, it fit her body too snugly, making her breasts look perky. Her whole attitude was perky and I while I was grateful she’d apparently saved Yor’s life, I still didn’t like her. She acted as if she knew more than anyone else did and perhaps she did. “Does one of you care to tell me why the vethrals are attracted to this place like flies on trash? Vethrals are by nature shy. They don’t attack unless they’re starving and there’s plenty to eat in the land of the fertile.”

“What do you say that?” Garak asked.

“The whole province of Luan is considered exceptionally fertile,” Kira said. “There are more vineyards here than in all of Bajor. The landowners are wealthy. Granted, most are Cardassian and the Bajorans only recently started to be paid wages. Slave labor doesn’t cost a thing. And if your former sweetie were selling female slaves journal would have come in handy. It most likely named his contacts and offered a time schedule when the Marquis arrived to pick up their cargo and to whom they sold the slaves. Now we may never know

the truth.”

“Not if you stand here annoying me to death,” I said. “Look, none of us are doing any good standing around. I’ll ask a guard to watch Yor. Blythe’s sisters are arriving either tonight or tomorrow. Not soon enough to help. I think we should go to the Bajoran village and start asking questions. We can start with Oona’s father. Dukat told me she was Vardon’s lover and her parents fed her child to the vethrals.”

“Nice,” Kira said.

“I’m game, if you are, Garak?” I said.

“I think we should wait for Dukat to return.”

The door opened and Eben entered. The boy was covered in road dust and looked like he had run the entire distance from Fort Galdrak to Milea. He took one look at his unconscious mother and ran to me, throwing his arms around, letting his backpack fall to the ground. It fell with a loud clunk. I pulled Eben into my arms and sat on the bed, holding him, while he started to chatter away like an excited parrot.

“I have it all figured out. Mother had this idea the Pah-Wraiths were behind all this,” Eben said. “The other evening, we went to a Temple of Shadows and I found a partial inscription of a prophesy she thought had to do with her, you and Dukat. It’s what she’s been working on since we arrived. Lonak was helping her. He was trustworthy. As for Broc, I liked him. I can’t believe he’d killed Lonak, the guard and poison mother.”

“Abducted?” Garak rose to his feet. “Now this is interesting. Go on, boy.”

“Well, when we were at the temple, we were attacked by jakars. They bit Gil Komash and he died an awful death. Lonak told my mother the jakars would follow us home if he didn’t toss Komash’s body out of the transport. From what I’ve read, vethrals are the living version of jakars, and jakars are the Guardians of the Dead.”

“The dead being the Pah-Wraiths,” Kira said, angrily. “What in the world were you doing at a Shadow temple? No one goes to those temples unless they are a Shadow Dweller and particular cult has been outlawed by Kia Lucan. If any remain in this area, I need to inform Bajoran Intelligence and we need to find out whom they are and make arrests. These people will stop at nothing to keep their identities safe, and if they working for Gul Vardon,

then it stand to reason that, they worked for the Circle. You've busted into a hornet's nest, Helen."

"I haven't done a thing. And that's the problem. I've been blaming Yor and Dukat for everything and not helping them figure out what is going on." I took hold of Eben's face in my hands. "What did you bring in the bag?"

"Doppelgänger devises. I figured we'd turn them on and make it look like you and Garak are standing in the window keeping guard," he said. "I have audio trackers so we can listen to anyone who comes in here. I brought a map of Shadow temples in the area and mother's Death List because there are two assassins not yet located."

"Garak? Why didn't you tell me two remained?" I asked, wanting to punch him in the nose. "Just who hasn't been located yet?"

"I assume they are Vardon's contacts and they are Bajoran. Quin'tal and Drusal. They could be code names which makes it harder to locate them. As for Vardon, I had my suspicions about him. I was unable to prove he was with the Circle or involved in the slave trade. Now illegal, of course," Garak opened the drapes and stared at the courtyard, visible from the west tower. "There are guards posted outside. While I appreciate your enthusiasm and your plan, Eben, I believe you should remain with your mother as her bodyguard. Dunatar and her trusted War Dogs are with Dukat looking for Broc and there is no one else I trust in this house. Not even Blythe."

"If we're going into the village, then we need to leave now while it's light," Kira said. "If vethrals are active in this area, then we need to return before nightfall. Young Yor. Good idea about the holograms. It will appear we're still here. Just keep the door locked."

"Only open it for Dukat or us," Garak said. "This is one time when it's quite clear Dukat is innocent and on the side of good. should make you happy, Helen. Not only did he not murder Vardon and steal his estate, he has actually been trying to protect you and Yor."

"I'll apologize later. Right now, I want to talk to Oona's father," I said. "We need to find out if there is a cult operating here. I also want to know the entirety of this crazy prophesy and why everyone think it has to do with us. Sawyer didn't ask for any of this to happen to her. Nor did I. All this time I thought the Prophets had brought us here. I never

thought it through. If the Prophets had, then they turned us over to the Circle to get implants and to become assassins and doesn't seem like something lawful gods would do. And since the night the shuttle crashed, when I was visited by five demons and have been having horrible nightmares about killing everyone I love, I think I better learn more about the Pah-Wraiths."

"Mother has dreams," Eben said. "She Dukat said has them, too. Damar doesn't. He never dreams. Shazel does. They're bad, Aunt Helen. It's why she's become so mean to you and me. She scares me."

"She scares me, too, Eben."

Kira knelt beside the backpack. She placed it on the bed and gazed intently at Sawyer. "I don't think Shazel killed two Cardassian soldiers or two little boys," she said. "Shazel could have poisoned Yor's tea. If you're also having bad dream, Helen, then it's possible Shazel is as well. I'm told you have spouts of uncontrolled anger. It could mean the girl is under the influence of demons. In time, you may be as well."

"I hope you're wrong about this, Major Kira," I said, unsettled by her explanation.

Opening the back, Eben removed the wristbands and started fiddling with them. "I don't have those kind of dreams," he said. "In my dreams, I am always with Yor and Damar. I'm much older, I stand with them and fight shadows. Sometimes they are both consumed by shadows and I am left all alone. I never want to hurt anyone, only demons. They are bad and they must be returned to the Fire Caves."

"You think the gateway is open?" Kira asked. She stood still while Eben scanned her, turned on the hologram, and sent her doppelgänger to stand at the window. "They call the wormhole the Celestial Temple, it's more like a gateway. There's one on Bajor. It was sealed ages ago. What have you gotten yourself into, Helen? You and Ren Yor. If the Pah-Wraiths have taken in interest in you two, then we have a serious problem on our hands."

"Look, all I know is Yor and I have been played by your gods since we left Earth. In fact, they brought us here from Earth. I thought having an implant was horrible. We could have asked Torell, Yor killed him."

"Well, don't hold a grudge against your best friend, Helen. She may die," Kira said.

She changed the topic without pause. "Are we going or not?"

"First, I want to bring the twins into this room," I said. "Garak, you've placed doubt in my mind concerning Blythe. I don't want to leave her in charge of my children. Go fetch them and bring them here. We'll wait."

Exasperated with the entire female sex, at least that's how Garak acted, he left the room and returned a few minutes later carrying the crib and a bag with supplies. Gabriel and Madison were sleeping. The crib was placed on the floor at Eben's feet. He knew how to feed the children and change their diapers. There really wanted not anything the boy could do. I hoped he wouldn't have to use his pistol.

"Eben, lock the door behind us. If you need Dukat, or us use the com-link. Dukat is on channel 11A. I'm on channel...3B. Call if you need us."

We left the house through a back door, wearing cloaks, and I felt more than a little like an assassin as we snuck out the gate. No one could see us leaving, not when Eben relied on our holograms to give the illusion we remained in the west tower.

Falling into step beside Major Kira, Garak in the rear, my eyes darted to every tree, fearing someone watched, as we made our way along a well-worn path. I heard the tinkle of chimes, amazed when we entered a glen to find three tall stoned with engravings. Dead animals left to decay and bones fashioned into chimes hung from tree limbs. At first glance, it appeared to be a sacred burial ground. We all saw the carcass of a vethral lying behind the stones, blood on the ground, its stomach opened and its entrails pulled out. As we past, I took one last look at the blackened guts, covered with flies, and though it didn't seem possible, I imagined I saw three letters: H, D, and Y. I didn't need to ask Garak or Kira to explain part to me.

The tinkling of the chimes was left behind. After a few miles, we reached a fast-moving creek, the water dark and murky. A fallen tree provided a bridge. Kira went first, poised, and graceful, jumping off the log and drew her pistol, though she gave no indication why at moment she was on high alert. I came next. Moss covered the dead tree. I moved slow, my gaze attracted to the white and white rocks ten feet below and I heard Kira laugh. Someone about her laughter pissed me off and I made it across without an accident.

"Anger motivates you. I'll remember that," Kira said.

Garak was less than confident and used a long branch for balance. He'd made it about halfway when I noticed a number of moving shadows on the opposite side of the creek. I didn't want to alarm him. I now had an explanation for Kira drawing her pistol.

"Come on. You're doing great," Kira said. She placed her foot on the log and reached forward with her hand. Garak slipped at the last second, cried out. She caught his arm and pulled him onto the bank beside her. "Nice. Now everyone knows we're here."

"Shadow Dwellers," I whispered, pointing across the creek.

"I think they're the former slaves. Not demons," Kira said, sounding annoyed. "Just keep walking. They've been with us for the last mile or so."

Ahead on a path appeared a number of crudely built huts. I'd thought we were going to the town. This was clearly a place not on any map. A fire pit still smoked, giving away the place was inhabited. We'd already figured out. Kira motioned for me to look in the first hut. I reached for my own pistol, not drawing it as I entered the building. There were four bed mats, clothes, and a crate filled with food canisters. As I stepped out of the hut, I found Kira and Garak surrounded by twenty starving Bajorans, appearing more like scarecrows than humanoids. I'm sure finding two Cardassians with a Bajoran officer had them a bit confused.

"I'm Major Kira with the Bajoran Intelligence Division. These are my friends, the Garaks. All we want is a few answers. We were told the vethrals are active. A few children were killed over the last few days and want to find out why they're so active."

It was a plausible story and half right.

"Who is your leader?" I asked. "We're here to help. May we speak to him or her?"

"I am the leader," stated a deep male voice. I turned to face a medium sized Bajoran in his fifties. His head was clean-shaven and a feathered earring dangled from his earlobe. He wore a long tattered robe and a spear. "My name is Owyn, husband of Mureen and father of Oona. Do you come from Milea?" I nodded. "Have come to take us back?"

"No. Nothing like that," I said. "You're Oona's father. I'm sorry about what happened to her and to your grandson."

"Stefon was taken from our house by a Cardassian and tossed into a ditch. It happened

several days ago. My daughter blamed your people at Milea. She sought vengeance. I told her to not to return, she was headstrong."

"It is unfortunate what happened to your daughter and grandchild," Garak said. "We are not here to put you into bondage. Now Bajor is a colony, you will never be slaves again. If you need food, shelter, and medical attention, we can provide assistance."

"Thank you," Owyn said.

"Why are your people here?" Kira asked. "There's a town not more than five miles. Why do you want to live this way?"

"Before the Occupation ended, we were the slaves of Gul Vardon and worked the fields at Milea. The new owner Prefect Dukat released us and we came here. We were glad to hear Gul Vardon has been killed in the civil war. He was an evil Cardassian and he did evil things his estate. Still, my daughter loved him. He had a way with females."

I couldn't argue there. It still made me sick to think about Vardon.

"Vardon was a cruel master," an old woman shouted as she shook her fist at me. "All Cardassians are cruel. We trust none of you. Why don't you leave?"

Kira put away her pistol and held out her hands. "Look, this is an official Bajoran Intelligence investigation. We were advised someone in this area has been performing demonic rituals to invoke the help of Shadow Dwellers," she said. "Sacrificing people to any god or demon is against the law. Now I don't know who killed your grandson, Owyn. Your daughter was acting peculiar when she arrived at Milea. She attacked a woman and tried to kill her children. That's more than just vengeance. Did Gul Vardon or your daughter have any connection to the Pah-Wraiths? Do you know if Gul Vardon performs rituals to summon Shadow Dwellers? Some Cardassians think all of you are involved. I'd say we're looking for a high priest, not necessarily Bajoran."

"What do you know of such things? We do not pray to the dark gods," another man said. He had one leg and walked on crutches. "Vardon punished those of us who displeased him. He worked the adults in his fields, making his precious wine, while our female children were sold to smugglers. They come here every few months and met Vardon in Shadow temples. is all we know. Now leave."

“Be calm, Myka. They have a right to seek answers, for these are dark, troubling times, and shadows walk amongst in the fertile land,” Owyn said. He came closer to me. “You lack the smell of the Cardassians. It is a pungent odor to our noses. You do have it. You are not Cardassian, are you? You only appear to be so to walk among them.”

“I’m from Earth,” I said. I wasn’t prepared for the villagers to back away from me as if I had the plague. “What? What’s wrong?”

“I am a simple tailor and this is my niece,” Garak said. He removed his cloak Owyn appeared to admire and offered it to him. I did the same. “My niece lived on Earth for a while, is all.”

I realized I’d made a mistake. I needed to let Kira and Garak do the talking.

“Everyone stay calm,” Kira said. “Do you know who the Cardassian was who killed your son? We need to find him and arrest him.”

“They all look the same to us. I can tell you Vardon has unusual friends who came and went from his estate,” Owyn said. “If you past altar stones on the way here, then you have seen the places where they performed their rituals. The ruins of several Temples of Shadows are in this province, along with shadow places, like the standing stones. Vardon would meet the smugglers and sell our daughters and female children to them. Once, there were more than five hundred of us owned by Gul Vardon. Now there are only those you see. We live far north of here. Vardon brought us here, along with our children. After the Prefect arrived, we came here. We do not intend to stay. We will go home.”

“This Vardon guy just gets better and better,” Kira said. “If someone came here and took your grandson, I’d say you’re al in danger. You should leave as soon as possible. I hope Vardon didn’t release any demons. It’s said trespassing on shadow lands is all it takes to summon the Guardians of the Dead. And jakars were recently sighted near FortGaldrak.”

“While I do not know if Vardon’s contacts remain, he has left his evil mark on this land,” Owyn said. “Ten months ago, Vardon purchased us from our former master and brought us here. We knew right away he was dabbling in dark magic. At night, we’d see strange lights and hear strange sounds coming from the villa. My daughter knew, of course. And is why I suspect she was killed. She knew too much.”

“Have you ever heard of Trakon the Wise? I recently heard part of a prophesy told to me by the Kai of Bajor City’s sisters,” I said, feeling it was safe for me to talk. “I don’t know if there is a connection with Vardon, your daughter, and the Shadow Dwellers. Anything you could tell us would be helpful.”

The Bajorans started muttering and whispering. We’d certainly excited them. Males brought logs and sticks, tossing them into the fire pit and soon a fire appeared. The former slaves sat around the fire, though it was not yet dark and not necessary. It will still warm, yet Owyn put on Garak’s cloak, apparently liking the feel and richness of the material, for his manner changed. He no longer looked as sickly as he had, his confidence increased and he broke into what sounded like a fable, the very one I’d come looking for all this time.

“Three snakes shall come to a fertile land,
One shall feed, one shall starve,
And one shall devour all.

Blood will flow, shadows arise,
And a great fire shall burn the land,
Bringing death shall consume the living.

From the stars, a savior shall come,
Armed with a sword of justice,
To battle the one called Destroyer.
from the dark, a dagger will strike,
Poisoned with vengeance and disdain,
And savior and shadow will wage war.

The fire will burn, the land will bleed.
Legions will wither and die,
And evil shall reign in the land of shadows.”

When he fell silent, Garak and Kira stared at me and so did the Bajorans. I was more than a little spooked to hear the rest of the prophesy. The ending was tragic and didn’t bode well for any of us involved. I wanted to return to Terok Nor and forget I’d ever come to Bajor.

Everyone seemed to expect me to say something, so I said what was on my mind.

"I've heard the first part of prophesy before the other day in Bajor City. It was what I was hoping to hear, only I didn't know you would be the one to provide the rest of it, Owyn," I said. "My friend, Yor, has been researching this on her own. She didn't know I'd heard part of the prophesy and she must have as well. Someone poisoned her. Kira gave her a cure. She remains unconscious and may not live."

"What does it mean to you, Helen?" Owyn asked.

"I was wondering why you told us this particular prophesy. How could you know this was the very prophesy I wanted to learn about? Has this grown in popularity recently? Is this something Vardon was telling people or is one of those crazy coincidences isn't a coincidence at all and I'm really in the wrong place at the right time?"

Owyn smiled. "It seemed to fit what is going on, Helen. Someone has summoned dark forces in this place and I think we both agree it was Vardon," he said. "I grieve the loss of my daughter and her child. I blame myself for not stopping her from going back. When she left, I thought perhaps Vardon or this Dukat was one of the snakes. And you?"

"Three snakes? Sounds like it's Vardon, Mukot and possibly Agent Torell. I'm giving Dukat, Damar, and Garak a break here," Kira said. "A savior from the stars with a sword?. I know you want to be the hero, Helen. Leave for Ren Yor. Whoever slit Glinn Lonak's throat is the one armed with the dagger. That's our mystery Cardassian and it may or may not be Broc."

"If we don't stop them, then the fertile land will burn and bleed," I said. "I'm not so certain those are the snakes, Kira. I mean, Kia Lucan had three sisters. Blythe, the nanny, has also sent for her sisters from Cardassia. Again, the number three. It could also be Dukat, Sawyer and me. A savior from the stars? could be anyone who comes here off-world and a lot of people carry sword and daggers."

"You want a connection. I'm offering you my opinion," Kira said. "Look, Owyn, we're not here to cause you any trouble. Sounds like you have enough on your hands. I'd like to give my pistol. I don't want you shooting just any Cardassian who comes through her. I suggest you return to your homes in Cottage Row. Build more huts if you need to. At Milea,

you'll be protected by Prefect Dukat's soldiers. He's not half as bad as Vardon and someone has started killing off his children. Whoever it is, it sounds like we have the same enemy and I'm offering you protection."

"If Dukat knew you were starving, he wouldn't leave you out here. I'm sure you'd be more than welcome," I said. "I am the Prefect's mistress. I give you my word of honor you will be fed, clothed, and sheltered at Milea. You do not have to work in the vineyards. All you have to do is come with us and we'll make certain you are not harmed again."

"Tell me more about Yor," Owyn said, lighting a long stemmed pipe. He took a puff and handed it to Kira. I had no idea Bajorans had any connection to the Native Americans on my planet. This was a peace pipe, for lack of another name. "Do you believe this Yor is the savior from the stars? Is she here to fight the Devourer? Vardon summoned the shadows to this place and now he is dead, he has joined them. There is more to this prophesy. This is all I know."

"Your prophesy doesn't end well, so I'd hoped there is more to it," I replied. "My friend also comes from Earth. The Prophets brought us both here. Yor fights for Cardassia. She's saved my life and of Dukat many times. She is a hero. As I said, she was poisoned last night and remains in critical condition. Someone used the same poison the trackers used to kill the vethrals. Major Kira gave her an anecdote. It's only delaying her death. She has a son, a Cardassian orphan, and loves the new commander at the fort. You ask, so yes, I believe Yor is the one in this prophesy. Not me. I'm not special."

"What did you give Yor to cure her?" Owyn inquired.

"Synthal," Kira said.

"That would work," he said. "You assume this poison comes from a plant or a chemical. It could be evil itself. She could be trapped in the land of shadows at this moment, fighting demons to stay alive, while we sit her and smoke. What I can offer you is a powder to be placed in a cup of water you must force her to drink. It comes from a Temple of Light, stardust, blessed by a priest. We pray to the Prophets and perhaps our prayers have been answered. Would Yor be the blonde Cardassian who paints blue stripes on her eye ridges, who appeared yesterday on horseback to hunt the vethrals?"

"That's her," I said. "Yor the Brave is what the soldiers call her."

"If she is to be the savior," Owyn said, "she will need a sword with the power to kill demons."

"Do you have one of those?" I asked.

"We have no weapons other than the bows and spears we make, Helen," Owyn replied. "Please. Smoke. Relax. Soon you must leave us. I would have us part as friends."

I puffed on the pipe, felt an immediate buzz, and handed it to Kira. She took several puffs, a funny look on her face and then gave it to Garak, who in turn, handed it to Owyn and crossed his arms. Garak seemed to have more sense for as I stared at the old man, his face contorted, twisting into a gruesome mask. The Bajorans seated around the fire seemed to elapse into darkness and only face remained, large eyes and lips moved far too fast, and in the distance, I heard the tinkle of the chimes.

"Correct me if I'm wrong Owyn. I believe that's Illyrian blossoms in your pipe," Garak said. "It grows only at the steps of a Temple of Light. I have heard its purpose is for clarity of mind, a way of connecting to the Prophets. It also causes hallucinations. As you can see, I would prefer not to smoke and remain clear-headed. You should have warned us."

"If any of you are touched by the Shadows, Illyrian blossoms when smoke can purify your system. In the inhalation of the smoke can as well," Owyn said. To me, it looked like his head floated like a ball in the air. "Those possessed cannot tolerate the purity of this and will convulse and wither on the floor until the spirit leaves their bodies. It is hard to come by and in short supply."

Garak took the pipe and puffed away, creating a large cloud chased away the shadows, leaving the Bajorans quietly beside the fire. They appeared calmer. It was obvious we would pass their test. My head started to clear. The after effect left me feeling less vulnerable to and threatened by things I did not quite understand. Kira straightened, gave me a nod, most likely knowing what we had smoked and accepted a small blue bag from Owyn, and well as a white bag was handed to me. I thought it contained holy temple dust.

We sat for a while longer, simply enjoying the quiet, and the crackle of the flames. Owyn finally stood and helped me to my feet.

“There is a place not far from Fort Galdrak may hold the answers you seek. It is called Aloquin, an old monastery built on the cliffs,” he said. “Struck by earthquake and a tidal wave three hundred years ago, it collapsed into the ground and can only be reached by boat. My daughter mentioned after Vardon had taken her as his mistress. He visited this place several times. He did not take my daughter with him. She did not know why he went to this place. Perhaps what you seek is right in front of you. There are three of you.”

“Excuse me. Only two snakes. I’m Bajoran, like you,” Kira said.

Owyn placed his hand on Kira’s arm she stood, brushing dirt off her backside. “No prophesy is meant to be taken literally, my dear,” he said. “You are to interpret the meaning as you do with dreams. There are no monks at Aloquin. It’s in ruins and the priests in the nearby towns may be less than willing to speak of the Devourer and Savior.”

“Wait. It is a bedtime story. I know this.” Kira laughed and put her arm around the leader’s shoulders. “Don’t worry. I have this one. I will tell them all about what my grandmother used to tell me to get me to go to sleep at night. Honestly, it didn’t work.”

“Then you understand things are not always as they seem,” Owyn said.

“Not far from here is a stranded shuttle belongs to the Prefect,” Kira said. She reached into her pocket and removed a small device, handing it to the leader. “It’s just a guess. I think if you attach this to the controls, it will start just find.”

Owyn lifted his hand, a clear indication we were to leave. Kira whispered something in his ear. I hoped it was where to find the stranded shuttle.

“We’ll take a shorter path back to Milea,” Kira said. “I want to avoid shadow shrine and we need to get holy powder to Yor as soon as possible. Come on. Don’t dawdle.”

“I never dawdle,” Garak said with a sly smile.

SAWYER

Chapter Sixty-Four

Standing on a cliff beside Dukat and Helen, I smelled the scent of the sea as we watched the tide receding from the shore. It was a dream, I knew this, I was still afraid, for in the distance I heard rumbling like thunder. Across the horizon appeared a magnificent and terrifying wall of blue water. As the water receded from the shore, it left behind in the sand three withering sea snakes. Dukat took hold of our hands as we the clang of a bell from a nearby monastery, a last second warning the tidal wave approached.

“We must seek safety,” Dukat said.

His hair ruffled in the wind, he led us along the cliff toward the monastery. The ground rumbled beneath our feet, causing part of the cliff to slide to collapse along with the walls of the building. The large bell silenced as the tower toppled to its side and we clung together, able to hear the screams of the monks as a fissure in the ground opened, drawing the entire building into the ground. Dukat lifted Helen into his arms, running inland. I turned, transfixed by the tidal wave, able to hear their voices calling to me, unable to move as a dark shadow fell over me and with a start, I awoke from the dream.

“Mother!” Eben threw his arms around me, holding me tight, while I light away from my lips what tasted like sand and sea salt. “I told you she wouldn’t die. I told you!”

A warm hand brushed across my forehead, my hair damp with sweat, and I gaze into the eyes of Damar. He sat on the bed beside me, holding my hand and then kissed me. I heard someone clear his throat and turned to see Dukat standing with Helen, Kira, and Garak. Three large female Cardassians stood behind them, one held a tray with a glass and pitcher of water, another an armful of used towels, and the third held Shazel. The little girl broke free and ran to the bed, crawling on top of me and pressed her head against my

chest.

“Mama, you’re all right. You’re alive,” she sobbed.

“So much attention,” I said. “Is this a dream or is this real? Damar, what happened?”

“You were poisoned,” Damar said, clearly upset. “I came as soon as I could. It has been two days and nights, Ren. If Kira found a way to slow the poison in your system. It was Helen and Garak who found the cure. You are all right, dearest. It’s all right now.”

“Let my cousin rest,” Dukat said. He stepped forward and forcibly removed Shazel’s grip on my neck and lifted her into his arms. “Now the danger has past, we’ll let the three of you visit. You need to regain your strength, Yor. I’m sure Helen would love to prepare some chicken noodle soup for you, since I know you detest Cardassian mungro soup.”

“Sounds awful. I’ll try it,” I said, meeting her gaze. My friend had not slept. Helen looked worn out, she smiled at me as she knelt over Eben to kiss my cheek. “How did you know what to give me?”

“We can talk later,” Helen said. “Dukat is right. You must rest.”

“I have been resting,” I said. “We need to start while it’s still light out if we’re going to find the monastery by the sea.” Everyone stared at me. None more intently than Dukat. He moved closer to the bed and wisely refrained from touching me. “I saw it, cousin. A great tidal wave crashed over you, Helen, and me. The monastery collapsed from an aftershock. It’s a holy place and I feel certain holds the answers we’re looking for.”

“Then you will find it. Tomorrow,” Dukat said, in a firm voice. He used the tone when he wanted no argument and none was offered. “Come. We need to let my cousin rest. Blythe, you, and your sisters are relieved. Please see to my children. Take Shazel with you. She has not slept in two nights.”

“Yes, sir,” Blythe said.

As Garak and Kira walked toward the door, they whispered to each other. The former Order spy glanced at me, a troubled look on his face. I wanted to believe Garak was on our side. I wasn’t so sure. I watched Dukat hand his daughter to Blythe. I remembered

the names of the woman's sisters, Breena and Burta, one as ugly as the other. They reminded me of trolls from a folktale.

As the door closed, Eben laid beside me. He threw his arm over my stomach, while Damar poured me a glass of water. He returned, lifted my head, and held the glass to my lips. I took shallow sips, not able drink much.

"That was a close call," Damar said setting the glass aside. "The two trackers have been detained and as of yet have not admitted to the crime. Broc has been blamed for what happened, Yor. I am not convinced he is solely responsible. Lonak and an Alpha guard were killed. And yes, I have reinstated the Alpha Brigade. Moral was low when you fell ill. The only to raise the soldiers' spirits was to promise you'd return and take command."

"Oona's father told Helen about the monastery you dreamed about, Mother. I have dreamed about it too. Why is it so important?" Eben asked.

Damar ruffled the boy's hair. "We both need to stop talking so much and let your mother rest," he said. "Stand guard, son, while I help our mother bathe and dress. I know it is no use to keep her in bed when she has look in her eyes. We will not be long. Find something nice for her to wear in the meantime."

"My uniform or I'll go naked," I said. Their laughter was joined by my own.

Lifting me to his strong arms, Damar carried me into the bathroom. My reflection revealed my human face. Blythe and her sisters must have assumed I was a Cardassian burn victim. I had hoped someone the ridges would remain permanently and wondered who it was stared at me from the mirror. I felt a gentle pull on my hand as Damar led me into the shower, sat me on a tiled bench attached to the wall, turned the water to hit me directly and backed out, closing the door.

"There is time late to hold you. Wash away the illness, my love."

Damar left the bathroom. I stood in the warm water. My hair had grown another inch and I assumed it was a side effect from the strength enhancers I depended on to maintain my Cardassian strength. A few minutes later, Damar returned with my underclothes and uniform, minus the cuirass, placed them on the counter and gazed at me through the glass shower door.

"I'm tempted to join you," Damar said. "You've lost weight and two days of your life. Had I lost you, Yor, I am not sure I could continue. I have seen too much death this last week. I have left Glinn Korvinus in charge of the salvaging and burial detail. Yes, I promoted him. And no, he doesn't kiss as well as you do." He chuckled and held a towel for me when I stepped onto the rug, drying my body as I was no more than a child. I turned on the hologram and he ran the towel right through my illusionary ridges. "It's not necessary, you know. I love you no matter if you look human or Cardassian, Yor. What is inside is what draws me to you and keeps me at your side. You know this, don't you?"

"Don't look so trouble, darling."

I slid my arms around his shoulder and pressed my heated body against him. The kiss we shared was tender. Smoothing the hair from his brow, I kissed his cheek.

"We're close to solving this case. I know it. I am not afraid of death, Damar. No soldier is and I believe I have yet to fulfill my destiny. I will not leave you or Eben. Not ever."

"You're so stubborn, you would find a way to cheat Death," he said.

Smiling, I patted his bulge, causing his eyes to widen in surprise. "I'm not crazy," I said. "Go check on Eben, dearest. I'll be out in a minute."

With a shake of his head, Damar left me alone to dress. I know the fact I felt stronger and playful had eased his worry for me. Once dressed, I returned to the room, feeling normal in my uniform, to find my family seated a table, a dinner of soup and hot bread served. Damar had his monitor on the table, reviewing what appeared to be a poem. I filled my bowl and ate a rapid rate. Bread dunked into my bowl, broke apart and I lifted little to my lips, eating more than my fair share.

"What you two reading?" I asked.

"Trakon's complete prophesy about the Devourer. We're crossing referencing it to a Bajoran folk story Kira told us about," Eben said. He was existed. "Helen returned from the village with only half of the prophesy you were after, Mother."

"Did you two figure anything out?" I asked.

"It appears Vardon deliberately spread throughout the province an old tale about a

Pah- Wraith breaks free from the Fire Caves devours the people of 'a fertile land.' A lone warrior fights the demon god with a flaming sword and defeats him," Damar said. "In the prophesy, it's not the same outcome, far bleaker. It starts with, 'Three snakes shall come to a fertile land, one shall feed, one shall starve, and one shall devour all.' Eben and I have tried to figure out who the snakes might be have come here. Vardon seems like one."

"Not at all," I said, reaching for his glass of kanar. "I think its sea snakes and they represent Helen, Dukat and me. I will read the folk story and the prophesy. Until I see inside of monastery, we are only guessing what it means. What else does it say?"

"Roughly 'from the stars, a savior shall come," Damar said, "armed with a sword of justice, to battle the one called Devourer.' I assume is the Pah-Wraith and to summon one would require a Shadow Priest. Vardon was no priest."

"I'm still looking for two Bajorans, Talos, and Dovvos, who were on Garak's list as members of the Circle. One of them could be a priest. They're not they're real names, either. I told Broc. I don't think he killed anyone. I think the young man was in the wrong place at the wrong time. His father is wealthy and powerful. He could be held for ransom."

"Always trying to find a way to save your friends," Damar said. "Everything points to Broc. The journal is missing. He was also here when Dukat's sons were killed. Why do you insist he's innocent?"

"Because he was afraid night he came to the library. I think he saw something or someone in the house. I took one of Vardon's sword and went to investigate. I'd already drunk the poison, not much, just a sip, it did the job. It's just a hunch I have about him. I'm usually a good judge of character and I liked him."

Damar glanced at the monitor. "'From the dark, a dagger will strike.'"

"A dagger was used to kill Lonak and the guard in the kitchen," Eben said.

"'Poisoned with vengeance and disdain'," Damar said. "You were poisoned. much is obvious. Then it says, 'the savior and shadow will wage war', which I suspect is the hero in the story who fights the demon god. Trakon's last lines read, 'Thee fire will burn, the land will bleed. The snake will wither and die, and shadows will rule in the Land of the Dead.'"

“Fire burns. The snake will wither and die.” I finished the kanar and set it aside, feeling my stomach gurgle. “The snake consumes all is Dukat, I’m sure of it. And Dukat will die unless we figure this out. The snake feeds, that’s me, because Helen was starved of love by Dukat. Before I was poisoned, she certainly held me in disdain, the vengeance part fits Oona. As I said, we need to look inside the monastery for clues. The three of us will go tomorrow with a squad and check it out. Major Kira should go with us, since she’s knows more about these legends and prophecies than any of us. You boys did well.”

“may or may not be the right translation, Ren. I doubt it is simple,” Damar said. “We’re trying to make reason out of something is not reasonable.”

Eben lifted one of his hologram bracelets off the table, turned it on and Garresh Broc walked across the room. The officer turned toward me and I caught the anger in Damar’s eyes and reached for my son’s toy. I felt certain my comment about Dukat involved with me and Helen had upset him. It makes sense to me. One fed on love and one starved for the lack of it. I wasn’t going to press the point, nor was I going to let Eben be scolded by Damar.

“Why Broc, son? Why did you want his hologram?” I asked.

“Because I agree with you, Mother. I don’t think Broc willingly killed anyone. I was thinking if Vardon’s accomplices remain here, they’d certainly think twice if Broc was seen in the courtyard tonight. I’m able to control the holograms now. I can make them do whatever I want.”

“You think this will flush out one of Vardon’s accomplices? Not if Broc is already dead.” I handed it back to Eben. “Wait a minute. That’s not a bad idea. ‘Shadows will rule in the Land of the Dead.’ You know sounds like ghosts to me and this place is certainly haunted. It won’t hurt to try it, though it may get Dukat a bit raddled.”

Damar sighed. “You indulge the boy, Ren. No more. I can hardly inform Dukat he is a snake consumes all and will later be killed. This has gone on too long. Enough.” He stood from the table. “We are returning to Fort Galdrak tonight. I’ll send for a transport. It seems someone stole Dukat’s stranded shuttle. It was seen flying north and destroyed by a Cardassian cruiser in orbit.”

“Well, doesn’t help. Who stole the shuttle?” I asked.

“Not in front of the boy,” Damar cautioned.

A loud scream interrupted us. Damar drew his pistol, running to the door and opened it as Burta stumbled past. He was at her side in the instance. I caught hold of Eben’s arm and brought him with me into the hallway. The nursery door was open where we could hear the sounds of children sobbing and screaming. A girl about ten ran past us, screaming for her father and disappeared. Damar tried to calm Burta. She blubbered and threw herself into his arms. With Eben at my side, we entered the nursery, finding the window broken, the curtains on the floor, and three girls hiding beneath a bed. Eben crouched beside the bed, talking softly to the girls, while I stood in the glass to gaze out the window.

The sun was set behind a line of pink clouds. Soldiers stood in the courtyard, pointing into the air, shouting for Dukat and one soldier lay on the ground, not moving. Eben coaxed the girls out from under the bed, holding the hand of the eldest of the three.

“This is Yoan. It was her sister Llyana went to find their father,” Eben said. “These two girls are Pursilla and Aysla. Yoan? I want you to talk to my mother. Two of the girls were abducted. Tell my mother what you just told me.”

“The shadow came for us,” Yoan cried. She pressed her head against Eben’s shoulder. “It came for us. Don’t let it come back!”

“What do you mean?” I turned toward the children and found Eben surrounded by the three girls, their arms thrown around him. A bit young for a heartthrob, he didn’t seem to mind. “What does she mean, Eben? A shadow came in here and snatched a child? Was it a Cardassian or a Bajoran? One of the Marquis? Or were they transported out of here?”

Yoan glanced at me. “It took Jewell and Amber. It tried to get us, too. Burta fought it. It hurt Burta, and Llyana ran for hide,” she cried. “We hid under the bed. We saw it fly out the window, a shadow in the night. Help us, Eben. Help us!”

“I’ll do what needs to be done,” Eben said. He sounded like Damar.

“Where is Shazel? Who last saw her?” I asked. “Yoan? Shazel was here when the shadow came for you?” She nodded. Damar appeared in the doorway, his uniform covered

in blood. "Burta? What did she tell you? Did she describe what it was?"

"She's dead," Damar said.

"My love, Amber and Jewell were taken," I said. "Shazel is missing. I'm sure they three girls are together. We have to find them."

I grabbed one of the sobbing girls from Eben, Damar took another and grabbed Eben's hand, backing out of the room. Dukat stood in the hallway beside Burta's prone body as guards filed past him, entering the nursery. I caught his gaze, able to feel his grief and a fury blazed in his eyes. At a shake of my head, he burst into the nursery, his cries echoing through the house. Blythe appeared and ran toward her dead sister, muttering in Cardassian. I didn't stop to offer comfort, following Damar to the west tower to Helen's room.

At his knock, Helen opened the door. Breena was with her, holding a pistol, standing at the window. The crib was on the floor near the bed and Llyana sat beside it, her face in her hands, sobbing. Yoan ran to her as Damar handed a girl to Helen. Eben entered the room and sat beside Yoan and Llyana, trying to comfort them, while I placed the last child on the bed, covering her with a blanket. Shazel was not in the room.

"You cannot stay here," Damar said. "Nor do I think the fort a safe place for you and the children, Helen. I'd like to ask Dukat to have Major Kira escort you to Bajor City. Kia Lucan offered his hospitality once before and may well again. Garak and Breena should accompany you as well as a personal military escort."

"Yor, will you come with us? And what about Eben?" Helen asked.

"I can't, Eben should. I need to find the girls," I said.

I met Damar's gaze. I knew what he was thinking. We needed to act fast or the girls might never be discovered, at least not alive. Damar left to discuss the details with Dukat, while I motioned for Helen to join me. We stood in the hallway as the last rays of sunlight filtered through stained glass windows, raising shadows moved along the walls setting us both on edge.

"Yoan called a shadow," I said. "Ever since I went the Valley of Shadows, I saw shadows at Fort Varnok. They always appeared when something bad happened. I might

be going nuts. I think Vardon and his friends were in a cult, Helen. I think they dabbled in black magic. Vardon was at Fort Varnok. That's when I started seeing these shadows. And Gul Parnal's code name was the Ghost. It's no coincidence. The answers may be at Aloquin. I'll go there in the morning. It's not unheard for cults to desecrate sacred ground and if Vardon was using place to meet the Marquis smugglers, then it's possible we may find the three girls. No one saw Shazel. She was in the nursery and can't be found."

"You never told me about shadows before," Helen said.

"And you never told me you had dreams foretold the future. Eben told me a few of things you dreamed about. Like the assassin crawling through Dukat's window. You should have told me a long ago about that, Helen. It all has to do with the same thing. And you're right. I should have told you I sometimes see shadows move on their own."

"Do you think it was a demon? Is what Vardon summoned? Do they come from the Valley of Shadows?" she asked.

"Possibly," I said. "We need to find out all we can about Aloquin and this entire province. I could use your help. Someone knows something. You send to Bajoran village. Did Oona's father offer to help us? Could you go back and talk to him?"

"Garak must have told you about that. Owyn is gone," Helen said. "Kira had them take Dukat's shuttle was stranded near the town. They went north. I'm sure they've gone into hiding."

"Owyn fed his grandson to the vethrals," I said, admitting it at last.

Helen shook her head. "No, he didn't, Sawyer. Cardassians came to their village and killed Oona and Vardon's child. They were too afraid to stay here. Owyn did tell us about the monastery. I'm sure that's where you'll find girls. Can you go tonight?"

"The tide is high. I'll have to wait until morning."

"Do that, be careful, Sawyer. Don't be reckless."

"Take care of the rest of these brats. I've not been to Bajor City. I heard Kai Lucan was a little weird," I said. "In fact, don't trust anyone in city."

Hugging my friend, I couldn't tell her the shuttle Owyn had stolen had been destroyed and the Bajorans killed. Had Helen or Garak simply Dukat asked to help the

Bajorans, I knew he would have returned them to their old homes. That's not what had happened. Kira had convinced Owyn and his people to steal a Cardassian shuttle. I felt terrible about what happened, for I felt like I'd sent them to their deaths.

"Ambassador Sorvan is nice," Helen said.

"Yeah, he's one Cardassian in a city of five million Bajorans. Just make sure nothing happens to Eben. I'm sure he'll be full of ideas. The girls trust him. He can help you watch over them. Don't let boy out of your sight. And stay away from windows," I said, walking her inside her quarters. "That's where the shadow came from in your dream."

"Sawyer, you're annoyingly good at spying on people."

"I just like to know what's going on," I said.

Standing in the courtyard, a shuttle landed to transport Dukat's family, Garak, Kira, and my son to Bajor City. Damar and Dukat watched from the porch. Soldiers stood on guard in the courtyard. More soldiers used searchlights as they walked through the garden and vineyard looking for the missing girls. They also searched in the house and outer buildings. I didn't think they would find what they were looking for, not alive, in any case.

"Be good and mind Helen," I said.

"I will, Mother."

I kissed Eben on the cheek, sending him with his backpack full of gadgets and a couple of books on the Bajoran religion. He followed Yoan and Llyana into the shuttle. Breena carried Pursilla and Aysla, accompanying the group. Blythe remained in the house, helping look for Shazel. Garak, carrying several bags, boarded the shuttle, too distraught to speak to me. Major Kira walked over and gave a shake of her head.

"This is bad business, Yor. I'll talk to my sources and find out if there is a Shadow cult operating in this area. A few of the leaders have been arrested," Kira said. "I might get answers from them. I've sent for Constable Odo. We need all the help we can get and frankly, Garak isn't much help these days. He's distraught over the children. Helen isn't much better. I'll take care of them. I promise. If I learn anything, I'll let you know. Odo may want to pay you a visit."

“At this point, Kira, I want to know what the ritual is to summon Shadow Dwellers as well as the Devourer and where it might be conducted. I also need to know how to kill these things or send them back to where they belong. There has to a few priests who know and you might as well send me a few along with Odo.”

Kira glanced toward the house. I turned to find Helen crushed in Dukat’s arms, sharing a passionate kiss. I couldn’t bear to watch it for long. In the distance, the cries of a vethral were heard and the major shivered.

“Look, I don’t put much stock in prophecies, Major Kira. All it’s done is scare a bunch of people. Glinn Lonak told me to deal in facts,” I said. “I’m glad Odo is coming because that’s his style of investigation. Find out Talos and Dovvos are. Someone has to have heard of them. Garak might know more, so make him talk.”

“Sure you don’t want to join the Bajoran Intelligence when this is over? You seem more like a detective than a soldier, Yor. I know you are Dukat’s counter-intelligence office. You, Garak and Helen. It takes more than three people to run an agency.”

“Three. I’m sick of number. And I’m sick of snakes, shadows, wild dogs, and demons.”

“Welcome to Bajor,” Kira said. She boarded the shuttle.

Helen came last with her bag, nodded at me and entered. The door shut and I moved away from its exhaust heat, returning to the porch to Damar and Dukat. I didn’t want to watch the shuttle fly away, afraid I’d see shadows attack it, causing it to crash land in the vineyard.

Entering the house, I returned to the library, looking for Vardon’s sword, the one with the snake hilt and found it back in the pot. I removed it, strapped the belt to my waist, and buckled it on, knowing Dukat wouldn’t care if I took it. I also grabbed Trakon’s large book of drawings and prophecies, stuffed it into a back, and noticed a book on a far shelf, pulled out halfway. Intrigued, I walked over and removed it, glanced at the title and caught my breath.

“‘Ancient Bajoran Rituals and Magic’ by Trakon the Wise,” I said, aloud. “Well, someone clearly wants me to solve this mystery.”

I stuffed the book into the bag, expecting another book to fall off the shelf or a secret panel to open. Hearing movement in the room, I spun around to find Dukat sitting in a chair, holding a bottle of kanar and a glass.

“Where are the blueprints to this house and the property? I need to see them.”

“Looking for caves, Yor?” Dukat asked.

“I’m going to the monastery in the morning. Vardon was involved in the paranormal, Dukat. We’ve been calling it the supernatural, close enough. All signs point to a Shadow cult operating in this area. They may or may not be working with the Marquis. Vardon was far worse than we ever imagined. I hate to think what would have happened if he’d left with Helen and not returned to Bajor.”

“Then don’t,” he snarled. He took a swig from the bottle. “If you want the blueprints, they’re in the desk drawer. I’ve already looked at them several times, cousin. You won’t find anything out of the ordinary. If there is some secret room in the house, I’m going to tear down every wall to find it. Shazel is either hiding in this house or she’s with Amber and Jewell. I’m afraid they’re dead, Yor. I never should have let them come here.”

“I’m going to find your daughters.” I experienced a flashback to the Valley of Shadows and the hundreds of dead Cardassians. I had to look away from Dukat. Part of me didn’t think I’d find the girls alive.

“You can’t do everything,” he shouted.

The bottle was hurled across the room and slammed into the far wall, breaking, covering the books in the sticky substance. I’d never heard Dukat cry and I never wanted to again. Large sobs shook his body. He held his face in his hands, hunched over as he howled as if he’d lost his mind. I hurried toward him, the sword knocking against my left leg and against all caution, threw my arms around him, hugging him tight.

Electricity trickled between our bodies, making my hair stand on end and the lights flickered on and off. Bedazzled by what I perceived to be paranormal activity, I held onto him, wanting to see what happened next. The breeze coming in from the window twisted the curtains and books on the table fell to the floor. Dukat lifted his head and grabbed hold of me, watching as a painting crashed to the floor and the clay pot containing the swords

cracked. He gasped in alarm and pushed me away from me.

“Refrain from touching me, Yor,” he snarled.

“I just wanted to see what happened.”

“It’s you! You’re the one who has brought this calamity into my home. Savior? Shadow? Or perhaps you are the Devourer, for you have always wanted everything I have. What are you? Human? Demon? Must I carve you into little pieces to find out the truth? Is Helen the same as you? Is she too responsible for this?”

“I’m not a Shadow Dweller any more than you are,” I said. “Nor is Helen. I didn’t mean to upset you, Dukat. It’s just like it’s always been. Whenever we connect, lights flicker, shadows slide across the walls and my skin crawls.”

“You serve the Prophets. And the Pah-Wraiths want us to serve them.”

“So it seems,” I said. “We’ve been told so many things by so many people and entities I don’t know what is true or not anymore. I’m sorry about your daughters. I’m going to find them. I swear it.”

Dukat raised his fist, leaning forward in the chair. “Cardassian justice is what will happen in this cursed place,” he snarled. “I do not know what Vardon unleashed or what creatures now hunt my family. You will find it, Yor, and you will destroy it. Against my good judgment, I allowed Damar to send my family to Bajor City. If another child dies or goes missing, I will hold you both responsible. Now get out of my sight before you bring down the entire house on our heads!”

Crawling to my feet, I left Dukat in the library, shut the door, and hear something else slam against the wall. The noise continued as I hurried into the front room and found Blythe standing there, holding a bundled item in my hand. She gave it to me on my way out of the house. I tucked the mystery item under my arm, hurrying toward a transport had arrived. Damar already sat in the back seat, waiting for me. Ikarus drove and Dunatar sat behind him. My vethral hunting party remained at the villa with Dukat. I sat next to Damar, leaning against him as he put his arm around my shoulders.

“He’ll destroy the entire villa looking for Shazel,” I said.

Damar’s hand touched my cheek, pressing my head against his shoulder, not saying

a word as we drove to Fort Galdrak, away from the haunted villa, chased by the cries of vethrals or jakars. I wasn't able to tell the difference between the two and when the roof closed and windows raised, I no longer could hear the terrible cries.

"We'll figure this out, together," Damar said. His fingers curled under my chin. "Dukat may blame you for what's going on. I know you're here to help us, Yor. I've always known about you. You're Ren Yor the Brave."

"Don't say anything else, Damar. I'm not brave at all. I'm terrified."

Placing my fingers over his lips, I returned head to rest on his chest. His strong arms wrapped around my body, holding me on the return trip to Galdrak. I was exhausted by the time we arrived. He carried me inside the castle keep, arousing looks from the soldiers and took me to our bedroom. And he held me all through the night.

HELEN

Chapter Sixty-Five

Throughout dinner with Kia Lucan and his sisters, Laralyn, Tresla and Gesette, I continually compared the opulence of the palace with Owyn's refugee camp and found the leaders of Bajor cared little enough about the lower class. Knowing Owyn and his people no longer suffered filled me with sorrow. I mourned their deaths, while the Kai and his family dined like royalty, acting as if they didn't care their people were starving. My distraught state of mind ruined my appetite and did no more than pick at my meal. Next to my chair was placed a large gold cradle, the twins sleeping soundly, separate blankets tucked around their little bodies and I thanked my own God they were safe and sound.

Served by Nimbus and five more servants, Garak, Kira, Eben, and I were treated as if we were important dignitaries. The boy and Garak helped themselves to another plate of food, while Kia Lucan discussed trifling matter with the Cardassian, Ambassador Sorvan, an older, quiet male who frequently smiled or made a passing comment about either the meal or the beauty of the three sisters with a certain lack of sincerity I alone seemed to notice.

"The soup is sublime. I believe this is made from a type of squash," Sorvan said. "Squash is one of the most commonly found vegetables in this quadrant. You can find a variant of this species on Vulcan, Romulus, Orion, and Delta or even in the Gamma Quadrant. When the gods created vegetables, they must have favored squash over all others."

"Would be Bajoran or the ancient Cardassian gods?" Kia Lucan asked.

"I'm quite certain the gods from all religions dine well," the ambassador said.

“Whether they are real or not is a matter of conjecture. Personally, I have always suspected the gods worshiped by your people and my own are nothing more than myth, though I also think it’s possible there are greater powers are work than any of us understand. It’s easy enough for a race of superior beings to assume the likeness of gods. What do you think, Kia Lucan? Are the Prophets and Pah-Wraiths real or merely myth?”

“Oh, they are quite real, Ambassador Sorvan,” Lucan said.

“It’s a matter of faith, Ambassador. We believe in them,” Laralyn said, lowering her soup spoon. “It is well documented the Prophets live in the wormhole, while the Pah-Wraiths have been trapped inside the Fire Caves beneath the surface of this planet. Super beings? Of course they are, Ambassador Sorvan, and is why we both refer and fear them.”

“Yes, we do,” Tresla said and Gesette at the same time.

“Where are the Fire Caves?” I asked. Everyone stared at me.

“Far from here,” Lucan replied.

“We cannot say,” the three sisters said.

“I understand you have to protect your private places of worship and shrines. Which of these gods and demons are stronger, I wonder?” Sorvan took a sip of wine, watching his hosts under his half-closed eyelids. “Some say the Shadow Cult is as strong as ever. They worship the Pah-Wraiths, I am told, and while there are many Bajoran prophecies concerning these devil-gods, I wonder why anyone would approve of evil.”

Lucan smiled. “There is much you Cardassians do not understand about our faith,” he said. “I would be glad to provide you with reading material, Ambassador Sorvan.”

I noticed Eben’s head droop, his spoon lax in his hand and realized the boy was exhausted. Standing, I nodded at my hosts and pulled the boy out of the chair. Breana offered an apology, stating the boy needed to rest, her quick thinking giving us a reason to be excused from the awkward meal. The large Cardassian woman lifted Eben into her arms and carried her from the dining room. I reached for the cradle and caught hold of the handle, aware Ambassador Sorvan and Kia Lucan stood.

“Rest well,” Lucan said.

His three sisters stared at the cradle, making me feeling as if they were vultures

eager to pick the bones clean of both my children. I thanked them for the meal and quickly followed behind Breena, eager to seek sanctuary in our allotted room. Guards stood at attention as we walked through the corridors of the palace and reached the door. I opened it as Breena had her hands full and let her pass ahead of me with the boy.

“Those people are horrible,” Breena said. She carried Eben to the bed. “I don’t know how Ambassador Sorvan or Garak can stand another minute of their company. I will be much happier when we leave this place, Mistress Helen. I am frightened here.”

“I admit I am as well. Glinn Yor said there was a valley near Fort Varnok was haunted. The Bajorans call it the Valley of Shadows. The Cardassians named it EK-3. No one should ever go there.”

“It sounds dreadful,” she said.

Breena covered Eben with a blanket. I placed the cradle beside the bed, grateful the twins remained asleep and sank into a chair, easing out of my shoes. While Breena scurried above the large chamber to close the windows and pull the drapes, I noticed shadows trailing behind her in the glow of lamps hung from the ceiling were not her own. A shiver went through my body and I leaned over to check on the babies. Gabe clutched something in his tiny hands I’d not noticed earlier. I carefully removed it from his fingers and lifted it to the light, offering a soft gasp as I stared at a small four-armed statue made from red clay.

“Are you all right?” Breena asked.

“Have you seen this before, Breena? I’m sure I’ve seen this statue before on Gul Vardon’s ship. I don’t know how it came to be in the cradle.”

I held it upwards so she could see it. The woman shook her head. Behind her stood a shadow reflected on the gold curtains gave a nod and I against gasped. The statue slipped through my fingers and hit the tiled floor, shattering on impact and I heard Gabe let out a soft cry. Breena scurried over, bending onto one knee and retrieved the broken pieces from the floor, cutting her hand in the process. A drop of blood appeared on her finger. She held it to her lip, licking it off and one by one the lights in the room turned off, until on the lamp near the bed remained on. The darkness closed in around us and I caught Breena’s concerned eyes.

"The lights could be set on a timer," Breena suggested.

"Something haunts this place. I felt it the moment we arrived. I don't know why. I don't think Kia Lucan is exactly who he presents himself to be. He and his sisters are far too interested in my children. I'll be glad when we leave."

Breena tensed, pressing her injured finger to her lips yet again as she stood, and reached for a dagger hidden in the folds of her garments. She held the blade in front of her as she walked toward the door. I heard a jiggle of the handle. Pulling the cradle behind my chair, I knelt beside it, wishing I still had Saja's small pistol and gave a nod as the woman opened the door. Major Kira pushed herself inside the room and closed the door, breathing hard, as if she'd run to the chamber. I stood, wanting an explanation and found my voice had stuck in my throat.

"Those people are gluttons," Kira said. "They stuff their faces with food and wine, while most of our people have nothing more than gruel to eat. I left Garak and Broc with them. How they can abide listening to the Kai and his sisters is beyond me." She walked toward me and glanced upwards. "Why are the lights off? And why are you two so quiet?"

"There are shadows here," Breena whispered.

"I think it's time we left this place. Gather you'll things. I found a corridor is not guarded. We can use it to slip outside. I have friends who can hide us," Kira said. She approached the bed and gazed at the sleeping boy. "I'll carry him. Hurry. We don't have much time. I'm sure Kia Lucan will post guards outside our door."

