For Better or for Worse

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For Better or for Worse

by PerseShow

Summary

As the Dominion tightens its grip on the Alpha Quadrant, the crews of Deep Space Nine and the flagship *Enterprise* face trials that will test their deepest convictions.

Behind enemy lines, the Vorta Leralan unlocks a secret that will alter the balance of power forever.

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My retelling of DS9 from “Image in the Sand” to “What You Leave Behind,” the way I think it *should* have gone. Follows from Part 1, "To Have and to Hold".

Notes

"For Better or for Worse" is Part 2 of the prequel to my *Dauntless* series, which will be a massive serial story taking place 800 years after DS9.

This story is fully canon-divergent.

This follows from the altered canon of "To Have and to Hold," so I strongly recommend reading that part first! 😊

This is still a WIP — I'm about 310K words in out of an estimated 520K — and unfortunately I'm not the sort of writer who can post as I go; I need to leave room for structural revision. I'm aiming to finish in May 2027 and begin posting around August 2027.

Progress updates available on my tumblr: startrekdauntless.tumblr.com

See the end of the work for more notes

Chapter 1

Chapter Summary

Kira rises to the task of filling Sisko's shoes. Meanwhile, Ezri Tigan reaches a crossroads.

Chapter Notes

Continuity: "Image in the Sand," part 1

See the end of the chapter for more notes

USS Destiny

Ensign Ezri Tigan was settled on the couch with her legs tucked up beneath her, intently studying her PADD, when the door to her quarters swished open.

She barely glanced up from her work.

“Ezri?”

She peeked up over the edge of her PADD.

Her roommate, Pyvia, stood just inside the door, blue antennae twitching.

“Have you moved since I left?”

Ezri shrugged.

“It’s been *hours*.”

“And I’ve got to get this right,” Ezri said.

Pyvia marched straight over to her and snatched the PADD out of her hands.

“Hey!” Ezri shot to her feet, grabbing at the PADD. “That’s confidential!”

“I’m not *looking*,” Pyvia said, easily holding it high overhead.

Sometimes, Ezri really hated being short.

Sighing, she stood still and folded her arms, glaring up at Pyvia. She knew her roommate well. Pyvia could be impatient and short-tempered, but that often meant that Ezri could wait her out.

Finally, Pyvia shoved the PADD back at her with a huff.

“Thanks,” Ezri said.

She settled back down onto the couch.

Pyvia crossed to the replicator. “You’d think an assistant counselor would know when to take a break.” To the replicator, “Tuber root.”

“I have to cross-reference my notes on yesterday’s sessions with the diagnostic manual,” Ezri said.

As the tuber root materialized, Pyvia’s antennae splayed apart. “Oh, please. I bet you identified all the relevant diagnoses an hour ago.”

Ezri bit her lip.

Pyvia knew *her* well, too.

“Well,” Ezri said, tucking her hair behind her ear, “I need to be *certain*. I don’t want to be wrong.”

“You’re not.”

“How would you—”

Pyvia spun to face her, antennae stiff and straight, challenging. “Because *you*, Ezri Tigan, don’t get things wrong. You’re too careful for that.”

A tiny smile curled Ezri’s mouth. “Thanks.”

“If you want to thank me, you can take a damn break.”

Despite herself, Ezri giggled.

Then her combadge chirped. *“Ensign Tigan, report to Sickbay immediately.”*

Ezri jolted to her feet, barely noticing the way Pyvia’s antennae curled in concern. “On my way!”

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“Ensign Tigan, reporting as ordered,” Ezri said.

She stood calmly at the threshold of Sickbay, her posture straight but relaxed, her hands clasped loosely in front of her—just as she’d been trained to do. Affect a cool, calm air under pressure. Be the rock her patients would need in a stormy sea.

Except, right now, *she* was the one worrying.

She wasn't due for a physical. There were reasons—tragic reasons—a counselor could be called to Sickbay, but surely she didn't rank highly enough for such a call?

"Ensign!" Jorra, a Benzite nurse, rushed around the corner. "Good—come with me."

