

Star Trek: Sutherland Vigil

By David Falkayn

Part 1: The Dawning of a New Day

Activating the intercom on her desk, the captain of the *USS Sutherland* spoke, "Shelby to Sickbay...Dr. Murakawa?" On hearing the ship's chief medical officer's affirmative response, Liz asked, "How's Ensign Sito?"

Pausing for a moment to take a breath, Denise Murakawa fingered the crucifix hanging from her neck as she answered, "Right now she's in a semi-comatose...semi-catatonic might be a better word...state. Physically...the drugs and poisons have been removed from her system and all traces of the pain implant are gone. But..."

"But..." The Captain interjected, her voice edged with concern.

"But..." Denise continued, "...with all that's happened to her, Ensign Sito's body and mind have gone into what amounts to a type of 'shutdown mode'." Sighing, the Japanese-Centauran doctor concluded, "I've done everything I can do and have informed Dr. Bashir of her condition and he concurs with my diagnosis. There's a point where the patient has to decide for themselves whether to continue on or not. Captain, that's where Ensign Sito is now. It's all up to her..."

"Thank you, Doctor." Elizabeth replied, letting out a sigh of her own as she terminated the communication. Activating the intercom once again, she instructed the computer, "Get me Admiral Samson at Deep Space Five."

Terrence smiled warmly as the visage of his father, Admiral Samson Glover, appeared on his monitor screen. Mindful of protocol, the younger Glover

spoke, "Hello, Admiral. Is this a business call or social?" Noting the grim look on the older man's face, Terrance, forgetting procedure, asked as his face took on a more serious expression. "What's wrong, Dad?"

"You better sit down, Son." Samson advised in a grave tone.

"Ok, Father..." Terrance said, his voice carrying a faint note of impatience mingled in with the earlier concern, "I'm sitting. What's going on?"

"It's about one of the students in Nova Squadron that you used to mentor." Samson said, "Ensign Sito Jaxa."

"What about her?" Terrence asked, his voice taking on a somber tone as he lowered his head. "She was killed over a year and a half ago."

Shaking his head, the older man sighed as he shook his head. "No, she wasn't. She's alive."

Nonplussed at his father's surprise announcement, Terrance spurted out, "What?" Seeing the look on his father's face, a mixture of relief, anger, and sadness, the younger man leaned forward towards the image of the admiral, "Dad...I think you better tell me what's going on here."

Taking a deep breath and slowly exhaling it, the admiral spoke, "She was a prisoner of the Cardassians until a group of Starfleet officers freed her just a few days ago."

"Where...where is she...how is she?" Terrence asked, numbed by the bombshell his father had just dropped on him.

"She's on the *Sutherland*..." Samson replied in a gentle voice, "En-route to Deep Space Nine."

Gritting his teeth as he pictured in his mind at the treatment his former protégé had probably received from the Cardassians, Terrence prompted, "Ok, Dad. You've told me where she is...now...how is she?"

Shaking his head, Admiral Glover looked his son square in the eyes. "Not good, Son. The Gul holding her...Gul Rejak..." Seeing his son's eyes narrow at the mention of the Cardassian officer's name, Samson sighed, "I see you know of him."

"Only from what I've heard from Pell and a few others." Terrence replied. "I know that he's as bad as they come."

"He's worse." The elder Glover answered back. Pausing momentarily, the admiral shook his head, "They...he...brutalized her, Terrence. And that's putting it mildly. I don't know where to begin. I'm not sure I can find the words to describe what she's gone through."

"What do you mean?" Terrence demanded, his voice now taking on a quiet, dangerous, tone. "What did that son of a bitch do to her?"

Heaving a melancholy sigh, the admiral began, "When the rescue team found her, she was strung out on Corillan acid and the Cardassians were about to sell her at a slave auction."

"Frixing..." Terrence began only to be cut off by his father.

"There's more, Son. A lot more. Nurse Ogawa...one of the rescue party...had to perform emergency surgery on her to remove a pain implant that was killing her. She also confirmed that Ensign Sito had been the victim of multiple sexual assaults." Shaking his head again, the admiral muttered, "That poor woman has been through hell..."

"I want to see her." Terrence declared after his father had finished his tale.

"I figured you would." The elder Glover responded approvingly. "I see that *Cuffe* is due for resupply and that you had originally planned to do it at Deep Space Five. Those orders are now changed. You have my authorization to divert to Deep Space Nine for resupply, rest, and recreation." His lips turning up into a warm smile, the admiral added, "I know Jasmine's looking forward to getting back to duty on DS 5, but tell her she's stuck with you for a few more days."

"Will do, Admiral." Terrence acknowledged. Then, before his father could end the transmission, the younger man added, "And thanks, Dad." Punching the intercom button on his desk, Terrence commanded in a gruff tone, "Commander Kojo...set course immediately for Deep Space Nine...maximum warp."

As the unconscious Ensign Sito Jaxa lay on her biobed within the sickbay of

the *Sutherland*, the silence broken only by the hum of the instruments and the soft words of her best friend, Sam Lavelle, his warm hand clutching hers as he pleaded for her recovery, a war raged within the young Bajoran's mind and soul...a war in which the outcome was very much in doubt...

Part 2: Friends

"How is she?" Ensign Maria Django asked as she entered the DS 9 infirmary, seeing her friend and shipmate Sam Lavelle in his usual place, sitting beside the bed where the comatose Sito Jaxa lay.

"No change." Sam replied mournfully, his head lowered as Maria began to massage his shoulders. Sighing as his friend's ministrations loosened tense muscles, the young helmsman sighed. "I feel so useless just sitting here."

"Why don't you go lie down for awhile?" Maria suggested, frowning at the sight of the fatigue and worry lines showing on her companion's face. "You've done more than anyone could ask..."

"No..." Sam replied, his lips turning up in a slight smile, "I have to be here...I owe it to her." Guiding Maria to the seat next to him he asked, "Did I ever tell you about the first time me and Jaxa met?"

"No..." Maria answered back, taking Sam's free hand in hers as she sat down next to him. "Why don't you tell me?"

"Who's she?" Sam asked, jerking his head at the attractive blonde Bajoran cadet sitting by herself in the cadet cafeteria.

"You mean you haven't heard?" Sean Ratliff, a fellow cadet and friend of Sam's exclaimed in astonishment.

"You know I just got back from my cadet cruise on the *Repulse*." Sam replied and then repeated his question. "So...who is she and why is a knockout like her sitting all by herself. What did she do? Poison everyone's desert or something?"

"Hell..." Another cadet, Deanna Nyland interjected, "It would have been better if that was all she did." Gazing at the confused expression on her friend's face, she remarked, "You really don't know...do you?" Taking a deep breath as the little group took their seats two tables down from the lonely Bajoran, the raven haired Deanna inquired of Sam, "Did you hear about what happened with Nova Squadron?"

"Yeah...of course, I did." Sam replied. "It was the talk of the *Repulse* for days. One of the squadron...Josh Albert...I think...was killed when they tried to do

the Kolvoord Starburst maneuver.”

“That’s right.” Sean acknowledged. “Nick Locarno was booted out...Jean Hajar resigned...”

“Crusher’s still here...” Deanna added, jerking her head towards where another cadet, this one a young man with close cropped brown hair, sat eating his meal in isolation.

“So...” Sam concluded, “That must be Sito Jaxa.”

Much to the surprise of his friends, Sam got up out of his chair, picked up his tray and wandered over to the table where the ostracized cadet sat alone, picking at her food. Setting his tray down opposite her, he asked as he sat down, “Mind if I join you?”

Taking her barely audible grunt as assent, the young Canadian flashed his winningest smile, “Hi. I’m Sam...” However, much to his astonishment, the blonde Bajoran cadet instead of answering him back, simply stood up, picked up her tray, turned around and walked away without uttering a single word. Ignoring his friends’ laughter Sam stared at the retreating form of the ostracized cadet, the roguish young man silently swore an oath that somehow...someday...regardless of how long it took, he was going to get to know that tormented young woman better—a lot better.

“Well...” Maria chuckled, “That could have gone better.”

“Yeah.” Sam laughed, “Sort of like our first meeting...”

“So...” Django prompted with a mischievous smile, “What happened next....”

“Well...” Sam reminisced, “The next time I saw her was in ‘Intermediate Unarmed Combat.’

“Why do I think this part’s going to be very painful?” Maria asked with a wicked grin.

“You have no idea...” Sam rejoined with a laugh.

"I guess it's you and me..." Lavelle chuckled as he squared off against his opponent, the same stony faced Bajoran woman who had walked away from him during lunch. "Can't walk away from me this time..." He smirked as he lunged; his grin vanishing as Sito easily dodged his blow and then, hooking his ankle with her foot, tripped him.

Hitting the mat with a thud, the roguish Canadian ignored the snickers coming from his friends in the bleachers waiting their turn. "Not bad..." Sam remarked, this time eliciting just the barest hint of a smile from the woman standing opposite him. "But I bet you can't do it again."

Moments later, Sam Lavelle was once again picking himself up off the mat. Chuckling in embarrassed defeat, he dusted himself off. "Ok...ok...you win." Taking a deep breath, he pleaded, noting with satisfaction that the Bajoran woman was now actually smiling at him. "You have to show me how you did that."

"All right." Sito, seemingly exasperated, replied, speaking for the first time to the attractive dark haired human who, it had seemed, had been accosting her all day. This is what you do..." She said as she demonstrated the maneuver, explaining the steps as she executed it. "And that's all there is to it." Sito grinned as she once again looked down on her human opponent.

"Thanks." Sam chuckled, standing up. "So..." He asked in a jocular tone, "Is getting my ass kicked the only way I'm going to be able to get you to speak to me?"

"It's not a good idea for you to talk to me..." Sito replied as she quickly turned away, her head lowered as she walked away.

Not willing to let her just walk away just after she had finally opened the door just a crack, Sam remarked as he rushed up to the side of the young woman, "I'll take my chances."

"Your funeral." Sito replied somberly as she walked on in silence not uttering another word as she made her way across the compound accompanied by a strange dark haired human who didn't have the sense to take 'No' for an answer.

"You sure have a way with women!" Maria teased; bringing forth laughter from her shipmate and friend.

"Yeah..." Sam answered back with a smirk, "I know."

"So..." Maria inquired, "What happened next?"

As he held on to both women's hands, Sam's lips turned up into a warm smile. "When we got to her dorm...Pike House...she turned towards me and said..."

"Why are you doing this?"

"Doing what?" The roguish Canadian asked innocently.

"Following me..." Sito replied in a stern voice.

Shrugging his shoulders, Sam answered back in a serious tone, "It looks like you could use a friend."

Shaking her head, Sito sat down on a bench across from the dormitory entrance. Her head lowered, she said mournfully, "You don't want anything to with me."

"Why not?" Sam asked as he sat down next to the haunted young Bajoran woman.

Tears rolling down her cheeks, Sito responded, "Because everything I touch turns to ashes."

"Nova Squadron...right?" Lavelle replied as he took the strange woman's hand in his.

Nodding her head, Sito choked back a sob, "Yes. It was because of me that Josh Albert got killed...that his name got dragged through the mud...that his family was hurt...that Jean Hajar quit..."

Cutting the sobbing woman off, Sam interjected, "That's not the way I heard the story. From what I heard, it was all Nick Locarno's doing."

“No...” Sito replied, vigorously shaking her head, “We all agreed to performing the maneuver and to covering it up by putting the blame on Josh...”

Clenching his teeth, Sam paused for several moments in order to get his thoughts in order before speaking. Taking a deep breath, the young cadet responded. “Ok, Sito...you want me to give it to you straight...from someone who wasn’t here at the time it happened?”

Taking the young woman’s hesitant nod of her head as assent, Sam plowed on, “If you’re asking me whether you screwed up or not...I’d have to say, ‘Yes’. I don’t think there are any two ways around that. But...” He declared as he brushed away the fresh tears from her cheeks, “It’s a mistake I could very easily have made if I were in your shoes. If you’d have pulled the Kolvoord Starburst off, you would have been the toast of the Academy—right up there with Kirk and *Kubayashi Maru* or Terrence Glover when he pulled that stunt off when he led Nova Squadron.” Pausing for a moment to take a breath, Lavelle continued, “But that’s not what happened. The worst thing that could have happened...happened.”

“Tell me about it.” Sito replied grimly as she shrugged off Sam’s consoling arm around her shoulders.

“Ok...I will.” Sam replied, deciding that the best way to get through to the tormented woman beside her was to force her to face up to what had happened during that dark time. “You, Crusher, and Locarno lost a squadron mate and a friend. You all were scared. Yeah, you panicked. But you and Crusher got it together in the end and made it right where it counted. You’ve got to learn from what happened and move on. If you don’t you’re going to end up a basket case—and I don’t want to see that happen to you.” As Sito sat there quietly, taking in all that he had said, Lavelle stood up. Placing a hand on her shoulder, he said, “Look...I know you’ve got a lot to think about, but if you ever want to talk...if you’d like a friend...you can catch me at Replimat Cafeteria Four at 0600 for breakfast.”

As the stubborn human walked away, Sito Jaxa looked up. Brushing away her tears, her lips turned up as the faintest traces of a smile occurred on her face. One morning a couple of weeks later, the young Bajoran woman walked into Replimat Cafeteria Four. Immediately recognizing the person she was looking for sitting by himself, drinking a cup of coffee. She took her tray and walked over. Sitting down opposite the human, she asked hesitatingly, “Do you mind if I join you?”

Looking up, Sam immediately recognized Sito. "Please..." He responded with a big grin. "So...Sito..." He asked gingerly, "How are you doing?"

"Better..." She replied. "Better than I was..."

"And that's how it started..." Sam recounted with a warm smile as he gently squeezed the hands of both the Bajoran woman lying comatose on the sickbed and his friend seated across from him.

"Were the two of you ever..." Maria, not sure whether she should proceed with this line of inquiry, asked, her words stumbling out of her mouth.

"More closely involved?" Sam supplied with a roguish grin that earned him a glare from the petite hot tempered Brazilian ensign. Shaking his head, he quickly answered, "No...not that I didn't think about it..." He added honestly, "For whatever reason though we just never clicked in that way. No..." Lavelle concluded in a soft voice, "We were always just very good friends...and right now I'm just glad to have her back."

Part 3: Voices Carry

“Morning, Sam.” Maria Django greeted as she entered the DS 9 infirmary. Handing a steaming hot cup of coffee to her fellow *Sutherland* crewman, the dusky skinned ensign asked, “How’s she doing?”

“Same as before...” Lavelle responded in a tired voice as he gratefully took a sip of the coffee that his friend had brought for him. Shaking his head, he continued, “Doctors Bashir and Murakawa said that physically she’s healthy, but...”

“But...” Maria interjected as she massaged Sam’s shoulders

“But mentally...according to Counselors Freedman and Troi...she’s still not sure it’s safe yet.” Sam sighed, his muscles involuntarily relaxing under the Brazilian woman’s firm fingers. “She’s trying to figure out whether it’s ok for her to come out now or not.”

Her eyes blinking rapidly as they adjusted to the glare of the white room, Ensign Sito Jaxa, dressed immaculately in her gold and black Starfleet shipboard uniform, took in her new surroundings. Sitting at one end of the bar was herself, her hair cut so short as to almost be shaved, wearing a brown leather jacket, shirt and trousers, her cheek emblazoned with a demonic tattoo that she immediately recognized as Andorian—marking its owner as one embarked on a Vengeance Quest. Watching in rapt fascination, Ensign Sito saw the Huntress idly fingering her necklace made out of Cardassian neck bones with the fingers of one hand as she toyed with a large saw-toothed Nausicaan war-blade with the other. Noticing the young Starfleet officer gazing at her, the Huntress stared back, her facial expression a mixture of anger and disgust.

Quickly turning her head away from that frightening version of herself, Ensign Sito spotted another Sito at the other end of the bar wearing a low cut see-through gown that left nothing to the imagination. Her hair long and stringy, this Sito, her hand trembling, picked up a vial containing a green fluid, as bringing the container to her lips; she quickly drained its contents. Her body shivering at the sight of this model of herself, Ensign Sito quickly turned away only to meet yet another Sito, this one her as a little girl, dressed in the rags and hand-me-downs that she worn as a child in the refugee camps.

"Please..." The little girl cried, tears rolling down her cheeks. "Don't let the bad men hurt me!"

"No one's going to hurt you..." Ensign Sito cooed softly as, kneeling down, she gently hugged the little girl. "I promise..."

"We all know what that's worth!" The Huntress snorted as she threw her knife at Ensign Sito, deliberately missing the Starfleet officer. As the knife struck the wall next to Sito and the little girl, vibrating from the impact, the vengeance seeker's words struck home. "You're the reason why we're all here."

"Yeah..." The Junkie interjected, slurring her words. "We wouldn't be here if it weren't for you."

"You were weak..." The Huntress caustically remarked. "You let them beat us..."

"Hurt us..." The Child interjected choking back a sob.

"Degrade us..." The Addict chimed in, "I loved it."

"But I tried to fight them..." Ensign Sito protested as she saw, in the corner of the room, Cardassian soldiers pummeling her to the floor with their fists and then kicking her as she lay helpless before them. Tears streaming down her cheeks, the young Bajoran wept. "I fought them as hard as I could...there were too many of them...and they just kept coming...and coming."

"And then they...they..." The Child cried.

"Yeah..." Ensign Sito admitted in a soft voice, watching helplessly as the Cardassian soldiers ripped her clothes off. "They did..."

"Bastards!" The Huntress growled and then said accusingly, "You should have slit their throats...or killed yourself. Anything was better than what you let them do to us."

"Don't you think I wanted to...that I tried to?" Ensign Sito responded, her voice growing louder and more agitated as she spoke. "After they finished doing...what they did to me...I wanted nothing more than to slit my wrists...to hang myself...to find some way to end my life—and I almost did a couple of times. But they always stopped me before I could finish it...and

then...afterwards...they would punish me even worse.” Sobbing uncontrollably, the young officer confessed as she fell to her knees, “Finally...I just gave up.”

“We know.” The Junkie declared as she drank down a shot of Saurian brandy. “And we grew to love it—didn’t we?”

“No!” Ensign Sito exclaimed, heatedly denying the Junkie’s claim. “I didn’t...I tried to find a way...a way...”

“A way out?” The Huntress mocked. “An escape? Well...” She grimaced as an image of Sito drinking down the contents of a vial containing Corillan acid appeared in the center of the room, “I guess you could say you found one—if you could really call that a way out.”

“Worked for me.” The Junkie replied, bowing her head. “At least it allowed me to forget...for a little while at least.”

“But they came back.” The Child sobbed, her tears staining Ensign Sito’s uniform.

“They always come back.” The Huntress replied, glaring at Ensign Sito, “And you just let them do those things to us. And then...when Rejak came...”

“You let him make us his little play-pretty...” The Junkie interjected.

“That’s not true!” Ensign Sito hotly denied. “I fought him...”

“At first...” The Huntress reluctantly conceded, “But then you gave up again...just like you did before he took you away. Why?”

“Yeah...” The Child asked, her moist eyes looking plaintively at Sito. “Why did you let him do what he did to us?”

Giving the younger version of herself a sad smile as she looked down compassionately on her, Ensign Sito then turned her attention to the other two versions of herself in the room. “I didn’t let him...I...”

“Gave up...” The Huntress completed.

Nodding her head in sad affirmation as the words of that angry side of her struck home, Ensign Sito acknowledged mournfully, “Yeah...I gave up. I

couldn't take it anymore. It became much easier to simply..."

"Lose yourself." The Junkie offered helpfully.

"Yes." Ensign Sito replied. Turning her attention to the Child, the Starfleet Officer tried to explain, "You see...I was...alone...Captain Picard...my friends...had all..."

"Abandoned us." The Huntress declared a sneer of derision on her face.

"No!" Ensign Sito shouted, her voice resounding throughout the white room. Then, her voice filling with warmth, she explained to her younger self, "Sam...Worf...Alyssa...Taurik...were always with me. They're the ones who kept me alive...who..."

"Wouldn't let us escape from that hell...who wouldn't let us die." The Junkie bitterly interjected. Shaking her head, she continued, picking up another vial of Corillan acid, "So how did we forget? That's right..." She grinned as she drank down the contents of the vial, "We got stoned. The acid took us away from that hell...took us to a safe place...a place our 'friends' couldn't...wouldn't take us."

"That's wrong and you know it." Ensign Sito retorted. "The acid didn't take me anywhere safe...it just made me...numb...unable to feel what Rejak did to me...what he made me do."

"Hey..." The Addict declared, "Numb worked for me."

"Not for me." The Huntress spat out, glaring at the Addict before turning attention back to Ensign Sito. "I want to gut that Denebian slime devil...slowly."

"So do I..." Ensign Sito responded in a soft voice as she lowered her head.

"Good." The Huntress replied, flashing a self-satisfied smirk as she sharpened her knife. "I'm glad to see that you haven't gone completely soft. So...when are we going to do it?"

"I'm going to go back." Sito announced, "Get better..." Her face now taking on an icy expression, the young Bajoran finished in any icy tone, "Settle scores..."

"Good." The Huntress declared, her lips turning up in an evil grin. "Count me

in.”

Pulling at the Starfleet officer’s trousers, the Child pleaded, “Please...don’t...it’s safe here...no one can hurt us here.”

“The kid’s right.” The Addict chimed in. “No one to bother us here. We can all stay here all nice and cozy.”

“No.” Ensign Sito declared in an uncompromising tone. “It’s time for me to leave.”

“Time for us to leave you mean.” The Huntress announced as she walked up to the Starfleet officer. “You made a mess of things the last time. I’m not going to let you do that again.”

“I guess you’re stuck with me too.” The Addict said as she staggered over to where the others stood.

“Please...” The Child, sobbing, begged. “Take me too...I don’t want to be left here all alone.”

Nodding her head, Ensign Sito responded in a soft voice. “Very well, you can all come with me. But remember...” She stated firmly, “I’m in charge.”

“For now...” The Huntress acknowledged sotto voce, “For now...”

Her eyes slowly focusing as she struggled into wakefulness, Sito Jaxa saw the face of her old friend, Sam Lavelle, looking down on her, a strange, dusky skinned, dark haired woman standing behind him. Her lips curling up into a smile, Jaxa’s spoke, her voice barely a whisper, “Sam?”

Upon hearing his old friend speak for the first time since their escape from the Cardassian prison, Sam Lavelle’s heart sang. “Jaxa!” He cried out, beaming. Turning to Ensign Django, whose lips had also turned up into a smile, he babbled, “Get Doctor Bashir...Counselor Troi...someone...anyone. Tell them Jaxa’s woken up!” Turning back to his old friend, the Canadian helmsman smiled warmly, “Hey, old friend. It’s good to have you back.”

“Good to be back.” Sito Jaxa replied softly as she squeezed her old shipmate’s hand while deep within a corner of her mind, the Huntress toyed with her

knife, anticipating the time that she would settle matters with all those who had hurt her—starting with Gul Rejak.

Part 4: Guardian

Author's Notes: I'd like to thank DarKush for the use of Terrence Glover and the crew of the *Cuffe* for this part and the next.

"Approaching Deep Space Nine, Captain." Commander Kojo announced as the commanding officer of the *Cuffe* strode on to the bridge.

"Very good, Commander." Captain Terrence Glover acknowledged, his expressionless face hiding a tumult of seething emotions. Pausing a moment, Glover turned to his tactical officer, "Contact Captain Sisko. When you get him..." The captain ordered as he made his way towards his office, "...transfer the communication to my ready room."

Several moments later, as Terrance sat down behind his desk, the tactical officer's voice came through on the intercom, "Captain Sisko is on line, Sir."

Leaning forward towards the monitor as his old friend's face appeared, Terrance asked, "How is she, Ben?"

"She regained consciousness last night." Captain Sisko replied, a reassuring smile on his face. "She's resting in the infirmary right now."

"I want to see her." Glover stated bluntly, not even making the pretense of forming his statement as a request.

His expression darkening temporarily at his fellow captain's abrupt manner, Ben forced his facial muscles to relax as he answered back in a polite, yet firm tone, "Doctor Murakawa and Counselor Troi are responsible for Ensign Sito's care. You'll have to get their permission before you can see her." Seeing the paternal look in the face of his friend, Benjamin, remembering how close the mentoring relationship Terrance had with his young charges in the former Nova Squadron, softened his expression. "But I'm sure there won't be any problem with you seeing her. In fact..." He continued with a conciliatory smile on his face, "I think that would be the best medicine for her."

Taking the olive branch proffered by his friend, Glover flashed a warm smile as he stood up. "Thank you, Ben. I'll beam aboard in about half an hour."

"Look forward to seeing you, Terrance," Benjamin replied, "Dax is too."

"How is the Old Man?" Terrance asked as he saw the wicked grin crossing his old friend's face.

"She's doing well." Sisko answered back. "She's off duty right now...said something before she left Ops about her and Captain Shelby dragging Major Kira into a holosuite."

Chuckling, Terrance quipped, "I hope it's not one of Liz's programs...you know what they're like."

Joining his old friend in laughter, Ben riposted, "I made sure to get promises from both of them not to put her through anything drastic. The last thing I need is a flustered first officer for the next three duty watches." Reaching over to cut off communications, Benjamin finished, "See you soon, Terrence."

As the door to his ready room slid open, Glover addressed his first officer. "Commander Kojo...I want you to coordinate with DS 9 and set up a repair and provisioning schedule. Those personnel off duty are authorized shore leave."

"Yes, Sir." Kojo smiled as he turned to the on duty tactical officer, "You heard the Captain. Contact Chief O'Brien at Deep Space Nine. The slightest hint of a grin on his face, the first officer added, "You may also inform the ship that all off duty personnel may take shore leave on the station, but remind them to take their communicators with them, just in case we need to recall them."

Extending his hand in greeting as soon as he saw his old friend standing next to the transporter pad, Terrence stepped off the pad. "Ben."

Taking the captain of the *Cuffe's* outstretched hand in a firm grip, Benjamin shook it. "Terrence."

Releasing Sisko's hand, Glover asked in a low tone, "Where is she?"

"I'll take you there, but first, come with me—there's something I think you need to see." Ben answered back in a grim voice as he motioned for his fellow captain to accompany him to his office.

Entering the station commander's office, Terrence took the seat immediately

in front of Sisko's desk. With more than a faint note of impatience in his voice, the gruff starship captain inquired, "So what was it that you wanted to show me."

"This." Captain Sisko replied, turning the monitor on his desk around so that it faced Glover. "I don't believe you've seen the video taken of Ensign Sito in captivity?"

"No." Terrence answered back, shaking his head as Benjamin activated the monitor display.

Sighing, Ben declared, "I think you should see it. It'll give you a better idea as to what she's been through—and why we're all so protective of her right now."

As the disturbing images of Sito's abuse at the hands of the Cardassians passed before his eyes, Terrence's anger grew. Grasping the arms of his chair in an ever tightening grip, Glover forced himself to watch the entire tape. Finally, as he saw Sito's filthy, grimy, naked form shoved to the ground in front of Gul Rejak, he could take no more. "That's enough, Ben." He growled, his voice now taking on a menacing tone. "I've seen all I need to."

"I'm sorry, Terrence," Ben said in a sincerely apologetic voice, "But I thought you needed to see it."

"You're right, Ben." Terrence replied in a somber tone. "How bad is she?"

"She's out of her coma now..." Sisko answered back guardedly, "...and while Drs. Murakawa and Bashir say that she's well on her way to a full physical recovery; Counselors Troi and Freedman both say that she's got a long way to go before she completely recovers."

"What do you mean?" Terrence asked, leaning over the station captain's desk.

Sighing, Ben replied, "I think it'd be better if you talked to the counselors about it. They can explain it to you far better than I."

Standing up, Glover requested politely, "I'd like to see them."

"I'll take you to them." Ben replied as he stood up and came around his desk. "They're in the infirmary right now. After you talk to them—you should be able to see Ensign Sito."

"Thanks, Ben." Terrence replied sincerely as he fell in beside his comrade. "On the way, maybe you can answer some more questions for me."

"I'll try the best I can." Benjamin responded as he motioned his friend towards the elevator, "But if the questions are what I think they are, you'll be better off asking the ones who were actually there and know all the details."

"I intend to." Terrence stated as the elevator began its descent. "But I wanted to get an unbiased picture from someone I know...and trust."

"You know I'll give you that." Ben replied as the pair exited the elevator and began to walk down the corridor. "So...what do you want to know?"

As the two captains drew nearer the space station's infirmary, Terrence turned towards his old friend. "Thanks, Ben. I appreciate your take on things."

"Not a problem, Terrence." Sisko replied as he motioned his fellow officer towards where Counselors Freedman and Troi were sitting, talking to Dr. Murakawa. "Here's the people I was telling you about..." Ben announced, introducing the three officers to the captain of the *Cuffe*. Once again clasping his friend's hand, Ben flashed him a reassuring grin as he expressed his confidence in the abilities of the medical personnel standing before them, "I have to go now, so I'll leave you in their more than capable hands. If there's anything more I can do for you—just let me know."

Nodding his head in assent, Terrence turned towards the medical officers. Getting directly to the point, he demanded of the two counselors in a gruff voice, "Tell me about Ensign Sito."

Smoothly responding to the brooding captain's demand, Counselor Troi, her voice level and calm, answered back, "Ensign Sito's sleeping right now, but she should be up in a few hours."

"That's not what I asked." Terrence bit back. "I want you to tell me what her condition is."

Smoothly ignoring the larger captain's efforts to intimidate her as her Betazoid senses immediately picked up on his deep concern and worry over his former protégé, Deanna flashed her most reassuring smile. "Physically...she's almost completely recovered..."

"Mentally..." Glover began.

"Mentally..." Deanna began, carefully choosing her words, "...she's been through an absolutely harrowing ordeal."

Seeing that he was not going to be able to intimidate the empathic counselor, Terrence sighed, "I know. I saw the video in Benjamin's office." Taking on a more conciliatory tact, he inquired once more, "Counselor...I know I'm not her family nor her commanding officer, but..."

"I understand, Captain." Deanna responded sympathetically. "I also know about your history with her and her former squadron mates at the Academy..." Placing her hand on his forearm, the counselor continued, "Without violating confidentiality, I can tell you that while she has a long road ahead of her, she's strong and young and she'll receive all the help she needs."

Slowly nodding his head, Terrence reluctantly conceded, "Thank you, Counselor." Flashing a rueful grin, he added, "I can see now why Captain Picard thinks so highly of you." His frown returning, he concluded, "I would like to speak to her when she awakens."

"When she wakes up..." Troi replied, "...we'll let you know."

As he turned to leave the infirmary, Terrence asked one more question of the counselor, "Counselor? Did you know about the mission that Picard sent her on?"

"No." Deanna replied, shaking her head, "It was a classified operation and I did not have a need to know." She then added maintaining her sympathetic tone, "I'm sure you know how it is."

"Yes..." Glover answered back as he walked towards the exit, his next stop already determined, "...indeed I do."

Walking down the station's busy Promenade, Terrence passed by Quark's. Glancing into the bar, the brooding captain immediately spotted several of his crew, many still in uniform, already enjoying shore leave along with what to

the captain appeared to be members of the crew of the *Sutherland*, mostly clad in civilian clothing. As his eyes scanned the bar, they briefly fell upon one woman in particular; his former security officer and lover, Nyota Dryer, engrossed in conversation with Pedro along with two other women, both blonde and all three flirting outrageously with his chief engineer. Her eyes catching his, Terrence managed a brief smile for the ebony skinned Nyota before his eyes spotted Lieutenant Commander Worf and Nurse Alyssa Ogawa sitting together at one of the upstairs tables. Giving his former lover a rueful grin as he jerked his head towards where the other two Starfleet officers were sitting, Glover made his way up the stairs. Approaching the pair, Terrence cleared his throat.

Looking up from their drinks, the couple began to get out of their chairs immediately upon noticing the four pips on the intruding Starfleet officer's uniform. "Sir..." Worf began, only to be cut off by the newcomer.

"No...keep your seats. You don't have to get up on my account." Terrence insisted as he made a halting gesture with his right hand. Gesturing towards an empty chair, the *Cuffe's* captain introduced himself, "I'm Captain Terrence Glover, of the starship *Cuffe*."

"Captain Glover? Oh...I remember now..." Alyssa exclaimed after a moment's thought. "Jaxa used to talk about you all the time, Sir, back when she was..." Her voice trailing as her mind flashed back to the good times the two women had on the *Enterprise*, before Sito's ill fated mission, the Japanese nurse suddenly fell quiet. Quickly recovering, Alyssa apologized, "I'm sorry, Sir..."

"No need to apologize, Lieutenant." Terrence replied as he took an empty chair, joining the couple at the table. "Actually...I wanted to thank the two of you. It took a tremendous amount of courage for you to do what you did."

Honored at the praise received from a man who had achieved near legendary status amongst many Klingon warriors, Worf's eyes gleamed with pride. "Thank you, Sir..." Then, remembering the others in the rescue party, the burly Klingon added modestly, "But I do not deserve such praise. It was Lieutenant Lavelle who planned and actually led the operation, and Ensign Django who was very much the heart of our group."

Chuckling, Terrence gratefully took the bloodwine that he had ordered from a Ferengi waiter earlier. "It's not often I hear modesty coming from a Klingon."

Flashing a faintly amused grin, Worf riposted, "As I have been frequently told,

I am not your standard Klingon.”

His chuckles turning into full fledged laughter, Glover drank down his bloodwine in a single gulp. “So I’ve been told, Mr. Worf. So I’ve been told.” His expression growing more serious, the starship captain continued, “But I do have a few questions I’d like to ask you...”

“We’ll tell you anything you want to know, Sir.” Nurse Ogawa supplied helpfully as she sipped her Altairan water.

“Thank you.” Terrence replied simply. “I’ve seen the video and read the reports. I’ve talked with Counselors Troi and Freedman and with Doctor Murakawa and they were all very helpful, but they couldn’t tell me everything. You see...the video...no matter how disgusting it was...was really just an anonymous recording and the others...well...they weren’t there at the time. What you...and Lieutenant Lavelle and Ensign Django...can give me is this—the real feelings and emotions of people who were actually there. You can help me fill in the gaps that the official records leave.”

Shrugging her shoulders, Alyssa responded with a sad smile. “Of course we’ll be glad to tell you what we can...but, Sir...if I might ask...why?”

Flashing a sad smile of his own, the normally taciturn Glover answered the young nurse’s question, “I’m sure you’re aware of the relationship I had with Jaxa—along with the rest of her squadron mates—while they were with Nova Squadron. I guess you could say that I still feel more than a little...responsible...for her...and...by getting your perspective of what happened...I’m hoping I’ll be better able to help her through what I know is going to be a difficult recovery.”

Nodding her head in approval as she gave the captain a warm smile, first Alyssa and then Worf recounted the events culminating in the rescue of Sito Jaxa all the way up to the present. As the pair spoke, Terrence listened quietly and intently, occasionally breaking into the narrative to ask a clarifying question. Much later, after Worf had finished his account, the *Cuffe’s* captain shook his head. “I’m surprised you didn’t break that bastard’s neck, Mr. Worf.” Glover growled, referring to Gul Rejak.

“Believe me, Sir.” The burly Klingon responded, “I wanted to.”

Shaking her head sadly, Alyssa chimed in, “Sir...this goes against everything I’ve always stood for and believed in, but...I wanted to kill that Cardassian pig

too.”

“Nothing to feel ashamed of, Nurse,” Terrence replied in an almost fatherly tone as he got out of his seat, placing a hand on the shoulder of the petite lieutenant. “What you all did took a great deal of courage and I would be honored to serve with any of you at any time anywhere.” Taking a deep breath, the dark skinned captain continued in a low voice, “I owe all of you a tremendous debt. If there’s anything I could ever do for you—just let me know.” Then, after telling a passing Ferengi waiter to put whatever the pair wanted on his tab, Terrence turned and walked away.

Walking down the stairs, Glover once again spotted a laughing Nyota. Flashing a final, rueful grin, the brooding captain’s comm badge beeped as he walked out the bar. Touching the pin, he heard Counselor Troi’s voice, “Captain Glover? Ensign Sito is awake. If you still wish to see her, now would be a very good time.”

“Thank you, Counselor.” Terrence replied, “I’ll be there shortly.”

Entering the infirmary, Terrence immediately spotted Counselor Troi. Spying the strongly built at almost the same time, Deanna walked forward to meet him. “Captain.” The Betazoid woman greeted, “Before taking you to see Ensign Sito, there are a few things I should tell you.”

Glaring down at the empath, Terrence answered back somewhat impatiently, “What things?”

“First, Captain...” The counselor explained, ignoring the intimidating presence of the broad shouldered Glover, “Don’t be surprised if she rejects you.”

“What do you mean?” A confused Terrence asked.

Taking a deep breath, Troi explained, “There’s a very good possibility that, on some level, she might blame you—and Captain Picard as well—for what happened to her.” Placing a comforting hand on the captain’s forearm, Deanna continued to elucidate. “Give her as much reassurance as you can. Even if it appears that she’s rejecting you, remember that deep down she respects you and looks up to you very much—as much as she does Captain Picard.”

"I see..." Glover vocalized. "You're saying that she's lashing out?"

"Only partially..." The counselor said and then clarified, "Really...she's blaming herself. She feels that by breaking under the torture, she let you down."

"That's ridiculous!" Terrence exclaimed, violently shaking his head. "I don't think anyone could have stood up to what she went through!"

"I know that, Sir...and you know that—and...on a purely rational level, so does she." The Betazoid counselor stated, "But subconsciously...she thinks she failed the two individuals she admires most: you and Captain Picard. Captain Picard's on his way, but won't arrive until after she's transferred to Bajor, but thankfully, you are here. I think it would do a wealth of good for her to hear from you that you're proud of her and that you don't think she failed—even if she does reject you now."

"She'll definitely hear that, Counselor." Terrence replied and then inquired, "Anything else I should know?"

"Yes, Captain." Deanna answered back, "You should refrain from making any sudden or jerky movements—especially in close proximity to her and don't try to touch her unless she wants you to. An aversion to physical contact is often seen following a sexual or violent assault."

"I understand, Counselor." Terrence replied, taking the counselor's advice to heart. "Anything else I should be aware of?"

Walking with Terrence to Sito's room, the Betazoid counselor looked up at Glover, "Just be careful of what you say and do and if you should need me..."

"I'll be sure to comm you." Terrence finished as he pressed the button to open the door. "And again, Counselor...thanks."

As she saw the tall, dark, burly man walk slowly into her room, Sito reflexively recoiled as the young Bajoran officer once again found herself in the white room.

It's the bad man...don't let him hurt me! The Child screamed.

Oh...someone wants to play with us! The Junkie remarked as she gazed lasciviously at the Starfleet officer. *Maybe he'll give us something...*

Shut up! The Huntress commanded as Glover drew closer. *He comes any closer...I'll rip his throat out.*

It's all right... Ensign Sito cooed to the others. *He's a friend...* Then, with just the faintest note of doubt in her voice, she finished, *He won't hurt us.*

Seeing the young ensign pull back from him as he drew closer, clutching her bed sheet tight around her, Terrence stopped. Heeding Counselor Troi's advice, he spoke in a calm, low, surprisingly gentle voice, "It's all right, Jaxa. It's Captain Glover. I just wanted to see how you were doing and to tell you..."

Don't listen to him! The Huntress cried. *It's all lies. He used us...just like Rejak and Baldy and all the others.*

Yeah... The Junkie interjected, *He just wants one thing from us.*

He's going to hurt us! The Child whimpered, *I just know it.*

Noting with sadness how Sito had pushed herself back even further, trying to put as much distance as possible between her and him, Terrence spoke in an even softer voice, "Jaxa..." The captain said, "I'm proud of you. You went through hell and came out the other side—I can't think of anyone who could have survived what you endured. You have my deepest respect and...admiration. You're a remarkable officer and woman and don't you dare let anyone ever tell you otherwise." Then, after pausing for a moment, he vowed, "And I want you to know something else, Jaxa. I vow if it's the last thing I do, I'll make Rejak pay for what he did to you."

Backing slowly away, Terrence quietly left the room. As the door swooshed closed, the starship captain turned towards Counselor Troi. "Even though you warned me...I still couldn't believe..."

"I know, Captain." Deanna replied sympathetically. "But I think your visit did a lot of good. You told her what she needed to hear." As the pair walked to the infirmary exit, she offered one final piece of encouragement, "It'll take time...and it won't be easy. But she'll get better."

"Thanks, Counselor." Terrence gratefully acknowledged, "Now...if you'll excuse me, I have a ship I have to tend to." Activating his comm badge, Glover

spoke, "Commander Kojo? I've finished my business here; I'll be back on board in an hour."

He'll be back...him or someone like him. The Junkie declared. *They always come back for us.*

He does... The Huntress vowed, *I'll be ready.*

As Ensign Sito listened to the comments the other parts of herself were making, she seized on the final words of her old mentor. His words of encouragement and praise began to take root within her, giving her the strength that she would need. As she heard the Huntress make her threat, Ensign Sito swore to herself that no matter how hard the road or how long it took, that one day she would be whole again.

Part 5: Coda

Entering the room, Counselor Troi smiled as noticed her patient sitting up in her bed. “Good news, Jaxa.” The Counselor greeted as she took the seat next to the young Bajoran’s bed. “You’re going home today.”

“To Bajor?” Sito asked in a soft voice.

“Yes.” Deanna replied with a smile. “You’ll be going to a hospital in your home province...your family’s looking forward to seeing you again.”

The slight smile on her face disappearing to be replaced now by a frown, Jaxa asked, “What about Sam and the others? Will they be able to see me?”

“Of course they will.” Deanna reassured. “They’ll be here to see you off and whenever the *Sutherland* is in Bajoran space, they’ll be able to see you—if you want them to.”

“Of course I do.” Jaxa answered back, an almost childlike smile returning. “Sam, Maria, and Alyssa have been really nice to me. I want to keep on seeing them.”

“Good.” The counselor responded. “I know they’ll be glad to hear that.” Pausing for a moment, the Betazoid woman asked, “Speaking of which...there are some people outside who’d like to see you...”

“Who?” Sito replied, a note of suspicion in her voice.

“Sam Lavelle for one.” Deanna replied maintaining her smile, “And Captain Shelby.” Her smile now replaced by a look of concern, the Betazoid empath added, “You don’t have to see them if you don’t want to.”

Relaxing noticeably upon hearing the names of those wanting to see her, Jaxa responded positively, “It’s all right. I’d like to see them.”

“Great.” Troi exclaimed as she activated her comm badge, “Captain Shelby? You all can come in now.”

As the door slid open admitting the two officers into her presence, Sito Jaxa smiled as she heard her old friend Sam Lavelle greet her with his usual roguish grin, “Hi Jaxa.”

"Hi Sam." Sito responded as the Junkie leered, *He's cute...*

Shut up! Ensign Sito responded, temporarily silencing the voice in her head. Noticing the dusky skinned woman that was usually with him wasn't there, the young Bajoran inquired, "Where's your friend?"

"Huh..." Sam vocalized, temporarily taken aback by Sito's query. Then, quickly recovering, he answered back, "Oh...you mean Maria? She couldn't make it...she's on duty. But she wanted me to tell you that she's glad you're getting better." Then, his smile vanishing to be replaced by a note of worry, the dark haired Canadian asked, "How are you doing?"

Her smile disappearing as well, Jaxa replied, her lower lip trembling, "Better...I guess...I think..."

"Hey...it's ok, Jaxa." Sam reassured, "There's plenty of time and I'll be by to see you whenever the *Suthy's* in this area."

"Thanks, Sam." Sito responded, a slight, tentative smile returning to her face. "I'd like that."

Catching Captain Shelby out of the corner of his eyes, Sam smiled once again, "The Captain wants to speak with you...I'll turn you over to her, ok..." Then, seeing the pleading look in his old friend's eyes, Lavelle said softly, "Don't worry, Jaxa...I'll come by and see you again before you leave." With that, he gave his friend's hand a gentle squeeze and then quietly left.

"I'm glad to see you're doing better, Jaxa..." Captain Shelby said, taking the liberty of using Sito's given name.

"Thank you, Captain..." The Bajoran woman replied, "...for everything."

Lowering her head, Liz apologized, "I'm just sorry we couldn't get there sooner. That you had to..."

I am too... The Huntress replied sarcastically as Ensign Sito once again silenced the voice within her. "Please, Captain..." Jaxa responded, "Don't blame yourself..."

No... The Huntress chimed in. *Blame those really responsible: Rejak...Glover...Picard. Those are the ones who are going to pay.*

Smiling gently at the young ensign, Liz stated, "I have some good news for you, Jaxa. You're no longer Ensign Sito...you're now Lieutenant Junior Grade Sito Jaxa. It's not official yet...but I spoke with Admiral Glover about it and he promised to push the paperwork through, so I think you can put these on..." She said as she handed the Bajoran an opened jewelry case containing a pair of dark pips, "...whenever you're ready." Pausing for a moment, Shelby then declared, "I also want you to know that whenever you're prepared to return, that you'll always have a place under my command—you'll always have a home with us."

"Thank you, Captain Shelby." Sito responded, her eyes tearing up. "I...I...don't know what to say."

"Just get better." The youthful captain replied. "We'll be here when you're ready." With that, the *Sutherland's* captain turned and walked away leaving Counselor Troi alone with her patient.

"Well, Jaxa..." Deanna announced with a warm smile, "Are you ready to go home?"

Walking into his quarters as soon as the door slid open, Sam Lavelle blinked in surprise as he recognized the female form wearing what appeared to be pajamas lounging on the small couch in the center of his room. "Maria?" The roguishly handsome Canadian exclaimed, his voice tone indicating that he wasn't expecting the dusky skinned Brazilian woman, "What...how did you get in here?"

Sitting up on the couch, Ensign Django patted the cushion next to her. Smirking as Lavelle sat down beside her, Maria rejoined, "You ought to know by now that there's nothing I can't do if I set my mind to it."

"Don't I know it!" Sam laughed as he slipped an arm around the petite woman's shoulders. "So..." He chuckled as he repeated his inquiry, "What are you doing here?"

Scrunching up closer, Maria laughed, "I couldn't get any sleep, Treasure's snoring again. She's sleeping off that party she, Candy, Nyota, and that chief engineer from the *Cuffe* went to last night." Then, her laughter vanishing, she

inquired in a much more serious tone, "Also...I wanted to ask you how your friend's holding up..."

Sighing, Sam's right hand unconsciously caressed Maria's forearm, "I don't know..." He answered somberly, "Sometimes it'll almost seem that she's back...but then I look into her eyes and..."

"The lights are on and no one's home..." Maria supplied without a trace of humor in her voice.

"No..." Sam responded, shaking his head, "More like the lights are on home and too many people are home."

"What do you mean?" Maria asked as she leaned into Sam's arms.

"I talked with Counselor Freedman about it." Sam replied, "He says that Jaxa's suffering from multiple personalities..."

"I get it now." Maria acknowledged as she rested her head on Sam's shoulder. "So...I guess they have to try and..."

"Integrate all those fragments of Jaxa back together again." Lavelle completed as he sighed once again. "Yeah. That's why the sending her back to Bajor. They feel that comfortable surroundings will help her to pull everything back together."

"I don't know..." Maria responded dubiously. "From what you've been telling me, she's defined her life far more as being a Starfleet officer than as being a Bajoran. I'm no counselor..." The youthful Brazilian admitted, "...but it seems to me that the best thing would be to keep her around friends...like you and Alyssa. You know..." She said with a sudden flash of insight, "They probably should have sent her to Earth where Alyssa could look in on her often."

"You're probably right." Sam allowed. "Earth probably would be a better place...but she does have family on Bajor...maybe they could help..."

"Maybe..." Maria conceded as a yawn escaped her and then, in a moment of compassion, she added, "For her sake, I hope so."

"I do too..." Sam concurred as he felt Maria's even breath on his shoulder. Glancing in her direction, a tender smile crossed his lips as he gazed upon her sleeping form. Moving gently so as not to awaken her, he picked her up,

carrying her to his bed. Setting her down softly, he looked down on the sleeping woman. In a tone barely above a whisper, he joked, "This is getting to become a habit." Shaking his head, he replicated a blanket and pillow. Stretching out on the couch, he glanced once again at the young woman sleeping peacefully on his bed. "One of these days we're going to get our timing right..."

"That was one of helluva a party, Ny..." Ensign Angela 'Treasure' Barrows remarked, her Texas twang dominating the Ferengi owned bar.

"Tell me about it!" Lieutenant Nyota Dryer answered back, taking a sip from her coffee. "I'm glad Pedro showed up."

"Yeah...he and Candy really cut the rug together." Treasure laughed. Then, flashing a wicked grin at her fellow crewman, she jibed, "I didn't think he had it in him. And here I was thinkin' all o' them on the *Cuffe* were like its captain."

Chuckling, Nyota deftly riposted, "Terrence Glover might be many things...but stiff sure isn't one of 'em."

The sound of a throat clearing, attracting the two junior officers' attention, they heard a baritone voice state in a slightly amused tone. "Well, I'm glad to hear that I'm not stiff." Looking up, both junior officers saw both Terrence Glover and Pedro Rojas standing before them, both with smiling faces.

Maintaining his grin, Pedro addressed Angela, "Treasure...can I buy you a drink at the bar?"

Taking the hint, the buxom blonde engineer responded with a smile of her own as she stood up, grabbing Pedro by the arm. "Sure thing, Sugar." As the pair walked away, she called out over her shoulder, "See ya'll later."

Glancing down at the chair opposite him, Terrence sat down, taking the slight nod of his former lover's head as assent. "So...Nyota...how have you been doing? Are you happy on the *Sutherland*?"

"Yeah..." The dark skinned security officer replied, "It's not the *Cuffe*...but it's a good ship...with a good captain and crew." Smiling, she added, "Captain

Shelby's not you, of course..." She said with a teasing laugh, "But she knows her job and she doesn't put up with any BS. Manny, Lieutenant Atoa, is a good boss and I've made some good friends."

"I'm glad to hear that." Terrence declared, relaxing slightly as he saw that the dark skinned woman sitting opposite him didn't appear to be holding any grudges over their parting not so long ago. "I was worried...given the circumstances of our last..."

"Don't...Terrence..." Nyota responded, placing her hand over Glover's much larger hand. "It's in the past." Taking a deep breath and then exhaling, she continued, "I...made a mistake. I got a lot closer than I should have." Seeing the captain about to speak up, the beautiful ebony skinned woman shook her head, "No...please...let me finish. When we got together...you were hurt...in a lot of pain. Maybe I took advantage of that..."

"No, Nyota..." Terrence responded, shaking his head. "You didn't do anything I didn't want."

"Maybe not, then." She said flashing a rueful grin. "Still...I think we both deep down knew that what we had wasn't going to last. That sooner or later someone like..."

"Jasmine."

"Yeah..." Nyota said, nodding her head. "Like Jasmine would show up and..." She then shrugged her shoulders, "That would be that for us." Sighing, she concluded, "It just took me some time...and space...to see that."

"So..." Terrence asked, "Where does that leave us?"

"Well..." Nyota pondered, "Except for when you're my superior officer, I'd like to think that we could be friends..." She then finished with a teasing note, "...as much as a captain and lieutenant who used to sleep together could be friends, of course."

"I think I can live with that." Terrence replied with a grin as he stood up. Smiling down at his former lover, he said before walking away, "I want you to know that if you ever need anything...even if it's just someone to talk to..."

Nodding her head, Nyota smiled back, "Don't worry. I promise you'll be the first one I call."

Earth: A few weeks later

As soon as Alyssa Ogawa stepped off the transporter pad at the San Francisco headquarters of Starfleet Command, she was greeted by her husband, Andrew, their little boy, Noah, in his arms.

“Alyssa!” The relieved husband called out as he drew closer to his wife. “We missed you.”

“I missed you too—both of you!” Alyssa replied, tears rolling down her cheeks as she took her child into her arms, hugging him closely.

Seeing the tears and the relieved...yet also anguished...look in his wife’s eyes, Andrew asked in a gentle tone, “How bad was it?”

“Later...” Alyssa answered back, managing a shaking smile for her mate. “I’ll tell you all about it later. Right now, though...” She pleaded, looking first into the eyes of her husband and then looking down upon her child, “I just want to be with the two most important people in the universe to me. Everything else can wait.”

Bajor

You can’t get rid of us...get rid of me...that easily. The Huntress declared. *You still need us...still need me...they’re still out there...waiting...watching. Without me...you’re nothing.*

“That’s not true.” Sito Jaxa answered back, aloud. “I can do this...I will do this...myself. You’ll see...everyone will see.”

The End