"Is Garak and Sorvan going to join us?" I asked, rising to my feet.

"Right now I'm not worried about them. They're big boys. They can figure it out on their own," Kira said. "We have children to consider. Now come on."

Stepping in my slippers, I caught hold of the handle of the cradle as the light from the single lamp started to dim. Kira roused Eben. He rubbed his eyes and slid out of the bed, lingering to place a wristband beneath the pillow. His hologram appeared in the bed. The boy ran to fetch a small pouch he'd placed on a table on the opposite end of the bed. Crawling across the mattress, he moved through his own hologram and sat on his knees as he dug inside, removing three more devices. He placed one beneath the bed. An image of

Kira appeared in the gloom. Two more devices were placed beneath a nearby chair and my own hologram and of Breena appeared, seated together on the edge of the bed.

“Clever boy,” I said as Eben hurried toward me.

“Don’t be afraid, Aunt Helen. I’ll protect you.”

Kira returned to the door, drew her pistol, and opened it, peering out into the hallway. Breena, armed with her knife, stood behind her. The cradle was far too heavy to carry and I lifted Gabe into my arms, handing him to Eben, and then lifted Madison into my arms. We left the cradle in the room and proceeded into the corridor with Kira in the lead. I closed the door, Madison held in my left arm, and hurried after the small group as we made our way along a dim corridor and reached a flight of stairs led downward.

“Keep close,” Kira said.

Descending the steps, Kira pressed against the wall. Breena let Eben and me move ahead of her, remaining in the rear. I could hear the large woman breathing hard as we hurried along, passing closed doors, aware a shadow glided along the far wall. A faint breeze touched my face and I smelled the odor of incense, shuddering when I heard a distant, faint gong. Kira halted, her hand raised in the air and gave me a quick look. I remained on the stairs with Eben and Breena as she went ahead of us and vanished around a corner.

“What’s wrong?” Eben asked.

“Just wait,” I said softly.

Minutes past and Kira did not return. Breena moved around us, moving quietly on the stairs as she took the same path as Kira, leaving us waiting on the stairs. At the sound of a scuffle, Eben handed me Gabe and drew a small pistol from his pocket. He ran down the stairs and let out a shout. I heard a pistol blast and hurried forward, rounding the corner and stared in horror to find Breena lying on the floor, her throat slit. Kira and Eben were both held by Bajoran guards in black cloaks. Another guard held the bloody dagger and a pistol, which he aimed at me and then motioned toward an oval door.

“I’m sorry,” Kira said.

“No talking,” the armed guard ordered.

Both Kira and Eben were dragged toward the door. It opened and I smelled thick incense and again heard the gong as I was led forward by the guards. Both babies had awoken and started to fuss as we entered a vaulted chamber. Lit torches were placed in iron stands and a group of cloaked figures stood in the center of the room, facing an altar where Kia Lucan and his three sisters stood wearing hooded black robes. The shadow had followed us appeared behind the quartet and darkened a large seven-pointed star on the wall behind them painted in blood.

"It's so nice you joined us," Kia Lucan said. "Laralyn, take the twins from our illustrious guest. Guards. Bring the woman to the altar. It is time for the summoning."

"Take one step near me and I'll..." I grew quiet. His eyes looked solid black. It was more than a little terrifying, for he looked demonic.

"Do what? Kill me?" Lucan asked. "Resist and I'll have no choice to kill Major Kira and the boy. I mean no harm to the children. They are vessels and needed. As for you, Helen, your blood is required to summon Gnosh the Destroyer. Ambassador Sorvan was right. We are members of the Shadow Cult. The only way to rid this world of the Cardassians is to release the Pah-Wraiths and you have conveniently provided the means to do so."

"Do what he says," Kira snarled.

"Where are Garak and Sorvan? Have you killed them?" I asked.

"I shouldn't worry about them, my dear. Plied with enough wine, they have retired for the evening and I doubt can be roused from their slumber. Here, beneath the palace, no one will hear your screams," Lucan said. "Now take the children. I am eager to commence the ritual."

Laralyn advanced on me. The same guard with the dagger aimed his pistol at me. I reluctantly handed my twins to the woman and watched as she placed them on the altar. Madison started to cry, her wails echoing in the chamber and I again heard the gong. Two guards grabbed my arms, while another ripped open the front of my gown. The group behind us started to chant, their strange words making the flames on the torches sway, sending dark shadows gliding around the chamber and I felt the hair rise on my arms as I

was dragged forward, forced to kneel before Kia Lucan.

Kira and Eben were forced to kneel as well. Guards held their arms and another aimed a pistol at them. I struggled against my captors and felt someone grab a handful of my hair from behind. I caught a familiar odor, cologne, the same scent worn by Gul Vardon. Trying to turn my head to see if he stood behind me, I froze when Kia Lucan approached me, removing a long, slender gold dagger from the folds of his robe.

“Your children will provide the vessels to hold the souls of two Pah-Wraiths,” Lucan said as he approached me. “It is your blood will release the Pah-Wraiths from the Fire Caves. Long have we await this moment, when a Terran would mate with a Cardassian, creating two keys will help unlock the door to the Shadow World.”

“Vardon? Is you behind me?” I asked, shocked to find he still lived.

“Be silent,” Vardon said.

“You can’t let them do this. Please, Vardon. If you want Cardassia to leave Bajor, then negotiate with Dukat. Don’t let them release those demons from hell.”

“It’s already decided,” Vardon said, leaning over to press his cheek against my own. “I chose you specifically for this ceremony, Helen. You never should have left Terok Nor. In fact, you never should have left Earth. It was Sawyer we wanted, the chosen one, Dukat mated with you instead. Cardassian twins are quite rare, half-breeds even rarer. Consider this an honor, my dear.”

Lucan stood before me and pointed the dagger at my face. His features distorted, darkened by a shadow lingered around him, and I heard the distance cries of something eerie and terrifying pressed against the wall where the star was drawn. The stones in the wall moved, pressing outwards with an energy force felt thick with evil and I heard the chanting grow louder behind me. Vardon released my hair and grabbed hold of my shoulders as Lucan pressed the blade against my throat.

“In the name of Gnosh the Destroyer, I, Kia Lucan summon the Shadow Dwellers. Accept the officer of this woman’s blood to open the gateway. Take the bodies of the twins, which I offer to hold the souls of your servants, great Gnosh. Come to us and rid Bajor of the Cardassians and exact your vengeance!”

“Please,” I groaned. “Don’t do this. Don’t release this evil into the world.”

“It’s too late. Your fate is already decided,” Lucan snarled.

the leader of Bajor would even consider dabbling in black magic and dare to release an ancient evil to devour another evil, Cardassia, made no sense at all. Lucan could no more control the Pah-Wraiths than he could his own ambition for power and lust for revenge. I would have taken pity on him had he not threatened to harm my children and kill me, both he and his sisters, compelled to fall their older brother straight to Hell.

At the prick of the dagger, I let out a soft cry and felt Vardon’s fingers dig into my shoulders. The chanting grew deafening and I watched as the shadow behind Lucan became larger, filling the wall behind him, able to discern four arms and in each hand a sword. As the dagger cut into my flesh, I watched as the shadow’s face turned into of a monstrous thing with bulging eyes and swallowed hard, aware blood flowed from the cut to drip between my breasts and knew I was about to die.

“Gnosh, accept this offering and join us,” Lucan said, his eyes widening. He wasn’t looking at me, his hand stayed its deathblow, and I heard shouts in the corridor beyond.

“Go,” Vardon said with urgency. He raised his voice. “Every one! Leave at once! Hurry!”

Vardon released me, not bothering to wait for Lucan’s response, running for the door, coward he was, opening as I heard a commotion at the chamber’s entrance. The worshipers started to scream at the sound pistols blasting the door and it dissolved, allowing a rush of armored Cardassians to enter the chamber. Kia Lucan lifted his head as a red beam struck his chest, vanishing from sight with a loud scream. His three sisters were shot next, dropping to the floor in lumps and I slumped forward as a flow of people ran past me, trying to escape as the Cardassians fired at their backs, dropping dozens before they reached the doorway.

Eben broke free from his captors and ran toward the altar, grabbing both children off the altar and disappeared from view. As people fled toward a side door, Kira punched one of the guard’s in the face, dropping him to the floor and ran toward me, pulling me toward the altar, out of the line of fire as Garak and Ambassador Sorvan and Cardassian

soldiers gave pursuit.

“Stay here. It’ll be all right,” Kira insisted.

The major stood and ran around the altar, disappearing from sight. Eben pressed both babies into my arms, covering all three of us with his little body as screams and pistol fire echoed throughout the chamber. Garak appeared behind the altar and knelt beside us, holding a pistol, and wearing a concerned look on his face. He remained beside us as the Cardassians filed through a nearby door, following after the cult members and the chamber grew silent.

“How did you know where to find us?” I Garak asked. I winced when Madison started to cry louder. The boy released me and crouched at my side.

“Assuming Kia Lucan was the leader of the Shadow Cult, I advised the ambassador prior to dinner of my fears. Sorvan knew the layout of the palace and arranged for your rescue,” Garak said. He removed Gabe from my arms and stood. “Don’t look so surprised, Helen. I have learned a few things from my own father and from the Order. You don’t seriously think I was going to let Kia Lucan sacrifice you to the Pah-Wraiths?”

“No, I didn’t think that,” I said, standing. I kissed Madison’s forehead and she fell silent, her tiny hand grasping a handful of red hair.

“Bajoran Intelligence advised me Kia Lucan was under suspicion of being a cult member,” Garak said. “The Bajoran People’s Army will take control of the palace. Until a new leader can be selected, Ambassador Sorvan will assume command. Bajor is still a Cardassian colony. Their people won’t be punished for what Kia Lucan and his sisters attempted to do. We’re not quite as heartless as you might think.”

“I don’t think either.” I leaned forward and kissed Garak on the cheek, aware Eben pressed against me. “Thank you, Uncle. For all of us.”

Garak smiled at me as we walked around the altar. We stared at dozens of dead Bajoran and Cardassian cult members left in the chamber.

“Gul Vardon was here. He is one of them,” I said.

“A fact I am also well aware of, my dear. He’s been the fly in our ointment from day one,” Garak said, in a purring voice. “Now, if you’ll follow me, I will return you and the

twins to your room. Word has already been sent to Dukat. He'll send someone to fetch us in the morning. I promise to stand guard at the door, Helen. No one will harm you again. Come, Eben, my brave boy."

"Is a promise you're sure you can keep?" I asked.

Garak gave a nod. "You're family. And no one harms my family and lives to tell the tale. Now come. This place is loathsome and I'll feel much better when the children are safe in their room, with guards at the door. I for one have had quite enough of Pah-Wraiths this night and will feel much better when the sun rises and chases away the shadows."

As we left the dead behind, I found myself longing to return home, not to Milea, to Earth. It was Dukat kept me there. My loyalty and love was for my children. I held my daughter close to my chest, keeping my eyes on Garak who held Gabe in his arms. With Eben leading the way still holding onto his pistol, I told myself this was no place for the young and innocent.

SAWYER

Chapter Sixty-Six

Damar stood behind me, his robe wrapped around our naked bodies as we gazed at the morning sun gleaming across the ocean. Fort Galdrak was quiet morning, the scenery tranquil as well as beautiful. I gazed at the sea and I imagined a great tidal wave consuming us. As I closed my eyes, I felt my lover's lips brush across my neck. Turning his arms, I slid my arms around his waist and pressed my face into his neck, taking a deep whiff of his scent.

"I wish this moment would last a little longer," I said.

"Hold it in your mind as long as you can, Ren. The smell of the sea. The glow of the sun across the water. The cool touch of the breeze on our skin. This morning belongs to us and no one else. I would stay here forever with you if was possible, my love."

A flock of gulls cried as they flew low across the water. We watched them sail over the crest of a wave and vanish along the coastline. Lifting my head to gaze at his handsome face, he smiled before he kissed me, holding me tighter. We returned to our bedroom, the blankets and sheets twisted from our earlier lovemaking and dressed in our uniforms. As we made the bed and collecting our weapons, I wondered how long we could live at the fort, a few more weeks, months or even longer.

We took breakfast in his office. He reviewed reports from his staff, while I studied coastal maps dated three hundred years earlier. A soft chime brought Damar over to his desk. He flipped on his monitor as he sat in his chair, holding a cup of red leaf tea to his lips. Seated on the floor, scanning a map, I heard him call my name, rose, and came around the desk to slide my arms around his shoulders, resting my cheek against his. Odo

appeared on the monitor, the tall steeples, and spirals of Bajor City behind him.

“Gul Damar. Glinn Yor. You will be pleased to know Ambassador Sorvan has provided his home and protection for Helen and her party,” Odo said. *“We’ve had quite an eventual evening and Kia Lucan and his sisters are under arrest for treason. Gul Dyhurst who brought me to Bajor has taken control of the Kia’s palace. It seems the Kia is a member of the Circle. Dukat has been notified. Hopefully, he will arrive soon before a riot starts in the street. The Bajorans are objecting to the number of Cardassians inside the palace”*

“Kia Lucan is with the Circle.” Damar glanced at me. “It would seem your list is not accurate, dearest. Is all well with our son, Odo? Is Eben is well?”

“Your son is fine. I arrived after Garak and Ambassador Sorvan dealt with the Shadow Cult. Eben, Helen, and the twins are fine, just fine, Breena was killed. Kia Lucan and his sisters and a number of people were also killed during the fight,” Odo said. *“Yor’s suspicions about the Shadow Cult is correct. The proper term for this religious sect is the Order of the Red Snake, which I discovered originated in Luan Province. From what I can tell, there have been an number of odd occurrences since Gul Vardon obtain Milea, from missing children, a rise in unexplained murders, as well as an increase in the vethral population, which some believed are attracted to the Temples of the Shadow.”*

“Dead vethrals turn into jakars and jakars protect the temples,” I said to bring Odo up to speed. “What did you find out about Aloquin Monastery? I found the monastery on the map or at least where it once stood. We’ll have to go to a fishing village and obtain boats.”

I felt Damar stiffen in my arms. My line of thinking was not the same as his and he started to interrupt, his sense of duty to Dukat and his family taking presidency. I knew he wanted to go to Bajor City to bring Eben home. I felt it more pressing to find the three missing girls.

“What about paranormal activity in this area?” Damar asked before Odo had time to respond. We both put a great deal of faith in the constable.

“Yes, sir. An increase in shadow figures was reported after a series of ritualistic styled murders occurred three years ago. Villagers informed Cardassian authorities of an outbreak of

unusual occurrences at the Shadow temples, however, Gul Gulch never inquired or investigated any of this occurrences and he has failed to respond to my request for information. It may very well be, Gul Damar Gul Gulch was paid by Vardon to be silent or could be a member of the Circle or Snake cult. In any case, Bajoran Intelligence is inquiring about Gul Gulch's affairs when he was in command of Fort Galdrak. Galdrak and the forts along the southern continent were not attacked by the Marquis. A ship has been sent to Fort Gleeson to arrest Gul Gulch and hold him for questioning."

"Good work, Odo. I am glad to have you here. Ren Yor is leaving this morning to find the monastery. Did you have time to research its history as well?"

"The monastery is built on an intersection of ley lines, which I have learned are built directly over a fissure is said to lead to the Fire Caves of the Pah-Wraiths. This area has long been recorded as haunted and there are hundreds of legends and folk tales about supernatural creatures, demons, and even sea serpents," Odo said. "Aloquin vanished after an earthquake struck the southern coast of this continent, followed by a tidal wave. The locals in the area report it is often used by smugglers."

I kissed Damar's cheek. "Told you so, babe. Thank you, Odo. I knew you'd find the underlying cause of this. Please thank Gul Dyhurst for bringing you here as well."

"It was a direct order from Dukat. Odo has no choice."

"I'm complimenting the man. Thank you, Odo," I said.

Odo nodded. *"Glinn Yor, I suggest you proceed with caution. You are prone to extravagance when it comes to rushing into battle," he said. "If these reports are accurate, you are dealing with a very real and serious supernatural entities. As you have no spiritual protection against the Pah-Wraiths, you are susceptible to their persuasion and manipulation. It obviously happened to Gul Vardon's tampering with these dark forces. I cannot say what he has released. Just don't tarry after dark, for is when more incidents occurred."*

"I'll have her back before then," Damar said. "When is Dukat coming to Bajor City to take charge of the situation?"

"Unfortunately, Legate Dukat is leading a search party into the hill, looking for his daughter Shazel and has not provide a time of arrival. Until then, we are to wait," replied Odo. "However, I am informed a thorough search of the villa and Cottage Row did not produce the missing children. A

number of Bajorans have been shot and killed. If word of this gets out to the public, our situation may drastically change for the worse."

"Understood. Damar out."

The transmission ended.

"I suppose you would prefer to go to Dukat's aid?" Damar asked in a clipped tone.

"My preference is to continue with my mission. I'm taking three squads to the fishing village. I'll be careful. Sorry you're needed here, my love." I kissed the top of Damar's head. "Be back before you know it."

Leaving the fort in a transport with Ikarus, Dunatar and three squads of Alphas, which meant I'd brought them all and we walked to the fishing village of Neece. We obtained three fishing ships and crews to take us to the location six miles to the east of Fort Galdrak on the southern peninsula. Ordering the soldiers to remove their armor, in case the high waves sent one toppling over the sides, we sailed along the coast, the water deep and blue, following the cliffs and the map I've brought with us. I stood with the captain, an older Bajoran with a potbelly, continuing to point at the map while he scratched at his backside, not at all impressed with my Cardassian ridges and blonde hair.

"Aloquin. It's a monastery not far from here on the coast. That's where I want to go."

"Never heard of it," the captain said.

"It's right on the damn map. There's a large cave and when the tide is out, we can sail right in and disembark. I've...I've been there before, recently. I know what I'm going about, so you take us where we want to go or I'll stuff your under shorts into your mouth."

"Eh?" The captain gave me a funny look. "You're paying. I'll take you wherever want, my little gold cuscus."

"No idea what is and don't tell me. What's your name?"

"Captain Leith. I've sailed these waters for many years and never heard any talk about a monastery sunk into the hillside three hundred years ago."

"I didn't realize you were old."

The captain laughed, repeating what I said to his crew who laughed as equally as

hard. A large wave splashed over the prow. All six of my proud Cardassian soldiers hung over the side of the boat vomiting. It was the same messy affair in the two crafts followed. Cardassians were not sailors and there was no fleet, not on water, for these crocodiles didn't know how to swim, above or beneath the water. No one on the boat had ever heard of scuba diving, snorkeling, submarines, or knew what a frigate was, which I was partial to, since I like tall ships. The fishing boat was no frigate and had to sails. No more than forty feet in length, with a large net attached to the starboard side, the deck was relatively clean. The odor of fish was overpowering. The Bajorans quieted as Prefect Dukat and two officers transported onto the deck. They'd not worn their armor, dressed in civilian's clothes, carrying pistols as well as swords. Another swell and one of the officer's turned green. However, Dukat laughed. He approached me with a pirate's swagger, slapped me on the back, nearly knocked me over, and placed his hands on his lean hips.

"You'll find I do not like to sit and wait for results," Dukat said. "This is as much as my expedition as yours, Glinn Yor. If my daughters' are inside monastery, then I am going to be the first one they see when they're rescued."

"Glad to have you on board. Captain Leith this is Prefect Dukat."

"I know who he is," the captain grumbled.

"Apparently my face is not well liked," Dukat whispered in my ear. "Where is the monastery, Yor? I'm anxious to go inside and see what all this fuss is about."

"You're a pendulum on a heart string. Only last night you were ready to cleave me in two and now you're in a good mood." With a shake of my head, I used the captain's small telescope to scan the cliffs, spotted a large cavern ahead, and pointed it out to Leith. "There is our destination. Bring us right in side cave."

"I'm going to regret this," the captain groaned.

Sailing across the dark blue water, we sailed past a large stone jutting out of the water like a sea god's finger, three smaller ones direction ahead, causing the captain to order his crew to lower sails. The four ships following us, smaller in size, followed suit, approaching the cave on the swells.

"We could have transported inside. This is more exciting," Dukat said, as excited as

boy. "Fortunately, I do think ahead, Yor. Gul Starnok has a fix on my location and can beam me out if there is any danger. It helps having a cruiser in orbit. I don't suppose you considered this as an option. No. With you, everything must be done the old-fashioned way, by horse and buggy, as they say on your world."

"That's not a saying. I prefer doing this with my hands and not having my particles separated and spliced together. A transporter is nothing more than a butcher's shop. If you'd seen those ten men inside the Bajoran fort turn inside, then you'd be reluctant as I am," I said. "Damar already asked Starnok to scan the interior of the cliff. Similar interference experienced from the ion storm made it impossible, so, if we'd tried to transport inside the cavern, we'd be part of the wall. Again, no thank you."

"You're rather surly this morning. I should be in Bajor City with Helen, instead I came here to help you find my children."

"Is Helen all right? And Eben?"

"Out of danger. Ambassador Sorvan has matters well in hand," he said. "I'm sure you'll hear the details later. I'll go to Bajor City just as soon as we rescue my children. You have enough to worry about right now. Focus on your mission."

Damar would fill me in later and also make certain Eben was returned home. I could not worry about everyone and everything. There was no reason for Dukat to remain, not if he needed to go to Bajor City. I was glad he was with me.

I watched the mouth of the cavern widen before us. The fishing boat moved around the projectiles in the water, entering the dank, dark cavern. I'd brought along a flair gun, also out-fashioned, found amongst Gul Gulch's possessions in his office. The majority of items had been handed from each generation of gul stationed at Fort Galdrak for one hundred years and the flare gun had caught my eye. As I fired it into the back of the cavern, watching it streak through the air, it lit the interior, revealing we already inside the monastery and the overhead ceiling had been the roof. The flare bounced off the roof, falling onto a ledge, providing enough light Leith was able to bring the boat alongside stairs led into the water.

"Move out," I ordered, retaining command until Dukat said otherwise. "Wait for us

here, Captain Leith. We'll be finished long before the tide rolls in."

The soldiers crawled out of the fishing boat, taking their armor and laser rifles, careful not to slip on the moss covered the stairs. I joined them, moving ahead of Dukat and his two officer, new to me, so I didn't know their names only the ranks; both were gils. Leith moved his head further into the cavern, allowing the next boat to unload the soldiers. When all thirty soldiers were on the platform, I tossed a flair through a doorway. Ikarus and Dunatar moved inside, waving me on.

"There's torches in a crate," Dunatar said. He pointed at a stack of crates contained a pile of ropes, manacles, empty food tins and the body of a dead female. "I'd say you found the location where Gul Vardon met the Marquis smugglers. Not all of the slaves left here alive."

"Squad 1 with me," I ordered. "Wait until we reach the next chamber before you. The conditions are stable, so be careful what you touch. We're looking for three little girls and anything of a religious nature. Engravings, ancient writing or scrolls."

I drew my sword and took a torch. Dunatar lit it for me and started to past them to the soldiers. Holding the torch in front of me, I walked through an inch of water as I entered the next chamber, finding remains of wine kegs, the wood rotten and the metal rims rusted.

"I should think you would allow me to lead, Yor," Dukat said falling into step beside me. He'd drawn his pistol and held a torch. "No, no, no. You seem determined, so I am content to follow. If you happen to run into Vardon's old partners, I want to be there to save you this time. I insist."

The monastery had sunk into the hill virtually intact, images painted of angels and strange supernatural creatures seemed to be the theme as I led the squad into the main sanctuary. Several doorways had filled with rubble. The pews had long sense rotten and the skeleton of a sea serpent took up a large portion of the sanctuary. As I approach the altar, curious to take a closer look at the engraving on its side, I felt fresh air on my face, the reason, and shaft rose nearly one hundred feet overhead.

"I'd say a disrupter beam from a Marquis ship made hole," Dukat said, his tone

mocking. "It would be relatively easy for a crew to beam direction into this chamber, collect the slaves, and return to their ships." He turned to the soldiers. "Fan out. Find the storage rooms where they held the slaves. Find my daughters. As for you, Yor, there are more than enough paintings preserved well enough for you to capture on your padd and send directly to Damar or Odo to analyze. Or did you think you'd take a few snap shots and study them later?"

"You're really getting on my nerves. Go find your daughters, while I do the job I came here for, Dukat." I walked through the aisle, noticing a bag of gold coins on the ground, a broken sword, along with several skeletons in tattered clothes still locked in battle.

Sunlight streamed at the back of the altar. As I rounded it, knowing Damar saw everything I did from the com-link attached to my uniform, my attention was drawn to a large hole in the ground. The Disrupter had widened the further it pierced the ground, creating a rank smelling pit was four feet wide, perfectly round, and dark. I found an iron stand to place my torch, finding a crate filled with white and black candles, a humanoid skull, a musty purple cloth, a collection of bones, and a dagger.

"Find anything of interest?" Dukat asked. "You didn't bother looking inside the pit."

"I thought you had something else to do."

His presence had spoiled my mood and the thrill of adventure. He tossed his torch into the pit, a bit careless if his daughters were in the bottom of it, and I heard it hit the bottom and fizzle out.

"Something is down there," Dukat said. "The water has receded enough for me to what appears to be white stones. Give me your torch, Yor. I want to drop it in and observe before it hits the water."

I motioned for a soldier to collect the box with what I considered to be items used in a ritual and walked over to Dukat, offering him my torch. He dropped it into the hole and we both watched, able to see a large stack of humanoid bones partially submerged beneath the water.

“Apparently Vardon tossed slaves or business partners he didn’t like into this pit. There must be hundreds of skeletons down there,” Dukat said. “I don’t see my...my children.”

“The high priest required human sacrifices whenever a ritual was performed.”

“This was a smuggler’s cave. I sense nothing evil or see any shadows lurking in the corners. I’m the only one you need to worry about.”

Dukat removed a flare and tossed it onto the altar. I hadn’t realized he’d brought any. The red flickering light provided a glow enabled me to see faint images on the walls. Someone had recently tried to paint over what appeared to be graffiti, crude prominent. The black paint glow in the fluorescent light of the flare. An enormous figure with four arms, holding four swords, stood with one foot on a temple and the other among a warrior. A circle was drawn around the figure in blood and curious symbols bordered it.

“Ah,” Dukat said. “That must be Gnosh the Destroyer. Legend says Gnosh, when summoned, destroys whole villages, and eat the inhabitants. It is said the Ghost Warrior, a great Bajoran warrior who died in battle, many times, returns when needed to fight Gnosh. Is this your Devourer in your prophesy? Gnosh was a Pah-Wraith of death and destruction. It’s been painted over. Vardon used the image to scare anyone away from this place. All he’s done is desecrate a holy place. Do you see evidence of magic practices or human sacrifice, Yor?”

“And I was rather hoping we find a magical sword. Travok wrote, ‘from the stars, a savior shall come, armed with a sword of justice, to battle the one called Devourer.’ Why would Vardon pick this particular prophesy and draw a picture of Gnosh on the wall? I know you said it was to scare scavengers off. That’s blood on the wall. I’ve been seen those symbols before, have you?”

“Ancient Bajoran writing,” I said.

I drew my pistol, set it on stun, hoping I could bur away the fresh paint and reveal the entirety of the drawing beneath. Before Dukat could cast his opinion, I aimed the pistol, burning through the paint and placed it in the hostler. Dukat broke another flare, holding it into the air. Far older than Gnosh or the ancient symbols written around a circle was

another painting. A tall warrior with a yellow halo around their head was armed with a flaming sword. It was impossible to tell the sex of the figure or what race. It reminded me of an angel.

“Is this your Ghost Warrior, Dukat? Could be the Savior fights the Devourer?”

“From what I remember, both of us were taken to the Celestial Temple to be judged. The Prophets decided the warrior was worthy and returned the Ghost Warrior to fight and defeat Gnosh. You say there were ley lines this structure was built over.”

“Over an intersection of ley lines. On Earth, meant powerful magic or paranormal activity. Many cults worshiped at these places or built temples or shrines,” I said, walking past him to see if the rock on the top of the altar moved aside, revealing a secret compartment. “I have met the Prophets twice in my life. Helen has also seen the Pah-Wraiths, night her shuttle crashed, in the shack she took shelter in. I think they sent Glinn Kieryl and the assassins to kill her and the twins.”

“Let’s check out the rest of this dismal place. Find my daughters,” Dukat said.

“They may not be here,” I replied.

Dunatar arrived, excited and motioned for us to follow him. He led us through a hallway into another chamber where the soldiers had placed their torches in iron stands. All four walls had been painted in blood, over the red in black drawn sentences in an ancient language, forming a curious pattern around the room continued from the top to the bottom. The ceiling was painted to look like the sky and on the floor was a series of white circles started small and grew wider. In the center of the circles was placed a giant, gold seal where the soldiers had started to use their trench shovels to dig it out.

“I’m not sure that’s a good idea. We’re not here for gold. Stop digging and return to the boats. We’re leaving,” I said.

“We’ve almost got it. It can’t be heavy,” a soldier said.

Cries from the sanctuary were followed by heavy laser fire. A loud rumble brought a wall crashing to the floor and a section overhead dropped. The entire monastery felt like it was coming down onto our heads. Dukat grabbed my arm and pulled me along behind him into the sanctuary, pausing at the threshold, as smugglers appeared from a doorway,

firing on our soldiers. I heard a scream coming from the back of the altar, where I'd been moments earlier.

All other sounds faded and I could only hear the cries of children. I ripped my arm from Dukat's grip and ran toward the altar. The cries came from my left. Turning, I kicked the wall with my right boot, creating a small hole, for it was new plaster and had been used to cover a former doorway. Dukat joined me and together we broke through the wall. A damp, cool breeze came from a stairwell sunk into the ground. Shazel stumbled forward, her wrists still tied together, acting incredibly brave. She ran toward me and I gathered her in my arms, hearing more cries coming from the stairwell. Broc appeared, his face bruises and swollen, carrying Amber and Jewell.

"This place is going to collapse," Broc said. "We have to get out of here."

"I knew you weren't a traitor, Broc," I said, pleased I'd been right.

"I'll be dead and so will the rest of you if we don't get out of here."

Dukat snarled at Broc as he grabbed Amber out of his arms and handed her to Dunatar, and then reached for Jewell. Another loud crash brought the far side of the sanctuary crashing to the ground and water appeared rising fast in the stairwell. Ikarus put his arm around Broc, helping him wall as we entered the battle in the sanctuary.

The Marquis had chased the Cardassians toward the doorway. As we came behind them, firing our pistols, the Marquis started to vanish, one by one. They were transporting out of the monastery. Dunatar tucked the child under his arm and led the way to the far side of the sanctuary. Ikarus made it through the door with Jewell, and then Dukat and Amber. Dunatar and Broc waited as I approached with Shazel.

"Move it," I shouted.

The two Cardassians disappeared and I reached the doorway, hearing more pistol fire in the corridor. Dukat leaned against the wall, Amber clinging to his left leg as he fired at Marquis appeared in a doorway. Ikarus and Jewell had made it past the Marquis, the persistence to fire on us while stones fell from the ceiling, placing us all in danger was sheer stupidity on their part. Dunatar joined Dukat, firing at the enemy, until they retreated and we pressed forward as cracks appeared in the floor, water rising fast.

"Mama," Shazel cried.

I glanced over my shoulder as the entire sanctuary collapsed, staring in shock at Gul Vardon, alive and well, aiming a pistol at me. Raising my sword arm, I stabbed into his thigh. It felt like real flesh and he bled. Laughing, he transported out of the cavern and I was left with a bloody and a screaming child on my left hip.

"Hurry," Dukat hissed in my ear. He grabbed Shazel from me, no longer holding Jewell and took hold of my arm.

His touch resulted in a dramatic alteration in what I saw, felt, and smelled. The images altered around me. I saw the monastery as it had been, monks passing me, taking no notice of me. A black form appeared at the end of the wall. It approached a monk who came out of a room, grabbed his head, and snapped his neck. The form continued toward me, thrusting its arm through the back of a monk, ripping out of heart. I felt another tug on my arm and stumbled, the scene fading and realized we'd reached the boats.

Dukat handed Shazel to a soldier and then turned, pulling me over his shoulder and jumped into a fishing boat. He released me, leaving me lying on the deck and grabbed an oar, helping the fishermen and soldiers row toward the open in the cavern. The two boats ahead of us vanished in the bright sunlight. Shazel crawled on top of me, bringing the two little girls with her. I released my sword and held the children in my arms, hearing their whimpers as the ceiling collapsed and a large cloud of dust blew toward us.

"Watch out!"

Captain Leith's shout was followed by a large chunk of stone hit the water beside the boat, creating a small wave pushed out the entrance. Stones continued to fall. Another loud rumble brought sheared off the side of the cliff off, showering the deck with stones and dirt. The boat moved out of the way, a miracle it wasn't struck and moved past the rock formations protruding from the water. Broc lay on the deck, unable to help due to his injuries. Dunatar and Ikarus had joined the squad and used oars to row us to safety. As the two fishermen raised the sails, wind puffing them full and we moved forward, gaining speed, I heard cheers from the three boats. Dukat set the oar on the ground and crawled over to set beside me. Shazel came to him, clinging to her father, while I held Jewell and

Amber.

“The rock slide has stilled. I can still see the entrance to the cavern,” Captain Leith said.

“Not destroyed? I must rectify this at once,” Dukat said.

Dukat leaned forward, grabbed my shoulder, pulling me close enough to kiss me. Shazel was crushed between us as our lips met. If he’d meant it to be a simple kiss, it had the effect of burning my lips, causing my resistance to weaken. I heard rocks strike the water, the cries of the soldiers and felt the boat shudder. The wind in the sails faded away and I felt chilled to the bone, aware the little girls sandwiched between had renewed their sobs. Dukat pulled away from me, his eyes flickering toward the cliffs and then to the sails as the wind returned and pushed us on, away from the landslide, toward the fishing village.

“Why did you do that?” I asked, angry.

“Curious, like you, only for a different reason.”

His ego had placed us in danger. I’d wanted to see books fly through the library in Milea by embracing him. He’d brought the rest of the cliff into the sea by kissing me. If the Pah- Wraiths controlled us, it should have gone the opposite way and Aloquin returned to its original location on the cliff, restored to its former glory. The rocks fell, closing the entrance. I felt certain the Prophets had helped us.

“How is Garresh Broc?” Dukat asked.

Dunatar held Broc in his arms. He gave Broc a drink of water from a flask. Captain Leith tossed his coat toward Dunatar, which he used to cover Broc.

“Keep him alive. I’ll want to question him at the fort,” Dukat said.

“Your little girls are cold, sir. Best cover them up,” a fisherman said.

A blanket was handed to Dukat by the Bajoran. Dukat wrapped it around Shazel, motioning for me to stand. I didn’t expect this eldest daughter to share the blanket. The same fisherman brought out another blanket, a bit dirtier than the last, placing it around Amber and Jewell. He remained to comfort the small girls, while Shazel glared at the Bajoran. I was disappointed in her. I didn’t say anything. I retrieved my sword and slid it

into the scabbard, able to see Fort Galdrak in the distance.

“Vardon is alive,” I said. Dukat didn’t look like he believed me. “He was there. He beamed out at the last second. You were right. We could have transported into the monastery.”

“You should know I’m usually always right, Yor. Do know what I think? I think our little trip to the Celestial Temple was a dream and you capitalized on my doubts to further worm your way into my heart. All this talk about black magic devil dogs is not more than a smoke screen for Vardon’s activities and you fell for it.”

“Then you believe me? I saw him and he’s alive?”

Dukat caught hold of my, despite my protest and pulled me toward the side of the ship, away from his daughters, the soldiers and fishermen.

“Oh, I believe Gul Vardon transported onto another ship before the Kobrak exploded, he led the attack on Bajor, destroyed my forts and killing my soldiers, during one of the worst ion storms in history. As to what I know, Vardon has clearly returned to collect a vast fortune, which I recently found in Milea. I know he has murdered slaves in gruesome ancient rituals, spreading rumors the Shadow Dwellers have arisen and jakars not vethrals have been summoned to kill those who enter the Temples of Shadow. I have no doubt he murdered my sons and transported my girls from Milea to Aloquin. This alleged great battle between good and evil involves you, Helen, and me? we are part of a grander picture involves the Bajoran gods? Yor, if I was gullible and naive, do really think I’d be Prefect and Legate?”

“No, sir.”

Dukat laughed. “Apparently, you believe the Bajoran gods chose an insignificant Terran with an obsessive compulsive tendency to bounce between the beds of her two Cardassian commanding officers to save us all. I know. Let’s find out,” he said.

His hands slammed into my chest and sent me toppling over the side of the ship. I sunk fast, weighted by armor, sword, and boots. The water was shockingly cold and my fingers fumbled to release the clasps to my armor, barely able to shrug out of it, as I continued to descend into the dark, blue depths. As I reached for my sword belt, my body

tingled and I found myself gasping on a transporter deck on a Cardassian war ship. A fish wiggled out of the top of my drenched padded shirt and flopped on the desk, gasping for air.

Flipping my hair to the side, I head Dukat laughing as his girls were led out of the room by two crewmen. I cursed his name and sloshed toward him, pulling back my right arm and threw a punch. He caught my fist, jerked my arm behind my back, lifting me onto my toes. His other hand grasped my jaw as he cruelly kissed me, while the lights flickered on and off. I struggled against him, unable to break free and felt the plunge of his tongue between my lips. My teeth connect with the tip and he retracted his hand, glaring at me before he wrapped his arms around my wet, shivering body and reclaimed my mouth.

Lack of air, the shock of near drowning and the unpleasant experience of being beamed from water into space weakened my knees. When he sensed I'd stopped resisting, his kiss no longer was meant as punishing and turned passionate, fed by my anger, and his egotistical need to dominate. The only way to end the torment was not respond further. I went limp in his arms, no longer kissing him or resisting, and I heard his responsive snarl. He held me tight as he met my gaze.

"As I said, Yor, the gods are not interested in either of us. If you insist on this paranormal investigation, then by all means, seek out a priest named Evard in the northeastern town of Yandal in Luan Province. I'm told Prylar Evard specializes in magic tricks. Take your Bajoran trackers and find this priest. I must go to Bajor City. Helen needs me and I have other duties to attend to."

"You a cruel bastard," I said. "I could have drowned."

"Careful, Yor. I'm a very important man. I'll see your son is sent home."

Dukat lifted me off the dead. He lifted his com-link, spoke into in in a whisper, and I felt my entire body tingle. I was beamed from the ship into Damar's office at Fort Galdrak. The head rush of my descent buckled my knees. As the floor rushed to meet me, I heard Damar's shout and nosedived onto the carpet. He was at my side in an instance, rolled me over, and pulled me into his arms.

"I'm sure there is an explanation for your beaming into the fort without your

squad," Damar barked. "What happened, Yor? Did you find the missing children?"

"Yes, I found them. They are back with their father, along with Broc. Vardon was behind everything. He even tried to kill our son. Dukat is going to Bajor City to return him to us," I said, still angry. I felt something wiggling in my boot and plucked out a small fish. "man is going to be so sorry he pushed me overboard. I'm going to prove he's wrong about the prophesy, and then I'll make him eat this fish!"

"Then we best save it for him."

Damar laughed and offered me a glass. I placed the fish into it and started to remove my wet uniform, not finding anything funny about the entire situation. When I was stripped down to my underwear, Damar walked over and placed his arms around me. I lifted my chin, not wanting to be kissed. He caught my face in his hands, forcing me to look at him.

"You're home safe," he said. "I'll send for Eben immediately. All will be well, my love. You have done the impossible and made a believer in me. If you believe in this prophesy, then so do I."

Even though I smelled like fish and dripped salt water onto his carpet, he kissed me. I had done the impossible, I thought. Eben would be home within the hour and we'd spend a quiet evening at home. After that, I intended to solve the mystery of the Prophets and Pah-Wraiths. Knowing Damar believed in me, if not Dukat, was all the motivation I needed to get results.

HELEN

Chapter Sixty-Seven

Surrounded by Dukat's soldiers, I held onto Eben's hand, with the twins' crib at my feet. Dukat had transported into the palace. Five platoons had joined him. Kia Lucan and his sisters sat on their gold thrones, each wore handcuffs, heads bowed. Dukat looked magnificent in his armor, I had to admit, as he strode toward Kia Lucan and his sisters. He always did like a theatrical entrance, I thought, relieved to see him.

Major Kira, Constable Odo, and Ambassador Sorvan stood beside me. My breath caught in my throat. I had no idea what Dukat intended to do. We'd waited all morning for him to arrive, and now he was there, I was filled with trepidation. Dukat put one foot on the golden dais, leaned forward, and pointed a finger at Kia Lucan.

"This is the last time you'll sit on those thrones," Dukat snarled. "Your audacity to attempt to sacrifice my family to the Pah-Wraiths should be met with Cardassian justice. Bajor might dislike her Cardassian protectors. I have tried to be fair, while you bleed your own people for the sake of appeasing demons. Well, your reign of terror is at an end, Lucan!" He turned and pointed at the window. "Do you hear those cries for justice outside? Your own people demand your immediate execution. It's something I considered doing, however, Major Kira with Bajoran Intelligence has asked me to grant mercy. As I mean to prove Cardassia can be a friend to Bajor, then mercy it shall be!"

I glanced at Kira. She didn't look at me. I couldn't imagine why she had asked Dukat to spare the lives of Lucan and his sisters. After what they'd done, I thought Kira would demand their deaths. The Bajorans were a strange people, I'd discovered.

"Lucan, you are removed from office. You and your sisters will leave at once for your new residence in the Salvane Mines."

Dukat smiled wide as the quartet were beamed out of the palace to a fate grimmer

than serving time in a prison. They would spend their days in the mines, worked to death. I felt no sympathy for their plight. Dukat surprised the audience when he promptly sat in Lucan's vacated throne, with his legs sprawled out before him.

"Ambassador Sorvan," Dukat said, "I do hope the Vedek Assembly has prepared a list of candidates for the recently opened post of Kai. Since the people are gathered outside, let them vote on it."

"Yes, Prefect Dukat," Sorvan said. He pointed at a collection of robed figures standing off to the side. "The Vedek Assembly is present, as you requested. They've also provided a list of names for the next First Minister."

"See they pick someone to fill the post of Kai, who is trustworthy, just, and kind, Ambassador Sorvan. It should be someone who worships the Prophets and not the Pah-Wraiths. Someone with experience and wisdom." Dukat waited until Sorvan approached the assembly before he continued. "A First Minister has always handled civilian matters in the past. As your Prefect, I simply offer guidance and the protection of Cardassia. Now Bajor is part of the Union, your rights for self-rule is allowed. Lucan held too much power. Never mix politics with religion. Who among you is worthy of such a position?"

Dukat meant to select someone in the crowd. Bajor's wealthiest citizens were present. I wondered who among them would step forward. The Cardassian ambassador returned to Dukat with a list of names offered by the Vedek Assembly. Sorvan whispered to Dukat who never looked away from the Bajorans.

"I trust you know every name listed, Sorvan," Dukat stated. He didn't bother to look at the list. "As long as the next First Minister is not a member of the Circle or the Shadow Cult, I am willing to work side-by-side with him or her for the betterment of the Bajorans. The first name on the list will do."

"Pelem Quill," Sorvan announced. He faced the audience and pointed out Pelem Quill, a small, non-threatening banker. At the waggle of his finger, Quill approached Dukat and trembled.

"First Minister Quill, it's a pleasure," Dukat said. He jumped up from the throne and motioned for Quill to be seated. The banker quivered as he sat down. "By the power

bestowed upon me by the Cardassian Union, Counsel, and Central Command, you're the new First Minister, Pelem Quill. See you don't annoy me. I neither tolerate cults nor hold faith in the Bajoran gods. Do what you do best. Invest, trade and spend money. And then arrange for the Vedek Assembly to provide several priests for the people to vote for their own Kai. I leave the spiritual matters in the hands of your people."

"Thank you, Prefect Dukat," Quill said, overwhelmed by his new status.

"See everything is handled properly, Sorvan. You will retain your position as ambassador and offer any assistant to the new First Minister as needed."

Leaving Sorvan to handle Quill, Dukat approached our group. He spoke to Kira and Odo and then walked toward me. I expected him to help carry the crib or whisper something to me. Instead, he snapped his fingers as he walked past me. It seemed to be a signal to leave. I lifted the crib in my arms and followed with Garak and the children. The soldiers walked beside us in a long line. We walked outside onto a balcony, with a view of the city and the mob in the streets. I had no time to bid farewell to Odo or Major Kira as Dukat contacted his ship.

"Transport us to Milea," Dukat said into his com-link.

A familiar sensation lifted the hairs on my arms. The palace vanished, and like magic, I stood in the living room in the villa, holding the crib.

The twins, agitated by the transporter, started to squall. I carried them to a couch, trying to shush them as Shazel, Amber and Jewell rejoined their siblings. The children talked in excited voices, exchanging stories. Eben turned to smile at me. He vanished from sight in a twinkling, I presumed, returned to Fort Galdrak. Garak remained with me.

"What is going on?" I asked as Dukat commenced to greet his children. "Why this devil of a rush, Dukat? Couldn't you at least greet me and explain where you have been for the last two days? You might even start with a hello."

"Hello, my little cherubs," he said.

Dukat bent over to kiss each child on the head. He greeted each child and then walked over, kissed my forehead without laying a finger on me, and left the room. Garak sank into a chair. He sighed heavily and offered no explanation for Dukat's maddening

behavior. I must have looked shocked, for Dukat's quick exit had left me in confusion. Shazel chose moment to needle me.

"Father and Mother kissed again," Shazel said. She glared at me. "They rescued me from the monastery and then it collapsed into the sea. Mother said she saw Gul Vardon. I suppose you'll want to know all about him now. I'm sure won't please Father."

I tried not to react to her comment or insistence on calling Yor her mother. My face kept bland, I placed the crib on the floor and turned to Garak. "Please, Uncle. Watch the twins for me while I talk to Dukat," I said. "I won't be long."

"Of course. Take all the time you need," Garak said.

Blythe entered the room. I left Garak to explain the horrible news about her sister Breena. I just didn't have the heart to tell Blythe her sister had died protecting us. The Cardassian woman let me slip pass without comment. I hurried along the hall, searching for Dukat, finding his officers had no idea where he'd went. I tried to think where I would go if I was upset with the world. My favorite place in Milea was the small veranda overlooked the garden, for it was quiet there and not used by the guards. It proved to be the correct place. I found Dukat in a chair, his face in his hands. As I slid my arms around his shoulders, he sighed and placed one hand over my arms.

"I didn't mean to cause so much trouble. Kia Lucan, as you know, meant to use the children and me as bait. If it hadn't been Ambassador Sorvan, we would have been sacrificed to Gnosh and the Pah-Wraiths would now be devouring the fertile land."

"Helen, please, dearest. No more discussion of this ridiculous prophesy." Dukat lifted his head, a faraway look in his eyes made me kiss him. He pulled me onto his lap, holding me close and sighed. "This is all part of Vardon's desperate plan to create a revolt in Luan Province. The gods of Bajor are not interested in us. It's time you and Yor accepted the fact you are here to stay and resign yourselves to living a less dramatic life than you've both envisioned. There is no Gnosh or Ghost Warrior, my love. They're names Vardon dredged out of the past to use for his own creative purposes."

"Shazel said Vardon was at the monastery. He was also at Bajor City."

"I should have killed him when I first had the chance."

“She also said you kissed her mother.”

“It’s not what you think, my dear. Yor found my missing children and I thanked her.” Dukat laughed when I glared at him. “Did I not come to your rescue?”

I thumped his chest with my fist. “I needed to be rescued last night,” I said. “What took you so long? I never been so afraid in my life. Vardon was there. He’s behind all of this, Dukat. I won’t feel safe until he’s caught.”

“I apologize for the delay. Everything will be all right, my dear.”

I nodded, a lump in my throat.

Dukat’s blue eyes searched my face. “I went with Yor to Aloquin this morning or I would have been with you sooner. She said we’d find my girls there and we did. She was also right about Broc. He was captured by Vardon and helped save my daughters. You mustn’t let what Shazel says upset you. The death of her own mother has taken its toll. I’m sure the girl needs counseling. As for you, you have been through quite the ordeal. I intend to spend all evening with you, making sure no shadows disturb us this night.”

“I like idea,” I said as I kissed him.

Momentarily, I shut out the world around us. His kisses were sweet and tender. Dukat seemed far too tired for caresses. I contended myself with sitting on his lap with his arms wrapped around me. It was late in the afternoon. The shadows he’d mentioned had started to grow larger in the garden. There was no cries from vethrals in the hills and no sense of dread I often felt in the villa, especially when he was absent.

“What about Vardon?” I finally asked. “What are you going to do about him?” I didn’t want to talk about Vardon. I was frightened. So many awful things had happened since I’d gone to Bajor City, I felt compelled to discuss the matter. Vardon was the one thing keeping us from finding peace and happiness. I wanted the matter resolved.

“Oh, he’ll come for his treasure. In the meantime, I’m sure he’ll set another trap for Ren Yor. She’s the one person keeping him on his toes.”

“Maybe she is the Ghost Warrior.”

“Helen, she’s an exemplary soldiers, not a preordained savior,” Dukat said. He slid the back of his fingers across my cheek. “I have advised Damar our mutual friend is to be

sent out on another mission. She's being sent to visit a priest named Evard in the town of Yandal. I believe he's nothing more than a charlatan who tricks his flock into believing he can cast magic spells. It will keep Yor out of my hair for a while, and lessen the death toll of my soldiers. Where Yor goes, death follows."

"That's a horrible thing to say."

"Defending her, are we? I thought you were angry with her."

"Not anymore," I said. "Well, maybe a little. She keeps secrets from me too. What else did you find out? Any signs of Vardon's smuggling operation? Details, please." I cupped his chin in my hands. His blue eyes lost their vacant look. "Where is Vardon now?"

"No idea," Dukat said. "Did you know Tain Enebran is Garak's father?"

"What does have to do with anything?"

"Tain is legally your great uncle and heads the Obsidian Order. Garak has never stopped being an agent, Helen. Garak does not ever speak of Tain. Their relationship allows him certain information not even I can obtain with all my contacts. I have asked Garak to find Vardon and discover what has been going on in these region since Vardon inherited this estate. So far, Garak has been less than forthcoming."

"I already know all about this. Garak isn't working for Vardon, if that's what you think," I said. "Don't forget Garak was with me. Lucan and Vardon meant to kill him. If it hadn't been for Garak and Sorvan, they would have succeeded."

"A message was intercepted from Tain to Garak stated Vardon has been involved in smuggling slaves from Bajor for the last twenty years. This is how Vardon acquired his wealth. Garak surely knows this, his father is not his only contact, yet he has failed to disclose this information to me. Further, the Order knew Vardon, desperate to win the war, relied on scaring the Bajorans with stories of black magic, Shadow Dwellers, and this prophesy about Gnosh the Destroyer rising from the Fire Caves. While the message said nothing about the last two names on the Death List, Talos, and Dovvos, it seems Yor is convinced they are Shadow Dwellers. She think they lurk somewhere in the mountains."

"Then we're not safe here."

"Why do you believe in this nonsense? Have I not just explained the reality of the

situation, Helen? There is no mystic summoning demons of the dark to destroy us in some cataclysmic, prophesied event. I'm beginning to think you two Terrans were not brought here by the Prophets at all. In fact, I tend to think you are Federation spies. First, Yor said it was Q who brought you here to play a game, and then Agent Torell used you both as assassins. Now you both want to play Joan of Arc. Enough, I say. My patience is nonexistent on this subject. I have indulged you both long enough."

I tried to rise from his lap. He tightened his grip.

"Dukat, let me go. I don't appreciate your keeping secrets from me," I said in a sharp tone. "I've been jostled about, used cruelly, and I'm as tired as you are, if not more. You asked me to come here to be your life-mate. I'm trying very hard to do very thing. I won't be kept in the dark. Not by you, Garak or Yor. Either trust me completely and confide in me or let me go. In fact, let me go right this second or I'm going to show you why you don't mess with Texas!"

His laughed. At the release of his arms, I sprang to my feet. I sat across from him in an oversize wicker chair, not at all pleased he continued to laugh at me. I crossed my arms and frowned. When didn't shut him up, I threw a pillow at him. He caught it in the air and tossed it aside.

"Careful, dearest," he said. "While I have posted enough guards in the villa and on the grounds, you still have me to contend with. I am not tired."

"And I'm not pregnant anymore. I'm stronger than you think."

Dukat leaned forward. A bottle of wine and glasses sat on the table. He removed the cork with his teeth, spat it out, and filled two glasses. With a sad smile, he tapped his glass against mine, making me wish I'd remained on his lap. I needed comforting as much as he did. I remained seated and sipped on the Bajoran spring wine.

"You are very strong, Helen," he said at last. "I trust you. I do not trust Garak. Be careful what you say to Garak from now on. I don't know what part the Order plays in all of this. I suspect they knew about Vardon and yet made no attempt to stop him. Garak pretends he cares for you and he children. I am far too pragmatic to fall for such ploys."

"This is just a game to you, isn't it?"

“Perhaps,” he said. “I play to win, as always, my dear.”

He stood and held out his hand. We joined the children in the nursery. A simple meal was brought in by Blythe, her eyes reddened from crying. Garak did not join us.

Watching Dukat spend the next two hours with his children, kissing away their tears and tucking them into bed made me love him more than ever. I’d feared Milea had lost some of its golden magic when we finally retired to his chamber. The sleepy vineyards, winding hills and flowering gardens took on the shadow of an Eden under the threat of a four-armed black god of unknown origins. I was more afraid than I’d ever been in my life.

* * *

SAWYER

Three priests stood in front of Damar’s desk, guards flanked them. The War Dogs had fetched the priests, saving me a trip. One prylar wore a humble brown robe tied with a robe and sandals. The other two wore finer robes of silk and thick-soled boots. They came from the towns of Troyus and Ellysus. The pastel colors of their robes and golden chains of made this pair appear far too ostentatious to be taken seriously. The poor priest held my attention. If any priest knew about the Prophets and prophesies, it wasn’t those who flaunted their wealth. It was the man with ink stains beneath his fingernails. I suspected the poor priest was Evard, the very man I had intended to visit. Intelligence was reflected in his eyes. I assumed he spent his days reading old tests and writing sermons. I did think he practiced black magic. From the expressions on the Bajorans faces, I could tell they did not appreciate being rounded up and brought to the fort for questioning.

Evard glanced sideways at me. I stood beside Damar. I wore Eben’s wristband. The hologram gave me the face of a Bajoran. Beneath my gray cloak, I was heavily armed. I said nothing while Damar interrogated the priests. From Damar’s tone, I knew he was losing his temper. Their answers were short, if they spoke at all. I was to choose one of them to travel with me and the War Dogs into the mountains to search for Vardon. I’d picked Zolon, Jenrak, Dunatar and seven others from the Alpha Brigade.