Ezri was ushered directly into the surgical suite. She barely had time to be alarmed before her gaze caught on the stasis chamber in the center of the room.

Within it lay a creature Ezri would recognize anywhere, no matter that she had never sought to be joined herself.

A symbiont.

Then she noticed the sickly green tinge to its wrinkled skin. The way it shuddered beneath the chamber's soft light.

She looked up at Jorra. "What's happened to it?"

"Its host was killed," Jorra replied. "We were rushing it back to Trill, but there's no time. Its condition has become critical."

"It's dying," Ezri whispered.

Her stomach tightened.

On Trill, symbionts were revered. Even an unjoined Trill would never let one die.

But Ezri had never even *been* to Trill. She'd grown up on New Sydney. Attended the Academy on Earth. Spent her entire Starfleet career so far on the *Destiny*.

All she felt, as she stared at its misshapen, wormlike body, was dread.

"Ensign," Jorra said, "the symbiont must join with a new host immediately. I know this is a terrible ask, but…you are the only Trill aboard."

Ezri's pulse pounded.

She didn't want to.

This would completely change her life—in ways she was totally unprepared to handle. She had no way of knowing who she'd become. She'd lose her center. And joining was irreversible. There would be no going back. No reclaiming the person she was today.

That was a valid reason to choose not to be joined.

It was *not* a valid reason to let a symbiont die.

Ezri drew her back straight, sucking in a deep breath. Her eyes flicked up to meet Jorra's. "I'll do it."

Jorra tilted her head. “Are you certain?”

“It’s *dying*,” Ezri said. She swallowed hard, hoping she sounded more certain than she felt. “It’s the right thing to do.”

*

Tobin Dax opened his eyes.

No, that wasn’t right.

Lela.

Wait, no. Curzon.

No, Torias.

No—

“Ezri?”

She blinked slowly.

Jorra peered down at her, her features blurred beneath the overhead light.

“Are you with us?” Jorra asked.

A surge of eagerness overtook her, and she bolted upright—only for the room to start spinning.

The ceiling was too high.

No, it was too low.

“Whoa, whoa, easy.” Gentle hands eased her back down. “Let’s take it slow, alright?”

Emony—wait, no, *Jadzia*—shifted on the bed. Since when did the foot of the bed extend so far past her heels?

She squinted up at the nurse. “Have these biobeds always been so long?”

Jorra tilted her head. “Their size hasn’t changed. Now, Ezri—”

“Oh, right,” she said. “Ezri. My name’s Ezri.”

Ezri Dax.

Dax.

In the blink of an eye, Ezri Tigan was no more.

*

Stardate: 52103.5 | Deep Space Nine

Kira watched from a promenade crossover bridge, one elbow propped against the balustrade, as a group of Bajorans chanted before the shrine, red bands of cloth wrapped around their arms.

It had been three months now.

Three months since the Celestial Temple had winked out of the skies.

Since the Emissary's departure.

Since Jadzia's death.

Fortunately, commanding the most strategic base in the Alpha Quadrant was good for keeping busy.

And, she thought as familiar footsteps padded up behind her, she had *Odo* at her back.

"Colonel," he teased.

She remembered the moment her promotion had come through. The way his eyes had brightened with pride.

"I wish you'd stop doing that," she said through a smile.

"Doing what?"

"Calling me by my rank," she said. "I was promoted two months ago. Besides, it sounds so formal."

He chuckled. "Well, has Admiral Ross—or should I say 'Bill'—arrived yet?"

Kira grinned. The last few months, his dry sense of humor had been back in full force, the pain that had haunted his features nowhere to be found—and she found herself fiercely grateful. He was, as always, her rock.

"The admiral's ship is due in three hours." She sobered. "And I wish I knew what he wanted to talk to me about."

"Well, maybe he's bringing good news," Odo said. "We could certainly use it."

"Yeah, well," Kira murmured, "don't get your hopes up." She passed behind him to walk along the second level, beneath those tall oval windows. "There was something about the tone of his voice."

