

Late-2375

Battle of Cardassia, Final Battle of the Dominion War

USS *Besiege*

After the Federation won the battle to retake the Chin'toka System, they took the fight to Cardassia. This one battle could decide the outcome of the war.

One ship and its crew in particular saw battle in many of the conflicts since late-2373. Cardassia was no exception. The ship, small by some standards, with its crew of 125 Fleet and Marine Corps personnel, was able to maneuver with better precision than the larger cruisers, able to weave around the other Federation ships and target select Dominion ships, while employing twice the firepower of similar escorts half her size.

To the surprise of the allies, the Cardassians switched sides during the height of the battle. However, that did not keep the Jem'Hadar and Breen vessels from continuing their attack on the Federation, Klingon, and Romulan fleet.

During one such attack near the end of the battle, with their shields low, the *Besiege* was struck by phaser fire from a Dominion ship. While the vessel's ablative armor took the brunt of the punishment, several consoles on the bridge overloaded and exploded, including the warship's primary tactical station. The *Besiege*'s tactical officer, Lt Commander Cathryn Pearson, was thrown to the deck by the force of the explosion. As the battle continued, one of the bridge crew activated the ship's emergency medical hologram to see if there was anything that could be done. When he materialized he found that Pearson had a weak pulse and third-degree burns over the left half of her face.

"She's alive, but she's badly injured," the EMH reported. "I can't treat her here, not under these conditions. She'll need to be put into stasis until we can get her to a facility where she can be treated."

With the *Besiege* severely damaged, there was little more that could be done. Captain McLeod reluctantly gave the order.

"Break off attack and set course for *Deep Space 9*. There's nothing more we can contribute here." He then activated the intercom on the panel next to his seat. "Sickbay, medical emergency on the bridge."

"Captain, we're a bit overextended," was the reply he received from sickbay. "We don't have anyone to send you."

"Doctor, Commander Pearson has been severely injured and needs to be placed in stasis immediately."

"You'll have to find a way to get her to sickbay. We have no one we can spare."

"Very well. McLeod, out." He then turned to the EMH. "Can she be moved?" the captain asked.

"It's certainly not advisable, but if there is no other choice."

"There isn't," McLeod replied. "Computer, deactivate the EMH. Porter, you're with me." McLeod lifted Pearson by the shoulders while Porter took her feet. As they left the bridge, McLeod called out, "Someone get me Commodore Raijeh at Starfleet Command once we're clear of the battlefield. Captain Fil, you've got the bridge."

As the *Besiege* limped away from Cardassia, the crew on the bridge noticed that the Dominion ships had stopped fighting. The war had apparently ended.

Space, the Final Frontier...

Star Trek: Personal Logs

"In the Line of Duty" By Nadine B. Bach

McLeod and Porter arrived in sickbay with the injured Pearson moments later. The medical staff already had a stasis chamber prepped and ready for the injured tactical officer when they arrived, and they quickly placed her inside. As soon as Pearson was placed in stasis, McLeod's combadge chirped.

"McLeod here."

"Sir, *Rear Admiral* Raiajh is on leave," Fil reported. "We were able to contact Doctor Jack Simmons of Starfleet Medical. He's listed as the emergency contact for the Val'ri and her husband. Once he heard that the *Besiege* was calling, he insisted on talking to either Commander Pearson or you."

McLeod was aware that after their mission to Betazed several months earlier, Dr. Simmons had kept in touch with Pearson via periodic subspace communications, so it was not surprising that he would be concerned about her now. "Put him through," McLeod ordered.

McLeod moved over to and activated the monitor on the chief medical officer's desk and was greeted by a worried looking Dr. Jack Simmons.

"Captain McLeod, is everything alright?"

"No," McLeod answered. "Commander Pearson has been badly injured."

"What's wrong with Cathryn?" Simmons asked.

"I need to contact Commo... I mean, Admiral Raiajh. She's Pearson's emergency contact, and I need to inform her of what has happened."

"The Admiral is due back any minute," Simmons said just before turning at the sound of a door opening off screen. "Actually, here she is now, Captain." Turning away from the viewscreen, Simmons talked to someone that McLeod could not see. "Val, come quick. Cathryn's been hurt."

Val'ri Raiajh rushed over and sat down in front of the viewscreen. Since she was just returning from a well-deserved leave following the Battle of Betazed, she was still dressed in civilian clothing, her hair hanging loose to her waist.

"William, what happened?" she asked McLeod.

"We were part of the armada that invaded the Cardassia system. During the battle we were hit by one of the Dominion ships. The tactical station blew up in Pearson's face. She has suffered burns on the left side her face and head, and the injuries appear to be serious. We had to place her in stasis to make sure she would survive long enough that we could reach some place where she can receive the attention she needs. We are currently en route to *DS9* at maximum speed."

"Understood," Raiajh replied grimly. "Have Doctor Bashir contact me with her prognosis as soon as he's examined her."

"Will do, Admiral."

* * *

San Francisco, California, Earth

The screen went blank and Raiajh just sat and held her head. She was hoping this day would never come. She knew the possibility always existed that Pearson might get hurt, or worse. The Federation was at war, and Pearson chose to serve on a front-line ship that was built for war. Over the years, especially after the *Arcturus* appeared in the late-24th century, the two officers had become close. Pearson was like a sister to Raiajh, and because Pearson had no surviving family members, Raiajh was listed in her records as Pearson's emergency contact if medical decisions needed to be made and Pearson was incapable of making them herself. The emotions of worry and despair seemed ready to overwhelm her. Then Raiajh realized the majority of the emotion she was feeling was not her own. She looked over to where Dr. Simmons paced the room. The emotions he was projecting were surprising, to say the least. Raiajh knew that he had met Pearson when he assisted the *Besiege*'s crew during their mission to Betazed. She was not aware that there was anything more between the two, as Pearson had not mentioned anything during their last conversation. However, from his reaction to the news, Raiajh knew there was something more going on between Simmons and Pearson.

Raiajh mentally projected to her husband to take Simmons into another room, partly to relieve herself of his overwhelming emotions and partly to see if he could learn anything about what existed between the young doctor and the tactical officer. Xaran took Simmons into the kitchen.