“We already know Gul Vardon was part of the Order of the Red Snake,” Damar

said. "You know as well as I do the under Bajoran law, the worship of the Pah-Wraiths is illegal and punishable by death. Over two decades, Vardon has sold thousands of Bajoran females into slavery, helped by the Marquis. Why do you insist on protecting this man? Do you not desire to bring Vardon to justice? Help us, help you."

"We do not protect Gul Vardon," Evard said. "All who live in this province are well aware of his activities. We look to you for justice, Gul Damar."

"Then tell me what I need to know. Where is Vardon and his men hiding? If I'm forced to use harsher methods, it will not go well for you," Damar said, standing. "Vardon was seen yesterday at Aloquin Monastery. He kidnapped Prefect Dukat's children. Fortunately, they were recovered. More children will be kidnapped and sold as slaves. They may very well be sacrificed in one of Vardon's cult rituals. Tell us where to find him."

"I suggest you release Lothar and Uther from your dungeon," Evard said. "It's my understanding both father and son were arrested after Prefect Dukat's cousin was poisoned. They should have been released by now. I assure you neither was involved. Gul Vardon was behind it, no doubt, and he clearly does not want to be found."

"So, you admit Vardon is nearby," Damar said. "Where can we find the smugglers?"

"Far from here, I assure you."

"Prylar Evard, I hope you are not hiding them in your temple. Seeing it's only three miles from this fort, I can have a platoon there in minutes. What about you two? Surely you have something to add?" Damar glared at the priests. "I order you to answer me! Where is Vardon?"

"Please, tell us," I said.

"Gul Vardon's smugglers are called the Order of the Red Snake. They are not in the town of Troyus" the priest from Troyes said. His pink and purple robe was stitched with gold thread. "The Shadow Cult is something different, Gul Damar. While we have endured the smugglers for many years, I do not know if they work with the Marquis. I can only assume since the Marquis defeated the Cardassian army and destroyed most of your forts you are more concerned in killing soldiers than capturing smugglers or Shadow Dwellers. Am I correct to think this?"

Damar snarled. "I ask the questions here. Not you!"

"The Prophets will send us a savior to protect us from these fiends," the priest from Ellysium replied. In his fine silk robes and gold chains, he clearly thought he was superior to his two companions. He bowed his head, hands clasped together.

I had to admit their attitude was infuriating. With my hands clasped behind my back, I approached the priests, taking my time as I studied their faces, sizing them up. When I finally stood in front of Prylar Evard, he boldly met my gaze.

"Luan Province is the largest on this continent," I said. "I spent all evening locating Shadow dwellings in this area. The cult has been active here for over five hundred years. There is a place called Narthalem is said to be thousands of years old. It's far to the east in the mountains. There's something about the name intrigues me."

"Narthalem is a dark and dangerous place," Evard said glancing at me.

"It's also the perfect location to hide Marquis ships within its deep gorges. If I was Vardon," I said. "I'd rely on the topography to remain hidden from Cardassian sensors and probes. Given the fact you're reluctant to talk about Vardon or the Shadow Dwellers, I venture a guess you were paid handsomely by Vardon to keep your mouth shut."

"Why is a servant speaking to us in this manner?" the Ellysium priest asked.

"This is Glinn Yor, Dukat's cousin," Damar said. He pointed at me. "Show them."

A touch of a button turned my face Cardassian. I whipped back my cloak to allow the priests to view my attire. Plate mail on my shoulders and forearms, a sand skirt, and two swords were strapped to on my back. Damar had given me another longsword, untried in battle, and I'd kept the snake sword taken from Vardon's home. A short sword hung on my left hip and a pistol on my right side. The priest for Troyus turned crimson, clearly offended he'd been tricked. The man from Ellysium trembled in fear. Prylar Evard scrutinized me with a thoughtful look.

"Glenn Yor yet again leads the charge into the shadows," Evard said. "Captain Leith told me what happened yesterday. You impressed him. Yet, I am puzzled by something Leith told me. Prefect Dukat kissed you and the cliff collapsed. Prefect Dukat threw you off the boat beneath the cliffs where the water reached depths of three leagues. You should

have drowned. You did not. You then vanished from the deck. The villagers in Neece believe you came back from the dead. In fact, if you show your face in Neece, they would think you are a ghost."

"You are referring to the prophesy of the Ghost Warrior," Damar said, intrigued. He walked around his desk and stood beside me.

"I like him," I said to Damar. "Prylar Evard will be my guide."

"Will you protect me, Glinn Yor, as you protected Prylar Evonya in the Valley of Shadows?" Evard asked. His smile was bland.

His companions moved away from him, certain Damar or I would strike Evard. I placed my hand over my heart and bowed my head. Not sure how to deal with Bajoran priests, I decided it was best to treat the learned man with respect and honesty.

"Prylar Evonya was paid by Gul Parnal to provide information to the Circle," I said. "He was a member of the Circle, just like Niyal Gora. However, Evonya had a change of heart. He led me to Parnal's hideout. The priest's death was not my fault. I take responsibility for what happened. Believe me. I have nothing the greatest respect for the Prophets. I will do my best to protect you, Prylar Evard."

Evard smiled. "Then I'll come with you, Glinn Yor. The guides you need are Lothar and Uther. I suggest you restore the illusion of your Bajoran face, for you are well known in these parts," he said. "I have seen many notices nailed onto trees and barn doors bare your likeness. Let me show you one." He removed a parchment from the folds of his robes and handed it to me.

I gazed at a crude drawing of an armored warrior fighting a four-armed monster. I looked at the likeness of the Ghost Warrior and Gnosh the Destroyer. The drawing reminded me of an advertisement for a 'Fight of the Century'. It offered neither the date, location, or time. Vardon had been busy spreading the story of the legendary battle. Damar took the parchment from me, looked at it, and placed it on his desk.

"You believe in this prophesy then, Prylar Evard?" Damar asked.

"Of course," Evard said. "There is not a single parish in this province does not know about the blonde Cardassian who defends women, children and.. priests. It is only natural

the people in this province would look to her as the savior. If you are indeed the Ghost Warrior, Glinn Yor, then we will discover the truth in Narthalem.”

“Traitor,” the Troyes priest snarled.

The flash of a gold dagger caught my eyes. The priest plunged the dagger toward Evard’s back. I pushed Evard out of the way at the last second. The blade scraped across my left shoulder, scratching the plate armor. I slapped the Troyus priest across the side of his head and brought him to his knees. The dagger clattered to the ground. Evard retrieved it from the floor, pausing when the guards aimed their pistols at him. He handed it to me hilt first.

“Thank you,” Evard said. “Perhaps I will count the times you save my life, Glinn Yor. This is the first time.”

“Count all you want,” Damar growled. “She saved your life. You can trust Yor. I want these other two arrested.”

The guards grabbed hold of the priest in Troyus, while he shrieked in terror, struggling to get free. The priest from Ellysius was taken into custody as well. They were removed from the office. A few days in the dungeon fed on water and bread would end in one of them confessing their involvement with Gul Vardon.

Damar took the dagger from my hand. “Prylar Evard, go wait outside for Yor,” he said. “I’ve already released Lothar and Uther. They have provided horses and will accompany you to Narthalem. All will appear Bajoran to lessen the suspicions of the locals or smuggler sent here to spy on us.”

“A well thought out plan,” Evard replied.

As soon as Evard left the room, Damar walked around his desk and tossed the dagger onto a stack of documents. He placed his fists on the desk and leaned forward. I’d thought he might be pleased with my performance. He scowled.

“You press your luck with these people. Was I so ineffective you felt it necessary to question the priests? Must you take every opportunity to show you are smarter and braver than anyone else? I am your superior officer and your companion. All you have done is prove to Prylar Evard you are impulsive, rash, and bold.”

“Well, if I am, that’s how you and Dukat trained me to be. I would not be alive if I hadn’t taken to heart how to behave like a Cardassian,” I said walking around the desk. “You said you believed in me. Don’t you still believe I can do anything?”

My hands slid over his shoulders and back as I pressed against him. He stiffened, standing straight and turned his head to the side to glare at me. I found it oddly endearing.

“Damar, after all the things we said to each other last night, this is how you’re going to send me off? Scowling and brooding? look, by the way, only works when you’re looming over me in bed, my love.”

“Have you no shame?” he asked.

“Not in the least. Now send me off with a kiss.”

Cardassian males did enjoy grabbing their females when it came to initiating anything romance or intimate. Their tendency to be a bit rough and demanding kept me wanting more. The kiss from Damar was one to remember. I felt a bit light-headed after I left his office and found Dunatar, Ikarus, Korvinus, Zolon, Jenrak, and five more soldiers mounted and waiting. Lifting my hook over my head, I hid my weapons as I approached my squad. Garak was coming with us. He wore a stained cloak and scuffed boots purchased from the fishing village. The soldiers wore similar clothes from Neece, smelling slightly fishy, their hoods raised to hide their Bajoran faces. The holograms were the perfect disguise. The priest fit in perfectly in his brown robe and sandals, creating yet another illusion we were on a holy pilgrimage.

My horse was held by Lothar. Saddlebags were hooked to the back of the saddle. I noticed Lothar boasted a black eye from his brief interment in a cell at the fort. His son Uther was already mounted and gave me a nod as I mounted. The only friend I’d not asked to join me was Ikarus. I’d asked Ikarus to remain behind to watch Eben, not expecting the Vulcan tutor to be able to handle the boy. With Ikarus as a babysitter, I knew my son would be safe while his father attended to his duties. Climbing into the saddle, I took the reins from Lothar. Garak required assistance to mount his horse. Dunatar hoisted the agent into the saddle, laughing when Garak stuck his boots into the stirrups and stuck his legs out straight. He’d clearly had not ridden a horse before.

“I hope you picked a sure-footed animal, Glinn Yor,” Lothar said. “The trails we take are steep and treacherous. Provided we do not encounter vethrals or smugglers, we have only three days to reach Narthalem.”

“What happens in three days?” I asked.

“Every seventy years the five Bajoran moons are in full alignment. It is believed this is the time when the Shadow Dwellers may pass into the realm of the living. If Vardon means to release Gnosh the Destroyer, then this is his only chance to do so.”

“Then you best get us there in two days, Lothar. Now let’s ride.”

SAWYER

Chapter Sixty-Eight

With a fair breeze at our backs, Lothar led us along a narrow trail into the eastern mountains, with a sheer drop off on our right side. A green forest yawned across a valley before turning into rocky bluffs and another mountain range, capped with snow. For hours we rode, keeping a fast pace, only stopping when our guide spotted fresh tracks and horse manure. He slid out of the saddle, kneeling beside the manure and pinched it with his fingers.

"This compost is a few hours old," Lothar said. "Ten riders came this way. The hoof prints of their pack mules are deep. They're weighed down by supplies, most likely weapons. I'd say its smugglers, Glinn Yor. We should be able to overtake them by the time the sun sets."

"All by fingering horse shit. You seem pretty sure of yourself," I said patting my mare's neck. I thought I was being funny. Lothar was not amused.

"I'm an expert tracker, Glinn Yor, which is why you brought me along. Even without tracks left in the mud, I could find those we seek. I know what to look for. You don't."

The Bajoran climbed into his saddle. The path into the valley took longer than expected, for the forest looked deceptively closer at a higher altitude. Twenty miles later, we reached the forest at dusk. Storm clouds lay dark upon the horizon and obscured the moons. The patter of rain on the canopy of leaves threatened to increase. A small Cardassian settlement appeared in a clearing ahead of us. Lothar slowed his horse. He waited for me to ride up alongside him and pointed at the buildings.

"We can rest here a while. I know these people," Lothar said. "The tavern is the most likely place where the smugglers will stop for the night. There are homes welcome these

men."

"Cult members who worship the Pah-Wraiths live in the most remote areas like this," Evard said as he rode up beside me. "I frequent this area because I hope to convert those who have strayed from the True Way. From here to Narthalem, it is likely we may run into those who practice the shadow arts, Glinn Yor. They will recognize me and Luther. I do not think they will cause a problem for us. Smugglers are an entirely different breed."

"Sounds like both groups are dangerous, Evard," I said.

"Let me do the talking, Glinn Yor," Lothar said. "You have a way of irritating people. You are loud and obtrusive, and often say things that make you sound foreign. As you are in disguise as a Bajoran, you must act meek and mild. Let the men do the talking. Sit. Listen. Watch. Surely you can do that?"

"You don't know Yor, if you think she can do that," Dunatar said. He laughed as he rode past me. "The only person who talks more than Yor is Dukat."

"No one talks more than Dukat," Ikarus replied. He winked at me.

Lothar and Uther rode up to a barn. The War Dogs and I followed behind. I noticed Evard and Garak acted quite chummy. They'd talked on and off during the ride, which made me suspicious. Evard was more than a mere priest. Lothar also seemed to be hiding something. He glanced frequently at the priest, as if they shared a secret. As Lothar approached a Bajoran who came out of the barn, I watched with interest as they shook hands. They knew each other. Uther dismounted and entered the barn. He returned a few seconds later and motioned for us to enter.

"Our guide seems reliable," Garak said sliding from the saddle. "You might have warned me sitting hours in the saddle produces cramps in muscles I didn't know existed. I may never walk right again, Yor."

"Are you reliable?" I asked.

"Of course I am. I'm here, aren't I? Give me some credit, Yor."

Two Bajoran stable boys tied our horses' lead ropes to a rail. I noticed horses in the stalls remained saddled, along with pack mules loaded with heavy bags. Dunatar and Ikarus checked out the equipment, while the boys provided hay and oats for our animals

and then wiped down the animals with coarse grain bags. Lothar paid the owner of the barn, while the soldiers gathered at the entrance, staring at a tavern. The priest and Garak talked quietly together and fell silent when Dunatar and Ikarus joined us.

“The mules are loaded with rifles,” Dunatar said coming up behind me.

“It has to be smugglers,” Ikarus whispered. “We should leave a couple of men here to watch the horses, Yor.”

“Jenrak, stay here with Uther,” I ordered. The War Dog wasn’t happy being selected. He didn’t complain. Uther knew the barn’s owner and the two stable boys. One of the boy’s produced a bottle of brew, which he gladly shared with Jenrak. I wasn’t sure I wanted them to drink liquor. It was cold and they needed to stay warm.

The rain turned into a downpour as we hastened toward the tavern with Lothar and Prylar Evard in the lead. Bolts of red lightning streaked across the sky. A rumble of thunder in the distance followed. Zolon fell in beside me, rubbing his backside. Ikarus and Korvinus moved in front of me, entering the tavern behind Lothar. Garak motioned me over as the soldiers straggled through the door.

“Evard said the Bajorans and Cardassians who come here are mainly farmers and trappers,” Garak said. “Vardon oftentimes hides slaves here. These people are paid for their silence.”

“Then we’ve come to the right place,” I said.

We entered the tavern. The vaulted chamber was smoky. A large bar was directly across from us. Tables with long benches offered seating for the clientele. Cardassians dressed in furs sat at several tables, served by Bajoran girls in low cut peasant dresses. Lothar went right to the proprietor, a heavy set Cardassian, pouring tall tankards of frothy ale. A few Bajorans sat at a table, bags of vegetables at their feet. Lothar ordered food and beverages for us. I chose a table in the center of the room and took a seat, joined by my men.

“It’s best we keep talking to a minimal,” Evard whispered.

Tapping his finger on the table, Evard pointed toward the corner of the tavern. Seated at a table were six figures in black hooded cloaks, mugs of ale placed before them. I

yawned and stretched my arms as I glanced toward the smugglers. From beneath a hood, a set of pale blue eyes stared at me. Unable to see if the man was Cardassian, Bajoran, or something else, I noticed he wore black leather gloves. Lothar has said we followed ten smugglers, which meant four were missing. I hoped with our Bajoran faces we didn't look out of place. I glanced at the priest.

"Do you know any of those men?" I asked.

"The black cloaks are known to me. They are Vardon's men."

Lothar and Garak sat at a stone fireplace, already served mugs of ale, while we waited. A pipe was stuffed and lit by Lothar. Evard excused himself and joined the trio, leaving me with my squad. Dunatar sat next to me, watching a pretty Bajoran girl place tankards on our table. I reached for my tankard too eagerly. My hand bumped into the girl's arm. I felt her trembling and knew our arrival looked more than a little suspicious to the locals. She was frightened and yanked her arm away.

"Thanks," I said smiling.

As the girl headed to the bar, a Cardassian farmer with a wart on his chin grabbed her arm, pulling her onto his lap. She let out a shriek, forced to endure his fondling.

"Don't even think about it, Yor," Dunatar said.

Zolon grinned. The thin scar on his face reddened. "Yor is the defender of females and children. Brawling is her solution to all problems," he said. "I bet one bar of latinum she won't be able to resist."

"Two bars says she'll stay in her seat," Ikarus said.

"As soon as the rain lets up, we'll leave. I'd prefer to sit here in peace and quiet," Dunatar said. He gave me a stern look. "Don't do it. It's none of our business."

"I'm not going to get involved," I muttered.

Suffering in silence, I drank my ale, listening to the girl whimper and the farmers laughing. She worked in a tavern. The girl had to be used to the rough treatment of the patrons. I could only listen for so long before I opened my mouth.

"I thought I told you I liked my ale cold, girl."

The loudness of my voice carried over the conversations in the tavern. A hushed

silence carried across the tavern. Any illusion might have existed ended. No Bajoran female shouted. I walked over to the farmer's table, caught the Bajoran girl by the wrist, and jerked her off the man's lap. The Cardassian glared at me, unsure how to react. I gave the girl a shove toward the bar.

"Well, go get me a cold drink!"

"At once," she said fleeing to the bar.

I regarded the farmer from across the table. The Cardassian looked furious. "I don't want any trouble, friend. I just want service. Any of you have a problem with that?"

One or two of the farmers at his table shook their heads.

"Then the next round is on me." I looked over at the bartender. "Another round for these hard working men," I said.

"So much for being meek and mild," Dunatar said with a shake of his head. He tended to his mug. "Keep your eyes on the black cloaks, boys. They are certainly watching us. I bet they're the ones we've been following."

The girl returned seconds later to set a tall mug before me. She caught my eyes before being called to another table. With a curt nod toward the hooded patrons in the corner, she said, "Be careful," and moved on.

"No one believes we're pilgrims now," Korvinus said. "It's only a matter of time before one of those smuggler's makes a move. My pistol is not set on stun."

"I hope they do," Zolon said, always eager to fight.

Staring at the new mug, I pulled it toward me, taking a sip of a cold draft. Lothar and Garak appeared content and warm in front of the fireplace, while Evard rejoined our table. His priestly robe was noticed by the farmers. They turned away from us. I kept my attention on the smugglers. The one with pale blue eyes pulled back his hood. He was human, in his forties with white hair. He met my gaze as he lifted his tankard, toasting me. His accomplices stared at me from beneath their hoods.

"Did you have to do draw more attention to yourself?" asked Jenrak. "Who is man, Evard?" I asked.

"His name is Cassidy. He's one of Vardon's best men." Evard smiled as the girl

returned with a platter full of meat and potatoes. "Ah, dinner. Please. Eat, my friends."

"These people know you," Dunatar said.

Evard nodded. "I am a prylar. I know everyone, even Cardassians who I have tried to convert to our faith," he said. "My faith is called the True Way. Those like me who serve the gods of light are called the Brotherhood of the Prophets. It is our chosen task to prevent anyone from molesting the Shadow Temples. Smugglers use the temples to hide their goods as well as slaves. Cassidy knows who I am. He won't bother us if we don't bother him."

"Right," Dunatar said with a chuckle.

"I bet he does," Ikarus whispered. "Two latinum bars says Cassidy takes the bait. I give him about two minutes before he approaches Yor." He took bets with my War Dogs, while I studied the smugglers out of the corners of my eyes.

Pewter plates were set in a stack on the table. Evard stood and took it upon himself to use a large fork to distribute the food to my squad, offering a prayer with each plate he handed out. A plate was handed to me. While the soldiers wolfed down their food, I slowly chewed on a piece of meat, find it a bit tough. Cassidy stood and walked over to our table. His eyes were auburn and I suspected he dyed his hair.

"Prylar Evard. You're a long way from home," Cassidy said. He had an Irish accent and I heard Ikarus chuckle; he'd won the bet. The smuggler put his foot on the bench close to where Evard sat and stared at me. "I pride myself on knowing everyone in these parts. I haven't seen your friends before, priest. Since when did you travel with a woman?"

"These are new members of my faith, Cassidy. We are traveling to the nearby shrine of the Prophets," Evard said. "I visit the shrine at this time each year."

"Well, you happen to be in the company of the prettiest girl in the room. The name is Cassidy. And you are?"

"The prettiest girl in the room," I said. Dunatar glared at me. I was asking for trouble by talking to the man. It had been a long time since I had seen someone from Earth. "I recognize your accent. Irish?"

"Dublin born and bred," Cassidy said. "You're the first Bajoran to notice. Why is it

you can when no one else on his planet ever has? Have you met many Terrans?"

"A few," I said. "Do you trade in flesh, Mr. Cassidy? I mean horses, of course."

With a chuckle, Cassidy sat on the bench beside Evard. One of his friends in the corner, a Cardassian with a long nose, ordered another round of drinks. My squad continued to eat. I knew they were itching to fight at the first sign of trouble.

"A little of this and that," Cassidy said with a smile. "Prylar Evard is in the Brotherhood. He doesn't approve of what I do for a living. I guess means all of you are in the Brotherhood. I don't seem to recall any women being members."

"This is the first," the priest said.

I wanted to know more about the Brotherhood. I'd been right about Evard, Lothar and his son. They had been keeping a secret from me.

Cassidy jumped to his feet. "I see no reason why the girl can't come over and meet my friends. Maybe she can guess where they all come from. It will be a little game," he said. "Your friends are stuffing their faces. Surely they won't mind? And it's been a while since we've seen such an attractive girl in these parts. Maybe she can convert a few of us."

"We have a long journey ahead of us," Evard replied. "Perhaps another time, Cassidy. We'll be passing this way again in a day or two."

"Get lost," Zolon said. He twirled his fork between his fingers and stabbed the prongs into the table. "She's not interested. In fact, she's mine."

"That's right," I said as I stared at the smuggler. "Sorry. Maybe later."

With a shrug, Cassidy returned to his table. I finished my meal, stood, searching for a bathroom. The serving girl apparently understood my need, pointing at a door between the fireplace where Lothar, Uther, and Garak sat and the smugglers' table. Wanting to make it quick and avoid Cassidy, I made a straight line for the bathroom. I heard Cassidy call my name and bolted inside the small room. I took a quick glance at my appearance. The hologram worked fine. I looked like a normal Bajoran girl. The toilet, however, was far from normal. A wooden platform with a hole cut out of it reeked. I did my business, smoothed out my cloak, making sure my weapons were hidden and left the room. Cassidy leaned against the wall, clearly waiting for me.

"I didn't want to mention anything before," he said. "I noticed you're wearing a short sword on your left hip. It's a Snake Cult sword. I recognize the hilt. Mind telling me why a follower of the Prophets is armed with a Pah-Wraith weapon?"

"It's none of your business."

"I think it is."

"What do you want, Cassidy?"

"See, this is the thing, sunshine. I don't recognize you, you seem to know me. Now, I'm sure Prylar Evard told you who I am. Did he tell you what I am?"

"Besides being Irish? Let me guess. You're either a Federation spy or you had a falling out with your starship captain, ended up here, and fell in with some shady characters. Again, not my business. Nor do I care. Now move aside."

"Oh, that's not the half of it, princess."

Cassidy grabbed my arm, dragging me over to his table. Lothar, visible on my right, sat forever, his pipe hanging from his mouth. With my back to my own table, I had no doubt Dunatar already had his pistol drawn. I yanked my arm free.

"Look, Cassidy. I don't want any trouble," I said.

"Hello, Ren Yor," one of the hooded men replied.

I recognized the voice. The hood was pushed away, revealing a partially burned and blackened face. I stared at Durgan, Renalt's old friend, a man I'd thought died in EK-1 weeks ago. Each smuggler's removed his hood. There was another Cardassian, a second human, three Bajorans, and an alien with blue skin and sharp teeth.

"Gil Durgan? You're dead. I saw you die."

"Did I give you impression? You see only what you want to see, Yor. No doubt you're armed with swords and pistols. Ready for action, eh? Cassidy said you were eager to meet us. What's the old Earth saying, Rigel?"

"Curiosity killed the cat," a human said with dark hair. In comparison to his friends, Rigel was clean cut and handsome. His moustache and beard were trimmed short. He held a knife in his hand, cleaning his nails, never looking away from me.

"sounds like an invitation, Durgan," I said. "I brought my War Dogs."

“Yes, I bet you did. Shame none of you are leaving this place.”

“Vardon wants her taken alive,” Cassidy said drawing his sword.

Durgan and Rigel stood. Feeling like I was in the Old West, I flipped my cloak aside to reveal the hilt of my Snake sword. Rigel drew two long rapiers. Durgan pulled a long knife out of his belt. The other smugglers rose to their feet, brandishing swords similar to my own. Cassidy and Rigel made a move toward me. I drew the Snake sword, yanked my cloak free, tossed it at Rigel, and reached for Damar’s longsword strapped on my back.

“She is prepared,” Cassidy said laughing.

I struck first and traded parries with both humans. I soon realized they were testing my skill with a blade. Cassidy engaged my right side, while Rigel kept me busy on the left. Loud, angry shouts created an exodus as the patrons rushed toward the main door. Rigel stepped forward, brandishing both rapiers and attacked me, while Cassidy stood back, watching us fight.

“She’s been trained in the *Telais Ta’Rom*,” Rigel shouted. He spun around and tried to stab my leg. I parried the blow and slashed through the material of his jacket. He laughed. “Fortunately, we have been too. Cassidy? Try a bit harder. Disarm her or I may have to kill her.”

“With pleasure, lad.”

As I fought against both skilled swordsmen, I heard Dunatar shout. The long-nosed Cardassian pushed the table over and opened fire on my men. Red lasers shot across the room. I spotted Durgan coming toward me on my right side. He lunged with his knife. I easily knocked the blade away, cutting deep into his arm and danced away. Durgan’s wound didn’t bleed, nor was my blade soiled and he came at me again. With three opponents fighting me, two skilled, one brutish, I had to keep on the move, avoiding their sword thrusts and remaining on the defense. I twirled around, swept low, using every maneuver I’d learned.

One of the Cardassian smugglers slammed into the wall, a burning hole in his chest. Cassidy fell back. Rigel stepped forward again. He was the better swordsman. While gunfire continued around us, I slid my sword around Rigel’s blade, moving toward him. I

disarmed one rapier from his hand. He tossed the blue-skinned alien in my path. A neat dissection left his innards on the floor. Laughing, Rigel turned and darted out the back door.

“Come visit us at Narthalem,” Cassidy shouted. He followed after his friend.

Durgan threw his dagger me, taking a shot in the shoulder and managed to get out the back door. The two Bajorans were shot down. I heard screams and jumped to my feet as pistol fire came through the front door, hitting a Cardassian farmer who dropped to the ground. It had to be the rest of the smugglers. They did not enter the tavern and fired at random throughout the tavern, striking lanterns, breaking bottles of liquor and retreated.

Fires ignited along the bar and several tables. The terrified barkeep and barmaids rushed out the back room, only to be shot by waiting smugglers. Dunatar reached me, grabbing my arm as fire erupted in front of me, signing my face. The squad barged out the front door, firing at the smugglers. Lothar and Garak shot their weapons, covering the priest who cowered behind them, trying to push them out the door to avoid the flames. Dunatar dragged me outside as the entire tavern erupted into flames, the heat forcing us to run out into the pouring rain.

Nine cloaked riders raced around the barn, bringing the rest of our horses with them. Jenrak lay in the mud outside the barn, rubbing his head. Uther staggered out. His head was cut and he looked dazed. As the riders past us, heading toward the trees, Dunatar, Korvinus, and Zolon knelt in the mud, shooting at the smugglers. Two riders fell from their horses. The animals never slowed and vanished into the dark.

“Shame we’ll have to walk,” Dunatar said. He started to laugh.

“What’s so funny?” I asked. “We’re wet to the skin. Three of our men are dead. The tavern is on fire and the trappers are gathering in the streets, wanting our hides.”

“Because as they say, ‘luck follow the man who rides with Yor’.”

“Bad luck,” Ikarus added. He laughed as well.

Korvinus looked furious. Jenrak and Zolon fetched the dead smugglers’ weapons off the ground. Kynbrus and Fassa, not original War Dogs good fighters, appeared at my side. The three soldiers we’d lost had been on Terok Nor, those accused by Dukat as traitors

who I'd smuggled out in crates. It made me think of Sorvan, Kira's friend, who had died despite Ravon's efforts to save him. This time I hated to think it was more than a coincidence. A message had been sent from the universe. I needed to be far more careful or none of us were going to return to Fort Galdrak.

"This is most inconvenient," an irritable Garak said. "I think our business is concluded here. We need to leave and quickly." He carried a black cloak under his arm.

The soldiers gathered around me, prepared to fight our way out of town.

"There is a nearby place we can go to is safe," Lothar offered. "Come. Quickly."

Backing away from the crowd, Lothar guided us through the rain to a nearby farm. He took us straight to the barn. It was a bit leaky and smelled of dung and old hay. We were staying the night and the soldiers separated to get comfortable. Fassa and Kynbrus closed the front door and remained there to watch for trouble. Korvinus took it upon himself to guard the back gate, while Ikarus climbed into the hayloft. Jenrak, Zolon, and Dunatar made themselves comfortable in a pile of hay. I sat on a bale and sneezed.

"Prylar Evard, she is the savior you told us about," Lothar said coming over to sit beside me. His son crouched beside him. "I have never seen anyone fight the way you do, Yor. Both Cassidy and Rigel are renowned gamers. They fight for money. You seem more skilled than either of them. Why?"

"I was caught coming out of the bathroom. I was lucky, that's all."

"Yor was trained by me," Garak replied proudly. The War Dogs laughed. "She is trained in the ways of the Obsidian Order. She is my pupil, and at times, my teacher." He stood and shivered. "You do realize Vardon will be told we are here. We should have rounded up those stray horses and ridden after them."

"We'll meet them again, little tailor," Dunatar said.

"Gil Durgan was one of them," I said. "We captured him along with Renalt in the Deben Forest, he died at Parnal's hideout. How can a corpse walk and talk, Evard?"

"The Shadow Dwellers can possess the dead," the priest said.

"Father, we should notify the rest of the Brotherhood," Uther said. He sat on the damp ground, not minding what he sat in. There were no horses in the barn. A number of

goats and chickens made a great deal of noise. It wasn't the cleanest place I'd been in, it would do for the night.

"They already know what is going on, son. They'll join us later."

Ruffling my fingers through my damp hair, I took the lit pipe from Lothar. I smoked it, finding the weed it was packed with soothing. Evard sat across from us on an old blanket, shivering in his priestly cloak. We all were cold and wet. Garak sat beside me, using the black cloak he'd taken from a smuggler to cover our legs.

"Those we seek use the power of the Pah-Wraiths. The smugglers come from all over the quadrant and beyond," Evard said. "I have lived at Milea for thirteen years, far longer than Vardon, and I stayed for one reason and one reason only." He lifted his right arm, pushed his sleeve upwards, and exposed a blue tattoo of sword circling one another on his wrist. "This is the symbol of the Brotherhood of Light. We serve the Prophets. Since the time we were born, each of us pledged to keep watch for the return of the Savior, also known as the Ghost Warrior. The prophesy says the Ghost Warrior will defeat Gnosh the Destroyer. We believe this is you, Ren Yor."

Lothar pushed up his sleeve, showing me the same symbol. Uther gave a nod and did the same. Both had a blue brand of two swords circled the other.

"You're talking about Travok's prophesy. I've seen drawings of the Ghost Warrior. To be honest, Evard, I don't think I'm this reincarnated warrior. I've trained hard. That's all."

Nothing made me feel smaller than being laughed at by my own men. When the barn filled with the laughter, I had only one choice, I laughed with them.

"You are the Ghost Warrior," Lothar said. "It's the only explanation why you can fight like you do."

"Oh, all of you calm down. We don't know this for sure, not yet," I said. "Does Vardon intend to release Gnosh the Destroyer. He is trained in the dark arts. He has tried to summon Gnosh before at Bajor City and failed."

Uther glanced at his father. "I have no doubt he'll summon something far worse than Shadow Dwellers," he said. "They are merely servants who possess the dead. They

are in a way like vethrals die and rise again as jakars.”

“That’s right, son,” Lothar said. “Evard can tell you what we will face when we arrive at Narthalem. I think it’s time you did so.”

“Yes, I see no reason to keep secrets from her. Not anymore,” Garak added with a sly little smile. I stared at him. “Evard has been working with me for some time, Yor. The Brotherhood can be trusted. They have confirmed the rest of Torell’s agents can be found at Narthalem. I’m referring to Talos and Dovvos, of course.”

“It is so,” Evard said. “Demons are not at all await us. Vardon doesn’t only deal in the slave trade. He makes a profit owning and fighting gladiators. Cassidy is one of the finest swordsmen in the Alpha Quadrant. Rigel Kentarus, the other human you fought, killed the former champion, a Cardassian named Kluge. Rigel has never been beaten. Not until tonight.”

“You disarmed Kentarus,” Lothar said in admiration. “That is when I knew you were the Ghost Warrior.”

I was not happy with the news, not in the least.

“Garak, you might have told this before we left the fort. I lost three men tonight,” I said, furious the Brotherhood had not come forward days ago. “We’re spending all this time going to Narthalem, when we could have simply destroyed their base from the air. I don’t want to lose anyone else. Let’s just call this in and return to the fort.”

“None of us have been to Narthalem before,” Lothar said. “We cannot provide the exact coordinates. We will have to go there on foot, unless we find horses on the way.”

“Yor, don’t look so murderous,” Garak said. “I knew about Narthalem, yes. I didn’t know Vardon was alive until Helen and I saw him in Bajor City. The OO confirmed Vardon beamed off the Kornak before it exploded. So did Kornica Dukat.” He lifted his hand before I could lambast him with questions. I was furious. “As for destroying their base of operation, it’s quite possible they have a number of slaves there, Yor. As someone who wants to protect the innocent, I should think you would want to go in on foot. The OO wants to be sure the last of Torell’s agents are killed. This is the only way to make sure the job gets done.”

I resisted the urge to hit Garak. "We will destroy the Cult of Shadows and kill Gul Vardon and his smugglers," I said. "If Gnosh is summoned, then I will kill him. I can't do it alone, gentlemen. This is a team effort. We, the dogs of war, will see this job gets done. It's what we do. Now get some rest. We have a long walk tomorrow."

HELEN

Chapter Sixty-Nine

“Have you seen this?” Dukat asked.

A piece of parchment was placed on my dressing table. I stood in front of a mirror braiding my hair. Dukat was sweaty from his morning patrol. Glancing at the parchment, I moved too slowly for his satisfaction. He spread out the parchment.

“It’s an advertisement Eben found pinned to a tree. Do you see the two figures locked in combat? This looks very much like Yor fighting some four-armed monster. I want to know which child drew this and pinned it to a tree in the garden,” he said. “I won’t tolerate this type of nonsense.”

“It’s too good to be a child’s drawing. It looks to me like an advertisement for a professional fight, Dukat. Why are you so upset about it? Just throw it away.”

“The four armed warrior is Gnosh the Destroyer. Gul Vardon made money by fighting slaves in an arena. He also brought in professional fighters throughout the quadrant. You confirmed he is still alive. He knows I have charge of Milea and confiscated all of his property, including quite a large fortune I found on the premises.”

“And you think Vardon is coming back here or his money?” I asked. I finished dressing my hair. I wore a new gown and slippers. For once I wanted to enjoy the day. He glowered at me, clearly more on his mind. “Do you have something to say or to show me? Either way, I wish you’d stop being so suspenseful and just come out with it. I’m taking the girls on a walk in the garden today. Stop leaning over me. You smell dreadful.”

“At times you can be so frivolous it’s frightening,” he replied.

Dukat walked to the wall and pounded on it. A panel opened, revealing a hidden chamber. He shouted for the lighted to come and entered the room. I followed him, gazing

at a room filled with shelved books, vintage, along with antiquities, most cast in gold and silver. Among Vardon's possessions were chests filled with latinum, bolts of sumptuous fabric, caskets of glittering jewels and a gold desk. A stack of data rods and an open ledger were on the desk, precisely where Vardon had left them. One wall was covered with weapons and another with paintings crowded together, family portraits in oil of Cardassians I didn't know.

"Don't be so amazed by his wealth. It's mine now," Dukat said. "Pay close attention to the artwork. In the middle of Vardon's family you'll find a map of Bajor. Milea is shown as a gold palace. Every fort and outpost, military structures, and shadow temples are indicated with precious stones. Only the jewels in the Cardassian forts have been removed."

"Thieves?"

"I'd say Vardon has been here since he supposedly died. The savagery in which he employed the knife to remove those tiny jewels would indicate he'd out for vengeance. Further, I think it obvious Vardon is the true leader of the Circle, not Agent Torell as we were led to believe. Oh, the Circle is alive until Vardon is permanently erased. It would seem the man desires immortality." He pointed upwards. "Do you see him? There among the Pah-Wraiths, leading them to war against the Prophets?"

Painted on the ceiling was Vardon, dressed in gold armor, with black wings and a flaming sword. He led the red-eyed Pah-Wraiths against the Prophets. Bajorans fought the Cardassians. On the ground, dead, lay a likeness of the Ghost Warrior. Jakars picked at the flesh of the warrior. I stared at me, waiting for an explanation..

"I hadn't realized the full extent of Vardon's greed or lust for power," he said. "He used the Fifth Order to keep me occupied, while he'd acquired enough wealth to buy his own fleet of Dominion, Marquis, and Romulans ships. What is more, Helen. He intends to use the Pah-Wraiths to take control of Alpha Quadrant and perhaps beyond its borders. He is mad if he thinks he can control those evil beings. I assure you. He will be stopped before this happens."

"Then Vardon really will return," I said. It seemed stupid for Vardon to stake his

own life to reclaim treasure. All he had to do was go into hiding. He seemed determined to destroy everyone who ever crossed his path, including me.

“Absolutely,” Dukat said squeezing my hand. “Vardon amassed this fortune through the slave trade. I have no doubt it also came from Fifth Order guls ransacking the homes of wealthy Bajorans. He’ll return to collect his fortune. I need to figure out what to do with this amassed fortune. I can’t leave it here. It places you and the children in danger as well as this planet and all of Cardassia.”

“Give it to the Bajorans and your own people. Get rid of it,” I said. The horrible scene painted above us made me sick. I lowered my gaze.

“Damar sent Yor and Garak to locate Vardon. His hideout is a place called Narthalem, located somewhere in the eastern mountain range. Your friend has proven to be indispensable, Helen. Repeatedly. If anyone can find Vardon, it is Yor. I assure you this was not my plan. Damar and Yor came up with it last night. I agreed to let her go and take Garak with her. It means he’s out of my hair, for a while.”

“You can’t deny the warrior in the drawing looks like Sawyer.”

“I was wrong to think the prophesy mere propaganda,” Dukat said. “I now believe Yor was brought here by the Prophets to fight Gnosh. All I needed was proof. She’s been well trained, Helen. What Yor has accomplished no mere human could do. Yes, she was trained by the best. I would be a fool if I didn’t accept it’s much more than that.”

“Careful,” I said. “You’re getting caught up in this prophesy like everyone else. Don’t start throwing salt over your shoulder every time you see a shadow, Dukat. Oh, I’ve seen the servants do it, time and again. I don’t believe in this prophesy. I can’t. And this treasure can’t remain here. You need to hide it somewhere else. Who else knows it is here?”

“Damar, of course. I suspect a few of Vardon’s former servants. I’ve tripled the guards around the villa. Don’t worry, dearest. I mean to take the treasure from this place today.” Dukat pulled me into his arms. “I never should have brought you and the children here. I was at first amazed by the beauty of this place. It’s all an illusion. None of us are safe until Vardon and the cult members are dead.”

“Then we should all leave,” I said. “We can beam onto a ship and wait for Yor to

complete her mission. Eben should come with us. Shazel will behave if Eben is with us. Somewhat. Tell me that's what we are going to do, Dukat."

"I am taking the treasure to Bajor City in an hour. You and the children will come with me. We'll be staying at Ambassador Sovran's home. I need to gather a few things and have this fortune beamed onto a shuttle. All will be well, my dear. I have a plan."

Dukat kissed me and set me aside to flip through a ledger. A frown appeared on his face and I came over to take a look for myself. The handwriting belonged to Vardon. It was his personal diary. I flipped through the pages and found the entry when I first met him on Terok Nor and read, 'the gul's mistress is beautiful. I mean to make her mine.' I caught Dukat's gaze, amazed to find them glimmering with emotion and felt my heart leap in my chest. He truly did care for me and in moment I loved him, dearly.

"Vardon planned to capture me from the first day we met," I said. "Had I known he meant to use our children as vessels for the Pah-Wraiths, I never would have gone with him. I didn't know what he was then, Dukat. I didn't know Vardon was evil. This place is so beautiful, so deceptive, like him. I saw what he wanted me to see."

"I don't blame you for what happened in the past," he said. "It is my fault I drove you away, Helen. I'll regret what happened as long as I live. If anything happened to you or the twins, I'd never forgive myself. I've already lost two sons to death, and three sons because they were not my own. I don't want to lose any more."

I randomly opened the journal. I read what was written on the page.

"Tonight I had guests visit from Fort Varnok and Outpost 9. While Tychek can be reasonably entertained with a pleasure slave, Gul Parnal and Glinn Kenmar have a peculiar taste for children. The market for children has never been better. I must pay the Fifth Order to look the other way. The Marquis have proven to be efficient. I've made a fortune working with them. Kenmar killed one of the children. If he comes to dinner next month, I will have to charge him for each child he kills. I despise the man."

"Neither of us knew the full extent of Vardon's madness," Dukat said. He eyed a Klingon dagger and picked it up, caressing the blade. "I swear this is the same blade Raynor used to kill himself. I thought Yor had lost it in the caves where she encountered

Parnal. Do you recognize this dagger, Helen? It's the one you used to kill Legate Mikor."

"Put it down! Don't touch it!"

"It's just a blade," he said, confused by my reaction.

"No, it's become a symbol of something else. Something evil."

"I think Vardon brought it to Terok Nor, though hardly matters," Dukat said. "Since the first day I met you and Sawyer, I had the feeling you were sent here for a higher purpose. It was easier to think Q was behind it all. He brought you here and now watched the game played between the Prophets and the Pah-Wraiths. They say good cannot exist without evil. I'm starting to think Bajor would be better if neither remained here. Are the Prophets to be trusted? Are they truly lawful entities who want the best for Bajor? Why ask Q to send two humans here from the past? Why not simply use their power to defeat me and the Pah-Wraiths?"

"It's a game," I said. "Nothing more than a horrible game. Vardon must be stopped. I believe in God, Dukat, one god rules all of us. If you're right and Sawyer is the Ghost Warrior, then you're putting a great deal of faith in her." I paused. I had an idea. "You could use the treasure to bait Vardon into coming here."

Dukat laughed. I saw no reason to be laughed at and glared. It only made him laugh harder. "He doesn't know I'm going to remove it, Helen," he said. "Grab journal and gather the children in the courtyard. We need to...."

His voice started to fade. I felt a strange tingle throughout my body. His eyes widened as he reached for me. I heard him cry out in alarm and then the room vanished.

I reappeared in a ravine, surrounded by the Marquis, mounted on horses.

I'd been beamed out of Milea and found myself surrounded by the enemy. Dukat had underestimated the tenacity and resourcefulness of his enemy. Two cloaked men threw me over the back of a horse. A rider in a black cape mounted behind me, holding me secure, and lifting my head, I was able to see his face in the pale moonlight, of a human, a man, with white hair. He glanced down at me, smiling wide and patted me on the backside.

"I'm Cassidy," he said in an Irish accent. "Vardon sent me to fetch you. You'll bring

a high price at auction, unless Vardon plans to keep you for himself." He put a bag with slits over my head and tied it loosely at the neck. "Our hideout must remain a secret, lass. Ride on, men."

Tossed about as I was on our wild ride, I was nearly unconscious by the time Cassidy pulled his mount to a sliding halt. Not caring what anyone thought, I slid off the animal and collapsed on the ground, intent only on drawing in deep breaths weren't being forced right back out of my lungs. From above me, I could hear Cassidy laughing at my discomfort.

"I always wondered if riding way was as uncomfortable as it looks and now I know. It must be quite painful, lass" Cassidy slid out of the saddle. He pulled me into his arms. "We've didn't ride all this way. It would take too long. Some of us know how to use the shadow temples. You can transport from one to the other. It's a bit of hair raising, we're here we are, safe and sound."

"I'm not safe," I said. "Not in the least. I'm your prisoner!"

Cassidy helped me to my feet. He left the bag on my head. It took a moment to brush off my dress. As he dragged me forward, I heard I heard the thunderous roar of a waterfall. Branches swept past my legs and the ground felt soft beneath my boots. I silently gave thanks for Eben's tracking device, imbedded in my palm. He'd told me about it. The tiny device resembled a freckle. I felt certain Dukat would tell Sawyer where to find me.

"I'm going to have to carry you, lass. Don't be alarmed. I'll hold on tight."

Strong arms lifted me into the air. I was dumped over Cassidy's shoulder. He carried me upwards. I tried to count each step, losing track at one hundred. I was still able to hear the waterfall, less powerful, a reminder I was in a strange location. I felt a tug on the bag. It was dropped to the floor and I lifted my head, able to see passages cut out of rock. It'd been taken to Narthalem and had been there far longer than Vardon and his men.

This place was an ancient Shadow Temple. The size and details of the engravings in the stone made me think it had been the main temple of their dark religion. Cassidy carried me into a large cavern. Chairs and couches were arranged into groupings. A fire roared in a pit, the smoke contained by a small boy tossing white power onto the flames. Thick carpets

covered the floor and tapestries hung from the wall. On the far side of the chamber was a gold throne covered with vethral pelts. A gilded cage hung on a long chain connected to a beam fifty feet above, hanging off to the side of the throne, which I suspected waited for me.

“What are you going to do to me?” I asked.

Cassidy laughed. “Little birds go in little bird cages.”

I started to struggle as he dragged me across the stone floor. Two guards lowered the cage, using a lever and pulley connected to the stonewall. When it was lowered to the floor, Cassidy shoved me inside and shut the door. Vardon arrived. He walked through a doorway, holding a wine glass, dressed in black leather. The kindness I’d once seen in his eyes had gone, replaced by a hatred I didn’t deserve. He approached the cage, pushing it with his fingers so it started to swing.

“Welcome to Narthalem. It’s such a pleasure to have you in my company, Mistress Helen,” Vardon said as he circled me. “Love the red hair. I’m quite certain your charms have a great deal to do with Dukat continued inept bungling. The only experienced security officer is Constable Odo, Dukat didn’t utilize his services. It’s sad. Dukat is incapable of taking care of you and his children. Let’s hope your brave friend arrives in time to save you. I’m counting on it, Helen. I’ve arranged all this for her. Are you jealous?”

“You won’t get away with this, Vardon,” I shouted.

“The usual response prisoners make when faced with the ugly reality there is no escape. You will follow my breadcrumbs. I chose a particular prophesy written by Travok I knew you would believe was written about her. Her vanity is as large as Dukat’s. Of course she saw herself as this Ghost Warrior. On my part, I used the Shadow Temples and Aloquin for my smuggling operation, knowing the Bajorans belief in the supernatural would add to the allure of this prophesy. When you disturb such places, shadows invariably are released, coming and going whenever they like. They’ve been watching you since you arrived. You brought a few with her after she visited the Valley of Shadows, like you, she didn’t take their presence as a serious threat or the pair of you would have left Bajor. Permanently.”

“Dukat will find me,” I said. “When he does, he’ll kill you. He knows all about your plan to release the Pah-Wraiths who will lead your Dominion friends in war against Cardassian and Bajor. You should have beamed your treasure out of Milea. Not me.”

“When a prisoner feels threatened, they make threats of their own,” Vardon said. “I shouldn’t look to Dukat to save you, my dear. Did you know he killed Owyn and my former slaves? I’m told Owyn stole Dukat’s shuttle. It was shot out of the sky.”

“You lie,” I said. “Dukat wouldn’t kill innocent people.”

“That’s something he excels, at my dear. Dukat has killed thousands of Bajorans, perhaps even millions, during the height of the Occupation. His witless second officer, Gul Damar, helped him. Yor is so certain her two commanders are great men. I’m actually doing both of you a service by removing them from power. My plan has taken longer to execute than I wanted. I’ve always been several steps ahead of your friends.”

“The Prophets won’t let you win, Vardon. We know all about Q. He’s not going to help you. He doesn’t care if you succeed or not.”

“About that,” Vardon said taking a sip of wine. “Torell can’t be believed. Not a word of it. The Prophets wanted Sawyer, not you. Q brought her here at their request. I suppose Q brought you along to pacify your friend. The Bajorans believe Yor is the Ghost Warrior. Perhaps you think if she beats my champion she’ll be able to set the Bajorans free. Doubtful. you? The Pah-Wraiths have used you to distract Dukat. The Prophets have Sawyer, the demons picked you. If I could convince you of this, then you need not be my prisoner. You could be much more, Helen. Admit it. Dukat doesn’t love you. Deep down inside you truly hate him. You want to kill you. You know he is not capable of loving anyone.”

“Give in to my dark side? I don’t think so. You’re lying.”

Whether Vardon was telling the truth or not didn’t matter. I loved Dukat. I wasn’t going to be swayed to Vardon’s way of thinking no matter what he said. Cassidy watched us. I don’t know why I thought he felt sympathetic for my plight. I sensed he did. He knew I was human beneath my Cardassian scales.

“Am I?” Vardon asked. “I know you see things, Helen. You dream about killing

Dukat and Sawyer. You want to see them both dead. It's what you've always wanted."

"I've met the Prophets. They said I could return home anytime I want. I could leave right now. So could Sawyer."

"Idle chatter from unintelligent creatures."

"How did Torell get his hands on us? Why the implants?"

"Q sent you through the wormhole. Torell was in the area. He beamed you on board his ship before the Prophets could contact you and took you both to Hdrok 4. The implants were already in used. Sending two humans to Terok Nor to kill Dukat seemed the perfect plan. I didn't think either of you would become so devoted to despot. It would have been much easier for me if it had worked. Mistakes have been made by both sides in this war."

"And the Marquis ships attacked Bajor?"

"Romulan technology made it possible for my allies to maneuver through the ion storm, raised by Kia Lucan in one of his little ceremonies. After the Marquis destroyed the forts and soldiers loyal to Dukat, the Marquis merely used the cloaking devices and vanished. The Circle is alive and well, I assure you, Helen. I am the Circle."

"You're insane," I said. I gritted my teeth as he twirled the cage around. Some of what he said did make sense. He knew about my nightmares. He knew I had dark thoughts. I didn't know how he knew, he did, and it terrified me.

"I don't repeat the same mistakes, hoping for a different outcome," Vardon said with a hiss. "The only reason I returned was to secure my fortune left behind in Milea. My mistress has expensive tastes. I'll get the treasure and use it to pay the Dominion for their assistance. I intend to rule Cardassia. Perhaps you'd like to meet her, my dear."

A slender, petite figure entered the chamber. Kornica sat on the throne. Her alteration from a naive yet haughty new bride into a femme fatale was startling. She wore a sheer black gown with gold plate mail on the shoulder. Her black hair was worn in braids. She wore a necklace of vethral fangs covered in gold as jewelry. She glared at me.

"This one offends me. Kill her, Vardon."

"All in due time, Kornica. I want Helen to see what I've planned for the Ghost Warrior."

“I should have known when I saw the four armed statue in your quarters on the Kobrak you were evil. I’ve seen pictures of Gnosh the Destroyer,” I said. Vardon walked over and kissed Kornica. “Kia Lucan played with forces he couldn’t control any more than you can.”

“I don’t want to control them, Helen. I mean to release them and let them do what they do best. They’ll kill the Prophets and open the wormhole for the Dominion. What they do after is of no concern to me,” Vardon said. He pulled Kornica into his arms for a passionate kiss. “I tried to convince her to see reason, my love. Helen refuses to join us. If I give her to the Shadow Dwellers, they’ll be able to make her see things our way.”

“Were you and Kornica lovers before Dukat married her?” I asked. It shouldn’t be important, it was to me.

“Is it obvious?” Vardon asked. “It’s always been Kornica I loved. My friends on the Counsel arranged for Dukat to marry her. Venna placed the implant in Dukat’s head, Kornica poisoned him. A little drop every day of poison added to his madness. Had Yor not convinced Dukat to follow her to Bajor, I have no doubt he would have killed everyone on the station.”

Vardon kissed the woman again. She laughed with evil delight. What an actress, I thought. She had fooled all of us. I had actually mourned her death. I had thought it unfair an innocent girl had been dragged into marriage and then abducted. Finding out I was Kornica was part of the conspiracy hit me hard. I’d been wrong about so many things. I was certain of one thing; I was not a minion of the Pah-Wraiths.

“Did you know Yor killed more than fifty innocent people at Dukat’s command?” Vardon asked as he met my gaze. “Kornica paints Yor in a far different picture than you. Yor is a killer and a liar. She did whatever Dukat asked. They’ve always been lovers, Helen. You are in the way. I intend to help you see things differently. You will join us, Helen. For now, I have set a trap for your friend. I’ve placed a considerable sum of money on Yor being defeated in the arena. You can have her head as a trophy.”

I trembled with rage. I wanted to kill Vardon and Kornica. If I’d been able to break free of my cage, I would have killed them all. “What arena? What are you talking about,

you sick fuck?" I shouted as rage filled my every thoughts. I tried to fight the images in my head, I had to fight them, for Vardon was right. Something was wrong with me. "Why won't you just let me go?" I sobbed. "I want no part of this."

"I have a death arena right here in Narthalem," he said. "Yor will fight Gnosh the Destroyer today and she will die. Perhaps with her death, you will finally admit what you are, Helen. I don't want to have to kill you too."

A servant brought a tray with three goblets. Vardon handed a goblet to Cassidy. He returned with the other two glasses and sat next to Kornica. They couple toasted me and then drank, staring at each other. They didn't love each other, I thought. Vardon used Kornica to gain control of Cardassia, and she simply wanted to be with a rich and powerful man. What part did Cassidy play? He didn't seem evil. He wasn't part of their scheme, I told myself. So why was he there? Really? I knew I wouldn't be given a chance to talk to him, not alone, and tried to catch Cassidy's eyes. He refused to look at me, I suppose it was shame, for he'd been the one to bring me to Hell's door.

"Torell has other agents were never found," I said. "Talos and Dovvos. Who are they? Are they here?" Cassidy glanced at me then. He looked a little too interested and I wondered why.

"Helen, you have so many questions," Vardon said. "If you are so keen to meet, Talos and Dovvos, I'm sure it can be arranged. You see, they are eager to meet you, too."

"I'm just trying to understand you, Vardon," I said. "You seemed so...kind. Surely part of you still exists. You said you loved me."