Odo followed her. "Something…ominous?"

"Something pleasant!" she said. "It was like he was going out of his way to be nice."

“I see…”

“Well,” she said, “whatever he wants to tell me, he *knows* I’m not gonna like it.”

“How can you be so sure?”

Kira sighed, spreading her hands. “It comes with the job.”

Odo hummed skeptically.

“No, I’m serious,” she said as he chuckled. “Sitting in the captain’s chair, having that kind of responsibility—it focuses you.”

“Well, I’ll take your word for it,” Odo said.

As they reached the next crossover bridge, Kira looked down at the Bajorans still chanting below. She braced both palms on the balustrade.

“How long have they been there?”

Odo sobered. “Three days.”

“I remember when the cult of the Pah-waiths used to be a joke,” Kira said. “Now those red armbands are appearing all over Bajor.” She shook her head. “It’s like everyone’s gone crazy.”

In a way, it felt like a betrayal.

If *she* could stand strong, if she could remain loyal to the Prophets even through the shroud of uncertainty that seemed to drape around her shoulders like a film of cobwebs, how could others turn their backs?

Kira didn’t have the *luxury* to turn to the Pah-wraiths. It would violate every principle the Prophets had taught her.

“A lot of people feel abandoned by the Prophets,” Odo said.

She snapped straight. “Believe me, I know how they feel. That’s no excuse to turn to hate and fear.”

“In times of trouble,” Odo said, “some people find comfort in hate and fear.”

Kira’s fingers tightened over the balustrade.

Oh, she *knew*.

It had once been all she’d known.

But her faith in the Prophets had uplifted her from that life. Lit her path forward to healing and redemption. She wasn’t the same resistance fighter she once had been—and she was watching her world fall back into the pit of fear and chaos she’d thought they’d escaped.

Could this be deliberate, on the Prophets' part? Not a retreat, not an abandonment—but a test of faith?

If it were, she would not fail.

"If you like," Odo said, "I can charge them with loitering and have them removed from the station."

"Ah, what good would that do?" Kira said. "I keep thinking if the Emissary were *here*… things might be different."

Odo nodded. "I would've thought we would've heard from Captain Sisko by now."

"Not a word," she said. "In three months."

It was hard not to feel *he'd* abandoned her, too.

But he wasn't just the Emissary. He was Captain Benjamin Sisko, a human, a Starfleet officer, and friend to both Jadzia and Curzon Dax.

She had to remember he was reeling, too.

That he bore the extra burden of responsibility for Bajor—one handed down by the Prophets themselves.

She *would* keep her faith—in the Prophets and in him.

"Nerys," Odo said softly.

She turned.

"I realize that things may seem bleak at the moment," Odo said, "but there's always hope."

A surprised smile tugged at the corners of her mouth. "When did you turn into an optimist?"

Odo smiled. "Must've been that day on my couch when we kissed for the first time."

His eyes sparkled with adoration, and Kira's smile bloomed across her face, her worries momentarily chased away.

"That was some kiss, wasn't it?"

"Changed my life," Odo said.

*

USS Defiant

As the docking clamps engaged, O'Brien swiveled from his console. "Gentlemen…we are home."

The bridge crew breathed a collective sigh of relief—all except Worf, who sat stiffly in the command seat, a glower darkening his features.

Bashir's head tipped back against his seat crest. "There should be a law against convoy duty lasting more than ten days."

Nog tapped at his console. "I'll say one thing for guarding convoys—it's usually a lot safer than being on the front lines."

"Is that the reason you joined Starfleet, Ensign?" Worf asked. "To be *safe*?"

Nog fumbled. "I…I didn't mean that the way it sounded, sir."

Worf was unmoved. "In wartime, it is the duty of every soldier to fight."

"Yes, sir."

"The invasion of Cardassia has ground to a halt while our casualties continue to mount," Worf said. "It is a time for warriors to do great deeds, to triumph in glorious battles, not waste away protecting a shipment of stem bolts."

With that, he pushed up from the captain's chair and exited the bridge.

Bashir and O'Brien exchanged a glance.

Nog approached, worried. "I hope Commander Worf doesn't think I'm afraid to fight?"

"Relax," O'Brien said, stretching as he stood. "Don't take it so personally. Worf is just gong through a bad time at the moment."

Bashir nodded. "I think he needs to focus on something other than Jadzia…and I hate to admit it, but a little combat duty might just do the trick."

He headed off the bridge.

O'Brien watched him go. "Pretty soon the *Defiant* will be going into battle. Worf will be happy, and the rest of us will be miserable."

He smiled down at Nog.

"It's not that I'm afraid to fight," Nog said. "I just don't want to die." He sighed. "I wish Captain Sisko were here."

"So do I, Ensign," the Chief said, clapping his shoulder. "So do I."

*

Sisko's Creole Kitchen | Earth

Sisko lost himself in the music, in the press of piano keys, as the familiar, companionable chatter of his dad's restaurant patrons swelled distantly behind him.

At least, at the piano, things were certain.

There was sheet music to guide him. Specific notes to play. Notes that combined to form tunes greater than the sum of their parts. And the most he had to worry about was hitting a wrong note that would make a few heads turn his way.

It was…freeing.

And yet, simultaneously, not.

The longer he sat here, playing chords, the longer the Celestial Temple stayed closed. The longer the Prophets stayed silent. The longer Bajor remained in jeopardy.

Then, suddenly, motion drew his eye.

It was his baseball—rolling across the wooden top of the piano.

It dropped off the edge and thunked to the floor.

As Sisko leaned over, reaching for it, light eclipsed his surroundings.

He was in a sandy desert, burning beneath the sun.

Digging in the sand.

His pulse thumped loud in his ears as he tossed shovelful after shovelful aside, panting with exertion. The wind whistled in his ears, buffeting his clothes.

His shovel struck something solid.

He stopped.

Tossed it aside.

Dropped to his knees, frantically brushed the sand away.

His fingers met red, wrinkled cloth.

He flicked it to the side—revealing a chipped stone face.

Then the stone began to crack, forks of light burning across its surface until—

The light flashed bright and receded.

The stone had become flesh. The face was a woman’s, her skin dark and smooth, alive.

She opened her eyes.

Then, as light eclipsed him and returned him to his father’s restaurant, a pair of familiar hands clasped his shoulders.

“Dad,” Jake said, “what’s wrong?”

His son’s fingers squeezed, jostled him.

“Dad?”

“I had a vision from the Prophets,” Sisko murmured. “I was on Tyree in the desert…digging in the sand. And I uncovered a face…the face of a woman.”

Jake’s hands left his shoulders. His son backed away to sit behind him on the bench. “… And?”

“And that’s all,” Sisko said.

“Who was she?”

Sisko considered. Then he shook his head. “I’ve never seen her before.”

Then he turned to face his son as a new purpose seized him, breathing life back into his pagh.

“But now I know why I came back here, Jake,” he said. “I have to find her. I have to.”

*

Deep Space Nine

Kira was headed for Ops when she passed Kasidy Yates on the promenade upper level, staring out those tall oval windows.

“Kasidy?” Kira called softly.

Kasidy turned. Smiled slightly. “Colonel.”

“You okay?”

Kasidy sighed. She looked back out the window.

Kira waited.

“You know, Ben and I talked, before he left,” Kasidy said. “And if he were just a Starfleet officer…I’d be more upset.”

The pinch of her brow, however, belied her words.

“But…?” Kira asked.

“What he’s got to work out right now, with the Prophets—it’s beyond me.” Kasidy sighed. “I don’t blame him for leaving.” Off Kira’s raised eyebrow, “Okay, I do. A little.” She quieted. “I just wish I could be there with him right now. I wish I could fit into this part of his life.”

Kira remained quiet, unsure if Kasidy would want words of assurance. They weren't exactly close.

"Oh, I—I'm sorry." Kasidy winced. "I don't mean to bother you, Colonel."

"It's no trouble," Kira said.