“Jack, what’s going on?” Xaran asked as soon as the door closed behind them. “I’ve never seen you like this. You’re normally a pillar of strength.”

“I’m worried about Cathryn.”

“Jack, one doesn’t need to be telepathic to figure that out.”

“Sylvan, I don’t want her to die.”

“Jack, I don’t want her to die either. I’ve seen my fair share of death recently. In only a year’s time, I lost both my parents, and we both lost a good friend in Tessa. Val will do everything in her power to help Cathryn recover.”

“I hope so.” Simmons moved as if about to get something from the nearby replicator, then paused. He turned to look back at the Betazoid doctor and said, “I need to get something off my chest. Sylvan, although I promised myself that I wouldn’t, I think I’ve fallen in love with Cathryn. I know she doesn’t want a relationship, simply wants to be just friends at this stage of the game, but I can’t stop thinking about her. I feel as if I finally met the perfect woman for me and now I may lose her.”

“No one is losing anyone, Jack,” Xaran replied. “Let’s just wait and see what Julian says. The burns themselves may not be life threatening, but she may need extensive reconstructive surgery after she heals if dermal regeneration doesn’t work, and as you well know it doesn’t always work in extensive cases. As for your relationship, let things just happen with Cathryn. She’s been through a lot. The fact that she even considers you a friend is a big step.”

“I know, Sylvan,” Simmons commented. “I know.”

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A day later Raiajh received a subspace communication from Dr. Julian Bashir, Chief Medical Officer of *Deep Space 9*.

“Hello, Val.”

“Hello, Julian. You have news?”

“With time, Commander Pearson will recover fully. She does have extensive burns over the left half of her face, including her neck and ear, more than can be treated by dermal regeneration. I’m not an expert by any means, but I think that she should be a good candidate for reconstructive surgery. She also may have damage to her eye. I’ve left her in stasis for now; if I try to wake her she’ll be in massive amounts of pain. My recommendation is that she be transported to Starfleet Medical on Earth.”

“Do you know of a good reconstructive surgeon?”

“Not in Starfleet. However, one of the best is Doctor Jacob Simmons. He maintained a practice on Betazed before the Dominion occupation. I don’t know if he’s still practicing.”

“Jacob Simmons? Jack’s father?”

Bashir nodded. “Yes.”

“Thank you, Julian. Can you send me all scans and data you analyzed of Cathryn’s injuries? I’ll need them when I go speak to Doctor Simmons in Toronto. I happen to know he’s been on Earth since we liberated Betazed. He joined the practice that was already set up by Sylvan’s sister there.”

“I’ll send you what I have,” Bashir assured before signing off. As the screen went dark, Raiajh collected Katrina and headed over to Starfleet Medical to find her husband.

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Dr. Xaran had decided to return to his duties at Starfleet Medical early instead of remaining on leave for several more days as originally planned. His wife, however, had decided to remain on leave as scheduled. Not only

was she enjoying the time she was spending with Katrina now that her husband was home, she now also needed to be available to help coordinate care for Pearson while the injured officer was unable to speak for herself. At Starfleet Medical she found Xaran conferring with Dr. Simmons about a patient. Simmons looked up and noticed Raiajh and Katrina. He gestured to Xaran, who looked toward his wife as well. Simmons did not need to say a word, as the worried look in his eyes spoke volumes.

In her mind, Raiajh heard Xaran tell her, *'I know you're conflicted about this, but Jack needs to know what's going on.'* Raiajh nodded, then spoke aloud to both of them.

"I got some news from Julian at *DS9*. Cathryn's injuries are not life threatening." Raiajh noticed some of the tension on Simmons' face ease at he heard her words. "However, he decided to keep her in stasis while she is being transported back here. Her overall prognosis appears to be good, but she will need some reconstructive surgery. We won't know more until she gets here and is taken out of stasis."

"Jack's Dad is actually one of the best reconstructive surgeons on the planet, and Jill knows her stuff too," Xaran said.

"Julian recommended Jack's father."

"Val," Simmons started to say, approaching the subject cautiously. "Would you like me to contact my father about Cathryn?" Raiajh shook her head in the negative.

"Jack, it's something that I'm going to have to do myself," she said. "Thank you for your offer of help. Truthfully, I don't know what to make of the situation between you and Cathryn. After Betazed, she never mentioned anything. Perhaps it was an oversight? I'm not sure." When she noticed an upset look forming on his features, Raiajh added to Simmons, "Don't get me wrong, Jack. I think it would be wonderful if Cathryn found someone. I would be extremely happy if that someone is you."

"Val, I understand," Simmons said. "I know Cathryn has difficulty bringing new people into her confidence."

"Jack, I'll do everything I can for Cathryn. She deserves that much."

"I know you will," Simmons replied.

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*Toronto, Ontario, Earth
Late-December 2375*

Upon returning to the planet of his birth after living on Betazed for over 30 years, Dr. Jacob Simmons continued practicing medicine. After settling down in Toronto, he chose to become partners with Sylvan Xaran's sister, Dr. Jill Xaran, who had an office in the Yonge-Eglinton area of Toronto for her practice.

With Pearson's medical information in her pocket, Raiajh exited the Eglinton tram station with Katrina and found her way to the office. As it was already late in the day, the office was nearly empty. The elder Dr. Simmons had agreed to add an additional appointment for Raiajh to account for the time difference between San Francisco and Toronto. Once in the office, Raiajh was treated like a patient and shown to an exam room, the nurse leaving her with instructions to wear the gown on the exam table if it was necessary to do so. Raiajh just sat in one of the chairs and played with Katrina while she waited for the elder Dr. Simmons, who walked into the room a few minutes later.

"Hello, Admiral," he greeted. "Good to see you again. If you don't mind me saying so, I was surprised that you called for an appointment. I would think, being you're married to a doctor yourself, you would have no trouble finding a practitioner a little closer to home?"

Raiajh smiled at his remark, as she knew that many of his patients went to him for reasons of vanity. She put the isolar chip with Pearson's medical information on the exam table.

"Hello, Doctor. It's good to see you again too," she said. "I'm actually here for a friend of mine. She was badly injured when we took the fight to Cardassia. Her physicians believe that she will need some reconstructive surgery, as dermal regeneration will not be enough to heal her wounds."