Kornica giggled. "She think you loved her, darling."

"There are more conspirators Garak's Death List, my dear. The Order left me alone because they know I have friends in high and low places. They don't dare left a finger to stop me. Kia Lucan summoned the Shadow Dwellers. He was not without merit. Talos and Dovvos reside in the bodies of two Bajorans. Dead Bajorans. They lead the Order of the Red Snake. My demon friends showed me where to find the Fire Caves. Yor went there once. It is called the Valley of Shadows. I assume the demons will take you with them. You see, they intend to go to the valley tonight and release the Pah-Wraiths. They have been waiting

for the five moons to align. By then, Kornica and I will be far from this place.”

Cassidy set aside his goblet. He remained, though I assumed he didn’t need to be there, listening to everything we said. I knew I was right about him. He was not what he seemed to be. I hoped it meant I had an ally.

“Who is Gnosh the Destroyer?” Cassidy asked. He grabbed the pitcher of wine and refilled Vardon and then Kornica’s goblets. “Why have I never fought him?”

“You would die, Irishman.” Vardon pulled Kornica against his chest. “Gnosh is already here. You’ll meet him soon enough. I’m being a poor host. Helen wants to meet Talos and Dovvos. Ask them to join us, Cassidy.”

“Their appetite for paks is insatiable. They eat souls,” Kornica said laughing.

“I don’t really want to meet them! You can’t do this,” I said starting to panic. “We can make a deal, Vardon. I can get the treasure for you. Let me talk to Dukat. I’ll arrange to have it brought here. You can leave with Kornica.”

“I can do whatever I want, Helen.”

Cassidy spoke to a human with dark brown hair. The man wore two rapiers on either hip. He nodded at Cassidy and left the room. He returned a few minutes later with two Bajoran men. I assumed they were Talos and Dovvos. The pair approached my cage, while Cassidy and the other human watched. Kornica laughed and turned Vardon’s head to kiss him. Neither cared I was in mortal danger.

The Shadow Dwellers were incredibly pale, with solid black eyes and fangs, reminding me of vampires. They glowered at me from beneath black hoods, circling my cage in a menacing manner. Both demons grabbed the bars of the cage. A long finger extended to touch my calf. I felt pain in every inch of my body and screamed.

“We’ll accept the human as payment, Gul Vardon. We also want Dukat,” the taller demon said. “Dovvos, see if Yor approached the temple. I’ll remain here to keep our friends company. Milea will be ours with your departure, Vardon.”

“Of course, Talos. You may have all the little children too.” Vardon removed a holocube from his pocket and tapped the top. It activated, showing a geo-topical map of Milea, with borders outlined in red and major routes clearly defined. “Milea, in addition to

being a prime piece of land, lies in an extremely strategic position. The foothills make is safe from a rear attack, and it is bordered on two sides by rivers flow into the ocean, which means it can never suffer from drought. It is also extremely close to Fort Galdrak, which makes it useful for anyone commanding fort. Do with it what you want, Talos. In fact, the entire planet is yours to take after I leave tonight."

"We are not concerned about defending Milea, Gul Vardon. When you leave, we will simply take what we want." Talos glanced at me. I was afraid of Talos and Dovvos far more than Vardon or his smugglers. They meant to possess my soul.

"Talos, I'm sure you won't mind if Helen dresses in something more suitable for the entertainment this evening," Vardon said. "If it pleases you, I'll have Cassidy and Rigel take her to my room and prepare her."

"As you will," Talos said.

Cassidy opened the door of the cage. Rigel dragged me out by my arm. He kept hold of me as Cassidy led the way into a passage. I was taken to another chamber, which appeared to be Vardon's personal quarters. A large bed was covered with pelts. Several large chests of treasure were pushed against the far wall, along with crates of weapons and supplies. Rigel held my arms as Cassidy rummaged in a chest. He removed several articles of clothing.

"You'll wear this," Cassidy said.

The Irishman lifted a long, opaque gown was sheer enough I could see his hand through the fabric. I opened my mouth to object, snapping it shut when I saw the last item Cassidy held in his hand. It was dog collar, complete with leash. Rigel pushed me toward Cassidy, walking over to the entrance to stand guard.

"Get dressed," Cassidy said grinning.

"I can't imagine demons actually care what I wear. They're going to suck out of my soul, not fondle me. Both of you are human. I am, too. I'm from Earth. I'm not really a Cardassian. I was made to look this way."

"Interesting," Cassidy said. "Yor is human too. That's why she knew I was Irish. We met here earlier today. She's skilled with a sword. She might defeat Gnosh."

"Don't bet on it," Rigel said.

"Why are you helping Vardon?" I asked. "If you both help me escape, Dukat will pay you handsomely. I swear it. He'll even give you a ship. He has lots of ship."

"We've already been paid," Rigel said in an angry voice. "Cassidy, we don't have time for this. If she doesn't shut up, put a muzzle on the bitch."

"I'm sorry, lass. We don't renegotiate. It's bad business," Cassidy said. "We have our reputations to consider, Helen. Rigel is a profession swordsman. He's never been defeated in the arena. I also compete, when it suits me. Vardon paid us in advance. Once paid, we do the job. He paid us to bring you and Yor here."

"I'm from Dallas, Texas," I said. "The Federation doesn't even exist where I come from, when I come from, is. It's all a mistake. I shouldn't here, I mean when...I'm not sure what I mean, I'm desperate. Are you both from Earth?"

"I am. Rigel is from Mars," Cassidy said. "Whereabouts?"

"Dallas."

"Never been there."

"Port Royal," Rigel said, as he removed a pack of cigarettes from his pockets. "Port Royal, Mars."

I stared at Rigel feeling like I was in the middle of a time warp. I'd not seen anyone smoke or smelled the odor of tobacco in months...make centuries. It was surreal to watch a human puff on a cigarette. I stared and thought about home. Rigel noticed and took a step toward me, the pack lifted in the air. His acted like he meant to offer me one and changed his mind.

"Nah. No sense getting friendly. Do you hear me, Cass? She may be from Earth, looks like a Cardi. Anyway, I need to prepare for the games. I'm scheduled to fight. You got her?"

"I've got her. Go on. I'll see you later."

"Drinks on me later," Rigel said. He left the room.

Left alone with Cassidy, I was faced with the cold, hard reality I was on Bajor, about to be given to two demons, while my friend was to be killed in an arena by Gnosh. I turned

my back to Cassidy to remove my gown and replaced it with a sheer negligee. It hung shy of my buttocks. Cassidy approached from behind and placed a collar around my neck. He fastened a chain to the collar.

“For some reason I feel like I should apologize,” he said.

“Don’t. I hate you.”

“Good. You should, lass.”

A gong struck three times. Several monitors lowered from the ceiling. On the monitors I saw Rigel standing with fighters on a ledge. The fighters came from all over the Alpha Quadrant. They watched a platform lower from the roof by heavy chairs. It hung above a large swimming pool of sorts, filled with boiling liquid. Around the pool sat metal bleachers. More than a hundred people sat in the bleachers. Some races I recognized, some I didn’t have a clue what they were, they were in high spirits. They eat and drank like any spectators at a sport’s arena on Earth and waited for the games to commence.

“I placed a bet on a Cardassian they just caught,” a fighter said as he ducked his head into the room. He was a Romulan. “You hear me, Cassidy? One of Glinn Yor’s soldiers was caught. He’s fighting a Jem’Hadar deprived of Ketracel White.” He dashed off and shouted down the hallway at someone else.

Cassidy wound the chain around his wrist. “The lack of it makes the Jem’Hadar go mad,” he said. “If he defeats the Cardassian, the Jem’Hadar will be get his drug. I doubt the Cardassian will win.”

“Sawyer is here. You don’t have to do this, Cassidy,” I said, turning to face him. He gave a little tug on the leash. “Be a hero. Let me go.”

“I’m no hero, Helen. Now let’s go.”

Led into the hallway, Cassidy brought me into the arena. Vardon and Kornica sat on two smaller thrones placed between the bleachers on a platform. He handed the leash to Vardon. The former gul tugged on the chain and forced me to kneel on the cold, stone floor. Cassidy sat on the bottom bleacher. The gong struck three more times.

“I think you’ll enjoy this, Helen,” Vardon said with glee.

“You’ll be sorry when Dukat arrives,” I said glaring at him.

Vardon gave a hard tug on the leash and pulled me against his legs. Kornica was too busy eating treats held on a plate by a slave boy to pay us any attention. Loud applause filled the chamber as the Jem'Hadar appeared on the ledge above us. A metal plank slid out from the ledge to connect to the round platform. He walked across the plank, raising an axe above his head, roaring like a mad beast as the crowd cheered.

"Dukat isn't coming, Helen," Vardon said with a laugh. He pressed his head against mine and shoved his hand under the material of my gown. His hand found my breast. I caught my breath and felt my cheeks grow warm. "Your lover is watching right now, Helen. I imagine Dukat doesn't like seeing me fondle you."

All the blood drained from my head. "What do you mean?"

"This fight is being transmitted live to Milea. I made certain to note the correct frequency in my journal. Provided Dukat read my journal I left out for him, he should be able to watch us on from his monitor."

"You're a monster."

"Soon to be a very rich monster," Vardon said. He ripped open the front of my gown and laughed when I tried to thrust him away. "Smile my dear. I want to give Dukat a show he'll never forget, Madame La Belle." He lifted his head and shouted, "Let the fight commence!"

Humiliated, I pulled my gown together and sobbed.

SAWYER

Chapter Seventy

Penned behind a line of trees, we fired at smugglers hiding behind rocks surrounded a pool of water fed by a one hundred foot tall waterfall roared. We had left the horses purchased at a farm a mile back on a ridge overlooked a gorge. Descending into the gorge, we had followed a fast-moving river to reach the waterfall. Narthalem loomed overhead, a monstrous peak encircled by a layer of clouds. The moment we took position at the waterfall, we encountered enemy fire; they had been expecting us.

Two soldiers were dead and Dunatar had not made it to the pool. I feared he had been shot somewhere along the river, tumbled into the water and floated away. Whatever Dunatar's fate, I felt certain I would not see him again.

Where I knelt with Garak behind a fallen log, I was able to see the War Dogs positioned behind boulders. Lothar and Uther stood behind trees. The men fired at smugglers grouped at the mouth of a cave, high above us. Prylar Evard dropped to the ground beside Garak and I. He closed his and prayed. It couldn't hurt, I thought. I took aim at the cave entrance, level with the top of the waterfall, and picked my target. The laser struck an alien in the chest. He lurched forward, tumbled over the ledge, dropping into the falls. More smugglers appeared in the bushes close to our position, keeping us from advancing on their hideout.

Garak used his com-link to contact Dukat. His voice was inaudible as he spoke into the device. He flinched each time a phaser truck the log and sent wood chips flying into the air. It was tough wood and made the perfect shield, at least for the moment.

"Helen has been abducted," Garak shouted as he lowered the com-link. I stared at him. "Dukat believes she was brought here. We've been ordered to pull back. Dukat is

sending reinforcements.”

“What?” I shook my head. “I’m not withdrawing. Dunatar is missing. He may be a captive. I’m going after him and Helen. Give me your com-link, Garak. As soon as I get a fix on their location, I’ll contact Dukat and have us beamed out.”

I held out my hand. Garak placed the com-link into my hand. I tucked it into the pouch on my belt and put on his black cloak. I needed I disguise. All I had to do was slip behind the enemy lines and make my way to stairs cut into the stone led up to the cave. Once inside, I’d find my friends and get them out of Vardon’s headquarters.

“I have a job to do as well,” Garak said. He caught hold of my arm. “Vardon’s ship may be cloaked and hidden in this gorge. It’s imperative we destroy it, Yor.”

“I agree. Get it done.” I glanced at Lothar as he dropped down beside me. “Contact the Brotherhood. Have them meet you here. Dukat may or may not send troops here. I can’t wait long. Go with Garak and locate Vardon’s ship. He’ll do the rest.”

“They’re already on the way,” Lothar said. He lifted his rifle and shot a smuggler advancing along the side of the pool. “Seems obvious they set a trap for us. It’s you they want, Yor.”

We need a diversion or you’ll never reach those stairs,” Garak said.

I lifted up my wristband and flipped a switch. My hologram walked out from behind the trees, arms raised over her head, and approached the pool of water. Snipers from the cave fired at the hologram. Laser bolts struck rock and water. I made the hologram stumble into the water and vanish from sight. The battle continued. I hoped the enemy thought I was dead.

“Let’s hope fools them,” Garak said as he tapped on Evard’s arm. “We’re withdrawing. I suggest you go with the War Dogs. Lothar is coming with me.”

Korvinus had made his way on his hands and knees to our position. “You’re in command,” I said to Korvinus. “Provide cover for me until I reach those stairs and then withdraw. Don’t stick around for me. Garak, fill him in about Dukat. I’m going.”

I raised the hood and crept forward. My squad continued to fire on the smugglers. I reached the side of the cliff, able to see the stairs ahead of me. A body dropped from the

mouth of the cave and slammed into the ground behind me. Before I had a chance to start climbing, two smugglers darted out of the brush ahead of me. They waved me over, the cloak tricked them, and together we headed up the stairs. One of my men shot the lead smuggler. He plummeted off the stairs and slammed into the ground. I continued to follow the man ahead of me.

A hard, vigorous climb brought us to the cave entrance. The smuggler didn't turn back to check on me. He entered a tunnel. I kept close behind him. Several Cardassian soldiers from the Fifth Order carried a pulse laser cannon to the cave entrance. I considered shooting them, and decided to remain with the other smuggler. I had to locate Helen. More soldiers ran by us and joined the Fifth Order renegades. I heard the heavy thump of the cannon and imagined my War Dogs being hammered. The smuggler ahead of me ducked into another corridor. As I prepared to follow, Cassidy and five smugglers came around the corner. Two men came up behind me. I was surrounded.

"Disarm Glinn Yor," Cassidy said. "Vardon is waiting for her. Be quick about it."

Someone pulled off my black cloak. My swords and pistols were taken from me.

"So much for stealth," I muttered.

The Irishman laughed. "We saw you coming miles away, Yor. This whole valley is monitored." He motioned at me with his pistol. "I'm sure you want to see your friend. Helen is with Vardon in the arena. Step lively now, Yor. We've a large crowd waiting for you. Let's not disappoint them."

"I wouldn't dream of spoiling Vardon's party," I replied.

Two smugglers pulled my arms behind my back and cuffed my wrists. Cassidy led me through a labyrinth of corridors and rooms. Smugglers sat in a private bar, watching a fight on monitors, smoking cigars, and drinking. Within the mountain, Vardon had created an entire city. I noticed several rooms filled with slaves, a casino, a mess hall, personal quarters and a chamber filled with creates of weapons.

"I'm impressed, Cassidy. You can have Vardon's treasure, if you help me rescue Helen and one of my men. Vardon is doomed. Reinforcements are on their way. This entire mountain will be surrounded within the next hour."

“Vardon said you’d try to bribe me,” Cassidy said glancing over his shoulder. “Helen tried the same thing. It’s bad business to accept a bribe. Keep moving.”

“You’re human. So am I.”

Cassidy stopped dead in his tracks. He turned around and jerked the Doppelgänger band off my wrist. He slid it into his pocket. His eyes widened to see my human face. “I’ll keep this little trinket. It might come in handy later. Let’s get you into your costume, Ghost Warrior or Vardon will send those creepy Shadow Dwellers to find us.”

Hauled down a flight of crude stairs, I was dragged into chamber filled with cages filled with half-starved Bajorans. Two smugglers cut off my armor and tossed it aside. I was thrown into a cell. Cassidy pushed a leather harness through the bars. He motioned with his pistol, indicating I was to put it on. I stripped and put on the harness. It covered my breasts and snapped between my legs. I still had my boots. No armor was offered. I apparently was meant to fight in the ridiculous outfit. My captor seemed to read my thoughts.

“You’re not meant to survive, Yor,” Cassidy said.

“I’m trained in the *Klin’Ha*. I can wrestle with the best of them.”

“This will be a fight to the death. You’ll have a sword.”

“Enough chatting, Cassidy. Yor is going into the arena!”

Vardon pushed through the guards and approached the cell. He smoked a long pipe. Smoke snorted out his nostrils. Six monitors dropped from the ceiling. Both Vardon and Cassidy turned to look at the monitor. A crowd sat around an enormous pit of boiling liquid, above which hung around platform on chains. Helen sat on the ground at Kornica Dukat’s feet. I hadn’t expected to see Kornica alive. I wasn’t surprised either. She’d been a part of the plot against Dukat the entire time. The crazy bitch cheered as a Jem’Hadar fought a Bajoran on the platform. The Bajoran didn’t have a chance against his berserk opponent.

“Not a moment too soon,” Vardon said. “I believe you can see everything you need to right from your cell, Yor. Helen is sitting right by Kornica. Surprised?”

“Relieved,” I said. “She’s your problem now.”

“Oh really? Then perhaps you are unaware of what is about to befall you. You’ll face three opponents, each of a superior level. If you manage to defeat them, which I’m counting on, you’ll then fight Gnosh the Destroyer. This fight, my dear, is what my audience has bet a large fortune on. You are not expected to win. Do give it your best. This is being aired live. No doubt your precious Dukat is watching.”

“Why did you bring Helen here?” I asked.

Vardon laughed coldly. “I’ve given her to Talos and Dovvos. What happens to her is not *my* problem.” He turned to Cassidy. “I’ll let you know when it’s time for Yor to fight. For now, enjoy the show.” He chuckled as he walked off.

The Jem’Hadar threw the Bajoran off the platform. With a splat, he landed in the boiling liquid. An invisible force field kept the audience from being drenched. I watched in amazement as the Bajoran vanished in seconds. The crowd went wild with applause.

“It’s acid,” Cassidy said.

The Jem’Hadar waited for his next opponent as a metal gangway slid out from a ledge to connect to the round platform. Dunatar and another one of my men, Fasso, appeared. At gunpoint, Dunatar and Fasso walked across the gangway onto the platform. Both men held swords. I grasped the bars of my cage, horrified, as the crazed Jem’Hadar let out a roar.

Vardon appeared on one of the screens. He sat beside Kornica and clapped his hands.

A gong was struck three times.

The Jem’Hadar attacked, swinging an axed over his head. He went for Fassa. The soldier deflected the blow with his sword. The horned Jem’Hadar kicked Fasso in the stomach. The Cardassian lost his footing and landed on his backside. The axe cleaned his head in half.

Dunatar charged toward the Jem’Hadar before he could withdraw the axe. He sliced upon the Jem’Hadar’s chest. Blood poured thick onto the platform. The axe was yanked free. Dunatar stabbed his opponent through the chest. Somehow, the Jem’Hadar remained on his feet. He lifted his axe over his head and chased Dunatar around the platform. Every

now and then, Dunatar stopped, stabbed the Jem'Hadar, and danced out of the way. Despite the numerous wounds inflicted by the Cardassian, the crazed Jem'Hadar never faltered. When Dunatar turned once more to fight him, the axe broke the sword in half. The Jem'Hadar grabbed Dunatar by the throat and lifted him off the ground. Dunatar was thrown off the platform. He landed into the vat of acid and vanished.

I turned my head aside and vomited.

"Sorry, Yor," Cassidy said.

"man was one of my best friends. I'll kill you and Vardon for this."

"You'll have to work your way to us. Start with the Jem'Hadar." Cassidy unlocked the cell and led me out of the room.

Wild applause greeted us as join the rest of the fighters waiting on a level above Vardon and his guests. The fighters were a collection of brutes from the Alpha Quadrant. Rigel handed a sword to me. I took hold of it. I felt numb inside after what I'd seen. I couldn't think about anything else. Under gunpoint, I walked across a gangway and stepped onto the round platform. The addition of my weight shifted the balance and I felt it dip low on my side. The Jem'Hadar jumped on the platform and it started to swing. The brute stood ten feet from me, his eyes on my face, holding the blood axe in one hand. I moved to the center as the gangway pulled away. I was trapped with my opponent.

A gong struck three times echoed in the chamber.

The Jem'Hadar advanced. I drew back my arm and threw the sword at him. The blade sunk deep into his skull. He dropped his axe and fell backwards, landing hard on the platform, which dipped in his direction. I ran toward the axe, able to grab the hilt and shift my weight as the body slid over the side. The crowd reacted with boos and angry shouts. I reacted with emotion, lifting the axe over my head and shouted.

"For Cardassia!"

I turned as the gangplank started to move toward the platform. The next opponent didn't wait for it and made the jump. The crowd went wild. It was Durgan. He was dressed in my Cardassian armor and carried my swords. Durgan ran straight at me, whirling the swords like propellers. His eyes glowed red. I should have been terrified to fight a Shadow

Dweller. The loss of Dunatar and Fasso sent me into a rage. I charged toward the undead thing, causing the platform to rock as I struck at him. The axe struck his arm, slicing right through. The sword fell to the platform. No blood spurt from the wound. The thing inside Durgan, however, let out a piercing scream.

One armed, Durgan did not offer a threat, though I had expected his possession by a bloodthirsty demon would make him more aggressive. I attacked with no fear and swung the axe downwards. It cut through his shoulder and sunk deep into his chest, and there I left it, in order to retrieve my swords. With perverse pleasure, I cut off Durgan's head and kicked it off the platform, heard it plop in the acid.

"Stay dead," I said.

A hard kick sent Durgan's body over the side of the platform. A splash was followed by a sizzle. From the acid came a loud shriek as a black shadow rose into the air. It sailed over the stunned crowd and vanished into the wall. There was no time to think about what I had killed or released into the wild. I assumed a defensive position in the center of the platform, prepared to meet the new fighter.

The crowd chanted, "Yor, Yor, Yor."

Across the gangplank, Rigel Kentarus appeared, armed with his rapiers. I was to fight him next. He stepped onto the plank and the crowd hushed, for he was their favorite. Cassidy rushed forward and pulled his friend him aside. I understand what it meant; Rigel was to be replaced. The humans glared at a male Klingon in his prime who trotted forward. The Klingon wore a similar black harness and carried a deadly bat'leth, altered to have an additional sharp point at the end.

"Yor, get ready! Baccus is the deadliest Klingon in the quadrant," Cassidy shouted. I wondered why the Irishman warned me. One look at the Klingon and I knew my opponent was formidable. I had fought enough Klingons on the holodeck to know how to handle him. I thought of my father, Gul Yor, running from battle against the Klingons. I had nowhere to run and prepared for battle.

The Klingon backed up and ran forward. He launched himself into the air. He landed on the platform, never slackening his stride as he swung the bat'leth and attacked.

This was a seasoned fighter, I thought as I circled Baccus. I kept my left sword raised and pointed my second sword at the Klingon, waiting for him to make a move. I could learn a great deal about his technique in the initial few seconds, whether he was trained or relied on brute strength.

“You will lose,” said the Klingon. He swung his weapon.

I dodged the blow and made a cut behind the knee, twirling out of the way before the curved blade made an arc over my head. The bat’leth came slicing back without missing a beat. I deflected it with both swords. The Klingon gave a hard push, knocking me backwards. He swung the weapon again. This time, he sliced upon my right thigh and knocked me off my feet. At the gush of red blood, the crowd cheered. The Klingon used both hands to bring the weapon down, intending to cleave me in half.

I rolled to the side and jabbed upwards with my left sword, feeling it pierce through his armor and his skin. The Klingon staggered. Blood flowed rich and thick from his side. As I pulled my Snake sword free, the Klingon landed on his knees and punched me in the face. I slammed against the platform, my head reeling. With an angry snarled, he lifted the bat’leth over his head. I kept rolling, moving dangerously close to the edge of the platform as it dipped beneath my weight. I managed to stand. The platform continued to slant as he rushed toward me, swinging the wicked bat’leth over his head. Between the two of us, our wounds covered the platform with blood, making it difficult not to slip as I ran and he gave pursuit. The crowd booed and hissed at our antics. Somewhere between the crowd’s heckling and the Klingon’s snarls, I lost control and my battle lust took over.

Another wide sweep of the bat’leth left the Klingon’s chest open. I stabbed the Snake sword into his chest, only to be pushed backwards by his weapon. The sword remained in his body as our weapons clanked together. I managed to grab the hilt of my sword in his chest, tugging free as he punched me in the head, against knocking me to the ground.

The Klingon stomped toward me, while I scooted backwards, lifting both swords as he raised his weapon over his head. At moment, I drove both swords upwards, driving them into his chest abdomen, and then slammed my body against him. With a cry of pain and rage, the Klingon fell onto his back. I toppled over him and slid fast toward the edge of

the platform. On my hands and knees, I scrambled toward the Klingon. He no longer moved. The platform swung in the opposite direction. I climbed onto the dead Klingon and used his weight to bring the platform to a slow halt. His tunic provided the means to bind my leg to stem the flow of blood. Standing, I jerked both swords from his chest as the crowd screamed and stomped their feet. I was too tired to roll the dead Klingon off the platform.

Two guards came across the gangplank and together tossed the body into the pit of acid. As soon as they left the platform, tiny sprinklers turned on, cleaning off the blood, which ran along grooves, dribbling into the pool.

“And now,” a voice announced. “What you’ve all been waiting for...the one and only, Gnosh the Destroyer versus the Ghost Warrior!”

Nearby, I heard the monstrous bellows of Gnosh. The crowd went wild. The lights came grew brighter than ever. I rose to my feet, pushing hair from my eyes and turned toward the ledge as my new opponent arrived. Gnosh the Destroyer was eight feet tall, with four arms, dark green skin, and a black ponytail braided with finger bones. He approached the ledge. Cassidy and Rigel Kentarus placed swords in each of his massive hands. Gnosh was not a Pah- Wraith. He was a race of giants, bred to kill.

I backed up to the far side of the platform. The platform swayed. Gnosh had room to jump. He landed dead center on the platform. The chains broke under his immense weight. The platform plunged downwards, acid bubbling at the side as slowly started to sink. The platform was three feet thick. I knew it would not take long for the acid to eat through it, sending us sinking into our deaths. The platform, now eyelevel with the crowd, afforded a closer view of Helen.

Vapors rose from the edge made my eyes to water. Helen looked terrified for me. She motioned at my opponent and somehow Vardon who caressed her shoulders. I looked away from her and lifted my blades. The giant was the biggest thing I had ever seen. He spread his arms wide and roared. Spittle flew from his thick lips. I wondered if Dukat and Damar watched the show as I ran toward the monster.

I slid across the platform like a baseball player coming into home plate. His eyes

widened in surprise as I glided between his legs. I slashed at his ankles and stabbed at his groin at the same time. The green skin on his leg was thick as tree bark. I managed to stab his ponderous testicles. It was not a mortal wound. All I did was piss him off. Gnosh turned around and tried to stomp on me. I crawled to my feet, wondering how I was going to fight a four-armed thing when he stopped roaring and decided to kill me. The platform bobbed in the pool of acid. The giant was smart enough to remain in the center of the platform to keep it balanced. Unfortunately, his weight made it sink faster and acid seeped over the sides.

His four arms moved simultaneously, keeping me darting side to side to meet each sword with my own, a constant rotation gave me no rest. It was a matter of his brawn against my intelligence, for while all I could do was deflect each blow, I counted the seconds between the next parry, treating Gnosh like the killing machine he was bred to be. When I felt comfortable with his routine, I changed tactics and started to run around him.

“Little girl, pretty girl. I’m going to eat your heart.”

As he adjusted to my tricks, he caught me by surprise and stepped into my path. I spread my arms wide, cutting off his lower hands. I crossed my swords at the upper arms sliced toward me, spread by two fountains of green blood, while he never stopped whacking and hacking. I backed away from him, able to see each of his hand sprout tiny legs, moving toward me like spiders. When I lifted my eyes toward Gnosh, his two swords came crashing toward me. I lifted my blade, blocked the blows. He pressed down, using his muscle to lower my arms.

“Gnosh kill now!”

I collapsed to my knees, able to see the acid coming toward us as the platform sunk another twelve inches into the pit. Releasing my swords, I dove through his legs as his fists slammed into the platform. Bent over as he was, I crawled onto his back, using his lower arms like a step as I wrapped my arms around his neck. I tried to snap his neck. It was like trying to twist a tree.

With a bellow, he jabbed the two swords at me. I dropped to my back, rolled to my side, and watched the momentum of his misplaced blows carry him forward. His big body

shifted the weight on the platform. Too late, he realized he had reached the edge. The acid lapped hungrily over the side as it dipped into the liquid and sent a hiss of smoke into the air. He scrambled to where I lay mid-section on the platform, watching the acid eat away the top layer of the metal, and rush toward his boots. With long strides, he stomped toward me. His foolishness hastened the submersion of the platform and now the acid rushed toward us in every direction.

“I’m not dying today,” I shouted.

I propelled my body into the air. Arms and legs flaying, I landed on his left side and scrambled onto his back. His big arms lifted over his head and the two swords barely missed impaling me. I grabbed his left arm and sunk my teeth into his bicep. At his scream, I managed to wrench the Snake sword out of his grasp and slid it across his throat. A splatter of green blood showered the platform as he stumbled forward. I tapped my heels to his thighs and somehow coaxed him to the side as the platform broke in half. At the last second, I threw myself over the side of the pool and hit the ground. The giant fell backward into the acid, screaming for two seconds before he fell silent in a sizzle and popping bubbles.

Gnosh the Destroyer was dead.

I stood in a daze, watching people cheer as they threw coins at my feet. Turning toward the pitch, I no longer saw the platform or the giant, just bubbles on the surface. I turned to face Vardon. I was exhausted, covered in red and green blood, he saw me as a threat. He yanked on Helen’s leash and stood. A dagger appeared in his hand. He held against her throat.

“You have defeated Gnosh,” Vardon snarled. “Don’t think it ends here, Yor. As long as Helen comes with me willingly, I will spare your lives. If not, then you both die.”

Guards marched out of four tunnels led into the arena. They formed two lines and aimed their rifles at me. Vardon held Helen close, his eyes a bit wild. He had not expected me to win. Talos and Dovvos stood, clearly displeased with Vardon’s behavior. Kornica sneered from her chair. Cassidy stepped forward, the only one willing to say something to the lunatic.

“Yor won, Gul Vardon,” the Irishman said. “The rules of the games are clear. Yor and her friend must be released. You will lose more than money today if you don’t keep to the rules.”

“I think not, Cassidy,” Vardon said.

“Right about now, Dukat’s reinforcement is encircling this place,” I said wiping blood off my lips with the side of my hand. “Take Kornica and leave while you can. Leave Helen with me. You’ve lost this time, Vardon.”

“Hardly. Cassidy, toss Yor into the acid,” Vardon ordered.

Cassidy stepped forward. He grabbed hold of my right arm. His friend Rigel appeared, parting through the line of soldiers, looking none too pleased with Vardon. He caught me around the waist. Together, they carried me toward the pool of boiling acid as I twisted to watch Vardon drag Hellen off in the opposite direction.

“At least it will be quick,” I muttered.

“Be quiet,” Cassidy hissed.

“Best of luck, Cass. Got to catch a ride out of here,” Rigel said. He let go of me and tapped a pin on his lapel. With a twinkle of lights, he transported out of the arena.

Cassidy kept a hold of my arm as Helen was led off by Vardon. Rigel approached Kornica to keep her from following, though I wondered why he bothered. Talos and Dovvos had vanished from sight. I feared the demons had gone to suck her soul dry. Cassidy led me out of the arena and into the slave pit. He helped me sit on a crate and bandaged my leg. When he finished, he gave me flask, which I hoped contained water. I took a sip. It was water. I guzzled it down.

“This isn’t what I thought would happen. You were to be set free,” he said.

“Vardon has Helen. Is he giving her to the Shadow Dwellers?”

“I don’t know. We need to find her and get out of here.”

“What?” I stared at him.

“Captain Picard sends his compliments. I am Section 31. I have orders to get you and Helen out of here. Now come on. This place is rigged to blow in the next five minutes.”

Cassidy pulled me from the crate. I followed behind him as he led me out of the

room.

He led me through several corridors and up a flight of winding stairs. We reached a landing where two guards stood in front of a door. Cassidy shot them both.

“That’s Vardon’s room. That’s where he took Helen,” he said.

The man handed me a pistol. I fired at the door. It evaporated in a dazzle of red fire. I charged into the room and found Helen and Vardon struggling behind a table. Helen straddled Vardon, her face pressed against his neck. There was a great deal of blood on the floor. Cassidy entered behind me. As Helen lifted her head, her face covered in blood, I saw she had ripped out Vardon’s throat with her bare teeth. Her eyes were bright red. She snarled at me, rising to her feet and took a step toward me. Setting my pistol on stun, I shot her in the stomach. She fell on top of the gul’s dead body.

“Pick her up,” I said, aiming the pistol at Cassidy.

“Don’t get trigger happy,” he replied.

Cassidy lifted Helen off the floor, carrying her naked body over his shoulder. He led the way out the door, going down the stairs. Whenever we came across a guard, Cassidy or I shot them, continuing moving through the corridors. He started to run and I followed, turning to glance over my shoulder to shoot at guards or smugglers. I heard Cassidy shout. The roar of the waterfall filled my ears. I smelled water and turned to see the tunnel ended. We stood at the edge, looking over a hundred-foot drop into the churning pool of water.

“We’ll have to jump,” Cassidy said. “The water is deep. Can you swim?”

“Yes,” I said. He was insane. The fall would kill us.

With a loud shout, Cassidy leapt from the ledge, taking Helen with him. I rushed forward and flew through the air, kicking my legs as I heard a thunderous roar and the blast of an explosion. Hot air struck my back as I descended, hitting a cold, hard surface and then sinking fast and deep. My first thought was to find Helen as the current pushed me away from the waterfall. With my head above water, I spotted her floating along with Cassidy, taking along the river away from the crumbling cliff. I swam toward Helen, managing to grab her arm, her body still held by Cassidy. Together, we swam toward the shoreline, managing to drag Helen onto dry land. I rolled over, staring at the night sky,

gasping for air.

The five moons were almost in position. The glow of the four moons behind the Prodigal, in front, started to fade from sight. Darkness spread across the sky, except for the forefront moon glowed red.

"We need to keep moving," Cassidy said. "We have another minute before entire mountain blows sky high. Now get on your feet and haul ass, girl."

"Where are we?" Helen muttered.

"Come on. There's no time to waste," he replied.

Cassidy jerked Helen to her feet, hauling her along the shoreline, while I limped along behind them. He veered away from the river, heading along a path wound into the trees, moving at a fast pace. A loud explosion shook the ground beneath our feet. I fell to the ground, scrambling up the hill as the thunderous noise continued and a wave of hot air blasted through the trees, hitting us on the left side.

"That's Cardassian handiwork, not mine," Cassidy said. "I assume they just destroyed Vardon's Bird-of-Prey." He pulled Helen against his side as he stood behind a tree. "My explosions should go off right about now."

An even louder explosion rained rocks, ash, and dirt on top of us. The trees around us bent and a few snapped in half. Another blast of heat struck us. I remained on the ground with my hands over my head. The earth trembled beneath us. Rumbles underground continued to shift rocks. I feared we would be swallowed.

Cassidy pulled me to my feet. He had given his jacket to Helen. With their help, I was led through the destroyed forest. Fires raged on our left and at our backs.

"The first rule of a covert agent is to never get caught," Cassidy said. "Actually, that's the only rule. I'll get you to safety and then I need to blend into the landscape."

"How did you get here?" I asked.

"The Enterprise," he said. "They dropped you off on the Prodigal, big blue moon in the sky, while I beamed down to Narthalem. Picard knew Q had brought two women from the past to alter the future of Bajor and Cardassia. Q likes to brag. I was sent here to make certain Vardon failed to bring the Dominion through the wormhole. We have had our eye

on him for some time. He certainly tried to destroy the Cardassian Union. For once, it seems, Dukat used his head and did not rush into war against the Federation. That's the only reason Picard agreed to step in and help."

"You know who we are? You know about Q's game?" Helen asked. "I thought I explained satisfactorily enough, lass."

The crack of timber and smell of smoke required us to run. They both helped me run from the fire, cresting a hill opened into a valley filled with tree. It seemed suicide to enter the forest. Cassidy kept us running along a right to the west, never looking back as the smell of smoke choked the air, requiring us to remain on the move.

"We're all playing the same game," Cassidy said. "The Federation plays to win. So does Captain Picard. In the worst possible situation, Picard always comes through. It was his plan to send me here. He had a feeling you two would convince those lizards to join the Federation. You must have made an impression, Glinn Yor. Picard went to a great deal of trouble to help you."

"Thank him when you see him," I said.

Smelling water, I made Helen and Cassidy stop as a Cardassian cruiser appeared overhead, showering the forest with water. The ship put out the fire, moving toward the east, away from us. I could not tell which ship it was, certain we would run into Cardassians up ahead. Cassidy left me with Helen, taking the lead along the path, a small phaser appearing in his hand. It was Federation issue.

"If the two of you were smart, you'd leave Bajor with me. The Enterprise is waiting for me right outside Cardassian space. I just need a way off the planet."

"It's our job to make certain wormhole stays closed," I said. "Q might have brought us here, the Prophets need us. Tonight is the night when the Pah-Wraiths will be released from the Fire Caves. I know where they are located. I am sure Talos and Dovvos went there. We cannot leave, Cassidy. If we do, Cardassia will lose seven million soldiers in a resulting war against Starfleet and then the Dominion. Both Dukat and Damar will die. Don't ask me how I know, Cassidy. Just let Picard know we're going to keep from happening."

"It makes you a collaborator working for the Federation," Helen said, giving me a stern look. She helped me walk with one arm wrapped tight around my waist. Her face was covered in blood and dirt. "I guess Dukat was right to suspect us all along for being spies."

We covered several miles entering a valley with more trees. As we began the descent into the valley, I heard the snap of twigs and rustling of bushes. Cassidy brought us to a halt. He motioned for us to take cover too late. We were no longer alone. Figures in dark brown cloaks emerged holding the reins of horses. For a moment, I thought we'd been captured by the smugglers. A hood fell, revealing the familiar face of Lothar. Behind him stood Uther, Prylar Evard, Jenrak, Zolon, Ikarus and twenty members of the Brotherhood of the Prophets. I didn't see Garak or Korvinus.

"You came back for us," I said.

"I told the Brotherhood was coming, Yor," Lothar said. "We never lost faith in you. Garak and Korvinus destroyed Vardon's ship and Narthalem. The Brotherhood will see you home. We've brought the horses."

"I can't confirm Talos and Dovvos were killed," I said. "They may be on their way to the Fire Caves to release the Pah- Wraiths. We have to go there!"

"I doubt they made it out alive," Cassidy said as he put away his phaser. He held out his hands. "I'm not one of Vardon's goons. I'm with the Federation, sent here to assist Bajor any way I can. I'm Cassidy."

"He's a friend," I said.

My bad leg buckled beneath me the moment Helen released me to take the reins of a horse offered by Uther. Lothar caught hold of me and removed his cloak, wrapping it around me before helping me onto his horse. He climbed behind me. His arms held me in the saddle. A second horse was given to Cassidy. Once he was in the saddle, he held out his hand and pulled Helen up behind him.

"Let's hope those two Shadow Dwellers are dead," Helen said. She sounded frightened. "Is Dukat nearby? We should take a shuttle, not ride."

"We've not seen him. Don't worry, child. If the demons had succeeded, the sky

would turn blood red," Evard said. "I don't want to give you false hope, Yor. If they fail tonight, they may yet find another way to open the cave. Travok was unclear how, the answer may be in this prophesy. We need to study it further in order to know how to stop them."

Lothar tapped his heels to the horse. "Move out," he said.

I realized then he was their leader. His arms tightened around me. It was a good thing because I blacked out.

HELEN

Chapter Seventy-One

On the weary ride through the mountains, I lost track of the time. I held onto Cassidy. I wore a scratchy brown robe. I kept my head pressed against his back. I listened to the clomp of the horses and breeze as it swayed the boughs of the trees. It was peaceful and this worried me. Nor had we seen Dukat and this worried me too.

The Brotherhood and War Dogs kept to wooded areas, avoiding farms and settlements. Stopping only to rest the horses and take a short break, we continued our journey through the night, heading due south, and by morning reached the sea. A narrow pathway running along the cliff brought us to the shoreline and in single file, rode in the surf, letting the water wash away the tracks.

“Fort Galdrak is twelve miles from here,” Jenrak said.

The Cardassian rode ahead of me. Sawyer now rode behind Jenrak, her arms wrapped tight around him. Her condition had vastly improved, thanks to healing agents provided by Prylar Evard. My companion Cassidy had chosen to wear a hooded cloak. He kept it raised over his white hair. When he returned to the Federation, I assumed he’d cosmetically alter his appearance. When I glanced at him, his face had already changed. He looked a little bit like Sawyer. I noticed the wristband he wore. He fiddled with the dials until he appeared more male than female. He was quite clever. Eben had designed it and now it was in the hands of Section 31. Somehow, I had to get it back.

“There’s really no need for you to continue the rest of the way with us,” I said keeping my voice low. The smell of the ocean helped cover the scent of horse manure. I took a deep whiff of the cloak and found it smelled musky.

“I promised to help get you home.”

“Dukat has suspected all along a Federation spy was involved. If he learns who you

are, Cassidy, you know what will happen. I'm sure the Brotherhood can spare a horse. You can ride to a town and vanish. No one will come looking for you."

"Thank you, Helen. I appreciate your concern," Cassidy said, turning in the saddle. "The life I lead is not easy, it suits my temperament. Long ago, I decided I could best serve the Federation as an agent. I have no other responsibility except the mission."

"Garak wanted Sawyer and me to be spies for the Obsidian Order. Technically, I suppose we are, though she takes it more seriously. Did you happen to coordinate plans with Garak? Is how he knew where to find the ship and was able to destroy it?"

"I don't usually provide information to Cardassians," he said, laughing. "I'm serious."

"I'm serious, too."

Cassidy turned around without answering my questions. He tapped his heels to the horse and rode alongside Jenrak. Sawyer had her head turned toward the sea, a thoughtful look on her sunburned face. We were three humans riding with Bajorans and a couple of Cardassians on a narrow strip of beach seemed to stretch on forever. For the new few hours, waves rolled in, crested and foam surged around the legs of the horses. A link of seaweed wrapped around the front leg of Jenrak's mount. The animal was well trained and continued on. Eventually, the seaweed slid free and returned to the ocean, again making me melancholy. I missed Earth. As the two men broke into conversation, Sawyer caught my gaze. She looked exhausted.

"How are you?" I asked.

"Fuzzy headed. Tired. Hungry."

"I don't remember anything from the time you defeated Gnosh to the moment you and Cassidy dragged me out of the river," I said. It wasn't exactly true. I'd be damned if I told anyone what I did remember about Vardon.

"I still have to locate Talos and Dovvos," Sawyer said. "You could go with Cassidy, Helen, and never look back."

"I'm not leaving you behind," I snapped. I did want my own bed in Texas. I considered leaving with Cassidy, for I certainly didn't care to see Dukat quiet yet. He'd

known about Vardon's treasure yet had waited to get rid of it, allowing me to go through hell in the meantime. I was angry with him. Knowing Sawyer was eager to find the Shadow Dwellers and go on another adventure after we nearly had been killed made me sick to think about. I needed time to figure out what I wanted to do with my life. I wasn't worried about Gabriel or Madison. They had their father. Perhaps I was a bad mother. I certainly was a bad friend, for I resented Sawyer and her determination to chance the future.

"We're almost home," Sawyer said.

"You don't care what happens to me or Cassidy." I felt unabated anger rise in my stomach, along with my breakfast. "You'll do whatever Dukat tells you to do. You're nothing more than a manufactured monster."

"Where the hell is coming from? I saved your life. Again."

"And once more you're trying to save everyone else," I said. "I'm sick of it, Sawyer. I'm sick of you and your determination to save Cardassia and Bajor. I just want to go home."

Cassidy and Jenrak stopped talking. I didn't care if they listened. I'd had enough of Sawyer's heroics and the danger she constantly put us both in to impress Dukat. If she wanted him so badly, then she could have him.

"The fort is right ahead of us," Jenrak said.

"I see it," I snarled.

On the cliff in the distance, I could see Fort Galdrak and the Cardassian flags waving in the breeze. I'm sure we'd been spotted by the guards. I felt a sense of panic. I wanted to tell Cassidy to turn the horse around.

"Don't you get it? Once Dukat put her in command, her head swelled so much she believes she's the savior of Bajor. Even the Brotherhood things she's some savior from the stars. If she wants to stay, then let her. Let's leave, Cassidy, while we still have time."

"Your friend gave me her word of honor I won't be harmed. I tend to believe in this prophesy, Helen. Yor is this Ghost Warrior."

"She's just a stupid girl from Kansas who believes in magic and miracles," I snarled.

I didn't know where the rage was coming from and couldn't control it. I clutched at Cassidy's shoulder, prepared to throw him from the horse and escape on my own.

"Go home then," Sawyer shouted. "Go back to Earth. If I had a wire brush, I'd scrub those ridges off your face. You don't deserve to be a Cardassian."

Two riders broke from the group and rode toward the fort. Sand flew from behind the hooves of their horses. Any minute a patrol from the fort would join us.

"Cassidy, turn the horse around. I mean it."

"Calm down, ladies," he said. "I'll be glad to explain everything to Prefect Dukat. I'm sure he is a rational man. Vardon is dead and the Snake Cult and smuggler ring disbanded.

Jenrak will certainly speak on my behalf. I have been nothing cooperative."

The War Dog rode forward, taking Sawyer with him. Zolon and Ikarus joined him, and rode ahead of the Brotherhood, as a patrol from the fort descended a staircase built into the side of the cliff. The two riders who had gone ahead of us had dismounted, holding the reins of their horses.

"It'll be all right, Helen," Cassidy said.

"No, it won't. You don't understand. Dukat isn't rational at all. He'll blame me for what happened with Vardon. Accusations and punishment will follow. Sawyer thinks he's magnificent. In truth, I'm dealing with a Cardassian with two distinct personalities. One can be gentle and loving, the one I love, and the other is cruel, selfish and ambitious."

"Then let's hope it's the loving Dukat awaits us."

The blood drained from my face the horse broke into gallop. The Brotherhood rose toward the patrol gathered on the beach. As we approached, I was able to recognize Dukat, the tallest of the soldiers. He stood beside Damar and Garak, the little weasel, and I had no doubt Dukat had been told precisely what had happened. I was angry with Garak as much as I was upset with Sawyer. Her gallant behavior and dedication to the Cardassians was the last straw. I didn't need her protection. Nor did I need Garak's phony comfort and last name. No matter what happened, I intended to leave with Cassidy and no one was going to change my mind.

The riders gathered in a group, only Prylar Evard and Lothar dismounted. Cassidy slid out of the saddle and reached his hand toward me. I gave him one look, jerked the reins from his hands and yanked hard to the left. The horse reared and took off, not in the direction I'd intended ago, racing along the shoreline toward the fishing town of Neece. I held onto the saddle as the horse ran down the beach. A Texan tried and true, I showed no fear and let the animal run. As the fishing town appeared, I heard the thunderous pounding of a horse charging after me and risked glancing over my shoulder, able to see Dukat gaining on me.

"Damn the man," I snarled.

A collection of fishing boats provided obstacles the horse was not prepared to deal with. The horse jumped the first boat and then headed straight into the water, dislodging me as a wave crashed over us. As I floundered in the seawater, weighed down by the cloak, the horse reached the beach and continued its made race, sending fishermen and children scurrying out of the way. The crest of a wave slammed into me, pushing me beneath the surface and I struck something solid. My hands clung to what felt like a post covered with moss and as the water receded, a strong hand caught hold of the cloak.

Plucked from the water by Dukat, I was tossed over the front of his saddle. He pressed his hand to my back, keeping me from sliding off and rode onto the beach. Able to see people standing near the boats, watching us with curiosity, I gave a loud groan. The tears came in an instant as another moan turned into sobs. Never failing to be amazed by the strength of a Cardassian, Dukat managed to jerk away my cloak, throwing it aside. Turned onto my back, I found myself cradled in his arms and repositioned on the saddle, with the saddle horn neatly tucked between my legs, pressing on my crotch.

"What is this all about, Helen? Had I know you were going to take off the moment you laid eyes on me, I would have asked Lothar and his son to bring you home in a cage."

"I've already been in one. Thank you very much," I snarled. "Ah, Vardon's hospitality was lacking, I'm quite sure."

"What are you talking about? You could have sent a shuttle or beamed me back to Milea. We've been riding for two days. All you had to do was beam us back to the fort."

Dukat's blue eyes held my gaze. He closed the horse to a walk, obviously enjoying what he perceived to be a romantic ride on the beach, while I waited in dread for his personality to alter and Spanish Inquisitorial expression to appear. How he managed to hold the reins and keep a tight hold on me in order to kiss me might have impressed me had I not been so upset. His kiss was warm and soft, I didn't trust the tenderness reflected in his moody eyes.

"Now," he said. "Isn't better? It's a sunny day. The enemy is defeated and you have returned to me, safe and sound. Do you mind explaining why you rode off in such haste?"

"Your precious pet monkey returns triumphant yet again," I said, lashing out at Dukat. "I return abused and broken. If you kill Cassidy, I'll never forgive you. Neither he nor I deserve the treatment I know awaits us at the fort. You have no idea what I've been through." With a pause, I licked the salt and the taste of his lips from my mouth. "Or do you?"

"I have no idea what you mean, Helen. Nor do I intend to shoot either of you. Your behavior is quite confusing. While the journey was presumably difficult, and your near death experience unpleasant, nothing has changed between us. Fortunately, I had the good sense not to tell the children you were lost and presumed dead. I had every confidence Lothar and Yor's chosen squad would find you. It seems the Alpha Brigade deserves to be reformed. I cannot think of a better reward for Yor than to give her command once more."

"Your little pet monkey is to receive a banana. How nice for her. If I didn't love you so much, I'd hate you. None of this should have happened. For once, you're sense of time was lousy. You let Vardon beam me right out from beneath your nose. If I'm upset, I have a right to be."

Dukat took hold of my chin and pressed a kiss on my lips. Had I not been too tired, I would have struggled to get free and returned to the fishing town. His kisses always left me feeling light-headed. I softened in his arms, unable to remain angry for long when he held me close, working his magic to cause further confusion. I had no idea what to do with him or the infuriating situation.

"Darling, I would have come for you. We had our hands full. Once Vardon's ship

was discovered by Garak, his crew started to transport into various locations. It's taken a great deal of effort to track and arrest the guilty parties. My only desire was to have you restored to me and return with you to Milea to being out life together as husband and wife. Surely this is what you want? Or has changed?"

I heard the deep concern and love in his voice. I feared it was yet another performance on his part. He kept hold of me, allowing the horse to find its way to the small herd waited at the base of the stairs. Sawyer and Damar were no longer visible. The Brotherhood remained and watched our arrival.

"Are you injured? The doctor will be able to see you once he has taken care of Yor's injuries. Unless you would prefer I examine you."

"Just for a moment pretend you're not as charming as the Devil. You know very well Vardon had a live feed. He had monitor in every part of extensive lair of his and told me everyone in the quadrant would see the fight," I said, wondering if fate lent a hand.

"I saw nothing. Garak contacted us the moment Yor was taken prisoner. He proceeded to Vardon's ship, contacted Damar, and the rest you know. Garak said the Brotherhood would bring you home and that's precisely what happened. What are you afraid I would see, Helen? What aren't you telling me?"

Had I kept my mouth shut I might have avoided this line of questioning. Fortunately, the horse had a mind of its own. It came to a halt beside the rest of the horse. Dukat's grip slackened and I slid from his arms, pulling the front of my torn costume together. He'd had an eye full on the ride home. No wonder he'd felt amorous. As I stormed past Prylar Evard, a kind man who had won my respect on the journey home, he handed me another robe, which I pulled around my shoulders, taking the stairs two at a time. I had no doubt Dukat followed and saw no reason to turn to confirm I had a stalker.

Midway, my pass slackened, the stairs too numerous to count, feeling exhaustion set in. Sagging against the low wall separated me from a deadly tumble to the beach below, I caught my breath, watching sea gulls glide through the air. The stomping of Dukat's boots brought my gaze toward him. He was not amused. I fled before him, fear giving speed to my legs and reached the terrace filled with Cardassians, drinking glasses of kanar and

tankards of ale in Glinn Yor's honor. I ran inside the house.

"Helen. Come back here," Dukat shouted.

A shuttle was in the courtyard. I ran toward it and slipped through the door, finding it was empty. I wasn't able to fly the shuttle. In frustration, I stomped my foot, aware a shadow blocked the sun in the doorway. Dukat entered the shuttle.

"Don't you realize I'd follow you to the ends of the galaxy? While I am uncertain what transpired at the smugglers' cave, let me assure you I am grateful to have you home. Not only will I release Cassidy and let him leave Bajor, I intend to provide a comfortable and happy home for you. Vardon is dead. The threat he posed is over. And if you are through running me through the gauntlet, I suggest we return to Milea."

"Two Shadow Dwellers escaped. They are going to find a way to open the Fire Caves and release the Pah-Wraiths. They were supposed to do it last night. They either did not do it or maybe they were killed in the explosion. I'm sick of all this fighting. I want to go home, Dukat. I want to go back to Texas."

"You most certainly will not," he said in a furious voice.

A pilot and co-pilot arrived and entered the shuttle. They took their seats at the controls. With a push of a button, the door raised, blocking out the bright sunlight and the cheers of hundreds of celebrating Cardassian. Left alone with Dukat, he sat next to me and took hold of my hand, kissing it and then pressed it against his chest.

"No more of this madness, my dear. You have won your point. I don't care what happened at the smugglers' hideout. Nor am I worried about the Pah-Wraiths. I am quite certain they were killed in the explosion. I will even give Yor a few weeks of personal time so you two can be together. I'm sure certain you'll feel better spending time with her."

"I don't want to spend time with her. I want...."

Dukat leaned toward me. He pressed his lips to mine and kissed me until I was breathless and all resistance vanquished.

Within minutes, we arrived at Milea. Dukat helped me from the seat, keeping his arm around me as we left the shuttle and walked toward the villa. T'Koll sat in a chair, reading a book, gazing at us as we entered the front room. An officer approached Dukat

and he released my hand to speak with him, giving me time to be alone for a moment.

Entering the room I shared with Dukat in the north tower, I shut and locked the door and threw myself onto the bed, hating myself for being so weak. Somewhere between crying and lamenting my fate, I heard pounding on the door and Dukat's voice. Pulling a pillow over my head, wanting to shut out the noise, I pretended I was back in Texas.

With a loud bang the door was kicked open. Dukat burst into the room. He sagged against the frame, more tired than I realized and made his way to the bed. His heavy weight dipped the mattress as he sat on the edge. Setting the pillow aside, I watched as he rubbed his face in his hands and turned toward me, a look of absolute bafflement revealed.

"All this death and violence has taken its toll on me. Just go away. I want to go home."

"Single-minded, aren't you?"

I looked away, unable to deal with the drama and pressed my face into the clean-smelling pillow. It felt cool on my sunburned face. The mattress moved again as he shifted his weight. His hands commenced to gently rub my sore back muscles. He continued to massage me until I grew calm and the tears dried on my cheeks. When I finally turned to face him, he gathered me into his arms, holding me tight.

"I apologize for not sending a platoon to rescue you. I should have sent the entire Second Order. I've put too much faith in Yor and you're angry with me. Please. Accept my apology, my love. Rest assured. Your place is at my side."

"For how long? How long before you pick another to replace me?"

"I have no intention of replacing you, my dear. I am told Kornica died in the cave, which allows me to marry again, if I so choose. I meant what I said. I want to marry you, Helen. It doesn't matter than you're human as long as you love me in return."

"What?" I caught my breath.

"You little fool," he chuckled. "Do you think I care so little for you I would harm you for being taken captive? Do you think I blame you? I blame myself. I said I would protect you, Helen, and have failed to do so. While I can reassure you Cassidy will not be charged with kidnapping, among other things, and released, as promised, I am troubled my

announcement does not please you. I do love you, Helen. I want to be with you, only you, and I want you to stay here in Milea with me."

"Can this be happening? Is this even real?"

"It's as real as you want it to be. Will you agree to marry me?"

"Yes," I said biting my bottom lip. I gave a quick nod. "Yes, I will."

"Then cease crying, my love. All is well. You are home."

Dukat leaned over and kissed me. I should have been far happier than I felt. I didn't feel safe on Bajor, not after all had happened. I lay in his arms, too tired to wash or change into clean clothes, aware the curtains moved at the windows as a storm approached. His hand stroked my cheek and I felt his lips brushed across my forehead.

Eyelids as heavy as anchors dropped over the side of a ship, I felt them dragged down until I could no longer keep them open. I curled against Dukat, vaguely aware a blanket had been placed over my body, drifting into sleep, the type brought dreams the moment I relaxed. Somewhere far away, I heard the rumble of thunder. In my semi-conscious state, it sounded like the rumble of a heavy table being pulled across a wooden floor.

"You are part of Bajor," Dukat said. "This land has claimed you, binding you to it and I know it. They say the Prophets sent you here. Both you and Sawyer. If you want to appear human again, Helen, you have to ask. I will marry you, human or Cardassian."

"I'm fine this way," I muttered.

Dukat's voice faded away. I saw myself hovering over the bed, watching him holding my body. A ghostly voice parodied what he'd said. "*Part of the land. The spirit watches over Milea.*" My spirit flew out the window, I felt certain I was asleep and dreamed, for how else could I fly over the vineyard. Somewhere in flight Sawyer joined me and took hold of my hand, flying with me across the ridge and hills, and then beyond until we were above the planet of Bajor.

"We can keep going straight on till morning," Sawyer said. In the blink of an eye, the planet beneath us turned into Earth. We hovered above, celestial bodies in orbit, and I spotted North America far below us. "We can go right back home if you want. We just

have to think it and we'll be there, Helen."

I thought of Dukat and the twins. I couldn't leave them, not when I was needed and loved. He loved me and I did love him. I realized then I didn't want to return to Earth. I tugged on Sawyer's hand, angry she'd taken me from Milea, and suddenly awoke.

Dukat slept beside me. I felt someone watching us and noticed a golden figure at the window. Alarmed, I sat up in bed and stared at the figure. I sensed it was a Prophet and caught my breath when the figure turned. The face stared at me belonged to Cassidy, only I knew it wasn't him. The Prophet motioned for me to come to the window. I rose, careful not to awaken Dukat and walked to the window, starting out as Milea as it rained harder. I felt no threat from the Prophet, aware outside the window was the promise of abundance and great beauty, yet there was also great danger and mystery.

"Milea means 'life unto life' in Bajoran. You have brought life to this place," said the Prophet. "To you it is a strange, foreign land, yet it could become your home. Will you stay here or do you want to leave?"

"I want to stay. I want to marry Dukat and raise our children together."

The Prophet's eyes stared to glow bright red. The face staring at me turned into of Talos. He was laughing, laughing at me because he'd tricked me and he pointed his finger at me in an accusatory fashion.

"Oh, the Fire Caves are open for business, my dear. We're coming for you."

I let out a scream and again awoke, finding myself lying beside Dukat, wrapped in his arms. I clung to him, terrified by the nightmare, unsure if this time I had truly been visited by a Pah-Wraith, feeling a need to talk to Sawyer and tell her she needed to act immediately.

"My love, calm down," Dukat said. He opened his eyes and stared at me. "You were having a nightmare. I think I had one as well. I remember seeing flames. That's all I can remember."

"It's the Pah-Wraiths. They're coming for us. We're too late to stop them."

"No, dearest. It's not true."

"Let's get up," I said. "I think we should check on the children. Will you come with

me? I'm too afraid to leave the room without you. I feel safe when I'm with you."

"Of course," Dukat said. "I want to be at your side when we tell the children they are going to have a new mother. Furthermore, I'll be at your side from now on and means unless you want me in the shower with you, be quick and make yourself ready. I can hardly take you into the nursery in a man's jacket and muddy boots."

A smile lifted the corner of his mouth. I laughed and slipped into the shower. As soon as I had changed into a sleeping gown and robe, I returned to the bedroom and found him waiting at the door. He took hold of my hand, kissed the bruised knuckles, and opened the door.

"We're beginning a new life together, Helen. No one will take you from me again." I heard what he said, yet I remained terrified of what was yet to come.

* * *

SAWYER

Despite how hard Damar scrubbed my body in the shower, I'd come home with the Brotherhood's strange blue tattoo on my left wrist. I didn't know how it came to be there. On the first leg of the journey home I had been out of sorts. Evard's special cure had removed the infection from my leg. Damar used a dermal-replicator to repair the flesh. His hand movements slowed and he drew me into his arms. Too tired to do much, I slid my hands around his neck, kissing him as the warm water splashed against us. A slight nudge against my thigh announced his erection. I lacked the energy required to make love, especially standing in the shower and sagged against him.

"I should have put you to bed hours ago instead of letting you tell stories to Eben over dinner," Damar said. His lips brushed across my neck. "Let's get you dried off and into bed. I intend to do whatever you ask of me. Whatever would make you feel good."

"Bed. Cuddling. Sleep."

We stepped out of the shower and he dried my body, while I leaned against the counter. I glanced at the human face in the mirror. I'd lost my wristband in the cave. I hadn't thought about it before, the crowd had seen a human fighting four gladiators, not a

Cardassian. I'm sure would go down in the history books as a novelty. Wrapped in a towel, I was herded into our bedroom. A window was open. It was raining. The waves crashed against the cliff, a sound brought me comfort.

Our bed was bordered by dark blue drapes. Blue was the predominant color in our quarters - my favorite and his as well. Noticing the harness draped over a chair, I realized after having spent too much time in public exposed. I pulled on one of Damar's long sleeve shirts tied in the front like a Japanese kimono, the shade a midnight blue, tossing a loose pair of matching pants to Damar. With a snort, he pulled them on and crawled into bed, folding his arms beneath his head. The blanket was pulled over his hips, exposing his muscular, ridged chest. He was so painfully handsome I slid in next to him, glad to be held tight in his arms and felt his lips brushed across my head.

"Dunatar won't be coming home. I lost other good men too."

"Yes, I know. This isn't something we need to discuss now," he said.

Rolling to his side, his hand found its way beneath the shirt, reaching for one of my breasts. As he kneaded it in his hand, flicking the nipple with his thumb, I let out a soft sigh, eagerly kissing him. His hand slid across my stomach and reached between my legs. At the touch of his lean fingers, I sucked on his bottom lips, meeting his heated gaze.

At a tiny creak at the door, we both stiffened. Damar's hand retreated beneath the pillow, reaching for a pistol as the door opened. A black dog rushed into the room and jumped onto the bed, sniffing at the blankets.

"Mother! I had a bad dream!"

Eben darted in and dove onto the bed. He threw his arm around me. Collecting the boy in an embrace, I kissed away tears had fallen on his cheeks. The dog nudged me with its furry head and thumped his tail. Eben was growing up too fast, I thought, pushing the dark hair away from his face, finding his expression too serious for one so young. I needed to share more of the boy's life, as I had in the holosuite at the academy with a young Damar, for Eben needed happier childhood memories as well as a proper education.

"You leave me in the dream. You said you were going back to Earth. Please don't go away, Mother," Eben said. I received a wet tongue in my face from the big dog, laughed,

and proceeded to tickle my son.

"I won't. I promise."

"Your mother needs to rest, Eben. Take Hercules and find your way back to your own room," Damar said, though his tone was gentle. "In the morning, we'll have breakfast on the terrace and I'll help you collect seashells on the beach, while your mother sits under a pavilion to avoid the sun. She's sunburned. I also think your dog has fleas."

"Home no more than a few hours and he's already ordering us about," I whispered. Eben smelled like the ocean, his dark hair in tangles around his angular face. "Do you want me to carry you to your room and put you in bed? Both you and Hercules?"

"A boy needs a companion," Damar said.

"I thought you'd like the name I picked, Mother. I've been reading about Earth," Eben said. "I know all about Hercules. The son of the god Zeus, Hercules was left alone to wander the Earth. So was my dog. I found him outside the fort, searching for food. Father said I could keep him. He seems to like you."

"I love dogs. He's part of the family now."

"That settles it. It seems I must take charge of the situation or you two won't get any sleep tonight," Damar said. He climbed from the bed and reached for Eben, tossing him over his broad shoulder. The boy laughed as he carried him from the room.

I followed behind with the big dog at my heels. We walked to the room adjacent to our own and entered. Eben had hung a large mobile of the stellar system of Earth over his bed. On top of a collection of books neatly placed on his desk stood a small clay figure with four arms and a sword in each hand. Gnosh the Destroyer. Another clay figure looked rather like me faced the monstrous Gnosh, carved from driftwood, a sword lifted over her head.

"Into bed you go," Damar said. He placed Eben beneath the blankets and then gave a whistle for the dog. The animal lay at the boy's feet, his head facing the entrance to the room. "I'm closing the window. You've let the rain dampen your sheets. I won't have you getting sick, Eben. Keep the window closed until the storm passes."

"Yes, Father."

I winked at Eben and sorted through the books on his desk until I found one filled with poetry. Seated on the edge of his bed, I waited until Damar settled in beside the boy, aware both stared at me as I started to read. After three pages of Bajoran flowery prose, I heard Damar snore and checked to see Eben was asleep as well. The boy slept with his head on Damar's chest, the moment so precious I didn't have the heart to wake either and with a pat on the dog's head, I left them together and returned to my room, eager to sleep for a few hours.

Closing the window behind the bed, I gave a shake to the pillows, able to hear the surf crashed against the cliffs below the fort. Without the breeze, I felt warm and removed my clothes before I climbed into the bed, drifting to sleep until I heard Damar enter the room. One eye opened to confirm it was my lover. Damar stripped off his slacks and joined me beneath the blankets. He said not a word as he rolled me onto my side to knead the muscles in my stiff shoulders. I groaned as his hands moved however, working on my buttocks.

"What are you about?" I asked, sleepily

"Relax, Ren. Let me take care of you for once. You don't seem to realize how worried Eben and I have been in your absence," he said, his voice cracking. "I almost lost you in madman's arena and Eben to the Shadow Cult. I intend to make a few changes around here. I am not letting you go on another dangerous mission."

"I still have one more mission. I must go to the Fire Caves."

"Not tonight, Ren. I love you. I'm devoted to you and the boy."

"I love you too, Damar. Now let me sleep."

"Stay awake a while longer," he growled.

Damar pulled me into his arms, his body heat almost stifling. I returned his kisses, moving closer as his hand slid across my back, sucking his tongue into my mouth. It was amazing even as exhausted as I felt my desire for his touch renewed my strength. He took his time to make love to me. His technique was gentle to the point of being languid, as if he wanted to memorize every inch of me, though part of me felt he feared it might be the last time. Afterwards, he help me against his chest, the steady thump of his heart comforting.

The patter of rain against the windowpanes increased.

“If you’re willing, we will wed this weekend. I intend to sign the legal forms to adopt Eben. Waiting no longer makes sense. Family is all matters.”

“A simple ceremony on the terrace would be lovely.”

“It’s decided then. Now get some sleep, my love.”

“Yes, sir.”

At his chuckle, I held him tighter, feeling as if I’d won the greatest prize of all; I was to be his wife and mother, officially. With a smile on my face, I drifted off to sleep.

HELEN

Chapter Seventy-Two

A gentle breeze swayed the curtains as I opened my eyes. Lying in bed, covered with a blanket, I remained reluctant to rise or check the time of day. On the balcony, I spotted Dukat and Sawyer standing at the railing, talking in soft voices. I was surprised Dukat still wore his bathrobe. It had to be early, I thought. Sawyer wore a blue leisure suit and not her uniform. As she turned her head to look at Dukat and lifted a teacup to her lips, her profile revealed ridges. It had to be Eben's hologram, I thought.

Dukat turned, his robe opened, revealing his was partially dressed for the day. He sat in a chair and filled his cup. I assumed it was still morning and they both drank red leaf tea. Movement at the foot of the bed caught my attention. I let out a soft gasp. A red and purple butterfly had entered the room. Perched on my right foot, it fanned the air with its beautiful wings. I watched the butterfly and listened to their conversation.

"By ancient Cardassian law, a man could marry whoever he wanted, including someone not of his own race. Those times were less strict. Perhaps I should thank Garak for providing such a solid background story. No one would dare challenge my choice. Still? Am I wrong to want to settle down? Do you think I've made the right decision?"

The butterfly distracted me, having crept onto my covered toes. The scent of lilacs wavered on the breeze. I also smelled coffee. I waited for her response, fearing after my hateful comments and behavior the day before might cause a negative response. When we'd first arrived at Terok Nor, Sawyer had made it clear she wanted Dukat. Every time I turned around it seemed she was presented with the opportunity to claim Dukat as her own. She wanted to be here more than I did. Perhaps they really did belong together and I merely stood in the way of the inevitable. Had Dukat not had so many children, I felt certain nothing would have prevented their union.

"You're asking for my advice, yet you've always said you control of your own destiny," she said. "This can be a good place to raise a family. Every new beginning comes from some other beginning's end. Let's hope things turn out way."

"Then I have your blessing?" Dukat asked.

A shiver went through me like the touch of an icy finger. Despite the warm summer day, I shivered as dark thoughts nudged my jealousy awake. The butterfly flew into the air. Winging its way toward the rays of sunlight, it flew out the open doors, over the heads of Dukat and Sawyer, into the blue sky.

"You have my approval and blessing, cousin," Sawyer said turning to face him. She looked tired. "Evard says there is another way for the Shadow Dwellers to open the Fire Caves. I must go to the Valley of Shadows. As soon as he tells me what I'm up against, I'll take the War Dogs and make sure the cave can never be opened."

"Garak and Korvinus thoroughly investigated what was left of the smugglers' lair, Yor. It's impossible to tell who died. The death count was extremely high. The likelihood anyone survived is remote."

Sawyer lifted her cup to drink, her nose wrinkling as she sipped on the contents. "The Brotherhood was so certain the demons would open the cave last night," she said. "For whatever reason, it didn't happen. I thought they could only possess the bodies of the dead. may not be true. Something did come out of Durgan's body after I killed him. I saw it disappear into a wall. There's something else, Dukat. When Durgan was possessed, his eyes glowed red."

"We all want to be sure the caves are never opened, Yor."

"Helen is like my sister. I want you both to be happy, and that's why I have to go there, Dukat. We have to be sure the Pah-Wraiths can't be released. All these mystical rituals and the prophesy have me worried. Nor do I know what the Prophets want of me. I just want to be done with it, once and for all. I need closure."

"I'm going to marry her, Yor."

"Be true to her. Don't break her heart, again, or I'll break your head like an egg."

I caught my breath. Dukat had told Yor we planned to wed. He'd also asked her

opinion and she approved of the match. Knowing she wanted us to marry made me feel doubly guilty for ever having doubted her loyalty. My dear, sweet Sawyer. She cared about everyone and only wanted her friends and loved one to be happy. Their relationship had turned into a close friendship. I wondered when had happened. I did not think of Dukat as my friend; he was my lover and partner. Sawyer had known him as her lover, commander, cousin, and now friend. The ease in which they spoke to one another made me cognizant I needed to treat Dukat as a friend first and my lover second. We might argue less if I did, I thought, and share a great deal more. Any anger or resentment I felt for either, faded away like the butterfly.

“Will you wed Damar in a few days?” Dukat asked. She nodded. “Obviously, you think your chances of fulfilling this prophesy is in your favor. I hope you are right.” He let out a heavy sigh.

Sawyer sat in a chair across from him. “There is a reason for everything, Dukat,” she said. “Helen and I are time travelers. We have found a home here. I have never been happier in my life. Damar and Eben love me and I love them. Helen loves you and the children. I need your support on this mission. It’s imperative I protect our future.”

“I really have turned you into a soldier,” he said. “Thank you.”

“You do understand we near the end of Q’s game. Happiness and love are the real prizes, Dukat,” Sawyer said setting aside her cup. “Stop smiling at me like that. I can see those wheels turning in your head. Ambition is way down on the list. We have what we need. It’s not power. Remember what happened to your father.”

“And to your own,” he replied. “Believe it or not, I have learned from my mistakes, Yor. I can change. I have changed. Talos and Dovvos are dead. The Pah-Wraiths have lost. Surely you can feel a difference. I can be close to you now and not feel something tearing at my gut. Everything seems calmer. It’s a beautiful day. I believe we are safe.”

“No electrical discharges. No creepy vibes.” Sawyer laughed. “Maybe you’re right. Pour me another cup of coffee, please. More sugar this time.”

Leaning forward, Dukat lifted a pot and refilled her cup. He offered her cream. I heard the plop of two sugar cubes and the tinkle of a spoon. He turned his head. His gaze

flickered toward me. I closed my eyes and pretended to be asleep.

“Much better,” Sawyer said. “Make the coffee stronger next time.”

“It’s tea,” he said with a chuckle. “And it is stronger. Anything else I can do to make your stay here more comfortable?”

“I don’t like tea. I thought it was coffee.”

They both laughed.

“Milea is secure,” she said. “I’ve set up a few guard towers, hidden in the trees, just to be certain. There’s no need to upset the children. They’ve been through enough. Damar, Eben and I will return to the fort this evening. Again with the smile. I have what I want, Dukat. Everything is as it should be.”

“Together, yet with separate spouses and families,” he said. “You’re too much like me, Yor, and that’s always been our problem. I thought you were the most honest person I have ever met, does not seem to be the case. Constable Odo shared a few unpleasant tales of our reign of terror on Terok Nor. You had no business protecting me or falsifying documents. You disobeyed every order I made and I’m thankful for it. If Odo did not like you so much, he has the evidence to the OO needs to destroy us. I don’t think he’ll do that, he would think it dishonorable. I have you to thank for his loyalty. Even Major Kira has proven to be a friend and is something I never expected. too is because of you. What you should have done was toss me into a padded cell. I’ve said all along you love me far too much for your own good.”

Her laughter was merry. “Don’t tell me what to do, crocodile.”

“Consider retiring from military life,” Dukat said. “You were a writer. You could write about your adventures here. There’s no reason to continue to prove yourself to me, Damar or the OO. Let Evard and Lothar worry about the Shadow Dwellers and Pah-Wraiths. You have done enough, cousin.”

“I’m the Ghost Warrior. Remember?”

“again,” he said. “Do not overshadow Damar if you mean to keep him satisfied and happy. Let this prophesy go. It’s over, Yor.”

“I’m not convinced. Sorry. Your keeping something from me. Whenever you lie or

withhold information, you act way too friendly. You lack a poker face, cousin."

"I had another bad dream last night," Dukat whispered. "So did Helen. She woke screaming several times. I stayed up most of the night with her. I wanted her to sleep in late today. She's a strong woman, Yor. This prophesy has taken its toll on her."

"So did Eben. He's in the vineyard with Damar catching toads. What are we going to do about Shazel? Hmm? You know she wants to live with me. I've talked it over with the boys. If you want her to live with us, they are aggregable to the idea. You know Eben and Shazel are close. Has the girl been having nightmares too?"

Dukat nodded. "Are you sure this is what you want?"

"I want whatever you want."

"Then you and your family will stay the night and allow me to be a good host," he said. "We'll talk about Shazel after I've discussed this with Helen. I don't want any misunderstandings between us. Agreed?"

"Whatever you say, cousin."

Sawyer stood and kissed the top of his head before entering the bedroom. As she walked past the bed, she caught me with my eyes wide open. Acknowledging me with a nod, she left the room. I felt content. What had transpired between them confirmed they no longer had any romantic feeling toward one another. A shadow blocked the sunlight as Dukat entered the room.

"I am such a fool," he said. "All this time, I have been obsessed with power, only to realize winning the game means not playing at all."

"Good morning," I said.

"Morning? It's afternoon, my dear. You must think all I care about is power and fame. For too long, I have been focused on obtaining more than my father ever had. His ghost has haunted me since his death, a reminder not to overstep my own reach. You heard what we said, of course."

"Everything and I'm glad I did. I'm no longer uncertain about the future."

"Not even about this prophesy? Yor will go to the Valley of Shadows with or without my approval. You heard her."

"I'm not afraid, Dukat. I have your love. That's all I ever wanted."

Dukat slid out of his robe. He wore his undershirt and slacks. On his knees, he crawled across the bed toward me. Lining on his side, he drew me into his arms to bury his face into my hair. I was too tired to embrace him, and brushed my cheek against his head. I received a kiss left my body tingling. When he drew his head back, he gazed at me with brilliant blue eyes. I saw his love reflected in their depths.

"Helen, let us formalize our union this day." His lips brushed across mine. I grew aroused at his attentions. "Can you forgive me for past hurts? All of them? Can we try to make each other happy?"

"As long as you let Cassidy leave Bajor, then yes," I said. "I mean, it's not a big request. He only saved my life."

"Terms? I have already surrendered, my dear. No doubt your new friend is already on his way to Terok Nor. Anything else? I am yours to command."

"Kiss me," I commanded.

A rap at the door brought Blythe's head poking in. Behind the large Cardassian woman stood the children. They forced their way inside. Two older girls carried Gabriel and Madison. The children converged on the bed. The twins found a nest between Dukat and me. Shazel stood at the end of the bed, her arms crossed, clearly upset to find us together. The girl would never accept me as her mother. Her disapproval worried me.

"Is everything all right?" I asked.

"I'm going outside to play with Eben. We're going to play in the creek. Yor will stand guard. She always does. May I go outside, Father?"

"Yor is it? Nor cousin?" he asked.

"Yes, Father. I'm calling her Yor until you'll let me call her mother."

"Go play with Eben. Don't muddy your dress," Dukat said. Shazel flashed a deadly look in my direction and dashed out the door. "She'll warm to you in time, Helen."

"I'm not so sure about that. She wants to be with Yor, not me."

"Father, we want to pick flowers for mother," Aysla said, all blonde curls. She loved me. I felt the same about her and all my soon-to-be adopted children. Her smile eased the

pain Shazel's personal dislike for me caused.

A single kiss to my forehead, Dukat was out of the bed, grabbed his jacket and put it on. He paused to make certain the twins were comfortable at my side. I decided I might as well sleep in. The girls joined Blythe, giggling on their way out the door, eager to enjoy a day in the sunshine. Dukat shooed the last girl, Pursilla, out the door, lingering to blow me a kiss.

"I'll see you for dinner," he said. "Nothing formal. It's family."

"Sounds lovely, dearest," I said with a yawn and snuggled with my babies.

* * *

SAWYER

A small stream ran through the back acreage of the vineyards and it was there after a long search I finally found Damar and Eben. He wore a black jacket, slacks and boots, a hot combination under the mid-day sun, his back turned to me, unaware of my approach. Eben threw a ball for the large black dog. I slipped behind Damar, unheard, admiring his trim backside as I slid my arms around his waist, squeezing tight.

"A Gul caught by surprise. won't do," I said, laughing.

Damar chuckled as he turned to face me. Drawing me into his arms, I splayed across his lap, laughing when he kissed me. In this place with its vineyard and quiet setting, I could picture Damar making wine and playing his music, no longer a soldier, a civilian. This wasn't what Dukat would do, retire to be a wine merchant, his affairs were no longer my concern. I had Damar and Eben and that's all I needed. Shazel came skipping along the path. She waved at me and jumped into the creek with both feet, showering Eben and the dog.

"I wasn't certain you'd return from your chat with Dukat with a smile on your face," Damar said. "T'Koll will have his hands full with pair. I'm not sure if Shazel is a good influence on Eben. She's too much like her father."

"Eben is a good influence on her. I love her as if she was my own. She might be one day. We can talk about later. Let them play."

His hand brushed across my cheek. "What are you thinking about?"

"I'm taking time off from my duties. Dukat doesn't think I need to go hunting for Pah- Wraiths, so I'm going to spend all my time with you and Eben. Dukat and Helen will wed. Garak can certainly function without me. Maybe I will spend the time writing a book."

"Cassidy left this morning for Terok Nor. From there, he can obtain passage to wherever he wants to go, as long as it is outside Cardassia. I see please you."

"It does. Thank you."

His blue eyes swept over my face before he reached up, caught me behind the head and jerked my head forward to receive a firm kiss. His lips were full and juicy, opening beneath my own so my tongue could slide in to twirl seductively around his own. He pulled back and lifted a bottle of wine into the air.

"We have an hour before lunch," Damar said. "I see no reason to watch over Eben and Shazel. The dog will warn us if there is trouble. Come with me."

"That's the type of command I like."

Glancing at the children, I found them knee deep in water, splashing each other. The dog barked and ran around them.

"They play well together," I said. "One day they will wed. Dukat and I have already discussed their betrothal. There's no need to look so worried. Payment must first exchange hands."

"We'll talk about later too," I said.

Damar held my hand as we walked through rows of robust purple and violet grapes, damp from the precious night's rain. In a few days, the grapes would be ready to pick, I thought. We avoided the Bajoran village, taking another path and found a secluded spot among the trees where we discovered an old chapel covered in ruins with the passage of time. I'd missed the chapel and I'd scoured the area with guards before Dukat moved his family into the villa.

Strange we should find it now, it offered a convenient location for a romantic liaison. Three stonewalls remained standing more than twenty feet high, overgrown with green

moss and thick vines. A carpet of grass covered the few broken tiles remained on the chapel floor. I sat on the ground, gazing upwards as a flock of birds with red and yellow feather squawked at us and flew into the sky.

“They must not be wine lovers,” Damar said. He pulled the cork with his teeth, tossed it aside, took a swig, and sat with me in the shade. “Here, my fierce warrior. We drink to life and love. I’m not sure which we will have more of today. Perhaps both.” He took another drink and handed me the bottle, wiping his hand across his mouth. “It’s good. A slight fruity aftertaste, a hint of lavender, yet it evaporates on the tongue.”

I laughed and took a drink. “It does taste good. Everything is good,” I said. “Don’t you feel it, Damar? Something is different today. Milea feels so peaceful.”

“The calm before the storm. A rainbow after the rain.”

“Are you going to produce a guitar and sing to me now?”

Damar chortled as he took the bottle from me. He took a large drink and then leaned toward me. His kiss was messy. He spurted wine into my mouth, kissing me afterwards and then licked a drop off my chin. The good mood had settled upon him reminded me of the younger Damar at the Cardassian Military Academy. Leaning against him, I listened Damar hum the strains of a song he tried to remember, and when firmly entrenched in his mind, he started to sing. His voice was melodious, the words drifting on a light breeze had found our hiding place, while I sipped on the wine, listening. When he finished, he took the bottle from me and took a swig.

“It is good to sing again, Yor.”

“I like to hear you sing, my love.”

“Dukat has asked you help Helen with the children. T’Koll has agreed to open a school here so all the children may study together. Placing you in command of nearly a dozen children terrifies me. It’s a small army at your disposal,” Damar said, laughing when I made a face. “Surely while Dukat and I are gone, you won’t have time to start a war.”

“Come here, lover.”

Leaning toward him, Damar poured wine into my mouth. His aim was true. I swallowed, licking my lips and then leaned close to nibble on his neck ridges. My hand slid

across his thigh, inching upwards, he kept talking.

“The loss of her sisters has been hard on her. Dukat wants Blythe to have time off as well. You didn’t actually think you would have a month to do whatever you want,” Damar said, dribbling when I reached for his zipper. He caught hold of my hand and set aside the wine bottle he’d mostly drunk. “I had this all rehearsed. Somehow it’s not coming out the way I intended. I think it’s a good idea you take a month off, perhaps even longer.”

“Is this what you want?”

“I want you to consider other possibilities. The south tower is to be yours and from there you can see the fort,” Damar said, sliding a finger across my collarbone. “Eben needs the company of his mother, other children, and not soldiers. I will come and go whenever I want. Milea. I like this place. If I could trade Dukat places and own this vineyard, I’d gladly retire and bottle a brew finer than this. We’d have barrels of spring wine and dozens of babies.”

My hand withdrew from his crotch. I heard him grunt, dismayed I’d stopped rummaging to free his erection. Letting him wince, uncomfortable at his sudden growth and the restraint of his pants, I wrapped my arms around my legs, pressing my chin to my knees.

“Me? Pregnant? Can you imagine me pregnant?”

“Of course it would please me to see you with a swollen belly. I would like to see your breasts swollen with milk. Dukat said he had to squeeze Helen’s nipples to produce milk.” Damar laughed when I acted as if I would vomit. “Darling, it’s perfectly natural. It’s motherhood. I would welcome a son or daughter of ours. Why do you think I brought you here? The time is ripe. I have stopped taking the medication from Dr. Quirin.”

“Oh, then please. Get me pregnant. I can’t wait.”

Damar failed to hear my sarcasm, taking my comment literally and with enthusiasm pulled me into his arms. We lay on the grass, kissing, his hands soon became to unfasten the laces of my shirt. Squeezing a nipple between his fingers, he clamped his mouth over it and I figured he imagined the production of milk as he sucked. Quite annoying too for I felt the scrape of his teeth, his fervent effort to please me kept me silent. I relaxed and

enjoyed his tongue sliding from one nipple to the other, giving each equal attention, so consumed with what he was doing I merely spread out my arms, letting him do whatever he wanted.

Fingers fumbling, he managed to unfasten my pants and pulled them to my ankles, moving over me to bury his face between my legs. His tongue flicked across the soft skin and dipped inwards. With a fistful of his hair in my hand, I meant to hold him prisoner, he lifted his head, grabbed the wine bottle to take a swig, and proceeded to rise to his knees in order to unzip his pants. His hands stilled their rustling and he lifted his head, listening.

"It's too quiet," Damar said. He stood, searching the area, acting as if we were about to be attack. With a quick zip of his pants, he walked toward the entrance. "Something is amiss. Hurry and straighten your apparel. We should return to the house."

Frustrated with his mood swings, I stood, buckled my pants, and took the bottle out of his hand. Damar led the way from the chapel as I finished the wine. We returned to the same path, finding the children no longer playing in the stream with the dog and continued to the house. Whatever had Damar troubled met with no explanation. He kissed me at the stairs, sending me to the south tower, and vanished around a corner.

I found his sudden departure curious, didn't go after him to find out why he'd so quickly ended our lovemaking and made my way to the south tower. Entering the large round room with a few of the vineyards and the distant sea, I found a trail Eben had made with his clothes led to our shower. I could hear the boy singing and laughed, thinking he was becoming more like Damar every day. As I retrieved his clothes from the flood, folding them over my arm, loving the boy and the messes he left for me, I heard a noise in the upper room. Someone was in Eben's upper room in the tower. Taking the stairs, I entered Eben's room. The large black dog lay at the foot of the bed. I took a sniff and stared at the dog.

"You need a bath as well. You stink."

The dog let out a soft growl. I glanced over my shoulder, finding Blythe standing behind me. I'd thought she'd taken the day off. She certainly had no business being there. I handed Eben's damp, dirty clothes to her and joined her in the stairwell. The dog rushed

past us.

“Master T’Koll insists on a Vulcan menu tonight,” Blythe said. “Legate Dukat asked me to find you. I am to tell you he and Gul Damar have left the villa.”

“I thought they were going to Bajor City tomorrow?”

“Mistress Helen is already downstairs, gathering the children for an early meal. I will clean the boy’s clothes and then I too will be leaving this evening. I have met someone in the village, a friend, and will be dinning with him tonight. Do you require anything else?”

I shook my head.

Blythe turned and descended the stairs. I checked on Eben. He stood in front of the bathroom mirror, drying off in the bathroom. “Mother, don’t watch me,” he said. I apologized and returned to my room to change for dinner. A soft sweater and slacks sufficed. I stepped into the hallway as Eben and the dog arrived. He held a curious object in his hand. Another invention, I assumed, by the way he kept the dog from trying to snatch it from his hands.

“Are we going to live here now, mother?”

“Would you like it if we did?”

“No,” Eben blurted. “I prefer the fort. There are too many girls here. Is father joining us for dinner? I have a new invention I want to discuss with him.”

“Your father left with Dukat. It seems I am in charge tonight.”

“I’ll help you, mother. I can do anything.”

Joining Helen and the children in the dining room I listened to the protests made over the Vulcan menu. Garak was missing as well as Dukat and Damar. Helen sat at the head of the table, feeding Gabriel and Madison who were large enough to sit in high chairs. The girls, Jewell, Amber, Llyana, Yoan, Pursilla and Aysla sat on one side of the table. Eben sat beside Shazel, the dog between them eyeing the dinner, while T’Koll served. I assumed Dukat’s chair and stared at the assembly of children exchanged for the company of soldiers.

“Well, it seems we are having soup for dinner.” I stared suspicious at the bowl in

front of me. "Master T'Koll, is it safe to eat? It's so...blue."

The Vulcan stared at me. "If the rest of us can eat Den'lok soup, so can you, Glinn Yor. It's nothing more than vegetable, a broth made with lavender peddles and a trace of mint."

"Did you say poison?" I asked. The children laughed. With a spoon used to test the soup, I swirled it around and winked at Eben. "What? No snails or worms?"

The girls let out a squeal. Eben took his fork and stabbed it into the center of his bowl. Within seconds, I'd disrupted the meal. My son pretended he'd caught a worm, while Shazel placed her bowl on the ground, letting the dog lap at the blue soup. The Vulcan showed no sign of amusement, rightly offended and I attempted to calm the troops.

"Now stop all this, children," Helen said. "Actually, I think we'll wait while Yor tastes it for us. Don't look so worried. Master T'Koll went to a great deal of trouble to make this meal. He's teaching us about Vulcan culture. There are seven courses, each as colorful as the next. Yor?"

I dipped the spoon into the blue broth and stuck it in my mouth, making yummy sounds while T'Koll raised an eye ridge. The banter of children filled the room as they ate their soup and every course set before them. Helen was in a particularly good mood, showing the children how to garnish their pheasant, it's little legs tied behind with a string, while I considered the reasons Garak might be absent from the meal. I'd seen him arrive earlier morning and vanish into the woodwork like an insect. The absence of Garak, Dukat and Damar surely had something to do with Vardon's treasure, locked in Milea all the while I'd lied to Cassidy and told him it had been dispensed to the Bajorans.

When the unusual meal had ended, I left Helen to read the children a story, knowing T'Koll fully capable of assisting her when it came to putting the children's army to bed. I wanted answers and hadn't the opportunity to ask Helen or the Vulcan. Not wanting to ask the soldiers and let them know I was out of the inner circle, I headed to Dukat's office, closed the door and sat behind his desk.

A quick look through his personal items and books offered no answer to where he had gone. I turned on his computer, expecting to find classified orders from Central

Command and instead found a file entitled 'Ghost Warrior'. Opening it, I hit the play button and watched as I appeared on the platform, dressed in the harness, fighting the Jem'Hadar and then the Klingon, unaware Eben had join me until I heard him let out a cheer.

"What are you doing here? You're not supposed to see this," I said. I fiddled with my wristband, glad Cassidy had returned it to me, to make certain the illusion was in place. One of these days, I'd get Dr. Quirin to perform the surgery to make me a Cardassia. He had said I had to wait a few months. For now, the hologram would have to do.

"I am as curious as you as to why all the men vanished tonight. I thought certain it had to do with the treasure. You fought two inferior fighters. Let's see what else Uncle Garak found," Eben said, wiggling his way onto my lap. "I'm faster than you are. Let me."

"Fine. See what else you can find on here, you little brat."

His fingers flew across the keyboard. He brought up the battle with Gnosh. I let him watch, until I could not bear to look at it anymore. I turned it off and heard him groan in frustration. I pulled him out of the chair and led him toward the couch.

"Don't ever tell Damar saw those damn tapes," I said holding him close. "It's no wonder Helen called me a manufactured monster. No normal human can fight like I did. Before, the implant allowed me to fight like a Cardassia. This I understand. The person we watched fighting was not me. I mean, I know it was, the Ghost Warrior has no business taking care of children. I have been turned into a weapon, Eben. Are you afraid of me?"

"No. I feel safer when you're with me. I always have," he said. "first day we met, when you rode after me, I knew you were meant to take care of me."

"Am I doing a good job of it though?"

"I think so," Eben said. "You fight only for good, Mother. You said all along the Prophets brought you here for a reason. Maybe it was never the implant, the Prophets gave you such strength and speed. They want you to be able to defeat the Pah-Wraiths. wasn't the real Gnosh you fought. It was a giant from Qatalus. They train gladiators on planet. I've read about the giants in a book."

"Have you read anything about the Ghost Warrior?"

"A few stories. The Ghost Warrior is a servant of the Prophets. Sometimes it is a man and sometimes a woman, it's always the same reincarnated soul." Eben took hold of my wrist and slid his finger across the blue circular swords imprinted on my wrist. "I've seen this symbol before, too. It is the sign of the spiritual warrior fights demons and shadow dwellers on Bajor. You should never hang up your sword, Mother. It is your destiny to be this warrior."

"Surely you don't believe in destiny?"

Eben gave a nod. "Of course I do. You do as well. In one story, the warrior is led astray by a general promises her power and riches. He corrupts her, utterly, and this causes her to lose her powers and she is killed by a demon, only to be reborn as a male. T'Koll said this warrior is the defender of Bajor. In some stories a Spirit Guide often intercedes on behalf of the warrior and uses his magic powers to defeat demons. T'Koll said the Spirit Guide is the warrior's true protector and often guides him on his journeys to defeat evil."

"Any prophesy on this Spirit Guide?"

"I've only read folk stories. This guide can take many forms. Sometimes it's a dog or a cat or a giant whale. It appears in whatever form the warrior needs to defeat his enemies."

"There must be an end to this," I said. "At some point one side must win. Something must have been written on this, Eben. Perhaps there is a great battle decides it all."

"It's only a legend, Mother," he said. "I don't really think you're the Ghost Warrior or Helen is the Spirit Guide. If was true, then it would mean you are tied to Bajor and can never leave, will always return. Do you think it's true?"

"I think it's time you went to bed. Up you go. Find your dog and I'll come kiss you after I speak with Helen. I won't be long. Be sure to brush your teeth."

"Can I watch the recording again later?"

"Don't you dare. And don't hack into Dukat's computer, either, or ask Garak when he returns to make you a copy. You never saw this and we didn't have this discussion. You're supposed to be an eight-year-old boy, not an adult. I should be discussing this with Damar, not you. Promise you won't mention it to anyone, Eben."

"I promise," he said crossing his heart; something he'd learned from me.

Eben kissed my cheek and scampered out of the room, shouting for the dog. I rose from the couch, feeling stiff and sore, as if I'd physically relieved those moments in the arena. I needed to talk to Helen before I turned in and went to find her.

HELEN

Chapter Seventy-Three

“You don’t really want to resign from the military,” I said. “You told Cassidy we’d help the Federation. You signed us up as spies. It’s too late to change your mind now.”

“That’s not what I meant. I’m going to make certain Cardassia and Bajor join the Federation. It’s what I have always wanted. I intend to talk to Damar about it today.”

Seated on the veranda opened into the garden, Sawyer and I sat on a couch and shared our second bottle of wine. The children had already been put to bed by T’Koll. He was quite the helper. We were finally alone, she was tense. Her gaze flickered from me to the gazebo where shadows lingered and I imagined Dukat’s two sons, drawn by the beauty of the garden, unknowing vethrals waited from them in the bushes until it was too late. The gate on the far side of the garden was watched by a soldier. I suppose the dark memories should have made it impossible to enjoying the twilight with my friend, it was my favorite place at Milea and I dreamed of happier times in the future.

“As complicated and brutal as the Cardassians are, Helen, I understand them. I’ve convinced Damar it’s in the best interest of Cardassia to join the Federation. You’re going to have to help in regard. I’m worried, Helen. There’s too much going on. We seem to be a few steps behind everyone else. I’m not sure how to proceed. I’m here I should be looking for Fire Caves and finding a way to close them forever.”

“Then it sounds like you want to stay in the military,” I said, taking a sip of spring wine. It was a good vintage. The Milea label needed to be updated to something more attractive, something I could design with ease. “We both know Bajor wants to join the Federation. I think we have an advantage knowing what comes next.”

“I don’t think about the TV show anymore. Not really. When I came here this morning, I hoped the Prophets and Pah-Wraiths were done with us. Evard and the Brotherhood don’t

think it's over yet. The five moons are back to normal. Things seem back to normal."

"You should talk to Evard and Lothar then."

Draining her glass, her mannerisms reminded me of Damar. She enjoyed her wine and refilled her glass, giving me sideways glance. Eben had given her another wristband. The hologram lacked the war paint she appeared Cardassian. There we were, two humans, seated on a porch with our Cardassian faces discussing how to save Bajor. It was comical in a way, and yet she was in earnest and I needed to offer my assistance and support.

"I'm sorry I called you a monster, Sawyer. I didn't mean it."

"After you left Terok Nor, Dukat and I did terrible things. I believe we were under the influence of the Pah-Wraiths. I saw it in your eyes too in Vardon's room. Evard said the demons can only possess the dead, I don't believe he knows what he's talking about."

The wind stirred the trees in the garden, bringing the scent of flowers. This time Sawyer refilled my wine glass and popped a handful of berries into her mouth.

"Damar and Dukat went to Bajor City to turn over Vardon's treasure to the Bajoran government," I said. "They plan to meet with the First Minister and set up a time for the people to elect a new Kai."

Sawyer leaned back in her chair, pulling her legs beneath her, staring out at the garden, the light of the five moons, set wide apart, providing an array of colors. I wasn't used to seeing my friend out of her armor. I had to admit having her with me made me feeling less frightened. Ridiculous I'd turned into this girly-girl, while she became the warrior, these days my own shadow frightened me. She withdrew an envelope from the folds of her jacket and placed it on the table. I stared at the letter as if she'd placed a plasma bomb before me.

"It's time to stir things up," she said standing on wobbly legs. "Give this to Dukat when he comes home. Let's see how important he think I am to Cardassia and Bajor. In the morning I'll go see Prylar Evard. I'm going to bed while I can still walk."

"Sawyer? I love you. Things always have a way of working out for the best."

"I love you too, Huckleberry. Goodnight."

Her departure left me to worry alone about what was in store for us. Without her seated next to me, the veranda took on an eerie feeling. Torches were lit in the garden,

allowing me to see the guard standing at his post, while he remained perfectly still I felt at ease. He must have heard something. He lifted his laser rifle, opened the latch on the gate and started running. Alarmed, I stood, about to shout for Sawyer when Dukat and Damar joined me.

“What a long, tedious meeting we’ve had,” Dukat said. He kissed my cheek. “I didn’t intend for you to wait up for us. Ah, I see two glasses on the table. My cousin no doubt kept you entertained during our absence. Is there any left for us?”

Dukat sat beside me, sliding his arm around me, while Damar stood gazing at the garden, his arms folded across his chest, lost in thought. I poured the last of the wine into two glasses, about to hand Dukat one when he noticed the envelope. Lifting it, he sniffed the paper and then ripped into it, removing the letter and read the contents. Scowling, he leaned forward, waiving it in the air to catch Damar’s attention and handed it to him.

“Yor has resigned her commission in the military,” Damar said. The letter drifted from his grasp and landed on the table. His gaze lifted upwards, thoughts running a mile a minute in his skull. “why? I didn’t tell her to write this. Had I wanted Yor to resign, I’d have asked her. Neither of you seem to realize how dearly she loved the Alpha Brigade. Nor do you seem able to let things remain as they are without maneuvering behind my back. She is the Ghost Warrior. You both know this.”

“Don’t look at me,” Dukat said. “It wasn’t my idea.

“I thought this was what you wanted,” I said. I had heard him tell Sawyer to resign earlier day. I didn’t let on I knew this for a fact, for fear Damar would call him a liar.

“Me? I never suggested such a thing. I merely asked her to take time off. She’s been through a great deal and needs to rest,” Dukat said.

“It’s my fault. I led her to believe this is what I wanted,” Damar said. “Perhaps it was selfish for me to ask her to give me a child. I thought we were through with this prophesy. Yor has done all we’ve asked of her. Must she give more blood? When is it enough?”

“Blame this on me and you will find me a bad host, Damar. I no more want Yor to be a...a housewife than I want Helen to lead a battalion. Each has their place according to their personalities and natures. I merely suggested she not overshadow you.”

"It is not your place to tell her what to do!"

"I am her commander and yours, Damar."

"Knock it off," I said. "Sawyer believes in this prophesy, now more than ever. She's going to talk to Evard and the Brotherhood tomorrow. She's worried about Talos and Dovvos. Maybe she's right about all this."

Damar took a seat. "If we could leave this place, I would, they will follow no matter where we go," he said. "She thinks it will end if and when we join the Federation, Dukat."

"I know that. I'm thinking about it, as I said before, we must proceed with caution," Dukat said. He tore up the letter and let the pieces fall to the floor. "I won't have her spirit broken. I won't accept her resignation for the simple fact she's one of my best officers. It has nothing to do with her being the Ghost Warrior, I believe she is."

"You think any move we make will anger the Pah-Wraiths. You're afraid of these demons," Damar said. "You think if Yor puts down her sword they'll take it as a sign to attack us. Had you told me this earlier, I would not have said anything to her."

"I don't have all the answers, I need you on my side on this, Damar," Dukat said. He stood as did Damar. They grasped their right forearms. "You're right. I should have confided in you in everything. Garak and Prylar Evard are looking into where the Shadow Cult has gone, in particular, Talos and Dovvos. Tell her we need her."

"I will. Goodnight, Helen." He left us alone.

My fingers slid around Dukat's wrist as I tugged on him. He resumed his seat and slid his arm around me. "This place is strange, Helen," he said, "far more than any planet I've ever been on, yet I am compelled to remain here."

"Don't you think it's a little odd you and Damar both proposed marriage to us at the same time? Is what we should be doing now?"

"I do not act on impulse, with forethought and planning," Dukat said. "I'm older than you and I think I have earned the right to decide a few things about our personal lives. You seem to think there is more to it. Perhaps you are right. It means, my dear we will have to postpone our plans until I can sort out what is happening here."

Dukat stared at the shadows at play in the garden. The guard had not returned to his

post and the gate swung open and shut in the wind. He left out a soft gasp as the gate slammed closed. Something slid along the garden wall and vanished behind the gazebo. Dukat stood, pulling me to my feet and into his arms. He pressed his lips to my ear.

“We’re being watched and it’s not by my guards. I want you to proceed ahead of me into the house, Helen. I’ll be right behind you.”

Trembling with fear, I gathered my skirt in my hand and entered the house. He followed behind me, closing and locking the door. With his finger pressed to his lips, he took hold of my hand and let me into his study. The lights flickered on and dimmed as he led me toward the couch. I sat while he went to a table and poured a glass of kanar. He offered me one, I shook my head, patting the cushion next to me, he remained standing.

“I saw something in the garden,” Dukat said. “When shadows take on a life all their own, it is time to take action. The Brotherhood has a reason to be concerned. So am I.”

“If Sawyer really is the Ghost Warrior, then what comes next?”

Dukat swallowed the kanar in a large gulp and set the glass aside. “You were both brought here for a reason, my dear,” he said. “This mystery must be solved. The moment I removed the treasure from the house, I felt something change, as though my good deed met with resistance. I may have actually done the wrong thing by being so generous with the Bajorans.”

“Why? It’s for the betterment of Bajor.”

“Had I kept it, I could have used Vardon’s fortune to rebuild my forts and strengthened our military presence on this planet,” he said. “What if the Vedek Assembly provides funds to the rebels? The Bajoran People’s Army resents me for the Occupation. I’ve resigned myself to being disliked by these people. I give them freedom and they continue to rebel. When I asked the Bajoran People’s Army to handle the election and choose their own leader, they suggested I resign my post as Prefect and withdraw my forces.”

“You did the right thing. The next step is to consider an alliance with the Federation. It’s truly what is best for Cardassia. The Federation can help keep the Dominion from entering through the wormhole. And they can keep the Klingons and Romulans in line.”

“This is why Sawyer and I chose to give the Prophets what they wanted. The

wormhole will remain closed, forever, Helen," Dukat said. "I have no intention of aligning Cardassia with the Dominion and giving the Pah-Wraiths what they want. I'd prefer Cardassia remains under Cardassian rule, a treaty surely will please the Prophets."

"What did you just say?" I asked. "I didn't know you met the Prophets. You've never said a thing about it. Why not? What exactly did you and Sawyer promise to do for the Prophets? Explain it to me."

Dukat turned to refill his glass, in no rush to answer. I waited impatiently as he sip on kanar, slowly walking toward his desk. He slid a finger across his monitor and turned toward me, an inscrutable expression on his handsome face.

"The meeting took place before Yor removed my implant. The Prophets believe if Yor and I forged a permanent union the Pah-Wraiths would use us, turning us into a Dark King and Warrior Queen, who would bring war and devastation to the Alpha Quadrant and those beyond the wormhole. In exchange for our agreement not to be together, the Prophets promised to keep the wormhole closed. The Dominion will not have access of it, nor will the Pah-Wraiths be able to control either of us. It seemed a fair bargain."

"So as long as you and Sawyer aren't lovers, then Cardassia and Bajor are safe? That's what you two meant this morning. All this time I thought you loved me, it turns out you really love Sawyer only you can't be with her or you'll end up tyrants seated on a throne!"

"Did you not ask for the truth? Should I have not told you?"

"The Pah-Wraiths already have their hooks in you. If they didn't, you wouldn't be afraid of them. Damar was right. He is always right to question why you're so interested in Sawyer and now I know the truth. In this case, it would have been better to like Dukat. Once I was willing to share you, those days have long since passed. If you don't love, if all I am is a replacement for Sawyer, then I'm glad we postponed our marriage. I knew I should have left with Cassidy when I had the chance."

"This is madness." Dukat caught me at the door. He caught hold of my wrist and jerked me against his chest. "I've come too far in life to be lectured by a jealous female who would rather hide in her bedroom than face the reality the Bajoran gods are trying to dictate what we say or do. Major Kira might not admit it, Bajor is better off since we arrived. We

gave this backwards, pathetic planet a backbone. If you had one, you would realize I am doing all I can to promote peace. If I did not chose my words carefully before then I will from now on. I would be your husband, not this monster you paint me to be, Helen. Whether you like it or not, I am a soldier and a patriot. will always come first. I do love you."

"You're a pawn of the Pah-Wraiths. You always have been and so am I." I turned my head away, not wanting to see his sneer. "I'd be angry with Sawyer right now if I didn't believe she was in love with Damar. I know she loves him. She chose him because he's a better man than you are. He's noble, loyal and kind."

"And I am not?" Dukat threw his hands in the air, remain in front of the door. I returned to the couch, feeling trapped, hurt, and disposable. "Should I resign from the military as well? Do you want me to wear a straw hat and grind grapes under my bare feet? Would make you happy? Would I be a more suitable husband then?"

"I'm not sure you were ever suitable material to be a spouse."

"Helen, do you love me or not? I grow weary of asking this question."

"Yes, I love you. Where does leave us? If the Pah-Wraiths were trapped forever inside the Fire Caves and the cult destroyed, would you want me or Sawyer? Damar plans to marry her in a few days. doesn't give you much time to decide."

Dukat approached he couch and knelt before me. He took my hand in his and lifted it to his cheek and then kissed the palm. "Helen, I chose you before I was ever involved with Yor," he said. "I've always know Yor and I were too much alike to be together. She is far too willing to give me what I want, when you act quite the contrary. I don't want a wife who agrees with everything I do, one who will give her true opinion and make certain I am kept in check. If the Prophets tell you I must leave Bajor and never look back, then I will do so. If they want me to stay and form an alliance with the Federation, I will present the idea to Central Command and make every effort to see this happens. At this moment, Milea is occupied. Not by rebels, by ghosts. I would see them permanently laid to rest and then proceed with plans to make you my wife."

"I...I didn't expect you to say this. I didn't think you'd pick me."

"Darling, you're the one who I want at my side," he said. Releasing my hand, he

pulled me into his arms. "I need your strength and stubbornness. I rely on your sound advice and good judgment. You're everything Mikelya and Kornica were not." He kissed me. "I love you, Helen Monroe. Please. Believe me. I want you."

"Then listen to your own advice. Let things work out the way they're meant to and stop controlling the lives of those around you. Think of pleasing others and not about what you can gain in doing so. Be selfless, not selfish and never tell me story again."

"In the future, I will be wary of what I confide in you. I will learn to control my emotions and redirect my lust for power...to the bedroom."

A passionate kiss followed felt like surrender. I left him to work late and went to the north tower, checked on the children and found them sleeping with a night light on. Shazel was not in her bed, Blythe sat in a chair near the balcony. She held a pistol on her lap. It was I who felt selfish, for I'd forgotten others in the household were afraid for their lives and those of the children, more concerned about Dukat's feelings for me than anyone else's. I went over to Blythe and kissed her cheek.

"The girl went to Eben's room. I thought you wouldn't mind."

"Thank you, Blythe. You're a wonderful nanny and housekeeper."

"I do my best," she said, wiping away a tear.

Knowing she must still grieve for the loss of her two sisters and yet remained at Milea to take care of the children gave me hope things would turn out for the best. I'd said it to Sawyer hadn't really thought of the full implications. When I finally slid into bed, Dukat entered, turned off the lights to undress and joined me. He put his arm around me, drawing me close and pressed his forehead to mine.

"I'm sorry. About everything. Given incentive and a great deal of understanding, respect, and affection, I hope to be the man you love. I can change, Helen."

"One day you'll learn after an apology, you don't need to say anything else.

Sometimes your mouth is your own worst enemy," I said, feeling his hands worm their way through the folds of my nightgown.

"And sometimes it is your best friend. Let me love you."

With a nod, I lay against the mattress, while he worked his magic. When we finally lay

exhausted, side by side, I lay with my head on his bare chest, and listened to him snore as I watched the moonlight dance at the balcony windows. He slept soundly, I lay awake for a long time, wondering if the Prophets would return and whether they wanted anything from me, before I realized they had given me something. I had Dukat.

