Love, Understanding, and Surprises

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Love, Understanding, and Surprises

by PerseShow

Summary

Odo was prepared for friendship with Kira Nerys. But after betraying her for the Dominion, the only way to get her back may be to bare his heart. My take on the infamous "closet scene."

Notes

This was one of my earliest fics, written waaaaay back in 2016.

My style has changed, as has my interpretation of the characters, but I thought I'd put it up here all the same!

See the end of the work for more notes

The door to Dax's party swished closed behind Odo. It was one of those days when he hated his job. Parties, in his experience, were never orderly and almost always involved some sort of diplomatic misunderstanding, when he'd be expected to break up a fight and drag a couple of drunken civilians back to their quarters. There was nothing particularly good about parties. But this one, he admitted, was necessary. The war was over, at least for the moment, and his friends needed a stress release. Especially Major Kira.

Kira. His eyes fell on her reluctantly, unwillingly. He could so vividly remember the days when their friendship was uncomplicated, when he was the friend she could always trust. She'd drop into his office, lean back in the chair—*her* chair, his mind stubbornly insisted—and unload her problems to him. Often, he'd just offer a listening ear. Sometimes, he'd find cause to speak up and offer advice, though he was never completely certain it was helpful. And yet, he never needed to fear misleading her with his advice. Kira was a strong, independent woman, perfectly capable of making her own decisions, and she never blamed him if something went wrong.

Well, *almost* never.

He let out an anguished sigh. It ran through his form, doing nothing to ease the nervous clench of his cells. This time, everything was entirely his fault. The blame laid squarely on him, and he was not about to shirk it.

He steeled himself to speak to her. She looked to be truly enjoying herself. Her smile beamed and she was dancing to the raucous music of Dax's party, one hand holding a drink. He almost didn't want to destroy the mood. But he was here on business. He would not let his personal life interfere with his duty—never again.

"I've been getting complaints about the noise," he said. "Someone even mentioned a fight…?"

Kira glanced at him. He was only mildly gratified that her smile didn't disappear—she was probably a bit drunk.

"Oh, there was a scuffle between Morn and one of the Bolians," she said. "They worked it out."

Odo nodded stiffly. "How long will this…party continue?"

She wrung her hands as she spoke, her only sign of discomfort. "This party will continue until further notice, on the personal authority of the station's first officer—who just happens to be me!"

Odo nodded again and ventured an observation. "You're in a good mood."

"Yeah, well…it's a good party!"

She was grinning. Actually grinning. He'd been afraid he'd never see that smile again. But she wasn't smiling at him.

Odo jerked another nod and decided it was high time he left before his luck ran out. He turned to go, but she called his name. Cautiously, he turned to look at her again. Her face was averted.

“Odo…” She suddenly turned and looked him straight in the eye. “I think we have a lot to talk about.”

Odo stared at her in surprise. “I agree.”

“So let’s *talk*,” Kira said.

Odo glanced about the party beyond them. Kira had appeared to be enjoying herself before he entered. Would she really abandon a party just to bend down and talk to someone like him? *Him*, who had betrayed her, who had practically handed victory to the Dominion? He hadn’t even managed to salvage things after he’d gathered his wits again—it was the Prophets, ironically enough, who had granted the captain this miracle.

“Now?” he asked.

“Don’t you think we’ve put it off long enough?” Kira demanded.

Now. She was going to take him apart now, he reasoned. This couldn’t be an attempt at reconciliation—he’d done nothing to earn that. She was going to tell him just how much she’d depended on him—as if he didn’t know—and how angry she was at him. She was going to put the matter to rest and tell him, once and for all, that she could no longer be his friend.

Well, it was bound to happen sometime. Odo saw little reason to delay it. He motioned to the deputies behind him. “Enjoy yourselves.”

The moment his deputies dispersed, Kira pulled him away by the arm. “Let’s find someplace…a little quieter.”

A bit startled, Odo allowed himself to be pulled through the display. He barely registered the different performers and partygoers as she dragged him away toward Dax’s room. He barely had time to register that they were intruding in Dax’s *bedroom* when Kira, after looking quickly in both directions, reeled him into Dax’s closet.

“Here?” he asked. “Are you sure…”

“Dax isn’t going to notice. She’s got a party going on out there," Kira said. She quickly found two storage bins and dragged them next to each other before perching on one and smoothing out her skirt. She looked up at him expectantly. “Odo, aren't you going to sit down?”

After a moment of hesitation, Odo sighed and sat rigidly on the second bin.

Their seating arrangements chosen, silence fell between them. They had never needed pleasantries. They knew each other so well they had dispensed with them years ago. Odo suspected that was largely due to his own inability to make small talk. Now, it was going to

be used against him. The silence swelled between them until it became an oppressive black cloud, suffocating him and cutting his tongue.

Finally, he forced himself to speak. “Major…”

“Odo…” Kira spoke at the same time.

Silence again.

“You first,” Odo said.

“You’re the one who has explaining to do,” Kira snapped.

Odo fell silent. He averted his eyes. Why couldn’t she just condemn him and get it over with? Was she really going to drag him through an explanation of just what had gone wrong?

Yes. Of course she was. It was his final punishment, before she informed him that she wanted nothing to do with him.

Well, two could play the game.

“I’m sorry, Major,” he whispered. “I betrayed you.”

“You got that right,” Kira said. “Now what I want to know is *why* you betrayed me!”

“Do you really need to ask?” He kept his voice low, didn't look at her. “She—the Founder—she offered me peace. Belonging. Contentment. Those are things I’ve wanted for a long time.”

“So the moment she barges in between us, you just run off to her like nothing else matters?” Kira demanded.

“No.” Odo shook his head. “I didn’t turn from you…not at first.”

“No, only later,” Kira said.

Odo sighed and let his eyes fall closed. Her words were knives in his very form. He was beginning to reconsider the wisdom of his choice to let her just take him apart. He wasn’t sure he could survive that look in her eyes, that sharpness in her voice, for much longer. And if he was going to stay here on the station—he didn’t intend to return to the Dominion now—he couldn’t be falling apart, teetering on the edge of a self-made cliff, leaning toward oblivion. But if he intended to stick around, he realized, he was going to have to cultivate some sort of working relationship with Kira. She was, after all, his superior officer.

Unless, of course…

“Did you drag me in here to talk, Major?” he finally asked.

“Yes, to talk!” Kira said. “What did you think we were here for, to play *tongo*?”

Odo sighed and looked at her for the first time. “Major…you realize that nothing I say will change what happened. Why don’t you just dress me down, file charges, and get it over with?”

“Because…” Kira opened her mouth, but stopped.

“Exactly.” Odo shook his head and braced himself for the assault. Formal charges, he could handle. He could maneuver his way through an investigation, a court martial. He could probably even come out on top, and distance himself from Kira in the process, if he pulled the right strings. “Go ahead, Major.”

Kira only stared at him, her gaze wild and demanding. At length, she yelled, as if she’d been saving up the words, “You were my *friend*, Odo! This isn’t about duty and your job! What do you want me to do, file a court martial?”

He gritted his teeth. “That’s *exactly* what I want you to do.”

"Well, too bad," Kira said. "I wouldn't have any grounds."

"What…"

"Yesterday, I filed my official mission report with Starfleet," Kira informed him. "It makes no mention of you having any association with the Founders of the Dominion."

Odo was speechless. "Kira…you didn't need to do that."

"No," Kira said, "I didn't. But, angry as I am at you, I don't want to lose you. We've been friends for too long to just shuck that away."

"I admit," Odo said, "I feel the same way."

"Unfortunately," Kira said, taking a breath, "you've made it kind of difficult for me to trust you."

Odo closed his eyes. "I know."

"Well?" Kira demanded. "Don't you have anything to say for yourself?"

He shook his head. "Nothing adequate."

"Start with when the Founder walked into your office," Kira said. "That's when I lost you."

Odo shook his head again, ruefully this time. "I'm afraid, Major, that it started long before that."

She drew back. "What?"

"You heard me." He sighed. "I don't suppose it ever occurred to you to wonder."

She peered at him. "What exactly are you talking about?"

Gaia. Shakaar. He could think of a million instances when she had been blind to his feelings, had only considered her own. But he couldn't blame her for that. Exactly how forthcoming had he ever been, when asked to talk about what was bothering him?

Instead of answering her, he replied, "It doesn't matter."

"It matters to me," Kira said. "And I'm pretty sure it matters to you, too, Odo. Don't you want to get through this?"

"I'm simply not sure that's possible."

"Well, you had better get over that!" Kira said. "Talking to you is about as easy as pulling a razorcat's teeth! Tell me what's bothering you, Odo!"

"Kira, why are you doing this?" he asked. "I don't see how you can possibly trust me."

"Well, I don't really trust you," Kira said. "But it occurred to me that if you really were one of them, you would have left the station when the Dominion retreated."

Odo sighed. "That much is probably true."

"Then I want to know why you stayed," Kira said. "And I want to know why you had reason to leave in the first place."

Odo sighed again and leaned back against the closet wall. "Gaia. *That's* when you began to lose me."

Kira's mouth sealed shut. Tension shot through her body. Odo looked away. He wasn't at all sure this was a topic he was willing to broach.

"What about Gaia?" Kira finally said, her voice tight.

"You know exactly the answer to that question."

"Right." Now it was her turn to look away.

"Major, you rejected me," Odo said carefully.

"What did you expect, for me to just fall in love at first sight?"

"No. That's not what I meant." Against all odds, Odo maintained eye contact. Above all, he knew, he could not back down from his ground. "You rejected our friendship then."

"I did not!"

"Really, Major?" He shook his head. "You didn't blame me for what my alternate self had done? You didn't reject my feelings as if they repulsed you? You didn't try to forget anything had ever happened, when it was obvious that experience would remain in my mind for some time?"

"Okay, so maybe I was a little uncomfortable with the idea of killing eight thousand settlers just because of some far-fetched notion of love for me!"

"He didn't kill them." Odo stressed the words. "He simply…"

"Erased their existence?" Kira said. "That sounds pretty much the same to me."

"And you blame me for that."

"This is not," Kira said, "about Gaia. The only thing I blame you for is practically handing the Alpha Quadrant to the Founders. I got over Gaia long ago."

"Did you, Major?"

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"I simply don't think you 'got over' the loss of eight thousand lives that easily, Major."

Kira shook her head. "That's irrelevant. Forget about Gaia. Tell me about the Founder. Why did you turn to her so quickly?"

"Think about it, Major. She comes into my office right in the middle of an argument between the two of us. She offers me another taste of my people, of the Link. I had no reason to believe she would manipulate me…"

"And just how true is that?" Kira demanded. "She's manipulated you from the day you first met!"

"That may be so, but she was trapped here," Odo said. "When the captain mined the entrance to the wormhole, she was in the Alpha Quadrant on war business. She didn't come to the station for the purpose of manipulating me. She came because she'd spent too much time with Solids and wanted to be with one of her own."

"I didn't know she still thought of you that way," Kira said.

"Apparently, she forgave me for the death of the other Changeling." Odo's eyes fluttered closed for an instant and he sighed. He glanced back up at the major. "I didn't believe her right away. I didn't trust her. She was the one who took away everything that mattered to me…who flung me into the Solid world without a care for what would happen to me…"

"I remember." Kira's eyes softened marginally. "But you still turned to her."

"Only after I showed her my quarters. I didn't see the harm." Odo let out a labored sigh and murmured, "How wrong I was."

"Go on," Kira said.

Odo closed his eyes again. "I encountered her again at the council meeting. Gul Dukat and Weyoun started competing for her attention, and when they left, it was just the two of us. She saw how difficult it was for me to deal with them and offered me sympathy. At the same time,

you were involved with your resistance effort…I was struggling to maintain some semblance of order on the station…it was as if she'd spoken directly to my anxieties. So she accompanied me to my quarters." He sighed. "She started examining my shapeshifting structures, and she seemed pleased enough. I started looking to her for approval…for some manner of congratulations…" He looked at Kira. "I can't explain my people's culture to you. I barely understand it myself. But…please try to understand…living among Solids… humanoids…" He held his hands out before him as he struggled to articulate his thoughts. "It's quite satisfying most of the time, but I've always longed for…for…"

"…for company," Kira said.

"*Yes*." He expelled a breath. "And not just friendship, Kira—the company of another Changeling. The Link…I've never explained the Link to you, but…it's…it's an essential part of being a Changeling. And I've cordoned myself off from it, haven't allowed myself even a single taste…the hold it has over me…I can't…"

"You've turned your back on them before," Kira said.

"Yes, I have," he whispered. "And it was the hardest thing I've ever done. The Link—it's—it's…"

"Paradise?" The word was barely audible.

Odo didn't answer. *Paradise*…was that really a proper description? It certainly had been, when it was the only thing he had left. When it offered him an escape from the challenges of maintaining a station under Gul Dukat's watchful eye. When the forces occupying his adopted homeworld and waging a war against most of his friends were his own people. When Kira herself, his beacon of hope for so many years, was an uncertain variable, unpredictable, his love for her burning more fiercely than ever before, and yet…nearly charring the part of his nonexistent heart that was still drawn to his origins…

"We started talking about the Link," he said instead. "She referenced my…ah…feelings for you." It was a dreaded topic, but there was no way around it. It had been the next step of his defection. "That's when she finally trapped me, Kira. She didn't tell me not to waste my time with a Solid. I waited for those words of derision, for the scorn that was sure to come, but it didn't come! She acted understanding. Luring me into a false sense of security, no doubt. So I started pouring my heart out to her."

Odo snuck a glance at Kira, and was surprised to find that she wasn't glaring at him, or expressing any such emotion. Her eyes were wide, her expression open and concerned—almost as if she was *hurting* for him. With that window open, Odo forgot to care that it wasn't exactly a door, that he couldn't just walk back in and be her friend again. At least she seemed to be accepting him. He turned his head to meet her gaze fully, his expression one of amazement. She paused for a moment and he could almost feel the understanding that passed between them, *linking* them…

Kira was the first to break the spell. "And? What did you tell her?"

Odo sighed. He opened his mouth, unsure what to say, and found himself repeating the very words he'd said to the Founder. "That I wish I didn't love you. All you have to do is smile at me and I'm happy beyond reason. One minor argument between us and I'm devastated… sometimes I wish I could reach inside myself and pull out my feelings for you…but I can't."

"I'm that much trouble for you?" Kira asked.

"Oh, absolutely not!" Odo whispered. "That's a pain I will willingly accept and even embrace, if it means keeping you in my life. Our friendship means more to me than anything ever has. The prospect of losing you…" Odo shook his head. "Kira, I can't stand the thought of staying here and enduring your glares, your hatred, your disgust. If you want me to leave, if our friendship is over, if you can't trust me anymore—I will leave this station, no questions asked. And I won't blame you. This is, after all, my fault."

"Not all your fault," Kira said.

Odo blinked. "What are you talking about?"

"Remember earlier, what you were saying about Gaia?"

He released a shuddering sigh. "How could I forget?"

"I think you're right," Kira said. "I think I finally understand how much I hurt you."

Odo remained silent. He knew, possibly more than anyone else did, when recrimination wasn't the answer.

"You're right that I ignored how you felt," Kira said. "I just…I guess I couldn't really believe it. I couldn't wrap my head around it. Eight thousand people, erased…for me…"

"And there you see where our troubles began," Odo said. "You didn't trust me."

"I trusted you, I just didn't…"

"You didn't believe I could love you."

Kira bit her lip. It was all the affirmation Odo needed.

"And you don't believe it now," he said. "Not after what I've done to you."

"I admit I don't understand it," Kira said. "But I don't want to lose you. That's why I dragged you in here in the first place."

"I thought you wanted to remind me of how terrible my behavior was, before you shuttled me away," Odo said.

"Is that really what you think?" Kira asked. "You really believe I only dragged you in here to demand a penance?"

"I deserve it," Odo said.

"Stop," Kira said, holding up her hand. "Stop right there. I don't want you falling in a hole of self-pity. Tell me what happened next with the Founder."

Odo sighed. "She offered the Link."

Kira leaned back on the bin, understanding crossing her features. "And you took it."

"I didn't know what else to do."

"You could have talked to me!"

"Oh, could I have, Kira?" Odo rounded on her. "Could I have walked up to you and told you how afraid I was, how lost? Did you ever, ever since Gaia, give me that opportunity?"

"Don't blame me for your resistance to personal conversation!" Kira said. "*You're* the one who's as frozen over as a Breen winter!"

"And you're the one who deflected talk of Gaia around every turn. If my memory can be trusted, Kira, you were equally affected by that experience. You were just as hurt as I was. I waited in my office for you. Every minute, I expected you to show up and unload yourself to me, and I might have taken that opportunity. But you never did!"

"Well, maybe I was afraid!" Kira said. "Did you ever think of that? Afraid of what you might say!"

"Afraid that I'd tell you that I really did love you? Afraid you'd hear those words from *me*, and not just him?"

"Well, I—I…"

Odo nodded as Kira trailed off. "Exactly as I suspected. Now tell me, Kira, exactly when did you make me feel welcome to *talk* to you about the burden my alternate self left me with?"

Kira paused, straightened. "What burden?"

"He linked with me, remember?" At Kira's nod, Odo continued. "The link isn't just a communal instinct, Kira. It can also be used as a weapon—quite easily, actually. When my alternate self linked with me, his intention was to make sure the timeline was fixed. He didn't want me to end up alone this time. He wanted me to know what he'd told you, and that there was hope of a relationship between us now that you knew." Odo shook his head. "How untrue that turned out to be." He paused. "He left me with everything, Kira. Everything I'd need to know, every experience that had made him the way he was. He hated himself for losing you. He wanted me to understand him, to carry on what he could never finish."

"And?" Kira asked.

"And he made sure I remembered every death he'd observed. He made me watch as every one of the senior staff passed away, as their children and grandchildren faded away into the past. Death…doesn't sit easily with me, Kira. It never has. Oh, I can handle murder investigations. But what I can't handle…is watching my *friends* slowly slip away, out of my reach…"

Kira looked down. "I had no idea."

"And he showed me you," Odo said. He covered his eyes to shut out the light, to stem the flow, but he couldn't stop the words. "Of them all, Kira, you died first. He wasn't there to see it. But he saw you later, saw your body as you were laid out in the grave he'd dug himself…I can still remember the feel of the dirt on my hands and knees, of every one of the shovel's impacts with the ground…"

He caught Kira's shudder in the corner of his eye and immediately stopped himself. "I'm sorry, Major, I didn't mean…"

"No!" She waved him on, wiping her eyes. "Go on."

"He died that day." Odo couldn't restrain his own shudder. "*I* died that day. And then, before I knew it, we were warping away from the planet. His presence withdrew from my mind. He never returned to Gaia. I drew myself upright, into my humanoid form, the moment that annoying interference passed, only to see him standing there, dissolving before my eyes as history was replaced…"

He trailed off. His counterpart had left him with a strong sense of urgency, of duty, of unfinished business. But the moment he'd set foot on the station, the true reality had slammed into him. His counterpart had been desperate, so desperate that he'd ignored the truth of the matter. Kira couldn't love him, couldn't love a Changeling. And now, thanks to his own idiotic mistakes, Odo was certain he had forfeited any chance of her changing her mind.

"Prophets," Kira whispered.

With difficulty, Odo called his mind back to attention. "I'm sorry, Major. I didn't mean to upset you."

Kira's head shot up. "Of course you didn't *mean* to upset me," she said. "But it upset me, because you're my friend and I care about you, right?"

Odo found himself at a loss for words. "…uh…"

"Odo, I admit that I wasn't sure if I could trust you again," Kira said. "I couldn't believe you loved me. It didn't make sense. It still doesn't make sense, but I honestly can't doubt that you mean everything you've just said." She sighed and bit her lip. "I realize now that we've both been at fault. I wasn't there for you when you needed me."

"Neither was I," Odo said. "I betrayed you."

Kira drew herself straighter. She met his gaze, eye for eye. "Odo."

He did not falter. He forced the name past his lips, the name he knew was correct. "Nerys."

"Odo," she said again. She set a hand on his shoulder. "Tell me you're sorry, right now, and I'll try to forgive you. Tell me I can still trust you. Tell me you're still Constable Odo, defender of justice. Tell me that no matter what lures your people offer, you won't betray me for dictatorial order."

Before Odo could stop himself, he reached up and covered her hand with his own. He was locked under that fierce Kira Nerys gaze like an insect on a pin. And yet, he wouldn't trade his position right now for anything. Not order, not justice, not the Link. He would wish for those things. He would feel torn between them. He had no doubt that his trials had only just begun.

But Kira…she was the most reliable link he had.

"I'm sorry, Nerys," he said. "For everything I've ever done to hurt you."

She nodded. "Good."

Silence descended once again. It was not quite as oppressive as before, but still, it weighed him down like a duridium weight. It paralyzed him. The cliff he teetered atop caught him, held him, cuffed him, gagged him. Odo shifted uncomfortably in his seat.

"So." Kira's voice broke the tension. "How's security going?"

Odo blinked. "I beg your pardon?"

Kira shook her head, an unlikely smile teasing her mouth. "Odo, if this friendship is going to work, we're going to have to make sure not to repeat the events of the past. And that means talking to one another."

Odo glued his eyes to the floor. He'd been prepared to offer her anything it took to get her back, but he wasn't quite prepared to bare his heart.

"Please, Odo," Kira said. Her fingers tightened over his shoulder. "If you're not willing to talk, fine. But I'm offering you a chance. Be my friend. Let me be a friend to you. Maybe this will work out better than it did before."

Odo's eyes widened. She was offering him a chance? The conditions suddenly didn't seem to matter as much. "Alright. I'll do my best."

"So, I'll ask you again. How's security going?"

"Good enough," Odo replied, not quite sure what qualified as "good" in his line of work.

Kira nodded. "Alright, I'm just going to ask you directly. Is anything wrong?"

Wrong? Were the question not in such dangerous territory, he would have snorted with laughter. Everything was wrong. His life was turned on end. His position on the station depended on his relations with one Bajoran major. His allies were uncertain, his own people were his enemies…

"No," he said. "Nothing's wrong. I'm fine."

Kira nodded again. "You know I don't believe you, right?"

For the third time that evening, Odo found himself staring at her in complete shock. "What?"

"As a matter of fact," Kira continued, "I've never believed you. I just respected your privacy. You don't lie well, Odo."

Odo sighed and stared at the wall. He could honestly say that before he'd fallen in love with Kira, he'd never lied. He could no longer make that assertion.

"So, you can't escape me this time," Kira said. "Part of being a friend, Odo, isn't just listening to the other person talk. It's sharing what *you're* feeling. I've been content to let you keep your silence, but this has to stop. I need to be able to trust that you will *tell* me if you're so close to the end of your string that you'd choose the Founders over me."

"If you insist," Odo said. "But I'm not accustomed…"

"*Get* accustomed," Kira said flatly.

Odo let out a long sigh of defeat. "Alright, Kira. You want the truth?"

"That would be a good start," Kira said.

"*Everything* is wrong, Kira," Odo said, trying and failing to restrain the note of desperation in his voice. "The friendships I've cultivated here…my job…*everything*…could all vanish."

Kira peered at him. "What's this about?"

"It's about trust, Kira," Odo said, casting his gaze down. "You might forgive me, someday, but that isn't grounds for anyone else to."

Kira's hand slid down from his shoulder to rest on his arm. "Odo, no one knows what happened between you and the Founder but me. This is between us."

Odo looked up at her, hope dawning in his eyes for the first time. He tilted his head back and expelled a long-overdue sigh of relief. "Major…"

"Kira."

