

*Palais de la Concorde  
Paris, France, Earth  
Mid-April 2392 (Earth Calendar)*

When the *Pariah* made port at Earth, above the Eurasian continent, Raiajh never expected to find herself here; meeting with the new Secretary of State of the Federation.

She had met the former Federation President, Nanietta Bacco, when the head of state came to 719 for a conference with the head of the new Romulan government. While everything turned out for the best after an assassination attempt on both the President and Romulan Praetor, it wasn't exactly a shining moment in her career.

Why she was here today was a mystery to Raiajh. She had not been to Paris, or the Palais, since the Dominion War and she noted that save for a new color scheme, most likely requested by Federation President Nerala herself, it had basically not changed.

Her time for commiseration over, she entered the office which was her destination. Raiajh announced herself to the person in front of her and waited for a response. The man, presumably the Secretary's aide, activated the intercom piece in his ear, announcing her. Once he received an answer, the device was tapped again to deactivate it.

"Secretary Strak will see you through those doors, Ms. Raiajh," he said to her.

She stepped into the inner office as the doors parted for her entry. Once she was sufficiently past the threshold the doors slid shut behind her.

"I didn't think you would keep the appointment," the voice of the Vulcan man looking out at the Paris skyline reverberated through the office. It was a voice she recognized from her past. A past that she needed to remind herself now and again was more than a century ago, and not the thirty-odd years that it was from her perspective, since she left the Vulcan Science Academy.

"Why would I not? It isn't every day one gets summoned to the Palais," Raiajh replied.

"Because it was I who summoned you," the man said, still facing the window.

"Strak is hardly an uncommon name. Until I stepped in this office and heard your voice, I knew not whom I was meeting with; save for your position and name. Although the timing of this meeting does bring your motives into question now that I know who you are."

Strak finally turned and faced Raiajh. "I do apologize for the timing. I'm preparing to head off-planet and this was the only available time I had prior to departure. What has happened in the past will remain in the past. There were no motives. In the present, I grieve with thee on the loss of your husband."

"Thank you. Do tell me why the formal summons to this meeting, *Mister Secretary*," she replied stressing his title to let him know she was not there to discuss what happened between them on her last day at the Vulcan Science Academy. Motioning to the chair opposite his desk, he gestured for Raiajh to sit. She did, as he took his seat on the opposite side of the desk.

"I asked you here to discuss your consideration of an ambassadorial position. I know you have retired from Starfleet, and for this particular posting, I need someone I know will not bend from their principles."

Raiajh nodded. Instead of a few years' difference, the man across from her was now middle aged. Despite the last quarter-century it was still unnerving at times to see people that she knew before that day on the *Arcturus* that changed her life forever. Even amongst Vulcans, who aged slower than most other humanoids, they had shown signs of the time that had passed; including Strak. His once dark hair was now heavily streaked with gray, a result of his age, along with the stressors of a long political career.

"You have me intrigued," she replied.

"The position is one that we have tried to fill before, but for reasons that elude the Federation, all the prior ambassadors have as the humans say, 'gone native' and abandoned the post."

Raiajh struggled to suppress a smirk and questioned, "And where is this posting?" She knew of only two postings where the turn-over rate was high. One was Orion, and the other...

"Bel-Terra," he replied.

"And how can you be assured that I won't – as you say – 'go native'?"

“I can’t. However, taking into consideration that you have some family members there, you have something the others did not; which is an understanding of Bel-Terran society,” Strak replied. “It is the hope of the President that your understanding will help keep you on the side of the Federation.”

“Were I to represent the Federation, there are issues that need to be settled between the Bel-Terrans and our government,” Raiajh remarked. “The main issue is something that the Federation Council has refused to even entertain.”

“It is the position of the Federation Council that Bel-Terra is a protectorate of the Federation,” Strak stated, obviously aware of the situation.

“Which is something that the Bel-Terran governments and population dispute,” Raiajh added. “While they wish to be an ally of the Federation, the Bel-Terrans do not want to be any part of the Federation, either as a member world or a protectorate,” Raiajh countered.

“We need to protect those living on the planet who are Federation citizens.” Strak’s words sent a shiver up Raiajh’s spine.

“A word of advice, Mister Secretary. Never say that to a Bel-Terran. Throughout the course of human history, those words have led to invasions and war on this planet. While we do have a consulate on the Orion homeworld, the one thing we never do is meddle in their affairs of State. We need to start doing the same with the Bel-Terrans. Yes, there are scores of Federation citizens who chose to live on the planet and make it their home, but it is their choice and we need to respect that; not tell them that the Federation way is better.”

“Your opinion is noted, Val’ri,” Strak replied dryly, yet starting to take a less formal approach in their conversation.

“It is more than an opinion. You need to know what and whom we are dealing with. I will not even consider a position where my hands are tied. An embassy is established to take care of the needs of the citizens it represents. Friendly soil in a foreign land, as it were. For the Deltans and Vulcans both, the embassies on Earth are a place where one can go to experience a bit of home away from home. If I take the position, I go as a representative of the United Federation of Planets, not as someone to help persuade the Bel-Terrans to come around to our way of thinking.”

“The President of the Bel-Terran government said the same thing.”

“That is just one of the misconceptions the Federation has about Bel-Terra. There isn’t one central government. Each Earth country that existed when Earth united in 2150 has been re-created on Bel-Terra and has a separate and distinct government. The President of their United States government has been given authority to speak on behalf of the other governments because the Federation’s prior administration would only speak to one representative. You should take the time to reach out to the other governments of the planet and let them know that the Federation apologizes for the error of not recognizing them as legitimate governments in their own right and that you weren’t singling out one group for preferential treatment.”

“That is good to know,” Strak remarked. “I was planning a trip to Bel-Terra in the coming months. I will make sure I let my scheduling secretary know to schedule appointments with any other heads of state willing to meet with me as well. Now about my offer...?”

After discussing the position and the political situation on the planet for the better part of two hours, Strak finally asked, “Do you think you will accept the appointment?”

“I need to discuss it with my family first, but it does look promising,” Raiajh replied. “May I give your office my answer by this time tomorrow?”

“That would be agreeable,” Strak replied. He rose from his chair, signaling that their meeting had come to an end. Raiajh stood likewise. Strak then spread his fingers in the traditional manner and said in Vulcan, “Live long and prosper, Val’ri.”

She returned the salute and replied, also in Vulcan, “Peace and long life, Strak.” She then turned and exited the office and, in short order, the Palais. Once outside she made her way to a transporter station and returned to the *Pariah* to discuss the events of that afternoon with her family.

Space, the Final Frontier....

## Star Trek: Tales from Bel-Terra

### “Part 1: New Orders” By Nadine B. Bach

IMV Pariah

*In orbit above Earth*

While her children had joined Commander Hans Spaak and his family down on the surface of the planet for a day at his (actually, his counterpart's) childhood home in the outskirts of Eindhoven, Netherlands, Raiajh and her father Tolek had use of her parent's stateroom aboard the former Orion smuggling vessel to themselves for a few more hours, allowing them to discuss the earlier events which led to her being offered an official position on Bel-Terra.

“I don't know what to make of it,” Raiajh said. “I was hoping for some quiet and to enjoy my retirement, but I am being asked to continue serving the Federation.”

“But why Bel-Terra?” Tolek asked.

“It's simple,” Raiajh replied. “The Federation doesn't understand why the Bel-Terrans would refuse Federation membership after the help given them. The planet to colonize; the industrial replicators to establish their colony; the transporter technology to aid in mobility. But now the Federation is a bit frightened of the Bel-Terrans because they are decades ahead of where the Federation assumed they would be at this point in the rebuilding of the planet and getting people to settle there. They are also worried because the Bel-Terrans are moving to create their own space fleet.”

“That's not a bad thing,” Tolek stated.