The elder Dr. Simmons picked up the chip and inserted it into a data slot on a padd he removed from the pocket of his lab coat, reviewing the records contained on it before speaking.

“From what I see, the burns do look pretty bad. She’s lucky her injuries aren’t more extensive. Her uniform actually saved her from the brunt of the damage. Do you know which doctors are working with her at Starfleet Medical?”

“Not at this time,” Raiajh replied. “The *Besiege* will arrive in Earth orbit within 24 hours to deliver Cathryn to San Francisco before continuing on to Utopia Planitia Fleetyards for repairs and upgrades. Cathryn’s been kept in stasis since the Battle of Cardassia.”

Dr. Simmons looked again at the name of the patient in the file. “Cathryn Pearson? I remember meeting a Lieutenant Cathryn Pearson on Betazed. She helped coordinate the attacks in our region that helped drive the Dominion from that world.”

“This is the same Cathryn Pearson.”

“Is there a chance that my son will be assigned as one of her doctors?”

“No sir. It seems he has developed an emotional attachment to Cathryn. As such, he would not be a logical choice to act as her physician. Would you be able to help Cathryn?”

Simmons just smiled and shook his head at Raiajh’s remark about his son before saying, “I’m pretty sure I can help Cathryn. I would need to see her in a few weeks, once she has started to heal, to assess her exact situation.”

“Thank you, Doctor. I’ll see to it that you have the necessary access.”

Before her mother stood up from the chair in which she was sitting, young Katrina turned to finally look at Dr. Simmons. He looked at the little girl and said, “Hello, Katrina.”

A smile broke out on the child’s face and she simply replied, “Hi.”

Katrina wiggled out of Raiajh’s lap and began walking toward the door, which slid open as someone else entered the room. Katrina looked up at the pregnant woman standing in the door, Dr. Simmons’ partner, Jill Xaran, who had always maintained a civilian practice on Earth. Lifting up her arms, Katrina squealed what sounded like, “Geeeee!” She was rewarded by being picked up by Jill.

“Val, what brings you here?” Dr. Xaran asked her sister-in-law.

“Cathryn was injured during the campaign against Cardassia. She’s suffered severe burns to her face and head when her console exploded.”

“I heard. Jack mentioned it the other day when he called his Dad. He said they’ve been talking whenever they have a chance via subspace since the Battle of Betazed. He even went to the San Francisco Fleetyards to see her get her promotion to Lieutenant Commander. He was a little upset that he was unable to get close enough to congratulate her in person.” Jill Xaran smiled slightly and added, “It’s good that Cathryn’s finally making new friends.”

“Jill, everything you just said is news to me. Cathryn’s never said a word of it. The first I heard anything about Jack and Cathryn beyond being assigned together for the mission to Betazed was when Sylvan and I returned from Sydney with Katrina. I walked in the door and Cathryn’s CO is on the compic telling me that she’s hurt badly, and Jack is extremely upset about it.”

Dr. Simmons then interrupted, “Val, I just want to let you know that I’ll do everything I can to help Cathryn. In fact, I don’t want you to worry about anything. Cathryn put her life on the line everyday during the war. She deserves something in return.”

“That goes for me too, Val,” Dr. Xaran assured. “Every year Jacob and I try to give something back to the Federation, helping veterans of battle like Cathryn who are injured. In the end, the injured are the forgotten heroes. When all is said and done, we remember those who lived and we remember those who gave their lives for us. The injured are the ones we tend to forget, and that should not be. We would both be honored to help Cathryn.”

Raiajh had tears welling up in her eyes as she spoke. “Thank you. I never expected this.” She hugged them both, and to Jill she added, “Are you still coming for dinner Saturday?” Raiajh and Xaran then began walking to the office’s waiting room, with the doctor still holding Katrina’s hand.

"I'll be there. You know I enjoy visiting. Mother may never have liked you, but I always have. Korin and his wife did as well. He may have been the only one of the siblings who chose the more traditional path that Mother wanted for us, but he never thought less of Sylvan and I for choosing otherwise."

"I would have liked to have gotten to know Korin and his wife better. Sylvan still speaks so highly of your brother. The four of us only got together for dinner once in San Francisco, not long before they went to Yosemite and suffered their accident. As for your mother, after a time the feeling grew mutual. I've never tolerated xenophobes, especially since I was teased growing up because of my differences."

"It must have been difficult. Yet you named your first child after her."

"She's named after both our mothers, actually."

"Are you and Sylvan going to have more children?" Xaran asked, finally broaching a difficult topic. Raiajh nodded before replying.

"You know Sylvan has always wanted a large family, and I'm certainly not opposed to that. Sylvan and I have already started trying again, in fact. I just hope it doesn't take us three years this time."

"I don't think it's going to take three years," Xaran said, sensing something different about Raiajh. "In fact, it wouldn't surprise me if you were pregnant again already."

"We'll see. I have a doctor's appointment late tomorrow. I have been a bit nauseous today. I'll let you know what the doctor says when I see you Saturday." Then, once the group reached the front office door, Raiajh said her goodbyes to Jill Xaran and Jacob Simmons and left with Katrina.

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Starfleet Medical
San Francisco, California

The staff at Starfleet Medical settled Pearson into a bed in the Intensive Care Unit. They had pumped her full of pain meds, then removed her from stasis. Their plan was to induce a coma to help Pearson heal, but the doctors were convinced by Admiral Raiajh, who had arrived at the hospital shortly after the shuttle from the *Besiege* landed just after 0200 in San Francisco, to allow her a few moments to talk with Pearson.

"Hello, Cathryn."

"Val, what happened?" Pearson asked, still groggy and in obvious pain. "What are you doing all the way out here?"

"You were badly injured at Cardassia when your console exploded," Raiajh explained, the first to tell Pearson what had happened to her. "That was more than three weeks ago. You're now back on Earth. The war's over. We won."

"We won?"

"Yes, we won. It seems you won a little too. I keep hearing that you have a new friend."

"I thought I did, but Jack probably won't come see me like this," Pearson said, gently feeling the side of her face tenderly with her good hand. "I must look hideous."