"Kira…I don't deserve that. This should go on my record."

"No." Kira's hand traveled to his and squeezed it. Odo shut his eyes, willing himself not to respond to the simple gesture. Did she know that he felt her touch in every atom of his being? "I'm giving you a chance, Odo. Don't disappoint me."

A chance. Odo opened his eyes and looked into hers. It was all he could ask. He managed a wry smile. "I suppose that will be sufficient."

Kira smiled. A real smile, like the one she'd given him back at Dax's party. Like she used to give him during their Tuesday morning meetings, before he had cancelled them in his foolhardy attempt to "keep to the essentials." That smile was a beacon of light in the ocean monsoon that was his life. He squeezed her hand back.

Then Kira's smile spread into a teasing grin. She set her elbow on the counter behind her so that the hand he'd once claimed dangled off the edge. She drew her legs up next to her on the storage bin. "So, Odo…"

The closet door suddenly slid open, saving him from whatever question she'd been about to ask. Standing there in utter bewilderment was Jadzia Dax.

"Hi," Kira said.

"Hi," Dax said.

"Is the party over?" Kira asked.

"You could say that," Dax said, still blinking. "It's 10:30."

Kira gasped. "In the morning? I'm on duty!" She dashed out of the closet.

"So am I," Odo muttered, following on her heels.

Before they could get far, Kira looped back, and she was gone. Odo continued through the ruined living room to the entrance of Dax's quarters. It felt odd, being here—he'd initially come in his capacity as security chief. Instead, he'd spent the entire night restoring his relationship with his only friend. His deputies had vacated the premises, along with all of the other partygoers. All that remained of the raucous activity was a scattering of plates, glasses, remnants of food, and bits of trash. Party streamers were strewn across the floor. Odo navigated the mess quickly, careful not to step in anything. Once in the corridor outside, he walked to the nearest turbolift and ordered it to take him to the promenade.

For the first time he could remember, as he rode the lift down, he could feel a genuine smile crack his face. Not a smirk, like he might favor Quark with after a particularly satisfying blackmail. Not even a grimace, the kind he might manage for someone at a social event. It was a real smile. The kind he hadn't felt in years. The kind he'd displayed all the time back on Bajor, before he'd discovered that his "friends" in the lab didn't really care about him.

The turbolift doors opened onto the promenade and Odo headed for his office. He found his chief deputy, Jaazil Aye, at his desk. She was the one who replaced him when he was gone and Worf wasn't available.

She smiled at him and vacated the chair. "Sir."

Odo nodded to her, rounded his desk, and took his chair for himself.

Jaazil paused on the way out. "Sir, if I may…"

"What is it?" Odo asked.

"I know it's not my place to ask, but you look…different. Not quite as…*stern* as usual," Jaazil said with a quizzical tilt of her head.

Odo hesitated only for a moment. "You're right. I'm not, am I?"

"Care to tell me about it?" she offered.

"Have you ever realized…" Odo folded his hands and leaned forward over his desk. "…what a good friend Major Kira is?"

"No, sir, Major Kira is my commanding officer," Jaazil said. "It's not my place to be her friend."

"Well, I think you're missing out," Odo said with a smile. "She's always ready to listen, but I just didn't realize it."

"I'll take your word for it, sir," Jaazil said.

Odo nodded. "Carry on."

Jaazil ducked her head and left the security office, leaving Odo staring after her, and at the promenade in general. He watched as the people he served to protect milled past, some sneaking glances into his office, others moving along as if he wasn't there. He had betrayed these people, and Kira had made sure they didn't even know it. He resolved not to try his luck again.

The chair opposite his desk, where Kira had sat countless times, caught his eye. Odo stood, rounded the desk, and set a hand on its crest affectionately. He shook his head.

"Hmph. Humanoids. They always manage to find a way to surprise you."

End Notes

I started writing this long before I read anyone else's interpretation of the "closet scene," but the Kira I wrote then was without her fire. I rewrote my old draft in the hopes of restoring what I'd drained from her character. Thanks to Queenix's "Recrimination and Resolution" on AO3 for inspiration.

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!