“No, but think about it. Rather than maintaining their own fleets, most Federation member-worlds contribute to Starfleet, which they then rely upon for their protection. Starting a few years ago, the Bel-Terran governments authorized the construction of their own ships to protect their own planet, instead of relying on the Federation. This was in addition to the handful of fast and lightly armed vessels they had designated for diplomatic transportation, like the one that came to *Starbase 719* when Jethro was a senator.”

“You aren't going to tell the Bel-Terrans to alter their ambitions, are you?”

“I was promised I wouldn't be bound by that constraint. In my opinion, Bel-Terra has as much right as any other colony as to how they run their own affairs. Right now, they are willing to accept the presence of the Federation and others on their world, the same way the Romulans, Klingons and other non-aligned worlds have been accepted on Federation worlds and the reason why the Bel-Terrans created the Embassy Row development.”

“You would think they would have placed it in one of the more prominent cities, such as their version of New York, San Francisco, or Paris. Instead President Spaight chose their version of Charlotte, North Carolina. I do not find that logical.”

“It isn't surprising. At the time Jethro left Earth, Charlotte was on the verge of becoming a monetary center second only to New York. Atlanta grew larger, quicker but Charlotte did have its leadership status, with several banks having corporate offices there. Yes, they had their troubles at the end of the Eugenics Wars, but they survived and adapted.”

Tolek sat silently in thought for several seconds, contemplating what Raiajh had told him. Finally he said, “Accepting this appointment will require you to no longer live here aboard the *Pariah*. What do you think your children's reaction will be to this?”

“Since Katrina is staying here on Earth, she will have little opinion, save perhaps wishing me to stay in San Francisco. As for Julian, since he was offered a chance to begin his studies on Bel-Terra, I'm positive he will jump

at the opportunity. I originally wanted him to wait another year because at almost sixteen, I don't feel that he is mature enough to be so far from family; but with everyone on Bel-Terra, he will not be so far away. Corrine and Korin will be harder to convince because they love interacting with Hans and Val's children. But in the end, they will do as told and go where I go."

"Such is often the burden of children," Tolek remarked.

"True, but at eleven and five they don't have much say in the matter." Raiajh added, "The most likely result will be Hans keeps the *Pariah* closer to Bel-Terra, as he likes being close to family. And last I heard from Marie, was he was considering opening offices for his family's shipping business on Bel-Terra, to expand their business presence."

"Then perhaps this appointment will give him the push he needs to make his decision."

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With the decision made and offer accepted, Raiajh relayed the news to the children. Save Katrina, who said she knew in her heart that her mother would take the most challenging offer presented, they all responded to the news as Raiajh said they would.

Everyone gathered on board the *Pariah* for a meal, and to discuss the plans for the future. Corrine sat next to her cousins Hans and Valerie, still glowering about her mother's choice to move the family to Bel-Terra and taking her away from her two compatriots.

Raiajh had received an update from her 'sister' about Corrine's ingenious attempt to remain on the *Pariah*. The girl had gone to Commander Spaak and requested formal asylum on the ship. She was not happy when he turned her down, stating that she belonged with her mother. He assured her that when she was of age, there would be a position for her on this ship or another; but for now, she needed to go to Bel-Terra and continue her studies there. He promised her that she would still get to see plenty of Hans and Valerie as the ship would be making port frequently in Bel-Terran space.

The gathering, which in years' past would have been held in the crew's mess, was moved to the cargo bay, as Hans' family continued to grow. Since the birth of Adriana and Sabina three years earlier, his wives had blessed him with additional children. With Marie giving birth to twin boys Sebastian and Stefan shortly after leaving *719*, and Lady Val having learned at the beginning of the current year she was pregnant with a girl, Spaak wondered how soon his ship would run out of room! And in the case of Val's unborn daughter, a medical exam had shown the baby to be an extremely rare occurrence, her genes containing none of her mother's Vulcan DNA. Because of this rarity, Ves had stressed to Hans in a private conversation that it would be best for the *Pariah* to remain close to a planet with the right medical facilities, in case there were complications with this unusual pregnancy. Bel-Terra fit that bill.

As the dining wound down, Commander Spaak rose and spoke to those gathered. "I know we were planning to continue on toward *Deep Space 9* and most likely the Briar Patch to visit the Baku, but there have been developments among us that have us returning to Bel-Terra. While we are in port I will be granting leave to most of the crew for at least six Bel-Terran months as I will be working on new upgrades to the ship's transporters, shields and weapons.

"It will be a time of change as well. Admiral Val – or I guess I should now say Ambassador Val – has been placed in a unique position where she can teach the Federation about what the Bel-Terrans hope to accomplish on their world." Continuing, Hans added, "I have also decided to go ahead and establish, with the blessing of those on Earth, a subsidiary of the shipping company my 'parents' run. In addition, Topuc will be establishing the Bel-Terran Institute of Technological Sciences. With many of the crew becoming planet-bound, it is a good time for this transition.

"When the *Pariah* launches again, it will be making semi-regular runs between Bel-Terra, *Deep Space 9* and the Baku homeworld. With new ships under our flag, there will be more positions available as well, and chances for some of you to advance, if you so desire."

Members of the crew began talking amongst each other as Spaak paused to give them a chance to take in everything. As the room quieted again, it was Tolek who rose to speak.

“Once the *Pariah* reaches Bel-Terra, my wife and I will also be moving surface-side. Topuc has offered us both positions at his new institution and we have accepted. While traveling these past few years have been most educational, we wish to establish a home, and Bel-Terra is the best place for that. Your hospitality has been nothing but exemplary and this was a difficult decision for both of us.”

“I understand and it further validates my position,” Spaak replied. “The children have enjoyed spending time with their grandparents and I want that relationship to continue. As such, I will be setting up a residence of our own on Bel-Terra. The redoubt on the Baku homeworld isn’t being forgotten. I still see trouble on the horizon and it will remain a place of sanctuary for all of us should war eventually break out. But for now, it seems fate is leading us to Bel-Terra!”

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*Ballroom, Federation Embassy*

*Embassy Row, Bel-Terra*

*Late June 2392 (Bel-Terran calendar)*

It had taken Raiajh and her family several weeks to settle in on Bel-Terra and for Raiajh to learn everything she needed to know to fulfill her responsibilities as the Federation’s official representative on Bel-Terra. Things had finally started falling into a routine when Karinara Raiajh suggested the time had come for a formal introduction to not only the various Bel-Terran governments, but her fellow diplomats as well.

Taking advice from her mother, Raiajh decided to host a reception for the respective Ambassadors of each world that had also established Embassies on Bel-Terra. While many chose real estate in the Embassy Row development, others had taken offers in others of the planet’s independent countries. Besides the main Embassy representing the Federation government, several individual Federation worlds – including the Vulcans and Deltans – chose to have a direct presence on this unusually fast-growing colony world. Besides the various Ambassadors, many of the heads-of-state from the various countries on Bel-Terra were in attendance.

Raiajh’s parents were each conversing separately with varied members of the ambassadorial parties. Surprisingly it was those from the Deltan Embassy who were being unusually friendly with both Raiajh and her mother. Most Deltans normally avoided part-Deltan hybrids or those who, like the former Deltan Ambassador to the Federation, had chosen a non-Deltan consort.

At the moment, Raiajh was talking with Addyson Povron, First Lady of the Bel-Terran United States. Povron’s husband was off on the side with several Prime Ministers discussing their recent visits with the Federation Secretary of State. After a few moments, Ms. Povron was called away and Raiajh was left wondering what to do next. She started to head toward the refreshment table to refill her glass with punch but was intercepted by one of the Deltan males from the delegation who arrived from their Embassy. He handed her the extra cup he was carrying.

“I saw you were running low, and I was looking for a good reason to approach you.”

Raiajh placed her empty cup on a nearby table and took the one he offered. “Thank you for the drink,” she said.

“My pleasure. You looked a bit lost there for a moment.”