Kasidy managed a tiny smile. "Thanks."

*

Dominion Headquarters | Cardassia

The laboratory door swished open. As the Cox Changeling entered, the Vorta Leralan looked up from her station.

Her eyes widened.

She was Rivun's replacement, and she had been made well aware that her predecessor had been executed for his failure.

"Founder." She approached with her arms spread, her head bowed. "How may I serve you?"

"What is the status of the wormhole?"

Leralan's breath hitched. "I regret to say that I have been unsuccessful in finding a way to open it."

The Changeling nodded past her to the single biobed, indifferent. "And him?"

Leralan followed his gaze.

Dukat lay straight beneath a precautionary forcefield, surrounded by blinking monitors.

"He is alive," Leralan said. "I believe he's in some sort of coma."

"Is he any further use to us?"

Leralan tilted her head, her violet eyes flicking to the side in thought. "Possibly. We may wish to find a new vessel. I must study his condition before I can recommend further tests."

The Changeling nodded. "Then do so."

"Yes, Founder."

The Changeling turned, but stopped before he reached the door. "Oh, and Leralan?"

"Yes, Founder?"

"I expect you to reopen the wormhole," the Changeling said. "If you cannot, I will find someone who can."

Leralan shivered. “I understand, Founder.”

“I doubt that you do,” said the Changeling. “You need only do as you’re instructed.”

Leralan bowed her head.

The Changeling made his exit.

Living amongst Solids, being separated from the Great Link, was quickly becoming intolerable.

*

Deep Space Nine

“Colonel,” Ross said, “I really don’t see anything for you to be concerned about. I’ve met Senator Cretak and found her to be…very cooperative.”

Right, Kira thought. *That* was why Ross had been so overly pleasant with her over subspace.

Kira set the PADD down on Sisko’s desk. “For a Romulan.”

“Cretak’s a strong supporter of the alliance,” Ross said. “And we’re going to need that kind of support if we’re going to win this war.”

Kira shook her head. “I wouldn’t care if the Romulans were the only thing standing between us and total annihilation. I would still think twice before allowing them to establish a military presence here on the station!”

She had come to trust the Federation. They were sometimes misguided, sometimes naive, often ignorant to the gritty reality of life in the galaxy—but their heart was in the right place.

The *Romulans* were different.

Ross was unmoved. “We’re just talking about a few officers for the senator and her staff.”

“And a contingent of personal guards—”

“A dozen people at most.” Impatience encroached in Ross’s voice. “Besides, it’s just a temporary arrangement until the end of the war.”

Kira looked him in the eye. “And when will that be?”

Ross stiffened. He stood.

“Let’s get one thing straight, Colonel,” he said. “I came here as a courtesy to you. This decision has already been made.”

“And I have to live with it,” Kira said.

He nodded. “That’s right.”

At least he was being direct. She'd gotten on his nerves, but what could she say? Pretense got on *her* nerves.

Ross paced the length of Sisko's desk, his back to her. "You've done a fine job taking over for Captain Sisko."

And they were back to pretense again.

"I'm just keeping his seat warm," Kira said.

Ross turned. "You still think he's coming back?"

"Don't you?"

For a long beat, Ross was silent.

"I'll be in touch," he finally said.

He exited the office.

Kira sighed. She leaned over to pick up the empty stand that still rested on the desk surface, where Sisko's baseball had once sat.

Her Emissary *would* return.

She had to believe that.

Chapter End Notes

Guys…what happened to Kasidy? Sisko is gone without a trace for three months, and the writers don't even *mention* her?

Obviously, I had to fix it 😂

The biggest change I made here was including Ezri Tigan, pre-joining. I really wanted to establish what she's like *before* she becomes Dax.

And then, of course, we have a continuation of the Dominion's work with the Pah-wraiths behind the scenes…

End Notes

Kudos and comments make my day

PS. If you enjoy my work, you have my full blessing to download my fics! It is my personal stance that I will consider it a compliment of the highest order if you want to hold onto your own copies for posterity.

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