"Cathryn, you'll be looking like your old self in no time. Jack knows about your injuries. He's been worried sick about you since he heard what happened."

"He has?"

"Yes, Cathryn, he has."

"He won't stay. They all leave."

"Don't underestimate Jack Simmons. He'll be here when you wake up again. And so will I."

Raiajh then stepped back and allowed the doctors to do their work. Pearson looked at Raiajh and did her best to smile as Simmons walked up behind her. It was the last thing Pearson remembered before she drifted back off into unconsciousness.

"I'm glad she made it safely, Val."

“She’ll be fine. She seems to remember bits of what happened. She didn’t say much, but she’s always been an easy read, telepathically, and there were many thoughts which came to the surface. I owe you an apology, Jack.”

“For what?” the doctor asked.

“For not believing you when you said that you and Cathryn had become friends. I’ll be leaving word with the staff that you can visit her anytime you wish, for as long as you wish.”

“Thank you, Val. I appreciate it.”

Changing the topic slightly, Raiajh asked, “Are you coming to dinner tomorrow?”

“Probably not. I haven’t been good company lately. You’ll probably find me here.”

“I understand. Just remember to stay out of the way of her doctors. Perhaps I’ll stop by sometime tomorrow with Jill.”

Before Simmons had a chance to reply, Raiajh quickly rushed into the ‘fresher and returned a few moments later, looking a bit ill. Simmons took his medical tricorder out of his lab coat and scanned the admiral, showing her the results of his scan.

“You’re going to need to make an appointment within the next few days, Val. Until then, you need to eat better and cut way down on the raktijino.”

“Jack, I already had an appointment to see you later today,” Raiajh explained. “I haven’t been feeling too well lately. Now I know why. For now I think I’m going home to bed.”

“Congratulations, Admiral,” Simmons said.

“Thanks, Jack. Good night.”

Raiajh then walked out of the ICU and made her way the two blocks back home. She got into the apartment she shared with her family and quickly climbed into bed. Although she tried to be careful, she ended up waking her husband. Still half groggy, Xaran asked, “Is Cathryn settled in?”

“She is. The doctors induced a coma to help her heal.”

“How are you feeling? I know you have been a bit under the weather the last couple of days.”

“Fine. The nausea should pass in a few weeks. And Katrina will be a big sister by fall.”

In his half-sleeping state it took a moment for Xaran to realize what his wife had said. When it hit him, he snuggled close and kissed her cheek. “I love you, Imzadi.”

“I love you, too,” was her reply as she drifted off to sleep in his arms.

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Starfleet Medical

Stardate 53124.8 (February 15, 2376)

Pearson slowly regained consciousness after her doctors decided it was time to wake her. One of the first sensations she felt was that of someone holding her hand. She found it comforting and confusing at the same time. She knew the hand was not that of her friend, Val’ri Raiajh. It was too large and definitely more masculine. Then she thought to herself, ‘It couldn’t be, could it? He wouldn’t have stayed.’ However, Raiajh had said not to underestimate her newfound friend. She gently squeezed the hand and found the return grip to be comforting.

“Welcome back,” she heard Jack Simmons say.

Pearson tried to open both eyes and found she could only open her right one. She went to feel with her left hand but the sound of Simmons’ voice stopped her.

“Cathryn, your eye was too badly damaged from the burns you received. The doctors will begin replacing it with an ocular implant in about a month.”

Pearson looked over at the man sitting next to her. She wondered why he stayed. Unconsciously she spoke one word aloud. “Why?” It wasn’t until he replied, “Why what?” that she realized she had spoken the word aloud. “Why did you stay?” she asked.

“Because friends don’t walk away when things are bad. And don’t you start thinking I stayed out of pity. I stayed because I care about you, Cathryn.”

Pearson noticed that Simmons looked at her the entire time he spoke. His eyes did not show pity or disgust. They showed concern, and something else. Something she remembered seeing long ago, in her parent’s eyes when they looked at her. There was no denying that look. She smiled. He returned the smile.

“Jack, how long have I been out?” she asked.

“It has been six weeks since the war ended.”

“But how long have I been out?”

“Six weeks. From what McLeod told us, the Dominion surrendered minutes after you were injured.”

“Just my luck. I make it through the entire war only to be injured on the last day. In the last hour!”

“Cathryn, don’t beat yourself up over it. You weren’t the only one who was injured, and there were many who were killed that day. You’re also going to get better. Val has lined up the best doctors she could for you. She’s been worried about you this whole time too. Remember when you told me you think of your friends from the *Arcturus* crew as your family? I know she feels the same about you.”

“I think of her the same way. We were great roommates, but working together was a bit difficult when we were on the *Arcturus*. However, she did teach me a lot. When I first arrived aboard I was really a horrible quartermaster. They took her out of the science division and made her my supervisor to teach me how to do my job properly. The oddest part about it was I missed having her in the quartermaster’s office with me when I was on the *Sarek*.”

“What made you go from operations to security?”

“Truthfully, I hated the job. I didn’t mind being historian, but there are quite a few historians in Starfleet. When I transferred to the *Sarek*, I was made quartermaster again, though by that time they were calling the position Supply Officer. Since they had an Academy Annex on the ship, I retrained to become a security and tactical officer, first under Lieutenant Toreth, and then later under Val. Shortly after I completed the training, Starfleet asked for volunteers for the Leviathan Development Project, so I volunteered. When I was assigned to the *Besiege*, I was surprised to find out that Val was going to be my Commanding Officer. I actually worked twice as hard to prove to her that I could do the job. I never wanted anyone to think I got the job because Val and I were friends, especially considering how bad I was as a newly commissioned ensign.”

“Cathryn, you’re very good at your job. I don’t think anyone would have thought that you got your posting because of Val.”

“I’ll probably never get a chance to do it again,” she commented, sounding dejected.

“Captain McLeod has repeatedly said he wants you back once you’ve healed. He’s been here several times since the *Besiege* entered drydocked at Utopia Planitia.”

“Any other surprise visitors while I was out of it?”

“There were a few,” Simmons replied. “Fleet Captain Penji Fil has stopped in. So have Val and Sylvan, Sylvan’s sister Jill, and my Dad.”