“First time I’ve had to host an elaborate event like this on my own,” Raiajh replied. “In the past I usually had help, either from my long-time aide or from my husband.”

“Sylvan and I grew up together and I was shocked to hear of his passing,” Istav said, offering his condolences. “I’m sorry I haven’t spoken of it to you before now. I only found out a few days ago from my father and I truly didn’t know what to say.”

Raiajh picked up on the image of a man in Istav’s thoughts when he mentioned his father; the image of a man who was assuredly not Deltan.

“It’s fine Istav,” Raiajh replied. “I knew you and Sylvan had corresponded for many years, but with the time we spent in one place once we reached *Starbase 719*, I am surprised that you and I have never met before tonight.”

“I had my work and my own life on Delta IV,” was all Istav offered in response. Raiajh knew there was more, but did not press the matter.

As other guests attending that evening’s soiree began to leave, Raiajh and Istav sat down at one of the tables and talked, remaining for about an hour after the last guest left and most of the other tables were cleared away. Istav finally stood up and said, “We can finish our conversation another time, Ambassador. I’m sure the embassy staff would like to complete their work, without having us in their way.”

Raiajh suddenly realized she had lost track of time. Looking around, she noticed the staff loitering around the edges of the ballroom or clearing the other tables in the room.

“I believe you’re right. It was a pleasure speaking with you. Feel free to stop by anytime,” Raiajh remarked.

“Good evening, Val.”

“Good evening, Istav.”

Raiajh stood and watched her final guest depart through the main doorway of the room. She then turned and passed through another door – this one leading to an executive turbolift directly to her private suite of rooms on the third floor of the large building.

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*A few days later...*

Raiajh’s parents had offered to watch Corrine and Korin for a few days to give her some time to herself. Ambassador Raiajh was wondering what to do when she heard a knock on her office door. When she first arrived, she thought it strange that none of the embassy’s interior doors were automatic-opening, like she had gotten quite used to aboard starships and other Federation facilities, but quickly learned that the Bel-Terrans preferred old-fashioned manual doors on hinges. She raised her voice so the person on the other side could hear as she said, “Come in.”

The handle moved, then door swung open and Istav walked in. “Good day. Several members of the staff of the Deltan Embassy and I are traveling into the city, and wondered if you would like to join us for some food and frivolity this evening?”

“You and your colleagues actually want me to join you?”

“They don’t mind, but I want you to come,” Istav replied. “*I assure you that my reasons are purely selfish,*” he added in Deltan.

“Odd choice of words,” Raiajh remarked.

“I want to get to know you better,” Istav said. “If I’m not mistaken, we seemed to have gotten along quite well the other evening.”

“We did,” Raiajh admitted. “And I would like to get to know you better as well. At the same time, I don’t want to lead you on. I don’t know if I am ready for a new relationship.”

“It’s why I suggested going out in a group setting. No pressure. Besides, everyone needs to eat. Why not sample some of the local cuisine.”

“You’ve talked me into it. It sounds better than a night at home alone.”

“I’ve had way too many of those,” Istav remarked. “First on Delta IV after Ilta died, and even more here. I know you haven’t been here long, but you will quickly notice that high-ranking Deltans don’t often visit the embassy when they have business on Bel-Terra.”

“I can understand them not coming here to the Federation Embassy because of my heritage, but why wouldn’t Deltans visit their own embassy on this planet?”

“Same reason.”

“Because your father isn’t Deltan?” The way Raijrh said it, it sounded more like a statement than a question.

“Not just me,” Istav replied. “Every member of the Embassy contingent. It’s our ‘punishment.’ The five of us were given the choice of accepting assignment here or having our family secrets revealed to the general population of Delta IV. I was the last to arrive. My predecessor, like yours, had decided to resign his position and fully integrate into Bel-Terran society.”

“That’s... well, not right. To force you to leave Delta IV and move here. Especially since you’ve all spent time on Delta IV proving you have no issues interacting with other Deltans,” Raijrh scolded.

Istav shrugged. “You know how it is,” he remarked.

“All too well,” Raijrh replied with a nod. “Some things never change apparently.”

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It was over an hour later when the group arrived at their chosen eatery, the Laughing Dragon Tavern. Raijrh noticed a chalkboard on an easel with the hand-written words: *‘Tonight’s specials: Mexican food, margaritas and karaoke.’* Raijrh now realized what Istav had meant by ‘frivolity.’

This was something familiar, as Shifty Powers used to serve up margaritas and Mexican food in the private room frequented by the starbase command staff in the Bastogne Lodge aboard *Starbase 719*, while the karaoke was found to be more of a hit in the main room of the Lodge than amongst the command staff.

Walking into the establishment, Raijrh noticed the dragon that took up much of the entry. It was lounging on its belly with patrons having to pass under the open mouth of the creature to enter the dining room. The effigy looked like the creatures she had heard both Galen DuLac and Anya Valerin Xaran speak of living on the planet Avalon. Dragons also appeared in many different forms in many different cultures in Terran myths as well, so it was little surprise one would turn up on Bel-Terra as well.

As the others passed into the establishment, fire streamed out of the dragon’s mouth and onto those passing beneath. “A hologram,” Istav offered.

With a smirk, Raijrh countered, “I would hope so.”

Istav laughed at Raijrh’s attempt as humor. “It’s all part of this restaurant’s charm.”

As they walked under and were surrounded by the holographic flames, Raijrh and Istav passed into the restaurant where the Deltan embassy staff were apparently regulars. They were greeted by the staff and other regulars as they were shown to a table large enough for all of them. As everyone sat down, the waitress said, “The bartender is making two pitchers of margaritas for starters. Will your guest be joining you or does she wish something different?”

“I’ll partake in the margaritas as well,” Raijrh replied.

Shortly after the drinks were served, food was brought to the table. It was obvious Istav and his staff usually ate the same menu items on Mexican night, as the waitress brought the food out without anyone even ordering. After the group ate, and was well into their sixth pitcher of the tequila infused drink, they started discussing the karaoke. The entire party, Raijrh included, was well on their way to being intoxicated, though in Raijrh’s case more from the sucrose in the margaritas than the alcohol. For the Deltans, most Bel-Terran establishments refused to serve Ferengi synthahol, their customers preferring actual grain and fruit alcohols.

Isolde and Iorin, two of Istav’s staff, had agreed to take turns singing on stage in front of the patrons, but wanted Istav to participate as well. He started to refuse, citing the presence of their guest as an excuse, as some of the other tables started joining in the singing.

“Don’t use me as an excuse,” Raijrh said to him. “If you want to participate, then do so.”

Istav finally relented and added his name to the list. He was soon standing before the crowd, mangling an Andorian pop song that had been popular thirty years earlier and causing even Raijrh to laugh. After a couple of hours and everyone who desired having their turn at the microphone, the group departed the restaurant and hailed a transport to return to the Embassy Row complex.

Just over an hour later, Raiajh stepped out from the ground transport in front of the Federation Embassy, followed by Istav. He closed the door behind him and the taxi pulled away. Istav walked by Raiajh's side to the embassy doors and into the entry hall. At the stairs, she stopped and turned to him.

"Thank you for this evening. I can't remember the last time I had such fun."

"Then I was successful in my mission," he replied with a smile. "I hope I was successful enough that you would be willing to enjoy another dinner with me later in the week."

"If I can arrange activities for my youngest children, then I would be willing. I cannot stick them on my staff every time I wish to go out."

Without thinking, Raiajh began to climb the stairs alongside Istav. They reached the top at the third level and walked to the large apartment set aside for the Ambassador and her family. There they stopped and said their farewells for the evening and Istav reached down to kiss her goodnight. As intoxication is wont to do, it lowered both their inhibitions and they got lost in the moment, neither hearing the door open behind them, that is until they heard someone behind them speak loudly.

"Get your hands off my mother!"

The voice surprised both Raiajh and Istav. When she last spoke with her son Julian, he said he was staying at the college for the remainder of the week and into the weekend. The fact he was present at the Federation Embassy was unexpected. Istav quickly complied with the verbal demand and took a step back.

"We'll talk soon," he said and headed down the stairs to exit the embassy building. Meanwhile, Raiajh, both embarrassed and upset at what had happened, turned and faced her son.

"What was that about?"

Raiajh pushed past her son to enter the apartment, and he followed as he answered, "It's too soon. Did what you had with Dad mean so little? He's only been gone a few months! You should still be mourning him!"

"Julian, that's not fair," Raiajh said to her son. "We've been mourning him for over a year; from the day we first believed him gone. When he DID come back to us, it was only for a few hours and he was gone again, this time permanently. Even your Aunt Jill agreed we shouldn't start the mourning period all over because of it."

"You're both wrong! We should have mourned him again! He died trying to get back to all of us! Isn't that worth something? If Aunt Jill didn't feel anything more, you still should have!"

"Julian, it has already been decided. Your father and I discussed this during those few brief hours he had back with us. Even he agreed that we shouldn't go backwards in our emotions. It has always been his desire that if something happened to him, that I should try and make a life for myself again. He knew we had grieved for him and that I nearly died in the process. Is that what you want? For me to nearly die again? Because it isn't what your father wanted."

"Of course I don't want that!" Julian protested. "I just feel you should wait an appropriate amount of time."

"The appropriate amount of time is not for you to decide, nor is it open for debate. If you wish to continue to mourn your father, that is your right. I didn't seek to begin anything tonight. I was given an opportunity to not be alone this evening and I took it. And after your little outburst this evening, I seriously doubt anything more will come of it. Since Istav is the representative from Delta IV to Bel-Terra, I will need to deal with him in a professional manner. That means one way or another, he isn't going away because of your little outburst.

"I'm not sure what happened tonight, anyway," Raiajh admitted. "It was a kiss. We probably got a little carried away, but we are both adults and it is our decision to make. Definitely not yours. If I decide to get involved with someone, whether it be with Istav or someone else, I want you to respect him. You don't have to be friends, or even have to like him, but you must respect him! It that clear?"

"Yes, but I don't have to like it," Julian replied. "I still feel that you are dishonoring Dad's memory."

"Julian, I don't need to justify my actions to you. I miss your father very much, but that doesn't change the fact that he's gone. I'm not going to stop living my life because of it. I'm not going to cater to other people desires because they don't like what I am doing. And that includes you. This conversation is finished."

Julian grumbled something that Raiajh could not quite make out and stormed off to his room. When Raiajh awoke the following morning, he had already left. It did not surprise her in the least when Lady Val contacted her a few minutes into her breakfast to let her know that Julian had arrived safely.

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Raiajh spent the majority of that day in her office catching up on paperwork and reading through communiqués. At the moment, she did not have an assistant to help with her tasks. She did not mind as it gave her a chance to settle into her new role. She thought about the previous evening, and she hated that Julian had left on such a sour note, but hoped that after talking with his uncle and aunts he would have a better attitude about the situation.

Late in the day, shortly before she was planning to leave her office, there was a knock at the door. She looked up and granted entry. The door opened part-way and instead of someone coming through the egress, all that appeared was a large bouquet of white and pink carnations and the hand that was holding it. From the other side of the door, she heard Istav say, "Peace offering."

"You can come in the rest of the way," Raiajh said. "The flowers are a wonderful surprise; but you aren't the one who needs to provide a peace offering."

"After last night, it felt warranted. Even more so after the face-to-face conversation I had with your brother-in-law. A most interesting individual, that Hans Spaak."

"I'll give you that," Raiajh agreed. "I'm sorry about what happened at the end of the night. Julian didn't tell me he was coming home from University. He's still upset about his father's death. He feels that since he is still mourning, everyone else should be as well."

"It's fine," Istav said. "It's not like there aren't children involved. What about you? You aren't upset that I kissed you?"

"It wasn't expected, but I'm not upset that it happened," Raiajh replied. "It made me realize that I may be ready to try again."

"That sounds hopeful," Istav said. "Aren't you the least bit curious about my conversation with your brother-in-law?"

"Not particularly. Sylvan gave him a task to watch over me and make sure that I live my life. Hans Spaak is a man that takes his assigned tasks seriously. Considering you're here for personal reasons means he finds you worthy."

"He reminded me a bit of my father," Istav admitted. "Someone with a strong sense of family. I was a little surprised about being put to the third degree considering we didn't even consider it a date. When he told me that your son was worried about things, I realized you probably had nothing to do with his unexpected visit."

"I didn't, and I wouldn't even have mentioned it to Hans," Raiajh stated. "But when it comes to Julian, he can be quite a bit like his father sometimes. Not to mention he was probably hoping that Hans would find some flaw in you that he would find objectionable, or at the least side with him that I haven't mourned long enough."

"Your son's actions last night didn't surprise me," Istav said. "And as for your brother in law, I doubt he would find anything objectionable; except for the fact I lived on Delta IV for many years without anyone realizing I was different from the others."

Raiajh shook her head at Istav comment. "Having a non-Deltan parent isn't a flaw. It took me many years to realize that."

"Neither I nor my mother hid the fact my father was not Deltan, but we never broadcast it either," Istav remarked. "And since, unlike you, I look Deltan, no one questioned that I might be different. When I first told Ilta, I was worried, but didn't need to be. She didn't care. We had ten great years and a wonderful little girl. But when she died, the Deltan doctors tried to make me feel like it was my fault because of my human father. That was just over two years ago. I was offered my current position even though I was still grieving at the time. It was made very clear that it wasn't something I could turn down if I wanted to keep my 'secret'."

“It’s a shame that you were coerced into this,” Raiajh said. “It probably wouldn’t surprise me if I contacted smaller Deltan consulates like yours and was told the same story. It always intrigued my mother and later myself as to why Delta IV established these consulates on planets where other Federation member worlds rarely set up a diplomatic presence. Now it makes sense. The Deltan government makes this look like a great thing to their people, when it is actually something far worse. What has your mother thought of your appointment?”

“She was against it. Asked the Council for more time before I left, but they refused. She moved here to Bel-Terra with me to make sure I recovered from my grief. Afterward, she made a life for herself here. Now, she works as an engineering instructor and occasionally takes care of my daughter Irsia. Mainly I rely on a nanny for her now that she has started pre-school. And we’ve all adapted and like living here. I even have property I own on the coast; although I let my father live there on a permanent basis. What about your children?”

“Right now, Corrine and Korin are the only two I have at with me here on a full-time basis. Julian stays at his university most days. That is when he doesn’t make unexpected visits. Katrina is a 4<sup>th</sup>-class midshipman at Starfleet Academy, and expects to graduate from Starfleet Medical in the Class of 2400. The two oldest, the two we adopted after Sylvan’s brother Korin and sister-in-law Ellie died, are married and have their own lives on Betazed. Charissa helps with the continuing post-war rebuilding efforts and Jonathan is assisting at his great-grandfather’s vineyard located there.”

“And the grandchild?” Istav asked.

The mention of Raiajh’s grandchild brought the emotions of happiness to her eyes. “Jonathan’s wife Anya mentioned that there will be a second by the end of the year. Charissa has always said she never wanted any, so for now it’s just Misha.”

Not wanting to get into the finer details of Ambassador Raiajh’s family tree, Istav changed the topic by asking, “Do you think your son will come home tonight?”

“I doubt it,” Raiajh replied. “Like his father, it takes time for him to work things out regarding his emotions. He knows he’s a welcome guest at the home of his uncle and aunts. And Corrine and Korin are with their grandparents until tomorrow night. Why? Did you have something in mind?”

“Dinner?” Istav asked in way of answer. “There are many restaurants in the area of Embassy Row alone that are great. Any cuisine you can think of all within a few minutes by ground vehicle.”

Raiajh smiled as she answered, “I’d like that.”

**The End**