* * *

SAWYER

At dawn, I watched from the balcony of the south tower as Damar left in a shuttle for Fort Galdrak. Eben came into my room with the dog, joining me at the window as the vanished on the horizon. I gave Eben a kiss on the forehead, ruffling his unruly black hair and then reached over to stroke Hercules on his enormous head. He was drooling on the carpet.

“Life would have been a lot simpler if we had returned to the fort,” I said.

“Mother, really. I just combed my hair.” Eben smooth a stray lock behind his ear. “Did father tell you he will be gone for a week touring the forts on Bajor? He is a very busy man. I do not think you know half the things he does. He took your hologram with him. He asked me for it, though I know you needed it to appear Cardassian and not human. I think it’s a bit mushy and all, it’s also rather, you know, sweet.”

“Did you put a tracking devise on him as I asked?”

“Yes, Mother. We can monitor him from my com-padd.” Eben was dressed already and went to the closet, pulling out clothes for me to wear. “I’m to join the girls in the dining room. T’Koll expects us to be on time for class today. He says if I continue to show progress I may be able to attend school on Cardassia next year. I’d rather stay here with you.”

“T’Koll did tell me you’re one of his finest pupils. Damar and I are both proud of you. By the time you’re old enough to attend the academy, we plan to have a home on Cardassia. I’m not ready to send you away quiet yet. You’ll have to wait. When you’re through with classes today, we can go for a short horseback ride. Would you like that?”

His eyes lit up. “We don’t have to take Shazel with us, do we?”

“Not now. Go downstairs. I’ll join you in few minutes.”

Dressing in loose slacks and a sweater, I joined the children in the dining room. Blythe

had resumed her duties, setting a bowl of porridge before each child, along with a glass of milk. I used the replicator to order a cup of coffee and a muffin. Aware the girls were staring at me, I brushed my hair forward, hiding my plain human features. I'd meant to ask Dukat if a surgeon could be sent for and surgery completed, I assumed it would be postponed along with my own wedding.

"As soon as you're through eating," T'Koll said, entering the room, "we'll commence class's right here. This is the largest table in the house. Glinn Yor, you have been asked to join Dukat and Helen on the veranda."

Leaving my cup and muffin untouched, I left the dining room as T'Koll handed out com-padds to the children and headed toward the veranda. The low table was set with a tray of muffins and a tea set with extra cups. Dukat sat beside Helen, his arm thrown over her shoulders, quickly poured me a cup of coffee before I slumped onto a couch. He added cream and sugar to my cup. Helen laughed.

"I'll have you know I've served Yor coffee many times in Ops." Dukat handed me the cup failed to meet my eyes. "I know how she likes it. I trust you slept well, cousin?"

"I like the south tower. The bed is hard," I said pausing to sip coffee. He'd made it perfectly for me. "Why didn't you tell me Damar was taking another tour of the forts? I thought you'd closed most of them since Central Command didn't want to spend money rebuilding them."

"Perhaps I used some of Vardon's fortune to purchase supplies and workers to rebuild Fort Varnok. You can't expect me to give everything to widows and orphans. I intend to join Damar in a day or so. I'm afraid this puts a delay to your own marriage, Yor. I thought as long as Helen and I must wait it only made sense you both did the same. We don't want anyone doing anything impulsive, now do we?"

"I suppose not," I muttered.

"Nor do I want another letter written by you. You will remain an officer until I say otherwise. Is understood, cousin?" Dukat replaced his arm around Helen and she leaned against him, looking quite relaxed and very much in love. I had no doubt they'd spend the evening in each other's arms. "Someone was on my computer, reviewing the recordings

made by Gul Vardon. I have no doubt it was you. In the future, you will kindly not make use of my office as your own. I considered sending the recordings to Central Command for review, it as you appear human and Vardon was killed, it was not in your best interest. He was considered a valuable war criminal. As for you, I've asked Dr. Quirin to come to Milea and perform another surgery. I can hardly let you remain here as a human."

"What am I expected to do while I'm here?"

"Look after Helen and the children. Of course you needn't wear your uniform. You're on leave for a month. With you on guard, I see no reason to keep so many soldiers in Milea and as the workers will soon be harvesting the grapes, it will put them at ease. You will keep my family safe while I am away."

"Then I'm in command of the soldiers?" I asked.

"Absolutely not," Dukat said. "I have placed Gil Korvinus in charge. I am leaving twenty soldiers here, which should suffice. After your fight against Gnosh, I doubt the Order of the Red Snake will return. Why aren't you eating anything?"

"I've lost my appetite. Thanks for the coffee. If you don't need anything else, I think I'll take a walk. I promised to take Eben riding later. I understand you've hired Lothar to tend to your stables. I'll go have a word with him." I stood without finishing my coffee.

"You've upset her," Helen whispered. "Say something to her, Dukat. Now!"

"Yor, you know very well you're indispensable to me," Dukat said. "If my manner is a bit brusque this morning, it is only because I have a great many things on my mind. Had you accepted the post as my aide, I would include you in these matters, as you are on leave, you need do nothing more than enjoy your stay in Milea."

"I'm sure I will," I snapped.

Taking the path through the garden, I headed to the stables and found Lothar leading a white horse around the yard, one of Vardon's prized stallions. Waving at Lothar, I went into the stable, finding the odor of manure and the sound of the horses munching on hay comforting. I spotted one of my favorite horses, a black mare, and entered the stall, intending to brush her. I turned to the bucket hung on a nail where the brush was kept and found Dukat standing there, staring at me in an annoying way.

"I hope you are not crying," he said. "I prefer your anger to your tears. It is hardly my fault Damar neglected to tell you he was to visit the forts are being rebuilt. He had the opportunity to review Vardon's recordings of the fight. I have no doubt his concern for your safety is why he suggested you resign. When I suggested before you did not overshadow him with your fame, I didn't mean I no longer wanted you to be an officer. Until the surgery is completed, wear your hologram at all times. It will cause too many questions having you here as a human."

"I thought it was on," I said. I flipped the switch and he smiled. "Better?"

"Much," he replied. "I ordered you to withdraw from Vardon's hideout. You did not. Instead, you went in for Helen and sent Garak to destroy Vardon's ship. You did precisely what you wanted. Nor did I have time to send reinforcements."

"What do you want? Are you here to chastise me further, to put me on report, or to apologize for being rude? You don't need me here. Korvinus can handle it. He follows orders to the letter."

"Why should I apologize? I have not insulted you. Nor have I been rude."

"Well, you've made it clear you have no intention of confiding me about your plans on Bajor. You've made it clear I disobeyed you. Helen is back. Vardon is dead. Stop needling me. Or do you want to pick a fight with me?"

"I am simply trying to have a discussion with my cousin," Dukat said as he leaned over the railing. "You are one of the finest warriors in hand-to-hand combat. Your natural predatory instincts make you a formidable opponent. You inspire others to follow you. You have the ability to gain information from reliable sources and how to exploit it to succeed at any given task. I chose not to forward the recording to Central Command knowing the Obsidian Order would obtain it and have gone out of my way to prevent Garak from recruiting you officially as a spy. The only way I can do this is by keeping you in the Second Order. All I meant earlier is I want you to avoid overshadowing Damar."

"And you," I said. "How much treasure did you give to the Bajoran delegates?"

"A fair bit. I also placed a percentage in an account for you. I thought you deserved to be rewarded for the success of your mission."

“Dukat, I didn’t ask you to do that.”

I set the brush aside and slid over the railing, dropping beside him. He reached for me, I knocked his hand away. Marching out of the barn, I headed toward the vineyard, wanting to return to the ruins of the chapel and enjoy the peace it afforded. Dukat walked behind me. He clearly had something he wanted to say to me, I was in no mood to play his game. Outside the corral, he grabbed my arm and wheeled me around to face him. I spun around, drawing his arm behind his back and pushed him head first into a mound of hay. As he still had a hold of my arm, I went with him and tumbled into the hay next to him. We both started to laugh.

“You’re a pompous ass,” I said.

“And you’re impetuous!”

I threw a handful of hay into his face. Still laughing, he stood and reached for my hand, pulling me to my feet. We brushed each other off and left the corral, leaving Lothar staring at us and continued along a path around the outer buildings, arms linked together.

“I need you here. You’re the only one I trust explicitly, and I don’t want Helen worried. Garak will try to learn where the rest of the cult members are hiding. You can do more here than at Fort Galdrak. Lothar seems to trust you. Having the Brotherhood nearby will come in useful.”

We came to a halt at the back of the villa facing the north tower. The weeds were high and needed to be cut. Dukat leaned over to pick a yellow flower and handed it to me. The moment he stuck the flower under my nose I let out a loud sneeze and pushed him away, hearing him laugh in response.

“If I do this for you,” I said, “then I expect you to tell me what you’re planning. I’m talking about Bajor. It’s obvious you intend to remain as Prefect. I want Cardassian and Bajor to join the Federation. At least consider it.”

“I have been for a long time, Yor. Damar and I are doing all we can to maintain the peace on Bajor. These things take time. For now, Bajor will remain a colony. That’s all you need to know.”

“Don’t lie to me. It’s better to have the Federation on our side than against us,” I said,

staring into his blue eyes. "I told you before what will happen if you ever go to war against them. The Dominion is our enemy. Not the Federation."

"The Prophets sent you here for a purpose. More than one, I seems."

I felt a faint tug at my heart when his sly smile vanished, replaced by an earnest look helped ease my concern about being played false by him. Dukat gazed at me so intently.

"I am being perfectly honest with you," he said. "If at any point Central Command want me to talk to the Federation or change the status quo of Bajor, you will be the first to know. I have already discussed this with Damar. So have you, it seems."

My smile came easy. "Good," I said. "Then I'll go talk to Evarad."

Helen appeared on the path, holding a basket filled with flowers. She spotted us and waved. I waved back. Dukat leaned toward me.

"Go chat with her. Helen will make you feel better."

"Dukat knows best," I said.

"Glad to hear you say it, finally," he said in amusement.

Dukat waited for Helen, kissed her, and then headed into the house. Helen handed me the basket of flowers. At my loud sneeze, she took the basket and laughed.

HELEN

Chapter Seventy-Four

"I can't remember the last time I've seen you're out of a uniform," I said. I offered Sawyer a kerchief so she could blow her nose; she had allergies no medicine in the future seemed able to cure. I placed the basket on the floor. "The twins are nine months old. Did you realize that? They are able to walk now, not well, they're both strong."

"Has it been long? I guess I hadn't thought about it much."

"I know you want to resign, everyone depends on you. Damar and Eben are very lucky to have you, too. You don't have to do what Dukat says. You're always trying to prove you're better than a natural Cardassian and can't see your own weak spots. It's pride will be your downfall."

"My problem is I constantly have to worry about you," Sawyer said.

"I love Dukat dearly, Sawyer. I'm not blaming you. I know how men in power think they are entitled to having whatever they want, I think he's finally ready to settle down here. I just want my life to get back some semblance of order. Being here makes me happy and I think the children can finally have a home. What about the Prophets and Pah-Wraiths? Have you talked to the Brotherhood and come up with a plan?"

"I'm working on it."

T'Koll's voice echoed down the hallway. Class was still being conducted. Blythe came outside and placed a pitcher of water and glasses on the table. She had always brought a bowl of fruit. Blythe did her job well. I needed to check on the twins, felt reluctant to leave my friend. We needed talk.

"I feel like you do, Helen. Helpless. You're tired of being visited by the Prophets, and I'm tired of waiting to see what will happen next. I suppose Garak is on clean up duty and that's why he's not returned. It will be difficult to track down the rest of the cult members, rebels and Brotherhood. As long as we can keep Dukat on the right path, then I

think we've done our job. I know Damar doesn't like to talk about our special purpose for being here. He wants to live an ordinary life and I do too."

"I'm worried about Dukat and you. If the Pah-Wraiths are interested in the two of you, then you must find a way to keep the Fire Caves close forever. We've committed ourselves to helping Bajor. I'll help you as much as I can."

"Me? The Pah-Wraiths visited you, Helen. Kira told me what happened night your shuttle crashed. They have no hold over me."

Sawyer went over to a shelf lined with rows of wine bottles. She selected a bottle, pulled the cork with her teeth and tossed her water into the garden before refilling it with spring wine. She against sat next to me, sipping on wine, her brows wrinkled together.

"Every move we make is being watched. I don't mean by the OO."

"That's what Dukat said last night. T'Koll isn't here by coincidence, you know," I said. "He specialized in ancient religions, both Vulcan and foreign before he took the post as tutor for the children. You know how I feel about Vulcans. I think we should ask for his help."

"Sometimes I think Q is still pulling the strings, not the Bajoran gods or demons." Sawyer finished her wine and glanced at me. "One thing is certain, Helen. We are here to help Cardassia and Bajor. We have both done all we can to keep Dukat from turning evil. I'm more worried about him than you. If the Pah-Wraiths visit you again, you must tell me about it. You saw what came out of Durgan."

"You really think that's really why we are here?"

"Yes, exactly what I think."

"So says the Ghost Warrior."

"The fire will burn, the land will bleed. Legions shall wither and die, and evil shall reign in the shadow land," she said. "Unless the savior tames the feted snake, the lean snake willingly returns to its lair, and the subdued snake bows its heads. Only then will peace reign in the restored land."

"what does it mean?" I asked.

"Maybe you, Dukat and Garak are the snakes." Sawyer laughed.

"Oh, the Terrans are plotting again," Garak said. He entered the veranda dressed in long dark robes. He took a seat across from us. He crossed his legs and sat back, smiling in a friendly manner. "Did I interrupt? I rather thought my timing most excellent. It seems Yor has forgotten she is an operative agent under my authority."

"No, I'm not. What are you doing here?" Sawyer asked. "You're supposed to find the members of the Order of the Red Snake and chop off their heads. And I'm on personal leave for the next month."

"Really," Garak said. "You look no worse for wear after your fight to the death with Gnosh the Destroyer. I did destroy Vardon's ship. I have been very busy. I'm famished. Helen, I hoped you might make me something to eat. Now you're both domesticated, it shouldn't be too hard to make yourselves at home in the kitchen."

Sawyer grabbed the bottle of wine, spilling liquid onto the couch and drew it over her head. Garak started to laugh. I was slightly offended at the reference. Bare foot and pregnant in the kitchen, I thought. Neither had any idea I'd recently learned I was pregnant, again. At least I didn't think Garak knew, for it was something I hadn't shared with anyone, not even Dukat. It had struck me as ironic Damar wanted to have children, it wasn't Sawyer who was pregnant; I was the fertile one.

"What is wrong with you, Sawyer? He's only teasing. Put down the bottle," I said in my sternest voice. "Garak, she's been through a great deal. Apologize this once."

"I'll do nothing of the kind. Yor should apologize. She called me a snake."

Sawyer took a swig from the bottle and resumed her seat, glaring at him.

"I have been trying to find out what's happened to the last two agents on our Death List," Garak said. "Your Shadow Dwellers have vanished. I see no reason to be angry with me. Haven't I always been on hand to lend assistance? Haven't I always helped you, Glinn Yor?"

"Just as often as you've interfered," she said. "There's the whole thing with Torell and how you failed to warn Dukat in time before his wife was murdered. You tampered with the Death List and added ours and Dukat's names to it. Murat's location also known to you, yet you failed to tell Dukat where he was hiding. I have no doubt you knew of

Vardon's escapades on Bajor, yet you did nothing to stop him. I'd blame you for what happened with Parnal, only I can't prove you knew he was in cave. Nor can I prove you were aware Dukat had an implant. I think you know far more than you've let on. You could probably be involved with Q as well. Is being helpful?"

"Now that's downright insulting," Garak said.

"Garak has done his best to protect me and the children," I said. "If anyone can find out what the Prophets and Pah-Wraiths want of us, it's Garak. I'm sure he'll locate your Shadow Dwellers, Sawyer. Calm down."

"And that's precisely what I have been doing," he said.

"I already know where Talos and Dovvos will go. They'll go to the Valley of Shadows," Sawyer said. "I still intend to go there. I'm only delaying the trip because I'm not sure what the Prophets want me to do. I thought by now they'd contact us."

"If you can calm yourself, I'll be more than happy to tell you what I've learned," Garak said. He waited until Sawyer set the bottle aside before he continued. "My sources confirm the Order of the Red Snake has gone into hiding. It is impossible to find them until they make another move against Dukat. I am still not convinced Vardon's prophesy is not simply propaganda. The wormhole remains closed, which means the Prophets have withdrawn and have not ventured out. leaves Q. I believe he is behind everything, he has not made an appearance either."

"we were visited by the Prophets and Pah-Wraiths," I said. "At least the Pah-Wraiths paid a call on me. Q dumped us off here. He's just watching. That's all."

"I believe it's always been Q, playing his little game," Garak said. "I have asked Bajoran Intelligence to assist in my investigation. Unfortunately, Major Kira has returned to Terok Nor. Her help would have been appreciated." He paused. "And for the record, I did not assist Torell in placing an implant in Dukat's head. Nor did I know he had done so. I came here meaning to congratulate you on a job well done, after your personal attack, I have changed my mind. I no more think you are this Ghost Warrior, than I think you are the savior of Bajor. If anything, you are a menace."

"And you would look nice as a hand bag," she said.

"Sawyer, go take a walk. I'll speak to Garak and maybe, just maybe, we can all get back to have a normal, ordinary life." I watched her storm through the garden, stomping on flowers and head toward the barn. "Now, Uncle. Tell me what you have learned."

"Your friend has an inflated ego and a horrible temper."

"And?" I asked.

Garak sighed. "Travok's prophesy of the Ghost Warrior may be true," he said. "I didn't want her to know. I'm afraid what she'll do if I agree she's the savior. young woman will either help bring peace or cause a war. The savior in the prophesy could be someone else, Helen. You could be the spirit guide I've read about in stories, Helen. Then again, I can't be sure until Evard admits what is really going on. He's been careful about how much he tells me. The Brotherhood believes Sawyer is the Ghost Warrior. After seeing Vardon's recording, the OO are more than a little interested in your friend. Yes, they've seen it, Helen. If she does defeat the Pah-Wraiths, you can be sure the OO will recruit her, permanently."

I stared at him, unsure what to say or to think. Garak patted my hand and then grabbed the bottle of wine, drinking from it directly until he'd finished the last drop. His eyes bulged and he sank back with a belch, and then gave a shake of his head.

"I want to talk to Evard and Lothar," I said.

"Later," he said. " Now, if you don't mind, I think I'll open another bottle of wine."

* * *

SAWYER

Finding Lothar in the barn, I sat with him, smoking a pipe filled with a bit of his blend of dried plants. I joined him and took only a few puffs before I felt light-headed. In a better frame of mind, I suggested a bottle of wine and went to the house to fetch one, entering through the front door to avoid Garak. I noticed several bags at the front door. Assuming Dukat was leaving evening, I was surprised by the sudden appearance of Dr. Quirin. He motioned for me to follow and led me into Dukat's study where I thought certain he'd set up a makeshift surgery room to perform the necessary cosmetic changes.

Dukat sat behind his desk in front of the monitor, troubled look on his face. Upon seeing me with the doctor, he motioned us both to join him. The doctor locked the door behind me, putting me on the alert.

“What’s going on?” I asked. “What are you doing here, Quirin? I thought it would be months before I could have surgery.”

“Hello to you too, Yor,” the doctor said. “I’m not here to operate, though it seems you have healed nicely. We don’t have to put it off. Any time you want, I’ll restore your ridges.”

“Good,” I said. “How are things on Terok Nor?”

“This isn’t a social visit,” Dukat snapped. “Be quiet. Both of you. I want you to watch this recording. Garak found it in Vardon’s hideout. I found a recording embedded within a file, marked ‘Ghost Warrior’. Dr. Quirin, as you have just arrived, I think you what you see if sufficient to bring up to speed.”

“I’ve already reviewed the recording,” I said annoyed.

At Dukat’s look of disgust, I joined Dr. Quirin and stood over the legate’s shoulder as the recording played. I watched Helen and Vardon struggling on the floor, her clothes ripped to shreds, while he fell on top of her. The scene was frozen as Dr. Quirin leaned in front of Dukat to use the controls and adjusted the image. I didn’t need to be told the doctor wanted to ascertain whether Vardon had raped Helen. Embarrassed and upset to be part of this meeting, I looked away as the doctor magnified the couple’s lower extremities. Dukat grabbed my arm.

“I don’t enjoy it any more than you do, Yor. Keep watching.”

Dr. Quirin tapped a button and the recording continued. Helen and Vardon fought, rolling across the floor and she actually sunk her teeth into his neck. I watched as my friend tore out his throat with her bare teeth and then shred what was left of his windpipe with her fingers. The door opened. Cassidy and I came rushing in. I took one look at Helen, drew my pistol and stunned her without hesitation. I slung her up over my shoulder, while Cassidy led the way out. As soon as we’d left, Kornica came into the room from another room. She took one look at Vardon and screamed, an explosion filled the room with a

blinding light and the recording ended.

"Helen was not raped," Dr. Quirin said in a very professional voice. "much is certain, Legate Dukat. I'm sure Yor agrees, though I'm not sure why you wanted her opinion on this. I thought this was to be kept private?"

"Yor was there, Dr. Quirin. She's a witness."

"Is that all?" I asked.

"I have my reasons for asking you both here," Dukat said. "This has nothing to do with what Vardon attempted to do. The Federation spy helped save Helen's life. Had you both not arrived when you did, Helen would have been killed."

"Cassidy set the explosives," I said.

"Are you certain?" Dukat asked.

"He said as much. He got us out in the nick of time."

"Am I the only one disturbed in the manner Helen killed Vardon?" Quirin asked. "She is lethal, a trained assassin, which I've suspected all along. We know Helen murdered Legate Mikor. And now she's killed Gul Vardon. We know what she is capable of doing, I remain concerned she may strike again. While I am inclined not to believe the prophesy you shared with me, Dukat, I still question whether someone has brainwashed your mistress and sent her to murder you. Is she with the Order? Does she work for Garak or not? Or is she with Section 31 like this Cassidy?"

"Neither of us are Federation agents," I said angry. I hadn't told anyone Cassidy was with Section 31. A gut feeling told me Garak had been spying on us the entire time. "Helen defended herself. When we had the implants, we were both dangerous. You can scoff, I believe Helen was brought here to be the savior of Bajor. She's the Spirit Guide and I'm the Ghost Warrior."

"Let's not recant the prophesy," Dukat said. "I'm concerned about who set the explosion, Yor. You claim it was Cassidy."

"Garak blew up the ship. Cassidy blew up the hideout. He's a Federation agent." I paused as Dukat glared at me. "Okay. He's Section 31. He's on our side. He was sent by Picard to help us out and he did. Who told he was Section 31?"

"It is not difficult to guess the Federation is involved," Dukat said. "I only regret I allowed Cassidy leave before he was questioned. That's on you, Yor. I don't blame Helen for any of this. Those she killed were enemies of Cardassia, you must realize the severity of the situation."

"The Federation is not our enemy. Not yet. They wanted to help remove Vardon because of his association with the Marquis and the Circle."

"Yes, well, Garak told us who Cassidy works for. If Garak knows, the Order does as well. I have no doubt he provided his father with a copy of Vardon's recording. You say Cassidy set the explosives in the mountain. What if the Garak and Cassidy were working together? Suppose they wanted to kill you and Helen? I'm merely asking a question. If you can't answer it, Yor, then it's a good thing I've Odo asked to come here to help sort things out."

"I thought he returned to Terok Nor with Major Kira," I said, confused.

"Odo and Major Kira visited with Evard to confirm what he knows about the cult and slave traders. They'll arrive when it is dark," Dukat said. "I am working with Bajor Intelligence, Yor. I have advised the major a Section 31 agent was here. She claims she was unaware of this and I believe her. She also thinks we have a reason to be concerned with Garak. He has been spotted many places in the last few days. She is as interested in I am as how he can manage to be in two places at once. If this Cassidy got his hands on your hologram, Yor, I don't need to tell you this creates a new problem."

"Cassidy gave it back to me. I'm wearing it," I said.

"Where is Garak now?" Quirin asked.

"He's with Helen," I said.

"I had not counted on relying on the Bajorans for assistance, it seems they prefer me, the lesser of two evils, than the Obsidian Order. If I am removed from power, there will be no one to stop Central Command from using this opportunity to restore the Occupation. I'm afraid your Mr. Cassidy has merely complicating things, Yor."

"Things here are worse than I imagined," Dr. Quirin said. "Garak could be a member of the Circle. If this could be proven, Dukat, then Central Command will most

certainly support you and the Order will be placed in a compromising position.”

“Indeed,” Dukat replied. “Send someone to check on Helen and Garak, Yor.” He turned as the door opened and Korvinus burst in to the room. “Yes? What is it?”

“Sir, the body of Garresh Broc was found in the stable by Lothar. He was stabbed through the heart multiple times. I suggest you all come with me and see for yourself.”

Leaving the house by the front door, we headed to the stables. Five soldiers guarded the door. Lothar waited at the very stall where I’d been earlier, brushing the black mare. The horse had been removed from the stall. Broc lay on blood-splattered hay, his eyes wide open. I entered the stall and crouched beside the body. Dukat joined me. I noticed a knife lying partially hidden in the hay. Using the kerchief Helen had given to me earlier, I retrieved the dagger, horrified to discover it belonged to Damar.

“You’re in the middle of the crime scene,” Dukat said. “Leave the dagger for Constable Odo and back out of the stall. As soon as the constable arrives, Dr. Quirin, you will conduct a forensic examination of the body and knife. Gil Korvinus, post guards. When Constable Odo arrives, you will assist him in his investigation. I want to know who killed Gil Broc.” He stared at me as I dropped the dagger. “Do you recognize dagger, Yor?”

“It’s Damar’s, he didn’t kill Broc. He’s not here.”

“I know that,” Dukat hissed. “Broc was in the east tower, awaiting Odo’s arrival to ascertain his involvement with Gul Vardon. Simply because he helped free my daughters doesn’t mean his name was cleared, Yor. This is a delicate matter.”

“I was in this stall before I joined you tonight. The body wasn’t here,” I said.

“The body was then placed here,” Dr. Quirin said.

Dukat turned toward Korvinus. “Hold Lothar for questioning,” he said. “Contact Odo and tell him to come here at once. I want you to remain with the body, Dr. Quirin. Commence your autopsy as soon as Odo arrives. Someone clearly wants Damar implicated in this murder. It is his dagger. I am scheduled to meet Damar in Bajor City within the hour to discuss an alliance with the Federation. I cannot put it off. I’m leaving you in charge, Glinn Yor. Do not tell Garak or Helen what happened. We’ll return as soon as we can.” He headed out of the stable.

"Wait! Dukat?" I ran after him. He waited for me at entrance. "What happens if Broc was killed before Damar left Milea?"

"Damar will be arrested. You know this, Yor. Contact me later. I must go."

Dukat departed thought I thought it the worst time to leave. I had a hundred questions running through my mind. Dr. Quirin returned to the stall to begin his examination of the body. Korvinus stood at the front door of the stable. He pointed at Lothar who sat on a bale of hay. Two guards watched him, seeing me sit beside the Bajoran, they looked away from us.

"Did you see what happened?" I asked.

"I took the white stallion for a walk. When I returned, I found the body of the young officer. Someone placed the body in the stall. much I do know. You know I had no part in this, Yor."

"No one is going to harm you, Lothar. You have my word. Do you have any idea who might have killed Broc?"

"Not who. What."

Lothar's response frightened me.

"Are you suggesting it was something other than a Cardassian or a Bajoran?"

"I believe it was a Shadow Dweller," Lothar said. "You are the boryhas, which means ghost in our language. It is the ancient term for the proclaimed warrior and is you. As long as you are alive, you pose a threat to the Pah-Wraiths. You know this, Yor. You know you are the Ghost Warrior. I don't think the Shadow Dwellers have gone to the Valley of Shadows. Not yet. I believe they are here."

"Perhaps I can be of assistance," a friendly voice said.

Odo appeared at the stall door. I stood, able to see Major Kira standing with Gil Korvinus, talking to him quietly. The constable joined us and knelt beside Lothar. I was so disturbed by Lothar's comment I felt anxious to return to the house and check on Helen. I stood and pulled Lothar up to his feet.

"Let's keep our voices lowered," Odo said. "If you know what did this, Lothar, then I need you to tell me."

"Where is Garak?" I asked.

"I just left Garak with Prylar Evard to continue their investigation of the writings of Travok. The priest believes Shadow Dwellers walk amongst us. I'm told two demons were working with Gul Vardon. Talos and Dovvos. Garak was unable to confirm if they were killed in the explosion at the cave. He was too frightened to return here, promised to bring Evard here this evening."

"I left Helen with Garak on the veranda."

"Then is not the real Garak."

"It is the Shadow Dweller," Lothar said trembling. "My son found a dead lamb on the altar in the shadow temple you visited before. This has happened before, so I made no mention of it, Glinn Yor. These creatures have ability to change forms. They need not possess a dead body. Evard and I were wrong about that. They can also possess the living. The only way to know if it is a demon or not is to force it to drink water has been blessed by a Bajoran priest."

"I've got to get with Helen! I may have left her with a demon!"

"Hold up, Yor. I've brought a bottle of blessed water with me," Odo said. He handed me a large vial filled with water to me. "Take this and see everyone in the house drinks it. Lothar and I will check on Helen. I want you to make certain the children are placed in the nursery under guard. Dukat made it clear they are to be protected."

"What will happen if a demon drinks blessed water?" I asked.

"It will turn into its true form and then you must kill it," Lothar said. "The body the demon inhabits will be mortal. You can kill it quite easily, you must move fast."

"What is a child is possessed? I can't kill a child," I said thinking the worst.

"Set your pistol on stun and shoot whoever is possessed," Odo said. "Garak and the priest will arrive this evening to assist us. Say nothing about this to Helen. The less who know the better. Lothar, gather the Bajoran workers and take them to holy ground. I'm told there is an old chapel nearby which should protect them."

"I'll bind them with newly made rope from an Everess tree and drag them inside the chapel where they will wither and die," Lothar said. "I know how to deal with a demon,

Constable. My son will help me.”

“Take Major Kira with you, Lothar,” Odo said. “She has blessed water as well and can assist you. Everyone must drink it, even you and your son. Kira will make sure it’s done. Yor, see to the children’s safety. I’ll join you directly.”

More worried than I’d ever been in my life, I headed toward the villa. I went through the garden, expecting to find Helen and Garak on the veranda. Neither were there and I ran into the house. The first person I saw was T’Koll standing in the doorway of the library. I pressed in beside him and noted the children were inside, finishing their lesson. He’d kept them up late, a wise move on his part. I handed him the vial of bless water.

“Take a tiny sip,” I said.

“What is it?” the Vulcan asked.

“Consider it a direct order and do it, T’Koll. It’s holy water.”

I watched him drink the hold water. He remained a Vulcan. I pushed him into the library, found a cup, and poured the liquid into it. T’Koll lined the children beside the table and told them to remain calm. I went to each child and had them take a sip. Shazel gazed at me with trusting eyes and drank. She was fine. I ended with Eben. None of the children turned into a demon, they were frightened.

“Take the children to the nursery and stay with them,” I said. “Keep the door locked, T’Koll. I need to find Helen and Garak.”

“I believe I know what you are doing, Yor. I’ll do as you ask.”

The Vulcan led the children out of the classroom. As Eben past, he handed me another wristband, which I locked it around my right wrist, turning it on and noticed he gave a satisfied nod as he followed the children out the door. Glancing in a mirror, I saw the reflection of my Cardassian self-staring at me. I found Blythe in the kitchen. I handed the housekeeper the cup of water, watched her drink it and when certain she was not a demon, I handed her a pistol.

“Stand guard outside the nursery. Let no one enter until I say otherwise. Keep it set on stun and shoot anyone who attempts to enter the nursery, Blythe. We have an intruder in the house. Don’t open this door for anyone me. Be careful.”

“Yes, Glinn Yor. I’ll do as you ask,” she said leaving the kitchen.

I had used half the contents in the vial. Removing my com-link from my pocket, I contacted Damar and filled him in on what had happened. He was at the remains of Fort Varnok, overseeing an arrival of supplies to commence rebuilding a smaller sized military base and assured me he’d not killed Broc and intended to join Dukat in Bajor City. He was running late.

“Demons in the house? I should be with you,” Damar said. “I did not even notice my dagger was gone, I did not kill Broc. The very idea is absurd. I’ll join Dukat at once and sort this out, Yor. We’ll return as soon as we can. The meeting with the First Minister and Kai will have to be postponed.”

“Hurry,” I urged him.

Ending the conversation, I placed the com-link in my pocket along with the vial of holy water and grabbed the cup. I planned on finding Helen first and then Garak, and turning off the lights, I went to find my friend.

HELEN

Chapter Seventy-Five

Aware my shadow was reflected on the wall, though no doors or windows allowed light into the corridor, I nervously made my way to my bedroom and from there to Vardon's hidden office. As far as I knew, no one had been in since Dukat had removed the chests of latinum. Everything looked as it had been before. I gathered Vardon's diaries and notes and then returned to my room, intending on reading as much as I could to try and locate where the slaves had been sold. I hadn't said anything to Dukat; yet, it was my goal they would be returned to their families. I sat on the floor, padds covering the floor in a semi-circle around me, using another padd to take notes. I hadn't made much progress at least I was finally getting the hang of how Vardon coded his notes. With a bit of luck, the rest of the codes might be broken. I hoped whatever I found would help Sawyer.

"You're up late, my dear."

Garak's voice, so close to my ear when I hadn't heard him come in, made me jump and let out a squeak of surprise. Instinctively, I put my arm over the padds used for notes as well as the one I was decoding. The door to my bedroom stood open. I was certain I had locked it, then Garak was a spy and picking locks was not a problem.

"You startled me!" As casually as I could I stretched out a leg, trying to push the padds on the floor under the bed. "I thought you went to bed. Is there something I can help you with?"

"Oh, nothing in particular." Garak sat on the edge of the mattress. "I know what you're doing. You're trying to break Vardon's secret code. Anything I should be made aware of?" Without warning, he grabbed my left arm and wrenched it behind my back. A thrill of fear went through me. I tried to pull my arm away, only to have Garak grasp it tighter.

“What is wrong with you, Garak?” I pulled again. This time Garak’s fingers clamped down hard enough to make me wince. “Let go of me or else!”

“Or else what?” Garak smiled, a look of pure evil, and reached into his pocket, withdrawing a small knife. “I believe Yor is looking for us. I wonder what she’d do if she found your dead body? Shall we find out?” He took the knife and made quick cuts into my wrist.

With a scream, blood flowing from the wounds, I pulled back my right hand and delivered a roundhouse punch to the side of his head. In disbelief I watched as Garak absorbed the punch, not even blinking when it impacted. I tried again with the same result and I froze, unable or unwilling to believe what I was seeing. Sawyer’s voice called to me in the hallway, breaking my paralysis and I let out a scream. Garak released me and fled from the room. Sawyer appeared seconds later, only I had no idea how Garak had slipped past her. She held a pistol and a cup, seeing the blood, she placed them on the bed, tearing a pillowcase off a pillow to wrap around my wrist.

“What the hell happened?” Sawyer asked in a rush.

“Garak was here. He was going to kill me,” I sobbed. Placing my right hand around the makeshift bandage, I risked taking a look at my injury. I stared in horror to see a seven-sided star had already started to heal, leaving a reddened scar. “Why would Garak cut this into me? What does it mean?”

“That wasn’t Garak. That was a Shadow Dweller,” Sawyer said. “Odo arrived earlier. Broc was found murdered. Lothar has gathered the Bajorans at the old chapel. Major Kira is here too. I was going to ask you to drink holy water, you’re not a demon.”

“What about the children? Are they all right?”

“Blythe is guarding the nursery.”

Helen trembled. “Where is the real Garak?”

“With Prylar Evard. They’re coming here. Dukat is meeting Damar in Bajor City. I’ve told Damar what’s going on. He says they’ll return. I need to find the other Garak.”

“This...this is the same star I saw in Kia Lucan’s lair. It’s the sign of the Pah-Wraiths,” I said shuddering. “What does it mean? How could it heal so fast?”

“I think the demon means to control you, Helen,” Sawyer said.

I watched as Sawyer pushed up the sleeve of her shirt, revealing her blue tattoo of two swords encircling one another. My eyes slid away from her arm, gliding to the same markings carved into the side of a bookshelf. The same symbol was also carved into the headboard and on a throw rug at the door of the bathroom. I was about to point out the similarity when a scream from the nursery brought us rushing to the door. Sawyer pushed out first, bolting down the hallway, while I hurried after her, my heart in my throat.

Blythe lay outside the open door, her cheek laid open to the bone, bleeding and unconscious. A pistol lay beside her which I grabbed, entering the nursery behind Sawyer and stared at a nightmare scene of overturned desks and frightened children hiding behind them. T’Koll was sprawled on the floor, bleeding from a head wound, not alive. At the windowsill, the large black dog, Hercules, stood over the large crib where the twins were placed. Gabriel was silent Madison cried. The dog’s eyes blazed red and froth fell in rivets down either side of its muzzle. It watched as Sawyer advanced, her pistol rose, making no sound as she took aim. In an instant, the dog vanished, replaced by the likeness of Dukat. Sawyer shot him in the chest, he spun around, unaffected, moving toward her as she fired again. The fake Dukat knocked the pistol from her hand and grabbed her by the throat, lifting her off the ground as she kicked and pulled at his hands. I aimed my own pistol at the duplicate Dukat. The blast went through him and tore a hole in the far wall.

“Stand aside,” Odo ordered as he entered the room.

I ran around Dukat and Sawyer, pulled the crib toward me, seeking refuge behind one of the bed where the girls and Eben hid. Odo set his pistol on the highest level and took aim at the Shadow Dweller. Sawyer was thrown across the room by the demon, crumbling in a heap as Odo opened fire. A gelatin-blob fell onto the floor in place of Dukat, the exact likeness of Odo in his natural state. Odo hurried forward, producing a bag made from the leaves of the Everess tree, its scent and the color of the leaves known to me, which he used to collect the blob with the end of his pistol, touching nothing as he bagged the demon. He tied off the end of the bag, lifted it and gave it a hard shake.

“Rest easy, everyone. It’s dead,” Odo said.

“Blythe!”

Eben rushed past me hurried over to the nanny. I watched as the boy cradled her in his arms, holding a kerchief to her cut cheek. He noticed me watching. The children crept out of their hiding places and gathered around me. Llyana and Yoan, the oldest girls, helped T’Koll to his feet, using another pillowcase to staunch the flow of green bloody from his head wound.

“I’ll be fine,” T’Koll said. He removed a devise from his pocket, which he ran across his forehead, sealing the wound closed. As he set it aside, Sawyer stirred, slowly coming around.

Odo came over to pull her to her feet. “I think it obvious Yor is the Boryhas Warrior,” he said, “or the Shadow Dwellers wouldn’t be here. We need to find the other demon before it makes a move.”

Sawyer’s forehead was cut and bleeding over her left eye ridge. The hologram flickered on and off, turning her human and then Cardassian, until she hit a button and it vanished completely. Dr. Quirin, dressed in pajamas, entered the room. I didn’t know he was at Milea. He tended to Sawyer and then went to help Blythe. Having him with the children made me feel a bit better, not much.

“Take the children to your room, Helen, and stay there,” Odo said. “Eben and Dr. Quirin, help Blythe into the north tower. Stay with her and keep the door locked. Set your pistols at the highest level. Yor and I will search the house for the other demon.” He met my gaze. “Lothar mentioned something about the Orb of Milea. He said it can be used to kill Shadow Dwellers. Have you seen anything resembling an orb, Helen?”

“No, it could be in Vardon’s secret office. The panel is in my bedroom. Eben and I will look for it while you search for the fake Garak. We’ll be all right.”

“I don’t need to lie down. I’ll go with Helen,” Blythe said. “No disrespect, Constable Odo. I’m taking those two men with us. We may need them.”

Dr. Quirin and T’Koll looked at a loss. Blythe handed each man a child and herded the rest, including Shazel, into my bedroom. Sawyer and Odo left us. The big woman pushed a dresser in front of the door. I placed the crib on my bed, made sure the twins

were unharmed and turned to find myself surrounded by children.

“Mommy, mommy, mommy!”

The girls each pulled on me, wanting individual attention. Blythe sat on the bed beside the crib. She caught my eyes. There was a strange look in the center, as if she was hypnotized, for she looked straight through me.

“Your son will protect you. Do not be afraid,” she said in a faraway voice.

“What is she talking about?” Dr. Quirin asked. “Helen, are you pregnant?”

I gave a quick nod and caught Blythe by the arm as her knees sagged. She gave a hard shudder as her eyes cleared. T’Koll looked concerned as he stood at the window, a phaser in hand, while Dr. Quirin helped me sit Blythe in a chair. He ran a tricorder over her. Eben found one of Dukat’s phaser kept in a bottom drawer of a dresser. I didn’t ask how he knew, noticing Shazel standing nearby, a strange smile on her face. Eben pulled a chair close to the door and sat down, acting as guard. Llyana stood beside him. She was two years older, Eben looked bigger than any of the girls, including Shazel. I decided it was because he acted like an adult, which made it easy to forget his true age.

“I have a very bad feeling about this, Helen,” Blythe said. “I’m not one to believe in Bajoran folklore, I have already lost two sisters. We won’t budge from this room until Constable Odo returns.”

“It is unlikely the Shadow Dweller will return,” T’Koll said. “If it does, we will be ready. Dr. Quirin, see the girls are kept calm. You might read them a story.”

“Me?” The doctor frowned. “You’re the tutor. You read to them, while I stand guard at the window.” He changed places with the Vulcan and took the phaser from him.

“All of you stay put,” I said. “I’ll search Vardon’s room for this Orb of Milea. I’ll keep the door open. It won’t take me long.” Llyana approached me. She took hold of my hand. “Do you want to help me?”

The girl nodded. “Yes, mother.”

I heard Shazel snort. I didn’t bother to look at her, knowing the look I’d find on her face. She was the only child in the room who didn’t like me. I heard her whisper to T’Koll about a book she wanted him to read. I left the Vulcan take charge of her. I kept Llyana

with me. I didn't like to have favorites, Llyana had won me over.

"Very well, sweetie," I said. "Come with me."

A thorough search of the secret office yielded no evidence of an orb. The girl and I looked everywhere, found nothing. When we left the small office and returned to the bedroom, Shazel had collected the com-padds and diaries from beneath the bed. T'Koll had organized them into neat piles instead of reading a story. The girls sat on the bed in a huddle, watching. T'Koll handed Vardon's diary to me. A piece of paper was arranged so it stuck out. He smiled as I opened the diary and gazed at a drawing of two symbols.

One was Sawyer's circular swords drawn in blue, the mark of the Ghost Warrior. The second was the scar the Shadow Dweller had carved into my left wrist of the star. I'd not let Dr. Quirin take care of it. He noticed my blood bandage, gave the phaser to Blythe and had her stand guard at the balcony doors, while he took care of my injury.

"I've seen a number of these emblems carved into the furnishings," Dr. Quirin said as he ran a dermo-replicator over my arm. "I think it clear Gul Vardon believed in the prophesy."

"He was frightened of the Pah-Wraiths," T'Koll said. "The scar on your arm, Helen, is their symbol. Dr. Quirin, try to remove it."

"I have. It will require surgery to remove."

The sound of a pistol blast from somewhere in the villa interrupted our banter. The girls ran toward me, clinging to my skirt. Dr. Quirin scooped a child into his arms. T'Koll sat on the bed and the girls gathered at his feet. I joined Eben at the door and listened.

"Mother has killed the second demon," Eben stated. "All of you can calm down. My Mother will take care of us. She always does."

"It's your fault, Eben," Llyana said. She clung to my skirt. "You let the evil dog inside. You said he was friendly. You were wrong."

"You leave Eben alone," Shazel snarled.

"It's all right," the boy replied. "My dog was friendly. He's probably dead, replaced by the shapeshifter. What you silly little girls don't realize is this entire province crawls with demons. I'll do my best to protect you, don't blame my dog for what happened."

Hercules was a good dog and I'm going to miss him."

"Can you be so sure Eben Hercules was a real dog? You found him sniffing outside the fort, looking for scraps," I said. "He could have been a Shadow Dweller."

"No. Mother would have known if he was," Eben said. "Besides, Hercules had every opportunity to attack us at the fort and he didn't. My dog is dead. He must be. He would have defended us against the demon dog if he was alive. I know you don't believe me, Llyana, I'm not quite as stupid as you think I am."

"Children, stop arguing," Dr. Quirin said in a sharp tone. "I don't know how any of you get any rest around here. I'll be glad to return to Terok Nor."

At a loud rap at the bedroom door, T'Koll stood and helped me remove the dresser from the doorway. He pushed it aside on his own, as if it weighed nothing at all. I let the Vulcan tutor open the door. Eben aimed his phaser. It was Sawyer.

She lowered the weapon and ran into her arms. Sawyer held something in her hand; a dog collar. Eben took it from her, letting out a little sob. His dog had been found. Sawyer had the good sense not to mention what happened. While she'd been gone, she had dressed in her armor and wore two swords on her back, two pistols on her hips. Seeing her dressed for battle comforted me. The girls, Blythe and the two men seemed relieved as well. Then I realized it wasn't Sawyer's weapon, the fact she was accompanied by Zolon, Ikarus, and Jenrak.

"Dr. Quirin and T'Koll, you don't need to remain here," Sawyer said. "Ikarus will stand guard with the children. Zolon and Jenrak will guard the door. We'll take no more chances. Eben, you will stay with the girls to make sure no harm comes to them. Blythe, come with me. You can bring dinner to the kids. Helen, Odo wants to speak to us."

"I'd prefer to remain here," Dr. Quirin said. "The children may need me. I am a doctor."

"Suit yourself," Sawyer said. She stepped aside for T'Koll. Ikarus entered the room. I joined her in the hallway. "Keep this door close, Ikarus. No one comes in or out."

"You did capture the other Garak?" I asked once the door closed.

"Yes, it's dead. The demon possessed a Bajoran worker. Did you learn anything?"

"I sorted through Vardon's diary and the com-padds. I'm sure T'Koll will look at them," I said. "I didn't find anything on this Orb of Milea. T'Koll and Eben will."

The two War Dogs took position outside the door. Sawyer led T'Koll and I to the lower level. Her ridges looked sharper than before. Dr. Quirin had not had time to operate on her. I didn't see him and assumed he'd returned to his room. I meant to ask her about surgery, we entered Dukat's study and found Odo seated at his desk, waiting for us. He stood as we entered. Major Kira was with him. The Vulcan sat in a chair. Korvinus sat sprawled in a large chair close to the window, a laser rifle on his lap. I noticed two more figures seated at the back of the room. Prylar Evard and Garak, the real Garak, wore the robes of priests. They sat together on a couch. I was surprised to see Garak and it must have shown on my face.

"It's all right," Garak said. "It really is me." He hurried over and pulled me into his arms. "I'm sorry you were worried, my dear."

"As long as your safe, that's all matters," I said.

"Everyone, please be seated," Odo said.

Sawyer closed the door. When I released Garak, I noticed Sawyer glared at him as hatefully as she had when he'd arrived earlier. Of course, hadn't really been Garak, Sawyer hadn't known then.

Garak returned to his place beside the priest, a plain looking Bajoran with sad, brown eyes. Candles were lit, casting a golden glow about the room, as the sun set beyond the windows. The large vaulted room had an eerie feeling and as we took our seats on two couches facing one another across a low-lying table I felt like I was at my first war counsel. I noticed Sawyer at the replicator, ordering drinks for everyone in the room, handing them out in a particular order. Each person I noticed was served a drink, presumably was their favorite, and her thoughtfulness shown even to Garak made me proud.

The priest set a large book drop on a table with a heavy thud. I took my cup of hot tea and sat in a chair, close to Garak, while Sawyer made herself comfortable on the floor in front of the table. Odo walked over, drawing a chair closer, Korvinus remained seated near the window. Flipping through pages, Evard cried out in triumph when he finally found

what he wanted.

"This is it. This is about the Destroyer," Evard said, softly. He smoothed his hand across the page. "When Garak, Odo and Kira arrived at my church earlier today, I had already spent the last day researching what I could about Travok's prophesy."

"I think you'll be surprised by what we found," Garak said.

"To understand Gnosh," Evard said, "we have to go back to the earliest time in Bajor's history, a time when legends say the Prophets lived among us, along with the Pah-Wraiths. My Order preserves the memory of this age, against the day when it will at last be laid to rest." He cleared his throat. "In the beginning, there was a spiritual order who sought a closer connection to the universe. They communicated with a higher realm of beings, and in time were able to shed their corporeal forms and they became the Prophets. You can see why we don't advertise our existence much, since most of the population considers us heretical. The Pah-Wraiths and Prophets lived together in the Celestial Temple, until the war with Gnosh the Destroyer which divided them for all times."

"Gnosh appears in countless guises on hundreds of worlds," Garak said, "and he is paradoxically necessary for the work of creation to begin, since before there can be any new creation, you must destroy the old. It was his lieutenants who struck the most fear into the people: Valana, Kolainus, and Th'Khan."

"Three?" Sawyer asked. "The three snakes in the prophesy, the fat, the lean, and the subdued."

"Quite so," Evard said.

Opening the book to a page of etchings, the priest revealed a drawing of a woman wrapped in a blue cloak, whose skin was drained of all color, her hair the pale white of an albino. With the hood of her cloak back, a circlet of gold was revealed above her head, holding a single jewel in it. Her staff stood as tall as her, revealing vines near the top.

"Valana was the first to arrive, a blue-skinned temptress with long black hair and the kiss of death and the last to be dispatched," Evard explained, translating the old script. "It was Valana who corrupted the Pah-Wraiths and convinced them to wage war against the Prophets. The war split our people in two, scattering them too far off lands, was only

the beginning. When the Prophets at last banished the Pah-Wraiths to the Fire Caves, Valana was defeated by a warrior, one who later became known as the Ghost Warrior. She left behind a book called the 'Kosta Mojen', and returned a century later to reclaim it, this time with the Dark Knight who is also known as Kolainus."

Evard turned the page to another etching. I could not see the face of the man in the armor, if indeed the creature was a man. Kolainus had serpentine characteristics, with feathered wings and a scaly tail. Black armor covered its body head to toe. In one hand it carried a sword, and in the other, a shield emblazoned with the sigil of Valana's order, a seven-sided star.

"Each point of the star represents a battle or occurrence between the Prophets and the Pah-Wraiths," Evard said. "The first is the war between the Prophets and Pah-Wraiths, and then their scattering too far off lands. The third is Kolainus who led an army the dead, he was defeated by the Ghost Warrior. The next two points are conflicts with terrible monsters each slew the savior. The fifth point represents the Cardassian Occupation and the sixth most assuredly the arrival of the Shadow Dwellers. The last, I believe, foretells a battle between the Pah-Wraiths and the Ghost Warrior."

"I've seen that. There is a painting in Vardon's office depicts battle," I said.

"Let me continue. The Spirit Guide represents the faith of the Bajoran people," Evard said. "I know it is easy to be confused by our beliefs, customs, and Travok's many prophecies. I believe the real war, the seventh point on the star, has yet to occur." He turned the page. "You can see a drawing of two more figures of Kolainus pitted against the Ghost Warrior. Kolainus again brings the army of the dead to fight his adversary. In the past, it is believed with each foe slain by his sword, the creature bolstered its army, he was defeated. This time the result could be different."

I wasn't sure if I was relieved or disappointed I played no important role in the prophesy. Sawyer had been so sure I had been brought to Bajor for a reason. I wished I could share her burden, at the same time, I was glad I was not chosen to fight such horrible adversaries. I noticed she drank Romulan ale.

"The legends speak of an enchanted weapon, a sword forged by the Prophets

themselves, used by the Ghost Warrior who challenged Kolainus alone on the field of battle. The battleraged for a full day and a night, in the end, Kolainus fell, as I said. Now see the third lieutenant.”

A new etching was revealed of the strange Th’Khan. A large creature, obviously male, with the appearance of a tiger had four arms, all carrying varying weapons.

“We don’t know how the Ghost Warrior defeated Th’Khan, it’s clear his reign of terror was worse than the Dark Knight. While the Dark Knight stole souls on the field of battle, Th’Khan plagued the countryside, destroying the fields before him. It was another reincarnation of the Ghost Warrior who rose to meet Th’Khan in battle, defeating him not by strength, through cunning. She bet the lieutenant he could not destroy the fields in the land of Aemil, and promised to wed him if he succeeded. When Th’Khan went into the fields, the land itself came alive to resist him and in the end he was swallowed by the Orb of Regeneration, it’s correct term. The Orb of Milea is a local term and it’s said to be hidden somewhere on this estate. I believe Gul Vardon searched for it, in vain.”

Evard turned to one final sketching. It was clear this was Gnosh himself. Valana stood by his side, the beast itself stood more than twenty feet tall. It had twisting horns on the top of his head, large wings on his back outstretched, powerful arms ended in claws, and it stood on its legs like a cat. Sharp teeth sat in his mouth and his body was covered in armor.

“Valana’s true purpose was to clear the way for Gnosh to come,” Evard explained. “Nobody knows if this is Gnosh’s true form, they say he fought with the strength of a hundred men, and was by far the most cunning general on the battlefield, often defeating a force three times the size of his own in the field in a better position. He fed off the souls of the living. When Gnosh stepped on the ground, he drained the life out of it, and only by using the Sword of the Prophets could the Ghost Warrior harm him in combat. So cunning was Gnosh everyone believed his objective to be the capitol city, except for the Ghost Warrior who it said to have remembered the images on the shield of Kolainus and later recorded them in the Book of Light, which I am now reading from.”

I turned the book around to look at the drawings.

“The image of Valana’s first war provided the key to stopping Gnosh, as the defenses of the people lined up to protect the capitol, when the Ghost Warrior drove the enemy into the Fire Caves and locked them inside,” Evard said. “Valana is said to have recovered the Kosta Mojen, a book contains spells of great evil, and took it with her into the caves. By this time, the Pah-Wraiths had become beings so twisted by Gnosh’s will, he planned to use his lieutenants and his army to consume the world of Bajor before moving on to the next. Gnosh’s goal is to consume the essence of the Prophets, which would have made him unstoppable as he devourers this world and each world he intends to destroy.”

“Just how did the Ghost Warrior lock them inside the Fire Cave?” Sawyer asked. “I thought there were many caves, you said there were, not there is just one.”

“I’m learning as I go along the difference between fact and legend,” the priest said. “The Book of Light is misleading as well, for it says Gnosh and Valana faced in battle the Ghost Warrior and the Deliverer. I have never seen mention of the Deliverer except in this one reference. The latter struggled with Valana for control of the dead, the Orb of Regeneration was broken in half during the battle and ‘separated it fell into hill and hole, vanishing from sight.’ is what the Ghost Warrior wrote. ‘And Gnosh fell in battle, a mortal wound, and as he died he said to me, I have fallen and risen on countless worlds. I am Death incarnate, the balance to life. My form may fall, the essence remains, and I will return to this world again.’ With this, he died and vanished into the waning light of the five moons.’ This is the quotation the Ghost Warrior wrote. Waning moons is far different from the five moons aligned.”