“Why did your Dad come and visit?”

“He and Jill are going to be performing your reconstructive surgery. Like I said, Val made sure she had the best lined up to help you.”

Before Pearson had a chance to remark, one of the nurses entered the room.

“Doctor Simmons, I just received a call that you’re needed in maternity,” the nurse stated.

“Thank you, nurse.” Then to Pearson he added, “I have to go for a bit, but I will return as soon as I’m done and have taken a shower.” He gave her a kiss on her right cheek, then left the ICU. The nurse then turned to Pearson.

“Can I do anything for you, Commander Pearson?” she asked.

“Is it ok if I sit up?”

The nurse adjusted Pearson’s bed so she was in a more seated position.

“If I may say so, Commander, you are one lucky lady. Doctor Simmons has spent every free moment by your side since they brought you in. Believe me, men like that are hard to find.”

Pearson just smiled. She had no idea how to respond to the comment as the nurse went back to tend to other patients.

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A day later, Val'ri Raiajh stopped by to visit Pearson while Simmons had a regular duty shift. Pearson had been moved out of the ICU and into a regular private room.

"Hello, Cathryn. Sorry I couldn't stop by and visit yesterday. I don't know what it is, but it seems that with each rank grade you advance, there is more and more paperwork. It's going to take me a few more days to get into a regular routine. I've actually had to have Marie schedule this visit as an appointment so I could be sure I would have the time to come see how you were doing. Not that I mind. I'd rather be here right now than back in my office."

"Hello, Val. Sorry to be such a burden."

"Cathryn, you are not a burden," Raiajh scolded. "Don't ever think that!"

"Val, did you know that Jack's been here night and day when he hasn't been working?"

"I didn't ask him to do that. He's been doing that on his own."

"Val, I think he's fallen in love with me."

"Would that be such a bad thing?" Raiajh asked.

"I don't know. I'm not sure if I even want a relationship," Pearson replied. "When they leave it hurts too much."

"Cathryn, you may not want to admit it, but you have feelings for Jack too."

"No fair, Val. You know I don't like when you do that."

"I didn't do anything, Cathryn. I can see that much in your expression when you talk about him."

"Sorry, Val. I shouldn't have jumped to conclusions like that. What should I do about Jack?"

"Just go with the flow of things. Don't deny your feelings. Take things at a pace that you can handle. Most importantly, learn from your past experiences, but don't let them rule your decisions now. Each situation is different and needs to be treated that way."

"I never thought of it like that."

"As for Jack, set down some ground rules now. If you don't want him here all the time, just tell him. He'll respect that."

"I didn't say I didn't want him here. I like when he's here. It's boring when he's on duty. He's so easy to talk to. The first day I met him, we talked our way through the entire afternoon watch and right into the evening watch. I couldn't believe how we lost track of time. After Betazed, on the way back to Earth, I stopped by his quarters to let him know that I made sure his parents were settled down aboard the *Hawk*. We talked some more, had a few drinks and a bite to eat, and we... we ended up doing more than talking."

"Cathryn, you don't need to tell me this."

"Val, I wanted to walk out on him in the middle of the night while he slept. The only thing that stopped me was that I fell asleep. Next thing I know its morning and he's waking me up. Val, he saw it in my face when I woke up. He said I could go if that was what I wanted. I found that I didn't want to go."

"Cathryn, perhaps it is time you take a leap of faith and trust yourself. I've known you long enough to know that you don't just fall asleep like that unless you feel safe, no matter how tired you are. As for Jack, he wouldn't have asked you to stay if he hadn't seen something more."

"Val, why are things so difficult sometimes?"

"Cathryn, if I knew the answer to that, I'd tell you. Perhaps it's just a way to see if we are ready for it. I know you are up for a challenge like this. You've faced difficult situations and found your way through them. Trust yourself." Raiajh then took a deep breath before continuing, "There's an old human saying. 'The greater the risk, the greater the reward.'"

"Actually I think that's a Ferengi saying," Pearson remarked.

"Wherever it comes from, it means the same thing," Raiajh said. "Don't be afraid to try."

"I guess you're right. It's time I stopped living in the past and start living in the here and now."

"That sounds like a good idea to me." Raiajh then glanced at her chronometer, surprised by the time. "Cathryn, I hate to stay for such a short period of time, but I need to get back to my office. I have a meeting shortly. I'll be back to see you tomorrow."

"I understand, Val. I know you're busy."

Raiajh got up to leave, giving Pearson a quick hug before departing. Exiting the room, she literally walked into her husband, Dr. Sylvan Xaran, as he was entering.

"Pardon me, Admiral," he said smiling at her.

"I'm sorry, Doctor. I really should watch where I'm going," she replied in the same joking manner.

"Are you ok, Val?"

"I'm fine. I really should watch where I'm going. I need to leave though. I have a meeting back at Starfleet Command and I can't be late."

"Will you be home for dinner?"

"I should be. I'll call if things change." She then gave her husband a quick hug in the doorway before leaving. As the door closed, she heard Pearson giving Xaran her usual hard time about his visits.

* * *

Starfleet Medical

Stardate 53133.7 (February 18, 2376)

Having a break from his duties working with the JAG office, and knowing that Pearson was in the hospital, Konstantin Harkonnen stopped to get some chocolates and some flowers and went to visit the security and tactical chief of the *USS Besiege* at Starfleet Medical. Entering the room, he saw Pearson lying in bed facing away from the door. He entered the room and made his way around the bed to look her in the eye. She was lying there with her good eye closed. Speaking in his Russian accent, he said, "Hello, Cathryn."

Pearson's eye snapped open. Seeing Harkonnen standing there she said, "Please, go. I don't want you to see me like this."

"Vhy?" Harkonnen asked.

"I look hideous. In case you hadn't noticed, half my face is burned and they had to take my eye," was Pearson's reply.

"You vill never look hideous, Cathryn," Harkonnen said, sitting down beside her as he shook his head. "Your heart and soul are amazingly beautiful and just. You are a voman of conviction. Thus your appearance vill always reflect that."

"Please go, Konstantin," Pearson told her visitor. "Respect my wishes that I don't want you to see me like this."

