

# A Death in the Family

by Mistral



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## SECTOR 001. EARTH.

The Breen ships decloaked in Earth orbit. Defensive platforms over the Western Hemisphere suffered massive power drains right as the ships appeared. The first salvos were on their way to the surface before Starfleet Command even knew the Breen were there. Emergency shields protected many of the intended targets. Many, but not all. Paris, Moscow, Nairobi and Beijing were spared. Geneva's system was in an unfortunate maintenance cycle. 300,000 died. Mexico City suffered a near-miss that disturbed the fault line running underneath it. 45,000 died in the resultant quakes before geo-stabilizers could be activated to dissipate the stresses. And in San Francisco, a Changeling infiltrator managed to take the security shield completely offline. Half a million perished in the first ten seconds of the attack. It was December 24, 2375. Christmas would not be a merry occasion.

Rear Admiral Owen Paris could barely see through all of the dust and smoke rising up from the ruins of Starfleet Headquarters. Massive sections of the vast complex were nothing more than rubble and fires had far outstripped the remaining fire suppression systems. He rubbed his face to get some of the dust out of his eyes and his hand came away bloody. It was only a minor head wound and he dismissed it from his mind. He'd gotten lucky. When the attack hit, he'd just left the Admiralty and was crossing the open plaza in front of it. