

"Arrivals, Departures, Omens"

Chapter 1

"It was terrible!" Valim repeated.

In Kira's office, she and Emyr listened somberly as the minister's obviously-shaken aide continued his report. There was a discolored, oval swelling across his forehead, and a parallel set of cuts across his cheek, ending in a split lower lip that had the man speaking with a bit of a lisp. Every now and then, he winced in pain, but it didn't stop him from talking.

"Minister Lizin and I were in Ilvia for the opening of the new exhibit of artifacts from the B'hala excavations. We had just arrived outside the museum, by transporter, and we saw there was a large crowd gathered. We thought nothing of it, obviously — as the Minister said, it was to be expected our people would be eager to see the opening of such a display. These artifacts are probably twenty thousand years old! Their historical value to Bajor is incalculable!"

Valim paused to lick his lips, wincing when his tongue touched the swollen wound. Then he took a careful drink from a cup before setting it back down, out of sight from their viewscreen.

"The minister thought mingling with the people would be appropriate, to share a few informal greetings before the scheduled speeches...."

Out of the corner of her eye, Kira caught Emyr mouthing the word "politicians" behind the clasped hands before her face, but her expression remained impassive. Kira couldn't help mentally agreeing.

"So we moved down to join the crowd. Suddenly the shouting started, out of nowhere, for no reason!" Valim shook his head as if in disbelief before repeating yet again, "It was terrible, terrible! There was jeering and pushing. And then they began throwing things!"

"What were they saying?" Kira asked.

"It was hard to hear exactly over the shouting, but it sounded like accusations against the government, against the ministers. Wild claims Shakaar is handing Bajor over to aliens. That the ministers are no better than the occupation government puppets. That the vedeks are blasphemers who've betrayed the Prophets and the people. That we've forgotten who we are." He swallowed, his gaze sliding nervously from side to side as if he expected a renewed attack at any moment. "And threats. That we deserved to burn in the ruins of our own decadence. That we were nothing but voles who should be hunted down by hara cats. That the day would come when sinoraptors would shred the flesh from our faces and rip out our eyes...." The man's voice kept rising into a near-wail.

Kira couldn't help staring at the matching slashes on Valim's pale face.

"What did they throw?" Emyr interrupted flatly.

"Snowballs." The aide's voice turned indignant. "But the first one that struck my face, I realized there were rocks inside! And ice! It hurt! And there were grasshopper eggs! Old eggs — do you know the stench of rotten grasshopper eggs?" Valim flung out his arms. "The Minister and I were both struck, multiple times. Our lives were threatened! Our coats were ruined! And I am certain I saw weapons among those madmen! If Che'Sinn's officers hadn't intervened when they did, pulling us to safety and dispersing the crowd, I have no doubt there would have been shooting!"

"And neither you nor the Minister heard anything that might suggest why you were the targets of this anger, or where it had come from?" Emyr pressed. "Or why it might have erupted there, at the opening of an exhibition of artifacts with, as you noted, such historical and religious significance for Bajor?"

"No, no reason at all." Valim seemed to collapse back into himself. "But when you are in peril for your life, you don't always think to ask why someone is trying to kill you."

"Very true. Thank you for taking time to give us your personal report, Valim," Kira told him seriously. "I assure you, we'll take all possible precautions here on the station for the festival. But you should have your injuries tended to. Convey my regards to Minister Lizin, and my relief you both weren't more seriously injured."

"Thank you, Colonel." Valim looked more mollified.

"We'll see you both here on the station in a few days, when you've had time to recover."

"Of course."

The viewscreen side with the minister's aide went dark, then vanished while the other image expanded to take up the entire screen.

"Che'Sinn?"

"We dispersed the crowd around the museum, but either they just decided to make trouble elsewhere in the city, or there were other conspirators in place ready to start riots timed to coincide with this one." Che'Sinn, head of Civilian Security for the city of Ilvia, looked understandably harried as he ran a hand over his balding scalp. "We had to break up four separate mobs in public areas of the city. There were three suspicious fires near the local commissioner's hall and the transport center. And we'll be cleaning graffiti off walls for at least two days, more likely three."

"Do you have any leads?" Emyr asked.

He shook his head. "No, not yet, constable. Unfortunately. We've only been able to apprehend a number of citizens who obviously were caught up in the mob mentality, no-one we're certain had any role in beginning the riot." Anticipating criticism, he added, "With winter clothing and hoods, identifying the instigators hasn't been easy."

Emyr mused, "The use of snow and rocks in the initial attacks *could* mean this was spur of the moment, that the protesters used what they had at hand. Or perhaps the hope was the larger crowd would become involved as well by emulating the protesters with easy-to-hand weapons. The eggs suggest planning. *Fresh* grasshopper eggs would be easy to come by, at any market, but *rotten* ones suggest deliberate planning."

"There's a very small chance this could have been spontaneous," Che'Sinn agreed, "but like you, I believe this was planned. That it began in so many parts of the crowd suggests the instigators were placed to maximize confusion and incite as much widespread anger as possible."

"Agreed."

"We'll be reviewing transport records into the area over the last few weeks and monitoring all other methods of travel in the next few days, to see if we can trace any outsiders with records of disruption anywhere else, or suspicious patterns. But Ilvia is a shrine and a popular northern destination, with its history, and so many recreational activities, and the museum, even more so with the excitement of the B'hala exhibit. We may have forty-five thousand visitors in the city this week alone."

"You'll assign extra security at the museum?" Emyr asked.

"Already done." Che'Sinn's already serious expression turned grimmer. "I can't see any of our people damaging such priceless artifacts, but theft is possible, even if just to embarrass the First Minister and the government."

"There is always a possibility of outside agitation, to cover theft by non-Bajorans," the constable noted.

Che'Sinn nodded once without comment.

"You'll keep us up to date on your investigation?" Kira asked.

"We will."

"Thank you, Che'Sinn."

The screen went dark.

Kira and Emyn looked at each other.

"Do you think it's related to the attempt to steal the Orb of the Hidden?" Kira finally asked quietly. Since that shocking attempt, the colonel had concluded Emyn's perception of how the outside universe viewed their sacred objects might be clearer than hers, and should be taken into consideration.

The constable shrugged. "Hopefully Che'Sinn will find out. At least he's not fool enough to think sacred still means safe, on Bajor."

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Bashir knew Dr. Girani was a competent doctor and quite capable of overseeing the infirmary. However, he fully expected most of his experimental work to have been ignored in his long absence on Cardassia. He was surprised to find the results of several ongoing medical research projects on Bajor had been neatly maintained and updated, along with notations as to variables to consider for future experiments and observations about the current results.

He didn't know whether to be pleased that someone had kept his research going for him, or disturbed that someone had interjected himself or herself into work he had organized and for which he'd overseen every previous detail.

"I see someone's been following my immuno-therapy experiments," he noted aloud.

"That would be Alex's doing," Girani noted with a smile.

"Alex...?" Bashir reflexively checked the medical personnel roster. "Ah, yes. Dr. Monrow. I met her at the party, I believe. She's been updating the supplemental medical logs as well?"

"Yes. She's been a boon to the department in your absence."

"Really?"

"As busy as we've been with the influx of refugees, and with you gone, it's been difficult to find time to handle anything but our daily patients and medical supply distribution for the zone colonies. But Alex volunteered to jump right in and help with anything she could. She recognized immediately what you were trying to do in your second-stage immuno-therapy project. And on top of her theoretical understanding and research skills, Alex is an excellent doctor — her surgical abilities are almost as good as yours. And," Girani flashed a very appreciative smile. "You'll be amazed the first time you taste her cooking."

"Her cooking?" Bashir crossed his arms and sat back in his chair, chuckling. "It sounds like the two of you are getting along famously!"

"We are. Believe it or not, she's the first non-Bajoran I've ever met who not only appreciates the taste of hasperat, but has taken the time to learn how to prepare it properly!"

"That," Bashir returned emphatically, "is one food I think I'll continue to pass on!"

"If you discover a cure for Orkett's Disease, I'll forgive you that failing," Girani quipped back. Then her

expression turned more serious. "I think you'll be disturbed when you read about the situation with Laas and his New Link."

"Why?"

"They had the Founders Disease."

He nodded slowly. "We have the cure for that."

"We did." A second's pause. "When Alex ... Dr. Monrow and I went to the databanks for the information on the cure, we discovered it was gone."

"Gone?" he repeated, frowning. "What do you mean?"

"All information regarding the cure, beyond the fact of its existence and its role in ending the war, was gone. There's nothing in the Starfleet medical database or your own logs about what the cure was, or how to synthesize it."

Bashir stared at her, appalled. "Somebody's been tampering with our computer information and my personal logs?"

Girani nodded. "That's our assessment. Colonel Kira believes it must have been removed for security reasons. She advised us to keep it confidential."

Bashir felt a cold stony lump settle into his stomach. "And I thought the *Cardassian* government had played god with their history and what their people were entitled to know," he breathed. "Section 31. It has to be. But—"

"Section what?"

The coldness spread; his expression turned grim. "Never mind, Girani, never mind. I'm sure Kira's right."

"I know you won't have forgotten your research and the formula of the cure," the Bajoran doctor continued, refocusing her attention. "But under the circumstances, I assume you won't be re-entering the data into our system?"

He hesitated a fraction of a second, then replied, "No, I won't. At least not until I talk to Kira and Starfleet Medical. Check the current protocols and such...."

It was better his staff didn't know what he suspected. He had always known it was a near-certainty Section 31 had agents on the station. If he hadn't been so focused on the bloody aftermath of the war and the reconstruction mission to Cardassia, it might have occurred to him those agents might retaliate against him for having lured Sloan to the Station, and to his death. Troubling as it was to contemplate, it was probably inevitable Section 31 would try to steal back from him what he had forcibly taken from them.