"I vill, but I vill return," he said softly. "You might not realize it, but you have touched me greatly. I really vant you to be okay."

"Thank you," was her simple reply, as Harkonnen turned and walked out the door.

Unbeknownst to either of them, Dr. Jack Simmons had returned after finishing his shift and had heard the entire exchange. As he entered the room, he said to Harkonnen, "She doesn't need to be upset like this. It will only hamper her recovery. She said she wanted you to go. Respect her wishes and stay away."

"I vill let her decide that another time, Doctor," Harkonnen replied before departing the room. As Harkonnen left the floor, he stopped at the nurse's station and handed the duty nurse the flowers and chocolate he had been carrying, asking her to make sure Pearson received them. Pearson never received them, because Simmons told the nurses to keep them; that Pearson she didn't want them, even though he never actually asked Pearson whether she wanted them or not.

Over the next month, Harkonnen tried to visit Pearson several more times, only to be stopped either by Jack Simmons himself or by the duty nurses under order of Dr. Simmons. At the same time, even though she never said

anything about it, Pearson had hoped that Harkonnen would return to visit at some point so she could have at least apologized for sending him away. As far as she knew that chance never came.

* * *

Starfleet Medical

Stardate 53223.18 (March 22, 2376)

Pearson was almost ready to be released from the hospital. Two weeks earlier the doctors had implanted the internal framework for her cybernetic ocular implant. Before she would leave the hospital, one of the cybernetic specialists was going to activate and insert the eye. This was the one part of the procedure that Pearson was not looking forward to. She hated the fact that she had to be awake for it, as she hated anyone poking around in the area of her eyes, not to mention that the left side of her face was still tender despite the plastiskin bandage covering most of it. As had become usual, Simmons was there. She had grown accustomed to his being there. Now that she was going to be released, she found herself already missing his daily visits. For the time since her injury she would be away from the hospital, she had requested quarters at the San Francisco Fleetyards.

“I’m going to miss this,” she said, pretty much to herself.

“Miss what?” Simmons asked.

“I was just thinking that I was going to miss having you around when you are not working. It’s going to feel weird living at the Fleetyards.”

“Cathryn, you don’t have to stay there. With my parents staying here on Earth permanently, I’ve gotten a larger apartment so I have an extra room. You are more than welcome to stay with me. You’ll have your privacy, and at the same time you won’t have to bunk with someone you don’t know.”

“I don’t know, Jack. What if your parents come to visit?”

“Then I’ll sleep on the couch and they can have my room.”

“If that happened, I’d feel like I’m imposing. That’s not fair to either you or your parents.”

“I could always let them have my room and snuggle up next to you,” he said with a playful smile.

“Jack, that’s not funny,” she replied.

“How about you try it for just a couple of days. If you’re not comfortable, you can still move to quarters at the Fleetyards.”

Pearson sighed before saying, “I’ll try it, for a few days.”

“After we get out of here, you want to go get something to eat?” Simmons asked.

“That sounds good,” Pearson replied. “Especially after a month of hospital food.”

“Is there any place special you want to go?”

“Not really. I’m flexible.”

“Do you like Chinese?”

“I do. I’ve never been to San Francisco’s Chinatown, so I don’t know where the good restaurants are. When the *Besiege* has returned to Earth in the past, I usually visit Toronto, because it’s familiar. I know where the good restaurants are there.”

“Don’t worry. I know some good places here.”

At that moment the technician who would be installing the new ocular implant came into the room, with an assistant who was supposed to hold Pearson still while she put in the implant. Pearson looked at the assistant.

“Who’s he?” she asked.

“He’s here to help,” the technician replied. “He’s here to hold you still so I can insert the ocular implant.” Pearson looked at Simmons. He saw how uncomfortable she was with the idea of a stranger holding her tightly and suggested, “I’ll hold Cathryn for you.”

“Doctor Simmons, I appreciate you wanting to help. However, my assistant is trained to properly restrain my patients for procedures like this,” the technician said.

“I would feel more comfortable with Jack... with Doctor Simmons restraining me,” Pearson said.

“Very well,” the technician said, sounding slightly annoyed and simply wanting to get on with the implantation. Simmons sat in one of the chairs and gestured for Pearson to sit in his lap, wrapping his legs around hers and one arm around her abdomen while the other restrained her shoulders. She seemed to relax a bit being held by Simmons, despite the awkwardness of it.

“Try not to move, Commander Pearson,” the technician ordered. “The urge to lean back is going to be strong. You are going to have to resist it. Doctor Simmons is going to do his best to help you in that regard.” She then looked at the doctor and asked, “Are you ready, Doctor Simmons?”

“I’m ready.”

He leaned his head on her right shoulder to keep Pearson from moving her head sideways. As the technician moved toward her eye socket with the activated eye, she tried to lean back, but Simmons held her firm, offering soft words of encouragement to get her through the procedure. Soon enough the new eye was in place and the final calibrations completed. Simmons relaxed his grip on Pearson but otherwise made no effort to move, just leaning his head on her shoulder and his arms in a relaxed grip around her abdomen.

“That’s it. Doctor Xaran will be in shortly to release you, Commander.”

“Thank you,” Pearson said.

Once the technician and her assistant left the room, Pearson spoke again.

“Comfortable?” she asked in a slightly humorous tone. She glanced down at Simmons arms still wrapped around her body.

“Yes, actually,” Simmons replied. He gave her a kiss on the cheek. “You did wonderful. I take it you wish for me to move?”

“No, I was just asking if you were comfortable.”

They just sat in silence for a while, waiting for Xaran to arrive. Both were beginning to doze by the time he entered the room.

“I can come back later if you two wish to take a nap,” he said, amused.

“No! I’m ready to get out of here,” Pearson replied.

Xaran gave Pearson a cursory scan, then said, “Just make sure you get your bandage changed every few days, and remember your appointments. Other than that, you’re free to leave.”

* * *

Toronto, Earth

Stardate 53423.6 (June 3, 2376)

Pearson sat in the exam room with Dr. Jill Xaran, who was going to be working with her partner, Dr. Jacob Simmons, performing Pearson’s surgery.

“Good news,” Jill began. “We’ll be able to schedule your surgery for July 1st. It’ll be a bit more extensive than we first thought because Starfleet did a bit of damage to your cheekbone installing the infrastructure of your ocular implant, but we’ll fix that too.”

“I just wanted to thank you again for this,” Pearson said. “You really didn’t have to do this.”

“You’re welcome,” Jill Xaran replied. “Jacob and I wouldn’t have it any other way. So do you and Jack have any special plans for tomorrow?”

“He’s assigned an early shift, and then he’s off for the weekend, but what’s so special about tomorrow?”

“I’m not surprised he didn’t say anything. He doesn’t like celebrating it. Tomorrow is Jack’s birthday.”

“No, he didn’t tell me. I should be able to get something special for him. There’s this bed and breakfast he’s been talking about in Victoria. I’ll give them a call and see if they have an opening for the weekend. That reminds me, I have a medical question, but it’s not something I’m comfortable talking about with your brother.”

“What’s your question?”

Pearson asked her question as plainly as she could. She hated talking about the subject and it showed as her face turned several shades of crimson.

“Cathryn,” Jill replied. “I know for a fact that my brother told you that you can resume all your normal activities. Normal activity includes that by definition. I need to go, Cathryn. I have other patients waiting to see me. I’ll see you a few days before the 1st. Until then, have fun,” Dr. Xaran said with a wink as she exited the room.

Pearson left the exam room, scheduled her next appointment with the office staff, and headed back to the tram station. Once back in San Francisco, she made a stop at a store she noticed on the way out of the city earlier, after which she made it back to Simmons’s apartment with some time to spare and called to make arrangements at the bed and breakfast that Simmons had expressed interest in visiting. About a half-hour later, Simmons returned from his shift at Starfleet Medical, removing his uniform jacket and sitting down on the couch. Pearson came over and sat down next to him, handing him an envelope.

“What’s this?” he asked.

“Open it and find out,” Pearson said playfully. Simmons opened the envelope.

“Reservations for tomorrow and Saturday night at Hemingway's By the Sea! I certainly hope this is for both of us. I wouldn’t want to experience this without you.”

“Jack, I want you to enjoy this weekend.”

“Then come with me. I want it to be something we do together.”

“I know. But I hate it when people stare at me. They stare even more when you’re with me. How are you going to enjoy your weekend with people staring?”

“First, I don’t care about other people, and neither should you. Second, I want you to answer me one question; Do you want to go? You have two options; yes or no.”

“Yes, but...” she started, but stopped when Simmons put two fingers on her lips.

“No buts. It’s settled. Be ready to go when I get home tomorrow.”

Pearson nodded her head in the affirmative, but said nothing.

“Cathryn, did something happen today? You’ve been in such good spirits lately.”

“I wanted to treat myself to something nice to wear. When I went to pay for the items, the clerk gave me a look that said, ‘Why am I wasting my credits?’”

“If it makes you feel good, then that’s all that matters.”

“I know.” She took his hand and got up from the couch, giving him a smile that caused her face to redden. “I can show you what I got, if you would like.”

Simmons was certainly intrigued, considering mentioning it made her blush.

“Do I get to see you wearing whatever it is?”

“I think that can be arranged,” Pearson replied.

* * *

Toronto, Earth

Stardate: 53500.3 (July 1, 2376)

Pearson woke up in a modicum of pain. As she began to come around, she asked for Simmons.

“I’ll let him come in and see you in a minute. How are you feeling?” The voice that spoke to her belonged to Jacob Simmons, one of the doctors who performed the surgery that was the cause of her current pain.

“Like I was hit in the face by a shuttlecraft,” she replied.

“Not surprising. I’ll make sure you get something for the pain. Jill and I did a bit of work to your face. We repaired the damage to your cheekbone on your left side, as well as all the scarring from the burns. We also made sure the left side looked pretty much the same as your right and did a bit of work to your nose and left ear. You’ll be looking much better once you heal in a few weeks, but you are going to be swollen for several days. Once the swelling goes down, the doctors at Starfleet Medical can help alleviate the bruising.”

“Can I see how bad the bruising and swelling is?”

“Your face is bandaged at the moment. You’ll be able to see when Jill removes the bandages before she discharges you tomorrow. Like Jill told you before, you’re going to look a bit worse before you start looking better.”

“I understand.”

“Now let me go find that son of mine. I’ll be right back.”

The elder Dr. Simmons left the room and returned a few moments later with his son, Jack. Pearson looked over and lifted her arm in a wave. Simmons sat down next to her on the bed and took her hand, while his father left the room to find a nurse to administer some pain medication.

“How are you holding up?” Simmons asked her.

“I hurt. And I wish I was home. The bed is more comfortable there.”

“It’s only for one night. Tomorrow night we’ll be home.”

“Are you going to be able to stay with me?”

“Yes. It took a bit of doing, but I can stay.”

“Why do I have this feeling I don’t want to know what you had to do?”

“It’s nothing like that. My Dad got some visiting physician privileges for me. I can’t do anything more than hold your hand, but it’s enough.”

Just then, a nurse walked in to give Pearson some pain medication. She pressed the hypo to Pearson’s neck and quickly left the room just as Pearson began nodding off.

“Sleep, Cathryn,” Simmons said. “I’ll be right here when you wake up.”

* * *

San Francisco, Earth

Stardate 53680.4 - September 1, 2376

Simmons and Pearson were sitting and having an early breakfast. As Simmons had leave for the week, the pair were going to spend the early part of the day hiking in the Lake Louise area of Banff. But just as they were finishing breakfast they received a communication from Sylvan Xaran asking Simmons to come over to his and Raiajh’s apartment. Pearson went with him because as soon as they were done with Xaran and Raiajh, they were going to head out on their trip.

Watching Pearson hold Xaran and Raiajh’s newborn son Julian left Simmons a bit shaken up, but the pair still headed toward the transporter station at Starfleet Command.

“Jack, if you don’t want to go today, that’s fine,” Pearson told him.

“I still want to go. The feeling will pass.”

“You know, there are other ways of having children,” Pearson remarked after the two had walked in silence for a time.