Sawyer set her glass aside. “Did Kia Lucan and Gul Vardon successfully open the Fire Caves? Or did Talos and Dovvos do it? I need to know if the Pah-Wraiths are released. I don’t care if it was when the moons were aligned or waning. Are they free?”

Everyone stared at the priest. Evard nodded and folded his hands in his lap.

“Not yet,” he said. “Shadow Dwellers have emerged through their dabbling. It is clear Gnosh has returned again. All the signs point to is and the recent activity of the Order of the Red Snake, which Gul Vardon gathered here, along with the outbreak of recent attacks by vethrals and their undead version, the jakars, are indisputable. Travok’s

prophecy says the only way to drive out Gnosh is with the Orb of Regeneration, the soul of Bajor, and reuniting the two halves. If this can be done, then the Prophets and Pah-Wraiths will be rejoined again in eternal peace. If not, then they will both be destroyed."

"What about Helen and me?" Sawyer thrust up the sleeve of her shirt, pointing at the blue tattoo on her left wrist. "You said I am the Ghost Warrior. You said you knew it after I faced the phony Gnosh in the smuggler's arena. I am a human. I was brought from Earth's past. Why? To fight these monsters."

"Was it the Prophets who brought us here or Q?" I asked. "The Shadow Dweller who posed as Garak said it was always Q."

"I do not know who Q is, the demon lied to you, Helen," Evard said. "I believe the Prophets brought you both here for a reason. Yor, we know, is the reincarnation of the Ghost Warrior. I'm not sure where you yet fit into this, Helen. These events I mention happened ages ago. It is quite possible you are the last reincarnation and is why you were brought from the past to this place. My task is to have faith, not to question it."

"Does this have anything to do with my children? Or my unborn child?" I heard the intake of breath from Korvinus. "It's true. I am pregnant. Blythe knew, though I don't know how, and mentioned I would be protected by my son. Can you explain this, Prylar Evard?"

"Perhaps I can," Garak interjected. "There is a Cardassian story may provide the key to finally defeating the Destroyer. I don't believe it's any coincidence the Fifth Point on the star, the same as those on the shield of Kolainus, concerns the Occupation. The Fifth Order rose in rebellion against Cardassian, led by the Circle, which would suggest things have circled around and the great war is about to be fought. Where Prylar Evard and I disagree is about the rejoining of the Prophets and Pah-Wraiths, for I believe those cast out, the other half who were split apart by Valana may be the Cardassians."

Korvinus stirred from his chair, rising to his feet. "I know this story," he said. "It was read to me by my father. It tells the tale of their hero, Lartosh, who lead the exodus of the ancient Hebitians from the land of Kimora Tan, and ultimately established a new home in Rilyana. In reality there is no province on Cardassia called Kimora Tan, and Rilyana is

regarded as a myth and has never been located by archeologists or historians.”

“The descriptions are worth mentioning,” Garak said. “A woman in blue appeared as though a member of the living dead. This was not the Prophetess. It was a third being called Prelat who forced Lartosh into making an oath of loyalty before he and the Prophetess could go to their new homeland. Together, Prelat, the Prophetess and Lartosh marched across the surface of Cardassia when their tribe was threatened, wiping out the indigenous species there. The Prelat drained the life out of the fields themselves, while the Prophetess coerced those to obey her and Lartosh killed the enemy with his sword. And when Lartosh finally returned home, he had changed, covered in black armor, emblazoned with strange symbols.”

“For Lartosh feasted on the souls of the men he slain,” Korvinus said. “Ah, yes. I liked part of the story the most.”

“Is Lartosh the real Destroyer?” I asked.

“I do not think Lartosh is the Destroyer,” Evard said. “Garak has convinced me that Lartosh is the Cardassian version of Kolainus, the Dark Knight. We did agree Gnosh’s corruption has been present on Bajor as well as Cardassia since the beginning of time.”

“The story ends with Prelat, the unnamed Prophetess, and Lartosh departing,” Korvinus said. “The trio promised to one day return and their kingdom would extend further than they ever dreamed possible.”

“Three evil Cardassians and three evil Bajoran lieutenants,” Sawyer said. “In the prophesy there is also three snakes. Three snakes shall come to a fertile land. One shall feed, one shall starve and one shall devour all. Unless the savior tames the feted snake, the lean snake willingly returns to its lair, and the subdued snake bows its heads. Only then will peace reign in the restored land and means Bajor, not Cardassia.”

“The key is the Orb,” Odo said. He walked over to Sawyer and stared directly at her. “The Orb of Regeneration holds the secrets of Bajor and far more. We must find it if we are to help the Prophets save Bajor from the Pah-Wraiths.”

“How do you propose I do this?” Sawyer asked. “We have no idea where it is.”

Garak cleared his throat. “I know you are inclined not to trust me, Yor. I’m well

aware this includes Dukat and I'm on thin ice with the pair of you," he said. "I have not betrayed you to the Order. Nor have I shown anyone the recording made by Vardon. First, no one would believe a mere human is the Ghost Warrior, though after viewing the recording it's obvious you are invincible. Secondly, I have no intention of letting Dukat anywhere close to the Orb of Regeneration, if and once it is located. The orb must be given to the Prophets and when occurs, I believe you and Helen will be allowed to return to your home."

Sawyer stood and faced Garak. "My theory is Prelat is Gnosh and both represent Death," she said. "There are three evil entities in each story. Three snakes in the prophesy. I was wrong about the identifies of the snakes, it's obvious who they are and both stories are similar. Gnosh's goal is to release the trio from the Fire Caves. If and when happens, I need the Sword of the Prophets to defeat them. That's what must be found first and then the Orb of Regeneration."

"It is a great deal to take upon yourself, Glinn Yor," Evard said. "The Pah-Wraiths want to be released from the Fire Caves. The Prophets want to rejoin their fellow kin. The Orb must be found. As for Death, there is no way to beat death, only to stop Death for achieving its goal of absolute destruction. I believe if the Pah-Wraiths can find someone they can manipulate, they will use the Orb to get free and destroy Bajor."

"Sawyer and I will do whatever is necessary to help the Prophets," I said.

"you have the mark of the Pah-Wraiths," Odo said. "I didn't want to mention it before, I may be you will do more harm than good, Helen."

"So I'm to be locked up?" I asked.

"No one said that, Helen. I'd like to see both of your marks," Kira said. She knelt beside Sawyer. She glanced at the blue mark and waited for Evard to open the book to a page with the same symbol. "That's it, all right. Now for you, Helen." Rising, she came over to look at my new scar at the same time Evard opened the book to the second symbol. "They look similar. If you want my opinion, Helen can't be involved in this. I don't mean any disrespect, Helen, Shadow Dweller marked you. I'd say cut it off, it's obvious it runs deeper than a mere scar."

"I'm not evil," I said. "And Sawyer is just Sawyer."

"Yor is the Ghost Warrior," T'Koll said. "It is not logical for you to deny her destiny. Nor is it logical to allow you to be of further assistance."

"My son will protect me. That's why Blythe said. It must mean my unborn child will keep me from turning evil. I'm not evil." no one listened to me.

"You were brought here by the Prophets for a reason," T'Koll said. "You are said to be fearless in battle. I saw the recording of your battle against the gamesters in the smugglers' camp. Once the Sword of the Prophets is found, Yor, you not only will be able to defeat the Three Lieutenants, you will triumph against the true Destroyer."

"Yes. It is your destiny, Sawyer. You are the one," Evard said.

"The story said there is a Deliverer." Sawyer glanced at me. "We're vulnerable here. Two Shadow Dwellers gained access inside this house and Broc was murdered. They've tried to kill me since I arrived. They also attacked Helen. If she is the Deliverer, then we should expect more demons to come here. We must secure Milea against further attack."

"That's your job," Odo said glancing at Korvinus. "Dukat must be advised of what has happened. We will need more than twenty soldiers to search the vineyard for the Orb and sword. Twice number to defend this villa."

"We don't even know where to find the Sword of the Prophets," Kira said. "Do you know where to look, Prylar Evard?"

"I have an idea," he said. "I tend to believe Helen is the Deliverer. She did have twins and is pregnant again. I take the Deliverer as a literally term. Somewhere in your mind, Helen, you hold the secret of the orb and sword's whereabouts, placed there by the Prophets themselves. You must try to remember."

"I remember nothing," I said. "I don't know where to find either item. Can't you keep looking through the Book of Light? It should tell you where to find them."

"Prayer and meditation is what is needed, my dear. The answers we seek are not in this holy book, imprinted on your soul," said the Bajoran priest. "Odo is right. We must prepare Milea for an invasion. I believe Gnosh will send first Kolainus and then Th'Khan. Valana is a priestess, the Prophetess, and is a master of manipulation and mind control. I

expect her to fight only if forced into a situation where she has to. We have the Ghost Warrior. All we must do now is find these two items and we must start looking for them immediately.”

“That shouldn’t be too difficult,” Garak said, with his usual sarcasm. “I trust you will inform Prefect Dukat I have been cooperative, Glinn Yor. I don’t care to have my throat slit in the middle of the night.”

“Fine,” Sawyer said. “I’ll tell him you’re working for us and not your father. It would look better for you if you helped find these two items.” She turned toward me. “Whatever you’re going to do, then do it. Pray. Meditate. Search your soul, my friend. You need to find both items before it’s too late.”

“Thanks for the added pressure,” I said.

Sawyer smiled, it only made me feel worse. She had faith in me and seemed the worst possible thing to do, for I had been branded by the enemy. No one had mentioned the entire prophesy, as Sawyer was fixated on the three damn snakes, I had a part of it memorized as well and muttered it more to myself than the group.

“From the dark, a dagger will strike,” Evard said. “Poisoned with vengeance and disdain, causing savior and shadow to wage war. This does worry me. It would suggest a third person will try to stop the Ghost Warrior from succeeding.”

“We’ll, it’s not me,” Garak said. “I won’t leave your side, Helen. Evard and I will help you remember.”

“I’m afraid I must disagree,” Odo said. “Dukat was quite clear about how to handle things, Garak. Leave Helen with Prylar Evard and T’Koll and take a stroll with me. Major Kira, you and the Bajorans you brought should secure the villa. I cannot stress enough for each of us not to wander off alone. There is only so much holy water to go around.”

I watched the group depart and sat next to the priest. T’Koll watched from afar as Evard took hold of my hands. He closed his eyes, muttering, “Let us pray.”

SAWYER

Chapter Seventy-Six

Helen entered the kitchen, alone, catching me seated on the counter eating a sandwich. It was well after midnight. I set the last half of my sandwich on a plate. The bread was dry. I wasn't particularly fond of turtle meat. It had the consistency of bologna and it was also light green. I tried to hide this fact by folding it in lettuce and topping it off with cheese and tomatoes. Helen stared at the sandwich, repulsed. She pointed at my mouth. I wiped off a milk moustache.

"What's up?" I asked. "I have the villa well defended. Lothar and Uther have the Bajoran workers back in their homes. For now, things seem quite."

"I can't listen to one more prayer. Not one more. I sent T'Koll to bed. The priest is now walking the house, chanting prayers he seems will protect us from evil."

"Evard can be a bit melodramatic, he means well," I said. "I came in here to take a break. The Brotherhood said the Pah-Wraiths would be released when the moons were aligned. Now Lothar claims it's when the moons are waning. You hungry? Want the rest of my sandwich? It's turtle meat."

"Gross," Helen said. She pulled the pens out of her hair and gave it a shake. "My head is killing me. I hear thunder in the distance. I hate it when it storms here. Everything collects static-cling. Your hair is standing on in, Sawyer."

"You're not supposed to be walking around on your own," I said.

"Nor are you."

"Good point."

Helen glanced at my glass of milk. She grabbed the glass, drained the remaining contents and then hurled it across the room. The glass hit the wall, shattering. I stared at her, unsure whether this was my friend or a Shadow Dweller, thinking it best to wait until she spoke before I stabbed her. A sob escaped her lips. She sagged against the counter,

barely able to stand and pressed her hands to her head. "None of it makes sense. All talking in my head. I want it to stop. Make it stop, Yor."

"I'm Sawyer and you're Huckleberry. Remember?"

"It's a stupid nickname. Don't say it again. And stop encouraging those fools!"

For some reason, I hesitated to come to her aid. First, she used my Cardassian name. I was actually afraid to touch her. The top layer of her red hair, the finest strands, rose into the air, proof of static electricity. My paranoia the strange shadows moving on the wall had not come to make friends made me slide off the counter and glance toward the butcher knife.

Helen gazed at me, wincing in pain as if her head pounded. She gave a thump to her head and lifted her upper lip in a snarl. The rumble of distant thunder shook the dishes on the shelves. Pots hanging over the center counter swung on the chains. The lights overhead flickered. Something was definitely happening.

"Everyone has lost their minds around here. This whole thing is ridiculous and so are you, Prylar Evard, Garak, and anyone else who believe this crap. You may have them fooled not me." Helen waved her hands in the air. "You're not the savior of Bajor! Just look at you! With your human face and Cardassian heart, you're nothing more than a fraud. They know it deep inside. They all know you're a fake. Give this up before someone gets hurt!"

I wiped my mouth on my sleeve and watched as her eyes darted crazily toward the same butcher knife I'd used to cut the turtle meat. I refrained from reaching for it, fearing would set her off, clearly something was wrong. This wasn't Helen, not the girl I knew who had been my friend for the last ten years. I feared she was possessed.

"I'm not sure why you're so upset, Helen," I said, using my most soothing voice. "Would you like something else to drink? How about a glass of wine? We can sit and talk about it."

"No! No more talking. It's all I can hear in my head. Talk, talk, talk!" Helen rubbed her face with her hands, causing her cheeks to turn bright red from the abrasive contact. "I've added up how long we've been here, Sawyer, and it's a year. An entire year of

everyone wanting this and that, telling me what I can and can't do. The priest is a fool. I'm just a girl from Texas who somehow ended up in a place I have no business being. The last thing I wanted was to be pregnant. Again. I want rid of it. I want rid of you and I want rid of Dukat."

Outside the kitchen window, I heard thunder rolling and noticed a bright flash of lightning. It was red not white like it was back on Earth. I glanced at the butcher knife and so did she.

"We're not going home, Helen. We live here now."

"It's over, Sawyer. It's been over a long time."

A loud crack of lightning sounded like it hit the ground outside. I placed my hand flat on the knife, feeling no respite in the danger I felt from Helen in her crazed state of mind. The storm had something to do with it. As it approached, she seemed to become worse.

"You can't pretend to be the savior of Bajor, you have to have faith in the Prophets, real faith, for to work. You no more believe in the orb than you do in the sword. Why should I bother to find them when they're only play toys for you? Toys for Dukat. And toys for little annoying boy you adopted. All of you are in my way."

"Come on, Helen. I can't do this without your help. We're in this together, babe. One for all and all for you. Right?"

Helen raised her hand and slapped me. The crack echoed through the room. My face stung. The hologram short-circuited and faded. I could feel it happen. When I appeared human once more, she started to cackle.

"I know you hate me because I'm with Dukat and not you. What we have is love, true love, and you can't handle it. No. You tried to steal him from me. You said from day one he belonged to you. You're only playing along with the others so you can impress him. You think if you defeat the Bajoran demons he'll marry you instead of me."

"That's not true, Helen. I told you before if Dukat and I got together the Pah-Wraiths will use us to destroy this planet and Cardassia. You know they're dangerous. Let me take you back to Prylar Evard. I'm sure he can calm you down."

“Calm down? Do you think I need to be calmed? Oh, I’ve heard what you say behind my back. You say the twins’ aren’t Dukat’s, must belong to Torell or Vardon. You call me a slut. You’re the one who spread your legs for Dukat and Damar. How many other Cardassians have you been with, Glinn Yor? Should I bother counting? Frankly, I’m surprised you didn’t sleep with Garak while you slept your way through the chain of command.”

“Helen, it’s the storm. It’s effecting you. Just calm down and let’s go into the other room and see the night priest.” I considered giving her a drop of holy water as she grabbed my wrist, and then pushed me against the refrigerator.

“Did you know I slept with Damar? You were with Dukat, so I visited Damar. I enjoyed it. So did he. I bet if I snapped my fingers he’d come back to me. I’m far nicer than you. I looked like a woman, all soft and warm, while you’re like cuddling with a hedgehog.”

I wrenched my arm free. “I already know about you and Damar. Dukat told me,” I said, feeling her hot breath on my face. “That was a long time ago, Helen. We both hurt each other in the past. I think you should see Dr. Quirin. Come with me.”

Helen gave a loud sob and reached for a knife. I darted around the counter, shouting for help as she slashed it through the air, coming toward me, hell-bent. There was no finesse in her attack, just savagery. I grabbed a metal pan, using it as a shield as she charged toward me. She stabbed at me, time and again, while I knocked away the knife with the pan, backing toward the doorway.

“What is going on?”

Dukat’s voice, ringing with authority, nearly made me drop my shield. I lifted it as Helen stabbed one final time and watched the tip of the blade emerge from the back of the pan. Helen spun around and fled to the far side of the kitchen. Brushing past me, Dukat approached Helen and with a loud sob she tried to run from him, she caught hold of her wrists, trying to hold on as she struggled against him.

“Why are you two fighting? Helen, I want an explanation.”

The moment he released her, Helen slapped Dukat across the cheek. He lifted his

hand to strike back, I let out a shout, stopping him just in time.

“Don’t! It’s the storm,” I shouted. “It’s causing her to act this way.”

He dropped his hand. “What do you mean? Have you both gone mad?”

“Don’t you see the lights, how they’re reacting, just like they did whenever we....it’s the storm,” I said. “I’m sure it was sent by the Pah-Wraiths. She doesn’t know what she’s doing. Be careful.”

“Both of you are liars and I hate you. Cheating behind my back. Filling my head full of stories,” Helen shouted. “I won’t stay here and be subjected to this any longer.”

Reaching the door, Helen opened it, Dukat caught her, pulling her inside as it started to rain and thunder peeled overhead. She fought against him, a thing gone wild, he managed to pull her arms behind her back, holding her firmly as she let out a demonic howl caused both Dukat and I to shiver in fear.

“What has happened?” Odo asked. He appeared behind me. “I arrived as soon as I heard the commotion. Evard feared this would happen. He said it’s not Helen’s fault this is happening to her. She is under the influence of the Pah-Wraiths.”

“We know,” Dukat said and I at the same time.

“Evard believes she should be sedated during the storm. It’s complicated, the demons want the same thing we do from her, the location of the Orb of Milea and the Sword of the Prophets. I suggest we retrain her.”

“What do you think I’m trying to do. I came to Milea as soon as I received your message, Odo,” Dukat said. He drew Helen against his chest, his arms wrapped around her body. “Calm down, my love. I’m here with you now. No one is going to hurt you.” He glanced at Odo. “What are you waiting for? Give her a sedative and be quick about it, Constable.”

Odo produced a hypospray. He’d come prepared. He came around the other side of the center counter and pressed the hypospray to Helen’s shoulder. In seconds, she collapsed in Dukat’s arms. He lifted her off the floor, carrying her out of the kitchen, leaving Odo and I to follow after him. Her scream and renewed kicking brought me running to Dukat’s side. “How can she be this strong when sedated?” Dukat asked.

“Helen? Can you hear me?” I asked.

I reached out and placed my hand on Helen’s cheek. She turned toward me, our eyes locked and another bright light flashed, this time inside of my head. The hairs on my arms stood on end beneath my armor and the room swirled around me. Somehow I stood outside Milea in the rain, able to see the ruins of the chapel through the downpour and a blue light radiating from its center. I ran toward the chapel, my boots slipping on the muddy path as the thunder boomed overhead and lightning streaked through the sky.

Whether it was a dream or not, it felt real. Shivering, I reached the temple, able to see the bright blue light emanating from a crack in the wall. With a push, I separated the stones and found a sword pitted and scarred from age. As my hand closed around the hilt, I heard another boom of thunder vibrated through my body and echoed through the air. It was followed by a flash of bright light. I pulled the sword free.

“Ghost Warrior! Where are you?”

With the sword in hand, I turned, struck by a sheet of rain, able to heard a man shouting my name in the wind. I stumbled forward and turned, able to see a large form standing outside the chapel. I had thought it was Damar’s voice, it was not my lover who I stood beyond the walls, an armored figure revealed as another bolt of lightning struck past, hitting the chapel wall, knocking it to the ground. Dressed head to toe in black armor, with feathered wings folded at his back and a serpent’s tail flipping behind him in rapid irritation, I watched as he lifted the visor of his helmet. He carried an enormous serrated edge sword in one hand and a shield on the other with seven images on the end of seven points of a star. I glanced at the one, which showed the Ghost Warrior fighting him, realizing I was in fact standing outside the chapel facing my opponent for real.

“Ghost Warrior! It is I, the Dark Knight.” His voice was deep and thunderous as the storm overhead. He continued to walk toward me. “I am Kolainus!”

I raised the sword and pointed it at him. “Come no further or I shall strike!”

“How can a nonbeliever strike back at what she does not believe this is real? To you I am a phantom,” he said, advancing through the rain. He slammed his sword against his shield, sending flaming sparks in air as he beat on it. “You are a mere mortal. You cannot

hope to defeat me. You can only die.”

Gathering my strength, I rose to my feet and noticed the Sword of the Prophets no longer glowed bright blue. I gave it a shake, expecting to feel its power, nothing happened. The Dark Knight appeared in front of me, his wings spread wide, in the act of whipping his tail to knock me off my feet. I jumped over the tail and landed in the mud, bringing the sword slashing upwards and connected with the shield.

The knight stepped back, smacking his sword against his shield once more, sparks flying and then with a savage roar charged. Planting my feet in the mud, I knocked aside his sword with my own, he moved faster and slid his blade across my shoulder. I screamed as I felt the tip burn into my flesh. Kolainus laughed as I staggered back. He swung his blade toward my legs, knocking me off my feet and sent me tumbling into the mud. Every time I managed to stand, he knocked me down again with his shield, bruising my body and cracking my ribs. In agony, I crawled through the mud, only to have my foot caught in a steely hand and with a jerk dragged across the ground. The blue light from the sword faded and I cried out as his foot landed in the middle of my back.

“What lies you have been told, girl. No creature named Q brought you here. It was Gnosh who did so. He did as an act of kindness. Your greatest desire was to meet Gul Dukat and so you met him. You are meant to be at his side. Join us and you can be with him and together we shall bring about the end of Bajor and the rise of Cardassia!”

Kolainus bent down, his strange incandescent eyes glowing from his helmet, instilling nothing fear in my heart. He stuck his sword into the ground, sending up sparks as the blade sunk into the ground. Holding back his shield arm, he reached down with his free hand and grabbed my arm, yanking me to my feet. I kept hold of the Sword of the Prophets it was too heavy to lift and I whimpered as he lifted me into the air.

“Still you resist, human. For centuries I have waited for this moment for you to be restored to life, knowing this time would be your last death,” he said, flipping his tail. “Death came for you once, the Prophets restored your life, and so Death has come for you a second time. There is no escape, Ghost Warrior. Your life belongs to me!”

His fingers started to close around my throat. I kicked and flayed my arms at him, to

no avail. Slowly, the pressure increased, cutting off wind from my lungs and I closed my eyes, focusing on the sword in my grip. I heard a gasp from the Dark Knight and opened my eyes as the weapon again emitted a brilliant blue light, blinding in its intensity.

Kolainus released me and grabbed his sword, raising his shield a notch higher. I brandished the sword before me, my confidence regained. I ignored the searing pain in my right arm as I swung the blade over my head, finding it suddenly light and easy to wield. With a battle cry, I charged at the startled serpent-man warrior. Our weapons clashed together with a clang of alien metal. Red and blue sparks shot up into the air, spiraling off into different directions like stray fireworks as we traded blows.

“Only a true believer in the Prophets can vanquish me,” said Kolainus. “You are not a believer. Vardon was and contacted Gnosh after he breached the Sacred Stone covers the Fire Cave. In so doing, he released me, Valana and Th’Khan. Valana summoned those weak of heart called the Circle to enter the Valley of Shadows to form the Circle. Mikor, Raynor, Mukot, Vardon, Tychek, Kenmar, Parnal and Torell came when she called. Had you and Dukat entered the valley when first you came to Bajor, you would have joined the Circle, as you were meant to. You Terrans are hard to control.”

I knew now what had happened, how the Circle had been formed, and why the Fifth Order had been led astray, resulting in their deaths. Had I not stepped into the line of fire, saving Dukat’s life and been wounded, Mikor and Raynor may very well had led us into the valley, the same where I’d been taken by Parnal and later killed Torell.

“Say what you will, demon. I may be human, I do believe in the prophesy.”

The Dark Knight was swift on the move, no longer toying with me, ardently trying his best to kill me. We traded blows back and forth as the rain let up, giving us a clear view of each other. Kolainus showed no signs of tiring, nor did the strength leave his sword arm. He kept attacking, pushing me backwards and using his tail to pound the water, trying to distract me with the spray and the noise. I kept my eyes on the serrated blade, saw him swing it back, then readied myself as it swung down in a large arc. I held up my sword, this time it not long held, it repelled the other’s blade, flinging his arm wide and giving me an opening in his defense. I lunged forward, stabbing Dark Knight full in the chest and

jerking the black out again.

His roars of anger and pain split the air, and backing up a step, he threw his arms wide and vanished in a brilliant explosion of red flames, taking the rain with him, not the large, dark clouds remained high in the sky. I lifted my arm over my eyes, shying away from the sparks and counting to two, I glanced back up. My opponent had vanished and the magic sword, while in battle a beautiful weapon made of what appeared to be gold, had reduced its blue glow, then too disappeared and it appeared again like a rusty, old weapon.

"Sawyer! Where are you?" Helen shouted.

"I see Yor. She's right over there," Dukat said.

Helen appeared with Dukat on the path, drenched to the bone, running toward me. Lowering the sword, I caught my breath as Helen ran toward me and threw her arms around me. She kissed my cheek and then landed one on my mouth, laughing and crying at the same time. With her arm around me, she led me toward where Dukat stood. Dukat slid his arm around me to keep me on his feet, helping me walked toward the villa, while Helen held my hand.

"How did you know where to find me?" I asked.

"I saw it," Helen said. "The moment you touched my cheek, I saw you vanish and reappear in the chapel. I tried to keep Kolainus out of my head. He wanted to know where the sword was, he made me say the things I did, I didn't mean any of it, Sawyer. I tried to resist, he was too strong for me, not for you."

"Luck. It was nothing luck," I muttered. "You don't believe in luck, Sawyer."

"Perhaps fortunate would be more appropriate. Without you, Helen, we would not have a Ghost Warrior a corpse," Dukat said. "If we are to defeat Bajor's pantheon of demons, it will take both of you. Let's get her into the house. She's injured."

Another step and I felt the sheer effect of my broken ribs and the wound in my shoulder. Crying out, I stumbled and dropped the sword. Dukat caught me in his arms, while Helen retrieved the sword, hurrying behind to keep up with his long strides. The rain lessened, clouds moving fast through the sky, revealing three of the full moons. I

noticed two shuttles outside the shuttle and troops gathered in the courtyard. Damar, Prylar Evard, Garak, Kira and Odo appeared on the porch of the villa, standing beneath the porch lights. As we entered the courtyard, approaching the fountain, Damar came running toward me.

“How serious is it, Dukat? Will she live?” Helen asked.

“It’s bad. Someone fetch Dr. Quirin,” Dukat said.

Evard bowed his head as I was carried onto the porch. “The boryhas was triumphant,” he said. “She has defeated the first of Gnosh the Destroyer’s three lieutenants. Two more shall yet appear, when and where, I cannot say. Which one did she fight, Helen?”

“Kolainus.” Helen released my hand and lifted the sword. “She also found the Sword of the Prophets. This is it. She used it to kill him.”

“it’s just a rusty old sword,” Kira said.

“It worked well enough,” Dukat replied.

Carried into the front room, Dukat placed me on a couch, standing aside as Dr. Quirin moved forward. I noticed Master T’Koll and Eben standing to the side. Damar lifted the boy into his arms and watched as Dr. Quirin ran his dermal-replicator over my body, healing my broken ribs without removing my armor. A group stood nearby watching as the doctor hit me with a hypospray, deadening the pain in my body and motioned for Dukat to remove my armor. When the buckled were unfastened, he peeled it off my body and then used a knife to cut away the material from my blackened right shoulder. At the side of the wound left behind by Kolainus’s sword, I heard Eben let out a sob and turned to see him bury his face against Damar’s neck.

“The boy shouldn’t be seeing this,” I said.

“The boy refuses to remain in the nursery,” T’Koll said. “I found him in your room, in the south tower, watching the battle on the hill. We both saw what happened, Glinn Yor.”

Damar handed Eben to the Vulcan. He knelt beside me as Dr. Quirin again ran the devise over my shoulder. Both men glanced at each other.

"The black mark remains. Can you not heal it, doctor?" Damar asked.

"In time I can do a great deal, not with you and Dukat breathing over my shoulder," Dr. Quirin said, angrily. "Let's get Yor into her own bed. Don't the rest of you have jobs to do, like standing guard, finding out where the orb is, and staying out of the way? Must Yor and I do everything. Pick her up, Damar. She's your intended wife. Dukat. Move aside."

"She is my cousin."

"A fact I'm well aware of, Dukat," the doctor said. "Tend to our own woman and get out of my way. Major Kira, you seem quite calm. Please gather my medical kit and join us in the south tower. As for you Prylar Evard, a few prayers might be helpful. Bring the sword along. We might need a little magic if nothing else works."

"You got it," Kira said.

* * *

HELEN

"And the orb Odo mentioned? Where is it?" Dukat asked. "You have to remember, Helen. The answer is there in your head."

Turning in bed, I faced Dukat, catching my breath when his hand slid between my legs. It was late and everyone Korvinus and the soldiers had gone to bed. I imagined even Odo had sought relaxation in his bucket kept in Major Kira's room was unfair, for he'd done his best to help us since his arrival. I wore only a sheer gown. The twins were in the crib at the foot of the bed. Blythe slept in the nursery with the children with four guards on duty. Since Sawyer had been taken to her room, I hadn't gone in to check on her, nor did it seem I'd be allowed to see her anytime soon, for I felt Dukat's erection nudge me as he pulled me close.

"Did you hear me, dearest? Is it on this estate? Where do I find it?"

"I have no idea where it is, Dukat. And if I did, I wouldn't tell you. It's for Sawyer to find, not you. She intends to give the Orb of Regeneration to the Prophets. She also has two more demons to kill and perhaps Gnosh and I can't concentrate at the moment if you're

going to continue to do that. Are you trying to seduce me to give information?"

"Is it working?" Dukat asked.

"No, it's not. You'll have to try harder."

Carefully, knowing how close I was to the edge, I pushed his hand away and straddled his large body. He slid into me easily and I'd barely started to move when an orgasm came crashing down on me. When I opened my eyes again, it was to see Dukat smiling at me.

"Are you easily satisfied, my dear?"

Snarling wordlessly, I started moving again, changing tempo and twisting my hips to drag as much sensation out of our joining as possible. When Dukat's movements became erratic, it was his turn to snarl and we flipped so I was once more on my back, this time giving him the lead. Dukat drove hard, holding tight as he pounded into me. My orgasm built and then exploded in stars and screams as Dukat groaned with his own completion. For several minutes we lay joined, coming back slowly to the present. As usual, it was Dukat who came to his senses first. He restored to a mart-ass remark.

"I think I rather enjoy this method of interrogation. Remind me to thank Yor for recommending it."

"Of course, dearest. In fact, let me give you a small reminder right now."

I brought my hands to Dukat's cheeks and kissed him until he was breathless. Dukat brought his hands up to capture mine and, as we touched, I felt a small electrical like jolt pass through us. This was true love, I thought. All around me the world suddenly seemed to grow still, as if everything had frozen in time, and while I gazed upon Dukat, I watched amazed as the pupils of his eyes glowed red. Instincts overcame caution and I slid my hand across his eyes, closing them, and felt the tiniest of trembles go through his body.

"Are you alright, my love?" I asked.

My voice broke through the stillness in the room. Dukat seemed not aware what had just happened or didn't want to admit something strange had occurred, for he merely frowned before removing my hands. His eyes were normal. I felt a string on my wrist from the scar left behind by the Shadow Dweller and lifted it to my mouth, sucking on it.

“Be warned. Valana, the Queen of the Dead, is near. We are not safe at Milea.” I stared at Dukat and then gave his face a slap. “What did you just say?”

“It is here Gnosh the Destroyer will appear.” Dukat fell silent and gave a shake of his head and rubbed his temple, lying back on the pillows, breathing hard. “My head is killing me,” he said. “Did you just say something to me, my love? Something about a queen?”

“No, was you. You said Valana, the Queen of the Dead is near. You said it in a perfectly normal voice, Dukat. I think I should wake Prylar Evard and bring him in here. Your eyes were glowing red seconds ago and my scar is burning. Something is wrong.”

Dukat wrapped his arms around me. “No, don’t leave. Whatever it was, it has past, dearest,” he said, kissing me. “Let’s make love again.”

“I think we’d better dress and wake Prylar Evard.”

I was frightened, more by Dukat’s manner than by what he’d said or the fact his eyes had glowed bright red. I tried to push him away, he pulled me beneath him and took me again. This time I wasn’t aroused and it was by force. When he withdrew, I slid from the bed, glaring at him.

“I’m going to Prylar Evard right now. All Sawyer did was arouse Gnosh’s and his remaining lieutenants’ anger by defeating the Dark Knight. Valana will use her evil powers to wreak havoc upon us all and I think it’s already at work on you.”

“You’ll not leave this room.”

Grabbing my robe, I slid into it and ran to the door. I opened it, leaving the twins in the room and ran down the hall, aware Dukat stalked after me. I reached Evard’s door first and threw it open, finding the priest kneeling on the floor, his hands pressed together, praying.

“I warned you,” Evard said. He turned toward me. “Valana can twist the heart of any man.” He withdrew a pistol hidden beneath the folds of his robe, aiming it at me. “Or woman, for matter.”

I stepped aside, aware Dukat was right behind me and he fired. Dukat hit the ground, stunned. The priest placed the pistol on the bed and ran toward a leather case,

reaching inside and withdrawing a robe made from the Everess tree. The stench of the leaves was overpowering. He used the robe to tie Dukat's hands and legs. Together, we dragged Dukat into his room and closed the door.

"This is what we call being hog-tied in Texas," I said.

"Both of you are in danger. I'd prefer if you allowed me to tie you as well, Helen. For precaution," Evard said, producing another rope from his bag. "If the Pah-Wraiths are able to get to Dukat, then they most certainly will get to you. Will you allow this or must I stun you?"

"Please. Tie me up, Prylar Evard. And then do whatever it is you Bajoran priests do and help us," I said, tears flowing from my eyes. "I don't want to lose him to the dark side. I don't want to have to kill him."

"Nor do I wish to kill you, my dear. Now sit on the bed and hold out your hands."

I did as I was told and let the priest bind my hands and ankles. Tossed onto the bed, he hoisted Dukat beside me, leaving us together and knelt once more, praying softly. Two figures appeared in the doorway, Lothar and his son Uther, armed with spears smelled the same as the ropes.

"The workers have joined the soldiers in the courtyard," Lothar said. "We saw what happened at the old chapel. When the next demon arrives, we'll be ready." He removed a vial of holy water from his coat, opened it and approached the bed. "Open your mouth."

The water had no taste, it burned my throat as I swallowed. Uther held Dukat still as his father poured water into his mouth. Snarls came from Dukat and he thrashed on the bed, spitting out the water, requiring Evard to help hold him still. The three men managed to force Dukat to drink the holy water and I watched, horrified, as the lights flickered and went out.

"Be still," Evard said. "Listen."

"I don't hearing anything," I said, in truth the silence was terrifying.

Dukat rustled at my side, bouncing the bed as he attempted to sit. Someone pushed him flat to the bed. A candle was lit by the priest. Shadows slithered across the wall, moving away from the bed and I trembled with fear. Three more candles were lit, placed

around the room, keeping the darkness at bay. The overhead light flipped on, giving me a sense of relief.

“Would someone kindly release me before I lose my temper,” Dukat said. “If the villa is under attack, I need to be outside with the troops, not trussed up here. I’m perfectly fine. Do you hear me? I order you to release me this instant.”

“You’ll stay where you are,” Lothar said. “We are the Brotherhood of the Prophets and it is our task to watch you, Prefect Dukat. When this is over, then and only then will you be freed. If need be, we will place you into the well to prevent you from interfering.”

“Very well. One of you go find out what is happening. Find Damar and make certain we have enough troops here to fight whatever is coming,” Dukat said.

Uther left the room. Shifting to his side, Dukat stared at me, concern etching his face with lines. He appeared far older than his years. I moved toward Dukat until our noses touched.

“I’m the one who brings out your bad side. Not Sawyer.”

A smile flickered across his face. “I chose you to be my wife,” he said, “not her for a reason. You are just now starting to understand why.”

“When you say it like that, it’s downright creepy. Be quiet. Please, Dukat.”

The two Bajorans knelt at the foot of the bed, praying together and I lay on my back, staring at the ceiling. Dukat placed his head against my own, working at the ropes, trying to get free, he eventually grew weary and ceased struggling. The two men kept praying.

I closed my eyes and said a prayer as well to my own God. I hoped he heard me. I’d prayed for my family and Milea to be spared from the ravages of war and death.

Most of all, I prayed we’d live through the night.

SAWYER

Chapter Seventy-Seven

Roused from sleep by a stinging sensation, not in my shoulder, my face, I felt Damar at my side and touched my face. I felt Cardassian ridges over my eyes, on my foreheads and under my ears running the length of my arms. Shocked Dr. Quirin had actually performed surgery while I was sedated, I nudged Damar, awakening him as well. He opened his blue eyes and stared at me, looking more worried than I'd seen in a long time.

"How long have you been awake?" I asked.

"Not long," I said placing my head on his shoulder. We lay quietly cuddling together, listening to the wind howl outside the window. I felt his lips brush against my forehead. He slid one arm around me and placed his other hand over my own on his chest.

"In an hour, it will be dawn and we must rise. How do you feel?" Damar asked.

"Safe as long as you hold me. Why did Dr. Quirin perform the surgery? Was before or after I was brought here? Because I don't remember giving my approval."

Damar held me tight. "Does it matter? It was done and you are Cardassian one more," he said. "I have something to tell you, Ren, about the meeting in the capital between the Bajoran delegates. They have asked Bajor be allowed to join the Federation. I haven't told Dukat yet. It is my hope Cardassia will agree to join the Federation as well. In answer to your questions, I thought it best if a daughter of Cardassia defended Bajor against these supernatural creatures. And there is more. We both signed a marriage license and spoke the words of union before Prylar Evard, Eben, Odo, Major Kira and Dr. Quirin. Do you really not remember?"

Images of the ceremony appeared in my mind. Sedated after the surgery, I'd stood with Damar holding his hands on the balcony of the south tower, while Evard sprinkled us

with holy water. Kira had hold a bouquet of flowers and stems of the sacred Everess tree, while Odo, Eben and the doctor stood to the side, watching.

“Of body, mind and spirit, I take you to be my wife,” Damar had said. I’d repeated the lines. “As I take you as my wife, I take the boy, Eben, to be my lawful son and heir.” He’d kissed me and it was done. We were wed.

“Eben is now your son and I’m Ren Yor Damar,” I said. “I remember, you certainly picked one crazy night to marry me.”

“I didn’t care wait one my day,” Damar said. “When you forgot who I was to you on Terok No, what we meant to each other, it caused me great pain. I have loved you since the first moment I saw you, Ren.”

“I know and I love you,” I said, with a heavy sign. “Please don’t leave again until this is all behind us, Damar. I still have to find the Orb of Regeneration. I only feel safe when you’re with me.”

“I take as a compliment. I will stay and help you look for it.”

Damar glanced at the headboard. The Sword of the Prophets hung in its sheath from the headboard, near enough for me to lift my hand up and touch it, yet despite it being an inanimate object, I sensed feelings coming from the weapon. Such feelings I was overcome by guilty for paying more attention to Damar than the magical sword, for it was watching us. I had no idea how the sword was communicating to me, it was doing it, and I felt it envied my husband. Reaching up quickly, I drew Damar’s face back to mine, not wanting to stare at the sword, not when it was studying us.

“The election for the new Kai will happen whether Dukat and I are there or not. The people are also holding a vote on whether or not to join the Federation. This we can’t stop,” Damar said. “I have no doubt the Bajorans desire to join the Federation. I cannot promise Cardassia will agree. It could cause another war.”

“I’m trying to prevent from happening, we could use a little help here, Damar. The Bajoran People’s Army and more Cardassian are needed if we are suddenly faced with an army of the dead. Now is the time we unite with the Bajorans. Can you send Kira and ask Ambassador Sorvan to help?”

"I sent T'Koll, Odo, Kira, and Korvinus to meet Sorvan. They'll inform the First Minister and the Vedek Assembly of the situation," Damar said. "Soldiers from Fort Galdrak are coming here too. Soon I must arise and prepare for the defense of Milea."

"You really are staying here?" I asked.

"Did I not say I would, woman? Of course I'm staying."

Damar paused, as if he heard something, gave me a funny look and drew away. He removed the sword from the headboard and placed it between us, and then against pulled me into his arms. The sword seemed quite content to lie where it was, nestled against our bodies and grew silent. I sighed, assuming the sword had spoken to Damar as well, and simply met his lips in a soft kiss. I let my hand slide down his chest and played with the thin lines of ridges ran along the sides of hard-muscled stomach.

"I will do whatever is necessary to protect you, and if means defending Bajor, then I will lead both armies into battle against these demons," Damar said. "Perhaps I'm imagining it, Ren, the sword told me I must help you, and I will. I swear it. Know our marriage keeps you free of the Obsidian Order. They cannot touch you while married to me. Garak remains here, I believe he intends to help us."

I blinked and heard myself speaking, my voice sounded deep, not my own.

"I have fallen and risen on countless worlds. I am Death incarnate, the balance to life.

My form my fall, the essence remains, and I will return to this world again."

"Not quite the romantic sentiment I was expecting to hear," Damar said. He sat up, the sheet falling to his waist, turning to face me, concern clearly etched upon his handsome face. "Ren, what are you talking about? Is some kind of incantation?"

"So cunning was Gnosh, everyone believed his objective to be the capitol city of Bajor where they all gathered in war council, for one warrior who had defeated Kolainus with the Sword of the Prophets. As the people gathered to protect the capitol, Gnosh headed toward the Fire Caves, where Valana waited with the Book of the Kosta Mojen and an army of the dead. With his help, they would claim the Orb of Regeneration. There, Gnosh and Valana were met by the Ghost Warrior and the Deliverer."

"Ren, are you all right?" He asked.

"I don't know who was speaking through me."

Damar stared at me. "I do," he said. "It was the sword. Its name is Nazgard. It is neither Bajoran or Cardassian name, from a far more ancient language and it means 'deliverer'. Nazgard does not know where to find the Orb of Regeneration. It says you and Helen do," he said. "Tell me where to find the Orb? Is it close? Do we have time to find it before they strike against us?"

"The only way to drive out Gnosh is through the Orb of Regeneration, for it is the soul of Bajor and in the right hands will reunite the Bajoran people with those cast out by Valana so long ago. They were the Cardassians. The Orb is what will bind the two races together again as one nation. Whoever possesses the Orb holds the key to the Prophets power and can use it to change the destiny of both worlds. In the end, either the Prophets will be reunited with the Pah- Wraiths or both will be destroyed."

"And what of Cardassia and Bajor? Will they be reunited or destroyed?"

The sword grew silent, as did I, and the light suddenly flickered on in the room. I shook my head and lifted my left wrist. The blue tattoo was clearly visible. Damar lifted his on his left wrist and I noticed he wore a similar marking.

"When did you join the Brotherhood of the Prophets?" I asked.

"Evard painted this on me during the ceremony. I realize now why he did it. I am bound to you in every way possible, Ren. This is my battle as much as yours."

The door opened as Eben rushed into the room. He climbed onto the bed. I placed Nazgard beside me so Damar and I could hold the boy between us.

"I awoke from a bad dream. I dreamed you had left me behind."

"Never," Damar said, softly. The boy clung to him desperately. I stroked Eben's back, rubbing in small circles, while Damar wiped away the boy's tears. "Your mother and I love you very much. There is no reason to be afraid, son."

"Dead people were coming for me. " I was running all through the house and I couldn't find you or Mother. They were everywhere, coming in through the doors and windows, and I couldn't find anyone."

Eben buried his head into Damar's neck, crying. I expected Damar to chastise Eben

for showing so much emotion, instead he kissed the boy repeatedly on the forehead. I leaned in closer and kissed Eben on his cheek. As I lifted my head, Damar kissed me. I felt a shiver run through my body and reached for the sword, aware it felt the love I did for my family and shared it in kind. It did not want me to die. It promised to defend me and my loved ones.

"I think we should dress and start looking for the orb," I said. "I'll check on Helen and see if Evard was able to learn anything from her. Something to eat might be nice."

"I'll fix breakfast, Mother. I'll make pancakes," Eben said, excited at the idea.

"Horrible," Damar growled. "I'm sure we can think of something better than for a growing boy. Something Cardassian! Yamok sauce and garnook eggs should do just fine."

Damar still held Eben in his arms, his love for the boy touching me to the depths of my heart when they both started to laugh. Eben still wore his day clothes and waited while Damar dressed in his armor. I dressed as well, selecting my old Alpha Brigade uniform, belting my magic sword on my back and then slid into my boots. On my back, Nazgard shuddered and I patted the hilt, which felt rusted and ancient in my hand.

Together, we entered the kitchen. Eben used the replicator and made pancakes and ordered me a cup of hot coffee with cream and sugar, I noted, after taking a sip. Eben was full of questions about my battle with Kolainus, all of which Damar answered for me, taking a great deal of steam out of our son's enthusiasm, until he gave up and just pushed about his eggs. I grinned and placed one of my pancakes on Eben's plate which he immediately started to wolf down.

"He doesn't like garnook eggs, and neither do I, my dear husband. They are green and the color is disgusting. It's bad enough turtle meat is green. I'm not a fan of Cardassian food. Just saying."

"Me either." Eben pushed his plate away. "May I please have pancakes, Father, or must I starve to death?" he asked.

"Eat those sweet, sticky things then. Make yourself sick."

"Damar, your son happens to like Earth food. It's not a crime."

"You spoil him, Ren. And you feed him the wrong foods."

"Then stay home more often, my love. See we both eat a balanced Cardassian meal for once." I paused, waiting for Eben to replicate pancakes. The boy returned to the table. He had ordered a large glass of chocolate milk, only he'd colored it light blue. "We're going to look for the orb this morning. I don't suppose you know where to look, son?"

"Yes, I do, Mother," Eben said, stuffing his mouth with a large bite of quadruple stacked pancakes. He didn't elaborate. Syrup ran down his ridged chin, which he wiped away with the back of his hand. "I miss my dog. I'd like to get a puppy. If I find the halves of the orb, may I have a puppy, Mother? T'Koll told me about a Vulcan breed called shelats. They are furry dogs with tusks. May I have one?"

"If your father wants to bring you home a puppy with tusks, then I have no problem with it. First, we must find the Orb of Regeneration." I felt a thump on my back. I heard the sword, warning me danger was near. Not wanting to panic my family, I put down my mug and slowly turned toward the door. "You two stay here and finish your breakfast. I think I should go have a stroll about the grounds."

"What is it? Should I go with you?" Damar asked.

"Stay and enjoy your time with Eben. I'd feel better knowing he is here with you." I blew them each a kiss. "Don't worry. I just want to make sure all is in order. I won't be long. When you're done, we can look for the orb. I've a feeling Eben can find it if anyone can."

"Mommy, your sword just turned gold. It's very pretty," Eben said. "May I touch it?"

He scrambled out of his chair and came over to touch the weapon. I held the sword away from him. "Are you afraid the sword will hurt me?"

"I don't think it's a good idea to touch Nazgard right now," I said. "Damar, check on Blythe and the children before you join your men. Find Garak and send him to me. I may need his help to find the orb. I'm sure he knows something about its location."

"Don't stray too far," Damar said.

Opening the side door, I stepped into the garden, able to see the damage from the storm. Tree branches lay on the ground, the flowerbeds were flattened and the roof of the

gazebo had been blown off, leaving its exposed to the morning sun. As I headed along the path, able to hear Nazgard in my head, guiding me along, the scenery shifted, turning from a garden into the shoreline beneath Fort Galdrak. The ground beneath my feet turned into sand and on my right the waves crashed against the shoreline, the wind whipping my blonde hair into my face.

A male figure stood on the beach ahead of me. The helmet was shaped into the head of a grimacing tiger and medieval bronze armor painted with black stripes. In each of the warrior's four hands he held a scimitar and a black cloak fluttered behind him. With a snarl, the four scimitars pointed toward me. I knew this was the second lieutenant Th'Khan and as he approached, the tide receded, pulling back faster than normal until the soft sand revealed coral and small pools where fish were trapped, flopping in the open air.

Far out to sea I was able to see a wall of water growing in size. Overhead the flags of the Galdrak frozen in place and if soldiers remained, on the watch for danger, no alarm was given. The cannons were silent. No red blasts of energy were shot at this fearsome warrior as he clanked, walking toward me, offering no salutation or mocking remarking. Each footprint he left in the sand turned it black, leaving his prints visible and with a loud roar, the sound made by a jungle cast, he ran toward me, brandishing his weapons.

My sword glowed golden in response, lifting upwards while I hung onto the hilt, pulled toward my opponent. I had to hold on as the sword Nazgard fought against four blades, yanking me about as if I had no mind of my own, no ability to change direction, remain attached flopping on the end like the fish gasping for air in the sand.

Around us the scene changed from day to night, stars providing light from above as the wall of water grew taller. When it turned day once more, my opponent changed forms, turning into a giant tiger with swords for claws and jumped into the air. The large body blocked the sun. The sand softened beneath my feet, causing me to sink as the beast past over me and landed, rolling in the sand. With a snarl, Th'Khan turned, flipping his tail. He seemed unaware the wall of water now moved toward us, its thunderous sound drowning the growls he made to intimidate me.

"If you can hold back the tidal wave, I will surrender," I said.

“Is that all?” Th’Khan asked. He laughed.

Releasing my left hand, I held the sword in my right to point. The beast turned its head, able to see the rush of the water and with a loud roar I watched as the water froze in place. A jerk from the sword pulled me out of the trench. I flew through the air, hanging onto the golden blade with my right arm, feeling its tip and then the entire blade slide into the Th’Khan’s body, embedded to the hilt. As I drew back my arm, removing the sword, the tiger fell to its side and turned into its former armored guise, a large hold in the chest seeped black blood.

“Thou has cheated,” he said with a loud gasp.

“Nazgard fights to win, as do I.”

With nowhere to run, I watched the tidal wave advance. The sword gave a tug and I turned, able to see the kitchen door from the beach. It opened and Eben appeared. I ran toward it and entered right before an enormous wave darkened the sky.

The boy shut the door and I heard a tremendous crash outside the door, lifting my head from the tile floor of the kitchen, able to see sea water seep through the crack beneath, rushing toward me and then retreating just as swiftly. Damp, covered in sand and black blood, I must have looked a fright. Eben helped me to sit. I released the golden sword. It’s appearance altered and it looked rusted. The boy patted my back as I caught my breath. Still dazed by what I’d gone through, every muscle aching, I rubbed a hand across my eyes.

“Is this a dream, son? Am I back at Milea?”

“You were gone only a few minutes, Mother. I was cleaning the dishes and heard your voice outside the door. When I went to open it, I saw you on the beach outside the fort. I can explain it no more than you can.”

Someone cleared their throat behind us. Eben helped me to my feet. Across the kitchen stood Garak, holding the Book of Light, gazing at me with a look I could not fathom. He approached the center counter and placed the book on it, opening it to a page and pointed.

“I believe I have located the Orb of Regeneration,” Garak stated. “When you’re through doing whatever it is you’ve been doing, Yor, then I suggest we scour the grounds.

Bring the boy along. He might be useful.”

“Get me drink a glass of water, Garak,” I said. “I just defeated Th’Khan on the beach. Don’t ask me how. I managed to get there and back again in one piece.”

“I wasn’t going to ask, my dear.”

“Mother, we should check on Aunt Helen and Uncle Dukat,” Eben said. He placed a glass of water in front of me, not Garak.

I took a sip and spat it out, tasting seawater. Eben gave me a disgusted look and opened the refrigerator. He removed a quart of milk, hardly what I wanted, after he opened it, I drank the contents. Placing the empty bottle on the counter, I commenced to wipe blood off the blade. Both Garak and Eben stared at the cloth. If they had doubted I’d kill Th’Khan, they no longer did. I dropped the stained cloth into the sink.

“Let’s find the orb,” I said. I followed Garak and Eben out of the kitchen.

HELEN

Chapter Seventy-Eight

Able to feel Dukat moving at my side, the afternoon sunlight warm on my face, I opened my eyes to find the door open. Prylar Evard and Lothar had temporarily left Uther on guard. The young man sat in a chair, his chin on his chest, napping in the warm of the room.

“We must get free,” Dukat said. “I have loosened the knot. Turn around, Helen. Help me untie this damnable rope and I’ll release you as well.”

“Prylar Evard said we’re to remain here until it’s over.”

“When do you expect to happen? Hmm? Do you actually think your friend can fight three supernatural entities and find the orb on her own? Think, Helen. Why do you think you’re here? Surely it is to help Yor. Now hurry. Before the others return.”

Turning around, I felt for Dukat’s finger, finding them wiggling behind me. The rope made from the Everess tree was abrasive and cut my fingers as I worked on the knot. Each cut caused my fingers to bleed. I kept at the knot, loosening it, withholding my cries of pain until I felt Dukat pull one hand free. His arms whipped around and he leaned forward over his lap, untying the rope tied around his ankles.

“Help me,” I whispered.

Dukat knelt on the bed and turned me onto my stomach, untying the rope from my wrists and ankles and then pulled me along with him as he stood. Uther awoke. Startled to find us free, he lowered his spear, Dukat grabbed it out his hands and punched him in the face. The young man toppled out of the chair and struck the floor, along with the spear.

“Uther means well,” I said.

“He’s in the way. Check the hallway and make sure we were not heard.”

Darting to the doorway, I peered out, finding two guards in the hallway. I ducked inside and placed my hand on Dukat's armored chest, keeping him back. At my touch, a strange reddish glow appeared in his eyes. I let out a shout as he jerked me into his arms, offering a punishing kiss upon my mouth. My shout faded in my throat as I felt Dukat's tongue plunged into my mouth. His arms squeezed me all the harder, keeping me immobile as he broke off the passionate kiss and without warning sunk his teeth into my lower lip, drawing blood.

Pushing back with all my might, I managed to break free from Dukat. He caught my arm as I tried to run out of the room and slammed me into the far wall. Frightened and unsure how to handle the situation, I offered no resistance as he grabbed my arm, jerking me along behind him and entered the hallway.

"Why do you resist me, Helen? It's no use, you know. You belong to me."

"Let me go, Dukat. You have to try to fight the madness. The Pah-Wraith's are doing this to you, like they did before, this time I'm not going to let them have you. I'll fight for you. I swear it!"

"We have to find the orb, my love. You know this."

Dukat brought his head down, staying with me as I turned my head from side to side, able with a quick jerk to catch me and slam his lips against mine. This time his kiss was pure fire, sizzling, leaving a searing pain was akin to yearning pounding in my breast. From somewhere I felt my strength return and resisted with everything I had. I pushed Dukat away and ran down the hall, alerting the guards. I heard the sounds of scuffling behind me, the blast of a pistol and raced down the stairs.

"Helen!"

I heard Dukat coming after me as I the stairs three at a time, he was gaining, so throwing caught to the wind, I mounted the banister and rode it speeding like a bullet all the way to the bottom floor. Before I hit the colonnade at the end, I jumped off, finding no guards at their posts and the path to the front door open. I turned to face Dukat as he approached, his eyes still gleaming bright red.

"You do not possibly think you'll reach the Orb in time," Dukat said. "If you side

with me, Helen, think of all we can do together. This is what you've always wanted. I always knew it would be you and not Yor who would rule at my side." He lifted out his hand. I felt a shiver slide down my spine. "Come, beloved. We can rule Bajor together."

"This isn't you, Dukat. It's Valana. She's enchanted you. You must fight her."

"Why should I? This is as much what I want as you do. Together we can use the Orb of Regeneration to do with Bajor whatever we want. It is your fate to rule Bajor at my side."

Dukat kept coming. Part of me wanted to give in to him, I knew it was wrong, it was the Pah-Wraiths pulling at my emotions and I had to get free. I glanced toward the front door and bolted for it, able to open it and run outside toward the fountain where I found Lothar, Prylar Evard and a number of the Bajoran workers and members of the Brotherhood waiting. I turned toward the house and pointed. Dukat had not followed.

"The Pah-Wraiths have Dukat under their control," I said. "He just attacked me. Where is Yor? She must stop Dukat before he finds the Orb."

"One of the Shadow Dwellers possess him. There is nothing we can do for Dukat," Evard said. "We must protect the children. If it is Talos of Dovvos who possesses him, they will want to sacrifice the children." He patted my shoulder as I gasped. "Lothar, go find Yor. just saw her with Garak and Eben at the stable. Everyone else, come with me."

Armed with pitchforks and spears made of the scared wood, the Bajorans and priest followed me into the villa. We hurried toward the stairs, leaving the Brotherhood, ten members in all, to guard the front door. I was reluctant to climb the stairs.

"Dukat wouldn't harm the children," I said.

"No, he wouldn't, he is possessed, Helen," Evard reminded me. "We must think of the children first. Your friend will find the Orb. If anyone can save Dukat, it is her. Never fear, Helen. I have faith in your friend. Yor has defeated Th'Khan. Now come."

Evard led the way to the second floor, heading toward the north tower where the children and Blythe hid in my bedroom. On the third floor we met Zolon and Jenrak, stationed outside the door of my bedroom. Damar came out of my room and stared at the ground in the hallway.

"Your commander is possessed, Damar," Lothar said. "We must not let Dukat leave

Milea. He will try to reach the Fire Caves. He must be found and subdued."

"Are the children all right? Are they safe?" I asked.

"Ikarus and Blythe are with them. The children are fine," Damar said walking toward me. "Where is the last place you saw Dukat?"

"At the front door. His eyes are red. He was talking crazy."

"What's this all about?" Dukat appeared at the opposite end of the hall. His eyes were clear blue, his manner calm. The Bajorans backed away as he approached. "Helen, where did you go? I have been looking all over for you."

"You are well then?" Damar asked.

"Never felt better."

Only then did I notice Dukat was not wearing the same uniform he'd been in earlier. He'd have needed to enter our bedroom to change clothes and Damar had just come from the room where the children were kept. The priest sensed my alarm and removed a vial of holy water from his robe, opening it and prepared to toss it on Dukat.

"Why is everyone staring at me? I thought I'd look inside Vardon's office for the orb," Dukat said. "As T'Koll would say, it is the most logical place to find it."

"Drink this," Evard said. "One of you go check on T'Koll. Have him join us."

Two Bajorans hurried to do his bidding. Dukat took the vial and drained it. He handed it to the priest, smiling wide.

"Satisfied?" Dukat asked. He didn't alter forms. "I assure you. I'm not controlled by Valana. However, I did have to restrain your son, Lothar. You'll find him in the priest's room. Now, where do we look for the orb, hmm?"

"I don't know. No one does. T'Koll, Eben, and I read through Vardon's diary and reviewed his com-padds," I said. "We didn't find anything helpful because Vardon didn't know where to find the orb. It's not in the house. Garak and Sawyer are outside looking for it. Are you sure you're all right?"

I placed my hand on Dukat's shoulder. He looked amused as I patted his chest, expecting him to sprout horns and spit fire. Evard shook his head at me, clearly thinking I'd made up the whole thing. He and the Bajorans filed toward the stairs. Dukat patted me

on the shoulder. He hurried after Evard and slipped his arm around the priest's shoulder. They turned the corner and vanished from sight.

"Dukat looks fine to me," Damar said, annoyed.

"Damar, I'm telling you the truth," I said. "Only moments before Dukat's eyes were red and he was talking wildly."

Damar merely stared at Dukat. The two men acted like I'd lost my mind. I pushed past Damar, wanting to check on the children. He tried to block my path, I pushed him aside and knocked on the door. I heard the chest moved aside. Blythe opened the door. Madison and Gabe lay on the bed. The girls sat on the floor and drew pictures on sketchpads. Ikarus stood at the balcony doors. I gave a nod and backed out of the room, closing the door behind me.

Zolon and Jenrak returned to their posts. They stood with their backs to the door.

"I don't have time for this, Helen," Damar said. "Stay here if you want. I must go outside and make certain the soldiers and Bajorans are in position. Yor has killed two of the lieutenants, there is still a third to deal with and Valana."

"I think you should go after Dukat and restrain him, Damar," I said. "I'd feel a lot better if he was tied to a chair. He's far more susceptible to the Pah-Wraiths than you realize." I wondered if I was as well. "I know you don't believe me, his eyes did turn red. He's possessed by a Shadow Dweller. I know he is."

"I just saw him drink holy water, Helen. He's fine."

Dukat appeared in the hallway. He had changed yet again, wearing his black the uniform, the one he'd been wearing while we lay in the priest's bed, tied hand and foot. I remained calm inside I felt conflicted. Either this man or the one who had left with Evard was possessed by a Shadow Dweller. I was terrified.

"Is everything all right?" Dukat asked.

"Perhaps we should take the children to Fort Galdrak instead," I said. "If this is where Valana is coming with her army of the dead, we'd be safer there."

Damar stepped in front of me. "I could send a detachment back to the fort with the children," he offered, his eyes on Dukat. "Helen can go with them. She's not needed here. I

agree the children will be safer at the fort. I can arrange it at once. I have a shuttle waiting. Zolon. Jenrak. Go downstairs and see if the priest needs anything. Come right back. You'll escort the children and Helen to Fort Galdrak."

"Must both go?" I asked. I didn't want either War Dog to leave. It didn't seem like a good idea. Damar clearly didn't realize there were two Dukats in the house. The two soldiers walked down the corridor and vanished.

"Valana will go to the Fire Caves," Dukat said. "Yor was right. It is in the Valley of Shadows. If we find the orb, we can take it there to keep Valana from freeing the Pah-Wraiths. Let's take the children now and get them on board the shuttle."

"Wait until the War Dogs return," Damar said glancing at me. "Why don't we three go downstairs and look for Yor." As soon as the words were out of his mouth, gunfire came from the lower level. I ran toward Damar and stood behind him for protection. He drew his pistol and pointed it at Dukat.

Dukat raised his hands into the air. "What all this about, Damar?" he asked. "You know I'm the real Dukat. The War Dogs killed the Shadow Dweller. You could go look to be certain or do you intend to shoot me?"

"Forgive me, sir. I have to be certain you are the real Dukat."

Red light burst from Damar's pistol and struck Dukat in the chest. He stumbled backwards and collapsed to the floor, stunned. Damar pushed me aside and removed a cord of Everess he'd attached to the back of his belt. He handed me the pistol and quickly tied the cord around Dukat's hands and then his ankles. As Damar glanced toward me, Dukat's eyes opened. His eyes gleamed bright red.

"I can't tell if this is the real Dukat or not, Helen," Damar said. "Come over here and tell me if it's him or not. Helen? Do what I say."

A shadow drifted off the wall and enveloped me in its embrace. I trembled uncontrollably as I felt every nerve tingle. Something entered my body. I felt it step inside my skin and take control of my limbs. My thoughts were pushed aside as I felt another's take possession and heard myself speaking, though my voice sounded strange to my ears.

"Since the moment we met, Damar, I always considered you an exceptional officer,"

I said, hearing myself speak, not knowing why I said what I did. Though I tried to resist, I aimed the pistol at Damar, changing the setting. "Yor is the mystical Ghost Warrior, I don't think you're worthy of her. She only married you because Dukat was already claimed by Helen. However, Talos and I will help you defeat Gnosh if you take us to the Orb and free the rest of the Pah-Wraiths. With their help, Talos and I shall rule this world and those beyond."

"Yes, Valana. We will," Dukat said in a sinister voice.

"I don't understand. What's happening, Helen?" Damar asked. "Are you possessed as well? Answer me!"

I waved my hand through the air. The pistol dropped from Damar's grasp. He pressed against the wall, terrified by whatever he saw reflected on my face. Something crowded my thoughts and took control of my body and voice.

"Untie, Talos, Gul Damar. We're leaving. I am Valana."

"You won't get away with this," Damar said.

"I already have, Damar. Stand in our way and I will gladly kill you."

"This is madness, Helen! You are possessed," Damar cried. "Both of you are! You must try to fight it. Don't let Valana do this!"

"We'll need the twins and the rest of the children," Dukat said. "We need their bodies for the Pah-Wraiths to inhabit, my dear. Kill the Cardassian. His body can be used later, if needed."

"Dearest, we need this one to subdue the soldier and woman inside the room. Let Damar carry the smallest children. I cannot be bothered. We'll take the old woman with us. Now untie Talos, Damar. Do as we say, Damar, and you may live through this."

A sneer on his face, Damar untied Dukat and stepped aside. I opened the door of the nursery and waited for Damar to enter, unable to do anything else what the voice in my head told me to do. Damar entered the room. Dukat entered Vardon's secret study and waited for me to join him. Damar lifted two of the girls into his arms, the smaller, leaving Blythe to collect the twins. The rest of the girls entered the private study.

"What's wrong, sir?" Ikarus asked.

“Keep quiet,” I said.

I aimed the pistol at Ikarus, fighting against pulling the trigger and screamed as the voice of Valana ordered me to kill him. The blast hit the wall above Ikarus. He scrambled fast and dove off the balcony, crashing into the weeds below. I wanted to wait for help to arrive, I felt compelled to listen to the voice in my head. Blythe gathered the children around her.

“Get moving,” I said, aiming the pistol at Damar.

“You won’t get far,” he said. “Yor will stop you.”

“I wouldn’t worry about her, Cardassian. I have plans for one. Blythe, get the children ready to travel. Cooperate and all will be well.”

“I...I don’t understand,” Blythe said.

“They’re possessed,” Damar snarled. “Just do what the way, Blythe.”

Dukat and I raised our guns on the ground. Damar held Jewell and Amber in his arms. Yoan and her older sister Llyana held the hands of little Aysla and Pursilla. Blythe carried the twins in her massive arms, attempting to keep on a brave face, as they gathered inside the office. The girls sobbed, calling my name, I couldn’t help them. Valana wouldn’t let me. I could only do what I was told to do, feeling like a zombie, controlled by this powerful entity had invaded my mind.

A panel was revealed in the wall. Dukat hit a button and the floor proceeded to lower. The decorated walls and bookshelves were left above us, dwindling in size as we descended on a turbolift into the depths of the hill. The walls changed to stone, of the old masonry of the monastery Milea was built upon, and when we came to a jarring halt, I smelled the dusty, rancid odor of the corridors I’d once visited with Sawyer and Garak weeks earlier. I also knew I’d been there several times before as Valana.

“Fortunately, this chamber wasn’t closed off, as ordered. What incompetent soldiers these Cardassians are,” Dukat said. “Dovvos is outside the cave, Valana. The one called Garak thought he killed us when he destroyed Vardon’s cave, he is a fool like the rest of these spoon-heads. As you requested, Dovvos has brought horses. We will ride to the Valley of Shadows and there free the rest of my brothers and sisters.”

"The Gul and housekeeper can serve as vessels as well," I replied. "a child is missing, Talos. The one called Shazel. She is not here."

"The runt must have hidden beneath a bed. We don't need her," he snarled.

"I hope she goes and warns Glinn Yor. You'll be sorry when Yor finds us," Blythe said letting out a sob. "You don't dare hurt these little darlings. What is wrong with the two of you? Why are you acting this way? Please. Helen. Dukat. Help us."

"Dukat, my friend. You mustn't do this," Damar begged. "There's still time to turn around. The priest can help you. Release the children and take Blythe and I as hostages. The children are innocent."

"I've already made my decision, Damar. I am not Dukat. I am Talos. Your friend was weak minded. He allowed me to enter his body. I intend to use the orb, as soon as it's found by Yor, and free my kin. She too can be controlled. You should have known all along your friend's greatest desire was to rule Bajor as its supreme authority. It is ambition has led to his destruction. A pity you will not live to see our victory, Damar. Now get moving. We'll keep you and the old woman alive as long as you are useful."

A little part of me knew what was happening. Valana came and went from my mind, her strict instructions kept me on the path. Talos who resided within Dukat knew the way through the monastery, using unused corridors, finding the girls too slow, he grabbed Aysla and Pursilla, placing them over his shoulders. I tried to resist, feeling a thousand knives stabbing into my brain as I forced out words.

"Damar. I'm sorry. I can't fight it," I groaned.

"Keep trying. You must try," he insisted. "Shazel will find Yor. She'll tell her what happened. Yor will find us."

"not in time," Dukat said.

Blythe glanced at me. The toddlers pulled at her hair, finding it a game. "Your eyes are glowing, mistress, the brightest shade of red," she said. "It's no use, Damar. We've lost them to these dark creatures. They'll kill us. They'll kill all of us."

"Be silent," I hissed.

Reaching the mouth of the cave, Dovvos, using the body of a Cardassian soldier,

waited for us. He had brought five horses. I mounted one and received Aysla, deposited into my arms by Dukat. He kept Pursilla and mounted a horse. Blythe managed to tuck the babes into the front of her blouse and climbed aboard a dark bay.

Placing the two girls into the saddle, Damar swung his leg over his horse, pulling on the reins of the white stallion as it reared. He managed to get the horse under control and in the shadows of the cliff, we rode through the canyon, guided by Dovvos, riding away from Milea and any hope of rescue.

SAWYER

Chapter Seventy-Nine

Returning to the chapel ruins, I set to work using a shovel to dig where Nazgard directed. Three feet beneath the ground, I found nothing human bones. Garak and Eben searched the cracks in the walls. The Bajoran workers and Lothar had already set aside many of the stones, looking as we now did, for the orb. The workers had returned to their homes, hiding, though I wished they'd remained to help us. I stabbed the ground with the shovel and paused. The screams of a child raised the hairs on the nape of my neck. I spun around, the shovel held upwards like a weapon, as Shazel slid by several War Dogs who kept watch outside the chapel.

"Mother!" The girl stumbled forward. Her dress was torn. Tears streamed from her eyes. She ran toward me and threw her arms around my waist. "Father and Helen turned into demons. They took my sisters, Nanny, and Damar and left in a hole in the floor."

I tossed the shovel aside and lifted Shazel in my arms. Eben grabbed my sword. Garak stood behind him, his hand on the boy's shoulder, while I tried to comfort the girl.

"Calm down, Shazel. Just tell me what happened?"

"Their eyes were red. They said mean things. They tried to kill Ikarus. Why, Mommy? Why did they do it? Are they angry with me?"

"Hush, child. They're possessed," Garak said. "These Shadow Dwellers are far more clever than we gave them credit, Yor. It's not hard to guess we're they're going. They are headed to the Fire Caves."

"Gather the soldiers and let's get back to the house," I ordered. "We won't find the orb out here. Nazgard says the orb was here, it has been since been moved. The villa wasn't built yet when the sword visited this place. It's confused like us. We'll regroup and try to figure out where it is. I can't do anything for anyone until I have orb!"

Garak snorted. "Come on, Eben. Let's find Prylar Evard and go to the house." He led the boy forward. "You, War Dogs! Gather the soldiers! Find orb!"

I kissed Shazel's cheek. "None of this is your fault, darling," I said as I walked out of the chapel. "I'll get your father and siblings back. Don't worry. The orb has to be somewhere in plain sight. Eben!" He turned back to look at me. "It looks like a crystal ball attached to the end of a gold scepter. Perhaps it's a yard ornament by now. Maybe it's stuck in a closet or a storage crate. Put the War Dogs to work!"

"It could be anywhere, Mother. I'll look. I'll find it."

Eben handed the ancient sword to Garak and took off running. Garak fell back beside me, slid the sword into the empty scabbard on my back and waved the War Dogs to follow him. Korvinus walked toward me. He had the soldiers and Bajoran works and Brotherhood digging trenches in the vineyard. They destroyed the crop, I knew we had to prepare for an invasion of the dead. Wooden spikes were set inside the trenches and covered with plants. The group worked their way toward the villa. It was organized chaos at its best, for more than five thousand soldiers milled about the estate, setting up defenses. The main gate had been barricaded. Soldiers boarded the windows. The villa had become our fortress.

As I trudged along the path, kicking stones, my thoughts elsewhere. I had spent too much time in the chapel on a wild goose hunt. Listening to the sword had not been a good idea. It wanted to help, it was already thinking of the battle, trying to fill my head with images of what it had been through in the past. I felt Shazel curling my hair with her little fingers. It was the distraction I needed to focus.

"You should be my real mommy," she said. "I never liked her. I knew she would turn my Daddy against me, and she has, oh, she has! I've never been so scared in my life. I know you'll protect me. You always do. I'm safe with you."

"I'll get your sisters back, Shazel. I promise. And you can call me Mommy, if you want to. I'll do something about later, too."

"You can do anything. You're the savior!"

"I thought the Pah-Wraiths wanted to use me, not Helen," I said as I glanced at

Korvinus. "I should have seen this coming. Get a shuttle ready for me. I'll leave as soon as we find the orb." I smiled at Shazel when she kissed my cheek. "Tell me what you saw. Did Helen's eyes turn red? Did her skin turn blue? That's how Valana look."

"Her eyes were red and wide as saucers! her wasn't blue!"

"And your father?"

Shazel screamed, "That wasn't my father! He said his name is Talos!"

"Okay, honey. Okay," I groaned.

In the distance, the howls of the vethrals echoed. The wild dogs gathered in the hills. I felt the change in the wind as I stepped into the courtyard. The temperature steadily grew warmer. I pushed through the soldiers and reached the fountain. Shazel wiggled from my arms and ran to the water. She kicked off her shoes and stuck her feet into the fountain.

"It's hot," she tried, removing her feet.

A shout from Eben drew my eyes to my son. He crawled on his hands and knees in the garden near the front of the porch. He tossed flowers and weeds out behind him. I sat on the side of the fountain. Nazgard swatted my back. I turned to dip my hand into the water, splashing my face and noticed Korvinus had not left my side.

"What are your orders, Glinn Yor?" he asked.

"Find Major Kira and tell her what has happened. We may need the Bajoran People's Army to come to our aid," I said. "Korvinus, I need to leave you in command. I'm going to promote you right now to the rank of glinn. Take command after I leave to find Damar, Dukat, and the others."

"You put a great deal of faith in me."

"Put me together a crack squad for me. My best War Dogs. I can't do this alone."

"Ten should do," Korvinus said. "I'll send for the rest of the soldiers from Fort Galdrak." He glanced at a tall form. "Lothar! What are can the Brotherhood do about those vethrals? More are gathering." He walked over Lothar, giving me a moment to catch my breath in all the excitement.

"Mommy, there is a big ball in here," Shazel said. She stepped into the water and sunk down to her shoulders. She reached around in the water. After a moment, she held up

a large, crystal ball covered in slime. It slipped through her fingers with a splash and sunk to the bottom.

"I'll get it. Don't worry," I said.

I leaned over the side of the fountain, fished around for the ball and slid half into the water. Shazel grabbed the ball at the same time as I did. I sank onto the cobblestones with the crystal ball cradled in my arms. Nazgard whined as I washed off the orb. Shazel climbed out of the fountain. When I had the orb cleaned, I realized it did in fact look like something gypsies used to tell fortunes. Inside the orb appeared a tiny flame. Shazel sank onto the stones beside me, wringing out her skirt.

"This is the orb. You've found it Shazel. You've found it," I said.

Shazel retrieved her shoes as she hummed a little song. It was the song I'd heard Damar sing many times. I felt my heart lurch, knowing he was in great danger. I listened to the Cardassian soldiers and Bajorans workers and Brotherhood. All hummed the same song. It inspired me, gave me hope, to find they had bonded. I stood, holding the ball close to my chest. With Shazel at my side, I approached the house.

"Yor!" Evard appeared on the porch and waved at me. "You found the orb!"

"We did it, Mother," Shazel said, pride in her voice.

The priest noticed Eben used what looked like the leg off a table to dig through the garden. He hurried toward the boy and pulled him to his feet. Eben shrugged off the priest, angry to be stopped in his search, and waved the table leg at him. As the priest reached for Eben, the boy ran toward me, a dirty, muddy mess. He collided with me. The boy sprawled to the ground. With a startled cry, I dropped the crystal ball. I watched, amazed, as it miraculously floated into the air and attached itself to the end of Eben's table leg. Eben laughed as he held the Orb of Regeneration into the air, as astonished as I was. Shazel stood beside Eben, jumping up and down, as both laughed.

"Do you see that, Evard? The children found it," I said. The sword tapped my back as I stepped forward. I took the scepter out of Eben's hand. "You and Shazel found what I needed, when no one else could."

"Only two innocents could find what no adult could see," the priest said. "Both of

you children have done the impossible!”

The orb started to glow. The little flame turned from red into a bright yellow light. The filth on the scepter dissolved and revealed the orb’s true golden opulence. I lifted the holy relic over my head. Evard let out a cheer. The humming ended. Everyone around me started to cheer, the celebration ended as the howls grew louder.

“Jakars,” Uther shouted from the upper story window. “Hundreds of them!”

“Get in the house, Eben. Take Shazel with you. Find your pistol and lock yourselves in the south tower,” I said. “Glinn Korvinus, give the order to open fire!”

Nazgard slid out of the sheath and hovered before me. I caught hold of the hilt with my right hand and in my left I held the orb. From every direction vethral aided by undead jakars descended upon the villa.

“Take aim and fire,” Korvinus ordered as he jumped onto the side of the fountain. “Fire! Fire at will!”

Behind the barricades, from the tops of the adjoining buildings and the village, soldiers commenced firing on the horde of fanged dogs. I jumped onto the wall of the fountain, wondering what the orb did in battle, if anything. Nazgard shined bright blue as I lifted it over my head, lighting the courtyard with its intensity as the sun sunk behind the hills. Thousands of creatures crested the hills, racing toward the villa, while the soldiers fired their pistols and laser rifles. At every barricade, soldiers held their ground, firing as the creatures, froth at their mouths, eyes gleaming red, leapt toward the walls.

Zolon, Jenrak, and Ikarus appeared on the porch and headed toward me. From the door, I could see Garak and Prylar Evard keeping the two children behind them. A loud from the priest turned me in time to see a snarling creature standing on top of a fallen soldier. Rotten, black tissue hung from its skeleton thin body. As it ran toward me, Nazgard drew my right arm forward, plunging deep into the creature’s body. It vanished on contact more charged the wall in front of me. The soldiers closed ranks and continued to shoot.

Garak ran out of the house and hurried toward me. “Odo has contacted a Cardassian warship,” he said. “They are standing by for your orders.”

“Tell the commander to fire on anything moving outside the walls,” I said. “Have reinforcements sent here!”

“At once,” Garak said, tapping his comm link. “Gul Gregor? It’s Agent Garak. We need your assistance. Commence firing on those four legged devils attack Milea.” He smiled at me as a large red beam slammed into the ground outside the main gate.

“Anything else, Yor?”

“Have Gregor locate Dukat. Have him look in Valley of Shadows. Tell him to lock onto Damar, Blythe and the kids. He’s to beam them onto his ship, and then send Damar here. He can take command while I go to the valley. Get it done!”

Garak nodded and spoke quickly into the com-link. Crewmen from the Kurson started to beam into the courtyard, while Korvinus pointed out where he wanted them positioned. Finding Lothar and his son standing nearby, waiting for instructions, I ordered them to draw the Bajorans back to the villa and protect it, knowing they could offer little help armed with yard equipment and spears, in close quarters they’d be effective. Lothar and Uther shouted at the Bajorans, pulling those who hadn’t already retrieved weapons off fallen soldiers to stand at the wall toward the porch.

“You were born to command,” Prylar Evard said, bowing his head.

“If you know any spells or incantations, old man, then use them. Tell your Prophets I have the Orb. I don’t make house calls. I’m going to the Valley of the Shadows.”

“The jakars have quieted,” Evard said. “I can hear something else. Can you hear it? I’ve never heard sound before. It’s not animals. What is it?”

“Get on the roof,” I said to a passing soldier. “Take a pair of night-vision binoculars. Tell me what you see.” Noticing a garresh huddling behind the fountain, I pointed at him. “You there. I need Ops set up on the porch. I need eyes on every inch of this estate. And get someone in shuttle and provide additional air support on our blind side to the north. Make it happen, garresh.”

“Lavard,” he said. “Garresh Lavard.”

“It’ll be Gil Lavard if you can get the job done in two minutes.”

The light inside the orb grew brighter than the sword, blinding me and I looked

away. The entire courtyard and front gate were lit by the orb, enabling the soldiers to see the packs of wild creatures racing through the vineyard, hillside and trees beyond the main gate. The troops from Fort Galdrak were well trained and continued firing at the dogs, while eerie screeches echoed throughout the surrounding area.

Across the vineyard I noticed a formation of soldiers advancing on our position. If it was the same in front of me, then I knew it was happened in the other three directions. From a distance, I could see the bodies, some misshapen, others wearing nothing more than rags, shambling in a disorganized fashion toward the house. Over the loud discharge of pistols and the air assault from the Gul Gregor's warship, I heard the priest shouting at me.

"It's the undead," Evard said. "They're here, Yor! They've come for you!"

A shiver of icy coldness slid through my body, despite the heat. Fires broke out in the vineyard and along the hill western hills where the dry grass caught on fire. The yelps and barks of the vethrals and jakars blended with the screams made by the army of the dead.

"I need to know what the orb can do and how to use it, Prylar Evard," I said as I lifted the artifact into the air. "Tell me what I am to do!"

The priest stared at me. "I have no idea," he said.

Frustrated and angry, I watched a shuttle lift off the ground. It moved thirty feet over the ground, firing at whatever had gathered beyond the barn and gave pursuit. Another red streak came from the sky and blasted the east side of the estate, outside the gate, followed by three more short bursts. The ship altered its firing pattern and a beam struck the vineyard. I climbed the steps and glanced at the monitors, which another soldier had patched together. Images of multiple battles fought throughout Milea flickered across the screens. This was something I knew how to do and I tucked the orb beneath my arm, while I leaned over Lavard and issued orders.

"We need to be able to see what was coming toward us in every direction," I ordered. "Keep your eyes glued to the monitors, Lavard. If any barricade is overrun, pull soldiers or crewmen from another wall and send them there." I pointed at the soldier who

had assembled my Ops station. "Get Gregor back on line. He can see what's going on better than us. He'll continue firing on those damn things until I say otherwise. And find out if he had locked onto Damar. I need him here. Now!"

"Glinn Yor," Lavard said, "I'm advised Major Kira is bringing the Bajoran army here. More Cardassian forces will arrive from Bajor City. Two more guls from nearby outposts are coming to help. Korvinus has taken the Kurson crewmen the north side of the estate. Shall I have him return?"

"No, he has his hands full. I'll remain here until Damar arrives," I said. "Don't take your eyes off those monitors."

Behind me, I found the priest crouched on the floor, flipping through the Book of Light. Garak spoke on his com-link, I presumed with Gul Gregor, for he gave me a thumb's up; I hoped it meant Damar was incoming. The Brotherhood stood guard at the porch. At the priest's shout, Garak knelt beside him, going through the book to find something might help me use the Orb of Regeneration to defeat the enemy.

A pack of jakars made it over the wall. At the shouts from the Cardassians, the Brotherhood, led by Lothar and Uther, attacked the creatures. The soldiers slain by the jakars were shot by the Bajorans. For a moment, I feared a misunderstanding would bring the two forces into conflict. Korvinus returned and rushed toward the pack of jakars, shouting orders, and Cardassians came to the Brotherhood's aide. Together, they killed the creatures and rebuilt the barricade.

"Gentlemen, we are running out of time," I shouted as I glanced at Evard and Garak. The flame within the orb sparked. I felt the sword trembled against my back.

On the monitors, I watched the horror advanced on Milea. From every direction marched the undead, ancient Bajorans, Cardassians slain during the Occupation and an alien race I was unable to identify. With the support from the Kurson and three shuttles maneuvered around Milea, blasting zombies, I felt our chances at survival were good. The walls and barricades had not yet been breached. Nor did the Cardassians and Bajorans show sign of panic.

Garak stood and grabbed my arm. "Damar, the children and old woman were

beamed onto Gul Gregor's ship," he said. "We can't find anything in the book say how to activate the orb, Yor. Damar should arrive any moment. you have time to take a shuttle to the valley, Yor. Gregor can transport you and a team there."

"Send for Zolon, Jenrak, Ikarus, Luther, and Uther," I said. "That's my team. I'm also taking you and Evard with me. Bring the book."

Garak frowned. "I thought you'd say as much." He tapped Lavard on the arm and commenced contacting each of my shoulders. One of the members of the Brotherhood ran to find Luther and his son to bring them back to the villa.

"I am sorry I have not been more help, Glinn Yor. From what I can tell, the Orb of Regeneration does not bring the dead back," Evard said as he tucked into a pouch at his side. "I believe it creates a rebirth - the beginning of a new age. The Prophets will surely come to you when we arrive at the Fire Caves, Yor. They will know how to use the Orb."

"What good is it if it can't defeat Valana and her army of the dead? There will be no one left to being a new age of peace or whatever the Prophets intend."

"You can only try," he replied.

Shimmering lights presented Damar in the courtyard. He took one look at the advancing army and ran toward the porch to join me at Ops. No longer in armor, Damar looked ill-used. His uniform was torn and dirty. His face was bruised and a cut across his forehead had clotted. Gazing at the monitors, Damar assessed the situation and issued a string of orders, unable to fill me in about Dukat and Helen. Whatever I was going to do with the orb and sword, I'd have to figure it out once we encountered the Shadow Dwellers at the Fire Caves. I had to kill Valana to defeat the army of the dead and meant I had to get the demon out of Helen. Garak, Evard, Zolon, Jenrak, and Ikarus arrived. Across the courtyard ran Luther, Uther, and four more members of the Brotherhood, just as fast as they could. I had my ten men.

"I left Eben and Shazel in the south tower," Ikarus said, lowering a rifle from his shoulder. He carried a bag filled with plasma bombs.

Damar finally turned toward me. "I can handle things from here, Yor. Save Helen and Dukat," he said. He put his hand on my shoulder. "Do the impossible!"

“Yes, sir!” I considered it might be the last time I ever saw him. Damar turned from me, his focus on the battle and I motioned my team to join me.

Gathered in the courtyard, we were beamed onto the Kurson. I stared at the crewmen in the transporter room for only a second. We were beamed into the Valley of Shadows, the one place I feared most. With weapons drawn, we proceeded toward high cliffs on the west where a reddish glow was visible high above. Evard fell in beside me, glancing at the orb I carried. His breath came out in white puffs. It was still cold on this side of the world. There was no snow in the valley, only shadows and silence.

“I may have found an incantation in the Book of Light will be helpful,” the priest said. “If you can get me close enough to Helen, I may be able to draw the spirit of Valana out of her. What I can’t tell you is how the orb will react to Shadow Dwellers and Pah-Wraiths. I know only the Ghost Warrior used the orb to defeat his enemies in the past. Perhaps the orb will act on its own as the sword did.”

“And Gnosh the Destroyer? Is he waiting at the Fire Caves?”

“Gnosh is literally Death, Glinn Yor. It is all around us. Will it take form and want to fight you? I cannot say,” Evard replied. “Once you defeat Valana, her army will fall dead, much I can tell you. As for Gnosh, he may or may not take form. Let us hope the Prophets pay heed and come to us. I will start the incantation now, Yor.”

I closed my right hand around the hilt of Nazgard, holding onto the scepter with my left. Countless images of past battles appeared in my mind. My former self had fought against the three lieutenants and zombie armies, many times. The Orb of Regeneration had glowed in the hand of the Ghost Warrior and sucked demon souls into it, while the sword had fought on its own, needing no hand to guide it. Through the ages, this Ghost Warrior had defended Bajor, not once did I see the Prophets appear to assist the savior.

Vardon and Lucan had managed to draw out only a few demons in the last few months. The gul’s bloody sacrifices held in the glade to the north, and Kia Lucan’s dark magic performed in the lower bowels of the palace, had summoned the demons. They in turn had possessed the dead and the living or hid behind Bajoran and Cardassian faces. In each scenario shown to me by the orb, the savior had sacrificed his or her life to defeat the

enemy. I did not think I would live through the night, I was not afraid.

“Where is Dukat and Helen?” Ikarus asked. He had read my mind.

“Right ahead of us,” Garak said pointing at a shuttle. He gazed at a tricorder. “Helen and Dukat are outside the Fire Caves. I don’t see anyone else, doesn’t mean another army of the dead is waiting for us, beneath the ground, ready to rise the moment we set foot on unholy ground.”

“We’ll have to climb,” I said. “Keep close and stay focused.”

“We’re with you, Yor the Brave,” Zolon shouted.

Luther, Uther, and the four men from the Brotherhood fell into step with the last of the War Dogs. I trusted Luther had chosen the bravest Bajorans to join us. The crunch of the rocks beneath our feet had me worried. We made too much noise.

“Luck goes with the soldier who follows Yor,” Jenrak said smiling wide. He’d lost one of his front teeth in the battle. Blood had dried on his chin.

“Bajorans don’t believe in luck,” Uther said. “We have faith in the Prophets.”

“And the Ghost Warrior,” his father added.

“Maybe it’s time we all said a prayer,” I replied, hoping God was listening.

HELEN

Chapter Eighty

Standing outside the Fire Caves, I watched a prisoner in my own body as Dukat, possessed by Talos, and Dovvos attempted to roll the large stone aside. The stone moved an inch and I felt the entity residing within me growing frustrated at their feeble attempts. A loud whinny from one of the horses sent the entire small herd running off into the dark. The sounds of shuttle engine turned my head over my shoulder, watching as a white flash decided into the trees in the valley beneath us.

“You must hurry,” I heard myself say. Valana was anxious. “Roll the Sacred Stone aside, Talos! Hurry!”

“It’s heavy,” he said. “We need more time. Summon the dead, Valana.”

My head ached as I attempted to suppress Valana one last time. Images of the deaths of the twins appeared in my mind, burned to a crisp on the ship had transported them away. A ship was in orbit. It had stolen the children, Damar and Blythe from us. It would not be able to help those who had arrived on the shuttle. With a rumble the ground started to tremble and rocks fell from above, cascading into the ravine beneath us and a terrible noise filled the night. The sound of pistol fire echoed through the valley, along with the shouts of soldiers. Dukat and Dovvos moved the stone another inch and black shadows slid outwards, sailing into the sky, screeching angrily and vanished into the dark.

“Almost there,” Dovvos snarled.

I felt a tug in my mind, as if something wanted to get out and turned, able to see forms moving along the rocks, climbing towards us. Behind the group appeared a hundred rotten and moldering bodies of Cardassian recently slain in the last few months, gathering to pursue the climbers. A bright light appeared in the hand of a soldier in the lead. The ball

of yellow caught my eyes, blinding me and the tug yanked again, bringing a scream from my lips as I fell to the ground, aware beside me stood a tall woman with blue skin and dark black eyes.

"I've no more need of you," Valana stated. She gave a wave of her hand, sending me crashing against the stone Dukat and Dovvos attempted to role aside. I collapsed to the ground, unable to move, clearly able to hear Sawyer shouting and a second voice joined hers, saying something in a strange tongue and I realized Valana was reciting some type of magic spell. The air above us turned frigid.

Shivering, I glanced at Dukat, he ignored me, too involved me moving the rock to care. A small fire tornado swept across the stone, moving downwards toward my rescuers. Valana lifted her arms and electricity crackled. She flung a lightning bolt and I heard rocks explode and frightened shouts below. Again she raised another bolt, I stood, gathering my strength and ran toward her, shoving her off the ledge. She screamed as she fell, lightning shooting from her fingers.

I felt my eyebrows signed as I fell onto my stomach, gasping for air. Dukat walked over, grabbed a fistful of my air and lifted me to my feet. I saw no recognition in his red eyes. Talos controlled Dukat. I scratched at his face, leaving claw marks, able to see the evil in his eyes. He punched me in the stomach several times. With a scream, I clawed his face, he thrust me aside. I fell to the ledge, leaving a handful of my hair in his fist.

"Do not interfere," Dukat snarled.

In the valley below, I could hear the sounds of battle and the angry crack of lightning. Valana fought whoever had come for me. It could only be one person. Sawyer had arrived and brought her War Dogs and the Brotherhood, she'd not brought enough. I needed to give her time to defeat Valana and keep Talos distracted. Dovvos managed to move the rock another inch. On the other wise of the crack had gathered countless shadows to emerge, whirling around us, screeching at me as Talos drew a dagger and lifted it above me.

"Dukat! I know you're in there," I cried. "You must fight Talos. Don't let him do this. Don't let him kill me and our unborn child. You must fight him."

The death blow wavered and for a moment Dukat's eyes cleared, turning blue. He fought against himself, trying to drop the dagger, while the demon within him fought back. It was a losing battle. His eyes again glowed bright red. I grabbed a rock and threw it at him, hitting him in the face. With a snarl, he advanced toward me, I continued to back away, moving closer to the edge. I screamed as he knelt, crawling toward me, stabbing at me with the knife.

Dodging each blow, I kept moving backwards until my left hand felt only air and I knew I'd run out of space. His large body moved over me, in a panic, I kicked him in the chest. He pressed forward and I made a dive for his knife arm, grabbed hold of it and bit his hand. The knife dropped and I grabbed it, holding it before me as he raised his arm to strike me.

"Don't," I shouted. "Please, Dukat. Fight the demon. Fight it!"

A blow from his fist knocked a tooth loose. I tasted blood in my mouth. His hands closed around my throat, squeezing tight. I sobbed as I stabbed the knife into his stomach. With widened eyes, his mouth dropped open and the red light vanished from his eyes. Dukat cried my name as he slumped forward. He landed on top me. I yanked out the knife and sobbed as I felt his body grow still.

Overhead swirling shadows continued to race past. The creatures tried to grab Dukat and lift him off my body. I threw my arms and legs around his body and held tight. I wouldn't let the demons take him. As I struggled, I spotted a bright yellow light surround us. One by one the shadows were sucked away from the ridge, vanishing over the side. Duvos turned, stumbling forward and crashed to his knees, as something vile and dark, like sludge, emerged from his mouth. The blackness flowed into the air and his body slumped to the ground, dead. I felt Dukat move and turned my head, able to see his mouth open and a similar black ooze pour out of his mouth, floating into the air over him and dart away.

"Dukat," I sobbed. "Tell me you still live, my love. Say something."

Not a sound came from Dukat. He didn't move. I was too stunned to move. I had killed Dukat. I was part of the dreadful prophesy, after all. As Gnosh's lieutenants, the

threesnakes, were slain by the Ghost Warrior, I'd become the 'dagger of poison and vengeance.' Gnosh had come to Valley of Shadows. Death had claimed Dukat, for I realized then I had killed him and I screamed.

Over the edge of the cliff, I was able to see hundreds of corpses advancing toward Sawyer, Garak, and her small squad of fighters. They climbed the cliff, pausing to shoot at the undead crawling after them. I spotted Valana surrounded by her undead troops, directing things with rotten flesh invested with maggots, a nightmarish collection, screaming as she fired lightning bolts at random. Her precision was excellent. Several blasts struck the side of the cliff and caused the ground beneath my body to move.

An avalanche of rocks careened above the Fire Caves, giant boulders crashed past my position, causing me to throw my body over Dukat to protect him. I feared he'd return from the dead, an undead thing, reaching for me to steal away my life, his body remained still beneath me. A sob burst from my lips. I tried to hold my tears back and turned my head from Valana and noticed a red light appear around the edges of the large round stone blocked the entrance of the Fire Caves. Horrible noises filled the air, snarls, growls and cackling laughter. This was the door to Hell on Bajor and the demons wanted out to play.

Sawyer appeared on the ledge, brandishing a sword glow light blue and the Orb of Milea cast a white light. With her sword, she struck away the lightning blasts fired by Valana as if she swung a baseball bat. I heard Valana's frustrated screams over the cacophony of noise, a siren's call, aware every fiber in my body said to attack and kill my best friend. Garak scrambled into position beside me, breaking the spell as he grabbed my arm.

"It's all right, Helen," he said. "We're here."

Evard, Lothar and Uther reached the ledge. Ikarus, Zolon and Jenrak followed. No one else came with them. Ghoulish faces with no eyes and skeleton hands clawed at the ledge. Sawyer slammed the sword and orb together and then spread them wide, creating a bright light spread across the valley in every direction. It seemed like she'd released a sonic blast, for the undead soldiers plunged from the side of the cliff. I glanced over the ledge as Valana's feet slipped out from under her and with a banshee-like scream she was sucked

into the orb, vanishing from sight.

The army of the dead dropped, lying on the ground, no longer moving. I no longer heard eerie voices in the valley and the black shadows vanished, leaving a starry night overhead. Things cried from behind the stone. Sawyer and Evard ran toward the stone. The priest knelt, praying while she touched the stone with the orb and sword at the same time. With a loud crash, the stone crumbled into pieces and dozens of reddish forms flew upwards, showering the area with sparks. Sawyer crouched over the priest at the entrance as the Pah-Wraiths rushed past her, shadowy red forms flew upwards, joining ten white forms swirled around them. As I watched, amazed, the Pah-Wraiths' lost their red glow and turned into the same bright white lights, circling each other, and then darted upwards. The priest threw his arms around Sawyer's waist, pressing his face against her, sobbing.

"You did it," Evard cried. "You broke the curse and restored the Pah-Wraiths to their true selves, children of light, allowing them to rejoin with their kin. Praise be to the Prophets."

"Helen?" Sawyer shouted. "What's happened? Is Dukat dead?"

I gave a nod. "I had to do it. Talos was going to kill me. I had to kill him. I had to."

Sawyer pushed Evard aside. The men gathered around Dukat, looking as forlorn and grief-stricken as I felt. She pushed past them and knelt beside his body, placing the crystal ball on top of Dukat's body. A golden light came from the orb and surrounded his body. Dukat lifted several inches off the ground, while the sword turned the brightest shade of blue I'd ever seen and trembled in her grip. Garak and I grabbed Dukat, keeping him from floating upwards, using our weight to push him to the ground, while Sawyer pressed downwards.

"Live," Sawyer sobbed. "You must live, Dukat."

The glowing light faded from the orb and the sword lost its blue color. Dukat's body hit the ground, bringing Garak and I forward as we sank beside him. I felt Dukat's arm move and glanced at Sawyer. She handed the sword and orb to Evard, keeling beside Dukat and threw her arms around him, hugging him tight.

"Dukat! You're alive," Sawyer cried as she kissed him on the lips.

I watched, amazed, unsure what I saw could happen. Sawyer had by the grace of the Prophets restored Dukat's life. His arms slid around her, holding her tight. Their kiss was passionate as ever, I didn't care, not this time; she had saved his life. When Dukat finally released her, she moved aside and motioned me forward.

"Helen?" Dukat sat upwards. He wore a stunned look on his face. His fingers slid across the wound. It had healed. He grasped my face between his hands.

"I'm right here, my love! You're alive!"

With a cry of relief, I threw my arms around him, kissing his face repeatedly. He laughed as he caught my face between his hands, such a look of hope upon his face I had to kiss him again to make certain it wasn't a dream. He was alive and he was mine. I had no more time to process what had happened for the priest cried out in alarm. With my arms still around Dukat, I turned to look.

"The Prophets are here," Evard whispered.

Sawyer faced twelve white glowing forms appeared in front of her. Dukat pulled me to my feet. We stood beside the soldiers and Garak as the tallest Prophet approached Sawyer. Evard dropped to his knees and touched the ground with his forehead. This time the Prophets took no humanoid form or assumed the guise of familiar faces. Sawyer took the sword and orb from the priest and handed them toward the Prophet standing in front, took a knee and bowed her head. The holy relics were absorbed into the light and vanished.

"I have done as you requested," Sawyer said in a defiant voice.

"At last our two tribes can join together. You have done well, Sawyer of Earth. Rise, Prylar Evard. You are a faithful servant. You will not be forgotten."

All one Prophet, the one who had spoken, flew into the air. The sword reappeared. It shone bright blue as it tapped Sawyer's shoulders as if knighting her. As she stood, the Prophet spoke to us.

"Do you desire to stay here, Helen Monroe, or return to Earth? The same is asked of you, Sawyer Kincaid, also known as Ren Yor Damar. This is your final opportunity to return to your own time and place. If you remain here, then know your other forms will perish and life will go on

with you. If you chose to remain here, on Bajor, it is for you both to unite their people with the lost tribe, those from Cardassia, and you two shall know ever-lasting peace, love and happiness."

"I, Ren Yor Damar, chose to remain here," she said in a stern voice. "I have provided you with the Orb of Regeneration and the Sword of the Prophets. The Pah-Wraiths have joined the Prophets. I shall do my best to ensure the peace between the Bajorans and Cardassians. If I am needed again, you have to call on me, for I remain your faithful servant."

"You have done what was required. No more shall be asked. Have a blessed life, Ren Yor Damar. And you, Helen Monroe. What is your decision?"

Dukat took hold of my hands. I loved him with all of my heart. I wanted to remain with him, the offer had been made to return home. It was the last time, I knew, for me to return to Earth. I thought of my family, my friends, and the life I'd left behind. My heart thumped in my chest. I was close to panic. Dukat kissed the palm of my hand, he offered his love, I didn't know if the life he offered me was enough to sacrifice what I had on Earth. If I remained, I knew the plane would crash and a gravestone was all would be left of my former life.

"You must decide, Helen," the Prophet said.

"my family on Earth," I groaned. "I can't do this to them."

"If you leave me, Helen, my heart shall break and so will my spirit," Dukat said in a throaty voice. "I cannot govern Bajor and lead them into a new age without you. If you and Sawyer want Cardassia to join the Federation, then I need you. The children need you, Helen. Stay with me, Helen. Please. I need you."

Sawyer approached me, her face twisted with emotions. Tears streaked down her cheeks, bruised and bloodied, evidence she'd done her best to defend Bajor and those she loved. She placed her hand on my shoulder and I realized then it wasn't for the love of Dukat I wanted to stay, it was my love for Ren Yor; she'd earned name. Yor had never lost faith in Dukat, Damar, and me. She'd done what was necessary to alter the course of history. I couldn't leave her, not now, for I knew deep down inside she needed me just as much as I ended her. Together, we made a difference.

"I'm staying," I said. The moment the words were out of my mouth, I knew I had made the right decision. "My home is here with Dukat and Ren Yor. I will miss my family on Earth, I belong here. This is where I am needed."

"Thank you, Helen. Thank you for staying with us," Yor said. She knelt and threw her arms around me. Dukat placed his arms around both of us.

Together, we stood and watched the Prophet jetted into the air, joining countless others in the sky and vanished into the twinkling stars. I laughed as Dukat kissed Sawyer on the cheek and then kissed me with a tenderness I'd never experienced, not like this.

"Thank you both for what you have done," Dukat said. His blue eyes were filled with hope. "I have learned a valuable lesson. One I will never forget. The only thing in life worth having is love. This is what I have found with both of you on Bajor. I will not disappoint either one of you. Cardassia will be great again. From this day forward, we will enter a new relationship with the Federation and bring about peace to the Alpha Quadrant."

"Now isn't the time for a speech," Yor laughed. "we do need to thank the one person who helped make this all happen."

Yor slipped free from Dukat and I. She walked toward Garak. She kissed his cheek. Garak looked stunned. She embraced her War Dogs and the Brotherhood. The men hugged and kissed her. I knew Now I would never hear the end of the tales of Brave Yor. They were right to adore her. Ren Yor was the bravest person I had ever met and I would never again call her Sawyer; not unless she pissed me off in the future, which seemed evitable. After all, she had earned her Cardassian name and the admiration of Damar, the War Dogs, Brotherhood, and her precious Dukat. Our precious Dukat, I thought, as I met his gaze.

"Not once since we arrived in this strange world has Yor ever given up on me, despite my many faults, or on you," I said to Dukat. I smiled at Yor. "Fate brought us all together. We are lucky to have you in our lives, for you always knew there was a higher purpose to all of this, and you were right."

"Glinn Ren Yor, do the honors and lead the way to the shuttle," Dukat said, his arm around me. He kissed my cheek. "You, my dear, will be required to spend the rest of your

life loving me for all my faults. After all, you did kill me.”

“And Yor brought you back to us,” Garak said.

“I’ll be more than happy to,” I said, laughing. “I love you, Dukat. We have another little one on the way.” He smirked. “It will be a son, Dukat. I know he will do great things one day and follow in his father’s footsteps.”

“All is forgiven?” Garak asked sheepishly.

“Let the past remain in the past,” Dukat said as Yor motioned for us to follow. “We now look to the future, Garak. It will be hard work. I know together we will bring about a new era of peace. I’m sure you’ll have no problem reminding me from time to time what I said here this night. I have learned my lesson and am a better man for it.”

“Let’s go home,” I said, smiling through my tears of happiness.

“To Milea,” Dukat said.

REN YOR

Epilogue

The battlefield around Milea was not as I expected on our return. The dead had vanished, leaving behind only the joined force of Bajor and Cardassia, standing in formation in the courtyard and surrounding vineyard. The moment we stepped off the shuttle, I heard loud applause and cheering. With Helen tucked under his arm, Dukat motioned toward me and the crowd went wild. I waved at the troops and turned, searching for Damar and Eben and spotted them standing on the front porch. Running toward my loved one, I jumped into Damar's arms, kissing him with enthusiasms. Eben, joined by Shazel, threw their arms around me, holding on tight.

"You did it, my love. You did it," Damar said.

"Mother, you're a hero. You did the impossible," Eben said.

I heard the pride in my son's voice. He held onto Shazel's hand. The girl refused to go to her father or Helen. They joined us on the porch. Unsure how to respond to the girl's insistence I hold her, I knelt to gather her and Eben under each arm. The little girls swarmed Dukat and Helen. Blythe handed Gabe to Garak and kept Madison on her hip. Meeting Dukat's gaze over the heads of the children he gave an approving nod. I was not sure what he meant until Shazel giggled. He clearly meant for me to take charge of his daughter and be the mother she had always wanted. Lifting Shazel off the ground, I watched as Dukat approached me.

"Shazel has chosen you to be her mother," Dukat said, his eyes sparkling. "I approve of you raising my daughter. You can see I have my hands full. She'll be ours to share, another link in the chain binds us together, for you and I will always be together, one way or another. She idolizes you like everyone else. Will you accept her as your own?"

I glanced at Damar and Eben, waiting for their consent. Both nodded at me.

"Yes, Dukat. Shazel will be our daughter," I said. I noticed the relief on Helen's face.

It seemed right I would raise Dukat's child; we'd always be connected.

"Thank you, my warrior queen," Dukat whispered. He returned to Helen's side.

"Tonight, I want to sleep in our bed at Fort Galdrak," I said, pressing against Damar. Shazel threw her arms around his neck and he took her from me. "In the morning, you and Dukat can sign the treaty with the Federation. I've decided to resign from the military. Someone said I should write a book about all of this and that's what I'm going to do, while I take care of the three of you. I've had quite enough of adventure and battles. There might even be a new addition to the family, if you play your cards right, Damar."

"Exchange your sword for a pen?" Damar laughed. "That'll be the day."

"These boots have marched their last. I promise, my love."

"No, Cardassia needs you, Ren," he said. "I do too."

Eben and Shazel smiled at me.

"We're going to be a family now," Eben said. "My dream finally came true."

"And mine," Shazel said.

I had to admit the girl's love and loyalty offered to me, neither asked for or expected, reminded me how I felt about her father. This was the true female version of Dukat, from the shape her eyes and mouth to her personality. She'd picked me to be her mother. No one was going to change her mind. Eben had belonged to me the moment I'd scooped him off the ground and placed him onto my horse. As the children laughed, tugging on Damar, while he lifted them each onto his hips, able to better show them the fireworks, I noticed a familiar face in the crowd.

Across the courtyard stood Q, dressed like a Bajoran worker, a hat on his head, holding a rake. He removed his hat and with a flourish bowed. His voice echoed in my mind long after he vanished from sight. *"To the victor go the spoils of war and love. Well played, my dear. Well played."* I watched the rake fall to the ground, while the hat rolled across the courtyard, swept along by a breeze. I hoped I'd never see Q again. I turned to find Damar staring at me with love in his eyes. Eben and Shazel had joined the rest of the children, standing together on the steps, applauding and shouting each time another firework lighted up the sky.

"What are you thinking, my love?" Damar asked.

"Something Helen and I talked about a long time ago. She said she believed in coincidences and fate. You know I don't," I said. " you don't know why. I've always believed if you stop and pay attention, you may find the smallest coincidence offers a higher meaning. It's a personal message from above meant just for you. If you close your eyes, you might miss it. If you keep them wide open, something wonderful might happen. Everything happens for a reason."

Damar smiled as he took hold of my hand, kissing my knuckles. "I am indeed a fortunate man," he said. "I love you with all of my heart."

"And I love you to the ends of the galaxy and back," I whispered.

With my husband at my side, I gazed at the night sky to see a lone star streak across the sky. I imagined it was Q departing from the galaxy, off to find other souls to play his dangerous game of life and death. Then again, it might only be a falling star. I didn't make a wish on it, for I didn't need to. I had more than I ever dreamed possible.

THE END