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She had to get away from Ops for a few minutes. On impulse, she even turned off her combadge, mutinously feeling the need for a small act of rebellion. Making her way above the Promenade, Kira paused to study the crowd. Hands wrapped tightly around the railing, she gazed down from the overhead crosswalk at the bustling collection of personnel and visitors on the Promenade.

There was more than the usual cross-section of strangers. Lizin, the Minister of Culture and Arts, had invited artists from a number of worlds to visit Bajor — make that, to visit the station. Kira hadn't been consulted in advance. But the minister was currently a strong supporter of Shakaar; the colonel wasn't about to make waves about the "cultural event" for him, as tense as things were on Bajor at the moment.

Lizin was supposed to be here to handle the publicity and diplomatic interaction with the artists, but he'd

delayed his arrival for the opening of the B'hala exhibit at the Ilvian museum. It meant Kira had spent a good deal of time the last few days welcoming those artists and dealing with artistic temperaments and assignment nightmares, when her schedule was already overflowing. Hopefully the minister wasn't really injured in the riot, or at least that he didn't use it as an excuse not to come to the station....

At the moment, there were a number of visual artists displaying assorted paintings, holos, and sculptures of various types. She could also see some of the artists demonstrating their styles to eager observers, and she knew there were several musicians and dancers who would be performing over the next few days.

One cluster of observers was noticeably smaller than the others — a Cardassian water sculptor was at one of the display areas. Only a handful of Starfleet and station personnel had gathered to enjoy the melodic fluid trickles of her sculpture and listen to Nilom describe Cardassian aesthetics. One Bajoran, Deputy Brilgar, hovered nearby, probably assigned to ensure the Cardassian woman's safety. He did, however, at least seem mildly interested in her remarks.

Briefly diverted, Kira wondered why the minister had invited a Cardassian, and why the woman had come. Considering the still-dire situation on Cardassia, maybe Nilom just wanted to get away from what was left of her home for a while.

"Nerys! Here you are!"

Distracted, Kira glanced up as Dax approached. "Ezri! Hello! Yes, here I am. What is it?" She almost didn't want to know.

"We just heard from Bajor — Vedek Nane will be arriving tomorrow morning."

Kira couldn't help a delighted, relieved smile. "Vedek Nane! It'll be wonderful to talk with him again! I haven't seen him since ... well, since Ziyal's memorial."

Dax leaned over the railing with her. "I've never met Vedek Nane. What's he like?"

"He's a very spiritual man. A talented artist and a patient teacher. He's become a role model for so many of his students." Kira turned pensive, remembering one of those students, Tora Ziyal, the half-Cardassian, half-Bajoran girl who had become something between sister and daughter to her. "He took Ziyal in as if she were his own daughter. She lived in his abbey, at the university, for several months."

"That was quite a favor, for a Bajoran vedek to take in Dukat's daughter. I think I'll like him."

"I just asked him to give her a chance, to help her settle in — it was her talent and who she was that earned her a place in his heart." Kira pushed away from the railing to stand erect. "I suppose I have to get back to Ops," she said briskly. "I'm sure between them, the senior staff have a stack of reports on my desk that will take all day to get through, and hopefully it'll include the arrangements for the reception tomorrow evening. And I'm expecting another call from Bajor."

"About the riots in Ilvia this morning?"

Kira's expression sharpened. "I didn't think that was public knowledge yet. How did you hear?"

Ezri shrugged apologetically. "Quark."

"That figures," the colonel growled, casting a baleful glance over the railing toward Quark's bar. "I suppose that means the whole station already knows about it."

"Probably." Ezri studied her carefully. "You look stressed."

"And why wouldn't I be?" Kira complained. "Minister Lizin dumps a station full of temperamental artists from over a dozen different worlds on me, without any notice—"

"I'm sure it's not that bad."

"They're worse than diplomats, at least diplomats try to be ... diplomatic, these artists don't even care when they irritate you—"

"I think they just don't notice."

"And now I'm apparently the last person on the station to hear about a major riot at Ilvia—"

"Quark has his own sources, don't take it personally."

Kira tightened her grip on the railing. "I suppose," she said, low-voiced, "what's really worrying me is this seems to be happening all over Bajor."

"I thought it was just scattered disturbances."

Kira shook her head soberly. "I thought so too, until a few days ago. The more I hear, the more I worry. Somebody's behind what's happening. Directing things. I can feel it. And I wish there was something I could do besides ... host parties up here. It's as though nobody on Bajor is listening to me anymore, not even Shakaar." After a few seconds, Kira took a deep breath and changed the subject. "Doing anything for dinner tonight?"

"Meeting Julian at the Klingon restaurant," the Trill replied. "And I hope there's something I can stomach on Loron's menu! Preferably something not moving...."

"So let Jadzia order for you."

"That's what I'm afraid of!"

Kira forced a chuckle.

"Care to join us?"

"No, I don't want to interrupt your personal time together. Besides, I don't like my supper moving any more than you do!"

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