“I know, Cathryn. It just hurts to know that I can’t have my own sometimes. With all the things I can give the woman I love, that is the one thing I can’t.”

“I’ve told you before that it doesn’t bother me.” She leaned over and whispered in his ear. “Considering how good you are at keeping secrets, I have one for you. I love you too.”

Simmons stopped dead in his tracks. Pearson had moved a few paces ahead, not realizing at first that Simmons was not beside her anymore. She turned around and walked back to him.

“You knew?” he asked.

“Jack, I’ve known since I woke up in the hospital in February. I saw it in your face and your eyes when you looked at me. The way I felt about you scared me. It still does. I’ve never felt this way about anyone before. Right now I’m not sure if I want more than what we currently have. However, the closer I get to returning to duty, the more I’m finding that I don’t want to leave you. I’ve received my orders. In the middle of December, I have to go back to the *Besiege*, and we are going to be away for a year patrolling the Kalendra Sector and helping with the

rebuilding effort on Betazed. After that, the ship's being reclassified as an escort and will be spending more time here at Earth. As much as I want to keep my career in Starfleet, I want you too."

"Cathryn, I'm not going anywhere and I want you to have your career. During the year you are away we'll work through it. I'll call you when I can, and you can call me too. A year from now I should still be here in San Francisco. I know I won't be assigned to a starship. I don't have the clearances normally required to serve on a starship. The only reason why I was aboard the *Hawk* for our rescue mission to Betazed was because they needed someone who was familiar with the Loneel Valley. At the end of my fifth year, when I was assigned to the *Surak* for shipboard training, I had space sickness every day. It was the same when I boarded the transport to Earth in '63 to attend Starfleet Medical College. When I was on the *Hawk*, I had the EMH give me medicine to combat it every day. It was the first time I had returned to Betazed since I left for school."

Simmons put his arms around Pearson and pulled her into a hug. He just stood there and held her, causing Starfleet personnel to have to walk around the pair in hiking gear.

"I love you, Cathryn," Simmons said. Just saying the words felt like a weight was lifted off his shoulders.

"I love you too, Jack." After a moment's pause, she added, "I think we better get moving. We're blocking pedestrian traffic standing here."

"In a minute," he replied and kissed her right there on the busy San Francisco street that led up to Starfleet Command.

"I see you're feeling better, Commander Pearson," a voice said from behind them. The couple separated to find Fleet Captain Penji Fil, first officer of the *Besiege*, standing there and watching them with a crooked smile on his face.

"Yes, Penji, I'm feeling better. I'm going to be on recuperation leave until almost the end of the year though."

"It's good to know you're getting better. It's good to see you too, Doctor Simmons. But if you both will excuse me, I need to go. I have an appointment with Admiral Raiajh shortly."

"Sir," Simmons said, "Admiral Raiajh is not going to be in her office today. She and Doctor Xaran started their parental leave about two hours ago. I don't know if you hear, but the Admiral gave birth this morning."

"I see," Fil said, appearing perturbed. "Thank you for letting me know. I'll stop by Lieutenant Quintero's office and reschedule my appointment. I hope both of you have a good day." Fil then continued on toward the Starfleet Command building, while Simmons took Pearson's hand and they continued toward the transporter station and their trip to Lake Louise.

* * *

San Francisco, Earth

Stardate 53952.1 (December 13, 2376)

With her hair trimmed to brush the top of her shoulders, Pearson stood before the mirror wearing her standard-duty uniform. In a few hours she needed to report back aboard the *Besiege*, her medical leave finally having come to an end. While part of her was looking forward to returning to duty, another part of her wanted to stay on Earth, with Simmons.

The doctor snuck up behind Pearson, putting his arms around her as he kissed her cheek and rested his head on her shoulder.

"How are you feeling?" he asked.

"I'm still torn. Part of me wants to stay and part is ready to go. Right now the part that wants to stay is winning," she replied with a sad look on her face.

"I know. But I'll be here when the *Besiege* returns."

"We need to get going, if I'm going to catch my transport up to spacedock," Pearson remarked.

Simmons unwound his arms from her and shouldered her duffel bag. Then, taking her hand in his own, they left the apartment and headed toward the grounds of the Presidio. Upon arrival at the transporter station that

she would use to beam up to the orbiting Earth Spacedock, Simmons looked Pearson in the eye and said, "I love you." He kissed her and held her close for a moment before whispering in her ear, "Provided I'm not on duty at the time you return, you will find me here waiting for you."

"I love you, too. We'll talk soon," she replied.

Separating, he handed her the duffel bag and watched her walk away, noticing that she turned around several times to wave.

* * *

Stardate 54952.8 (December 14, 2377)

It was 0200 and the San Francisco Fleetyards was eerily empty at that time of the morning. A lone man with reddish hair in a blue medical uniform stood waiting for one person in particular to arrive on the last shuttle from the returning *USS Besiege*. Soon enough he saw six of the Marines that made up part the crew of the Leviathan-class vessel disembark from the shuttle, among the last of the crew to arrive on the surface. Finally, not far behind them, she appeared.

Cathryn Pearson, the *Besiege's* Second Officer, looked up from the padd in her hand when one of the Marines in front of her said out loud, "Isn't that Doctor Simmons? What's he doing here? It's the middle of the night."

"Keeping a promise," she remarked with a smile and waived to Simmons. "You do know what a promise is?"

The Marines casually replied, "Yes, ma'am."

Just short of meeting up with Simmons, she stopped the Marines. "Before you're dismissed, let me say on behalf of Captain McLeod, First Officer Fil, and myself; Thank you for your service to the *Besiege*. Enjoy your leave, and good luck on your new assignments."

The highest ranking of the Marines, a sergeant by the name of Ruiz, replied, "It was our pleasure to serve, ma'am. However, Captain McLeod's instructions were to see that you arrived home safely."

"There's no need. That's why Doctor Simmons is here."

Pearson shook each Marine's hand, then dismissed them. With a final wave, they headed out into the chilly December night. Pearson then walked the rest of the way over to Simmons and into his waiting arms.

"It's good to be home," she said as she held him.

"It's good to have you home," Simmons replied.

Taking her duffel bag from her, the couple left the Fleetyard behind and headed home.

The End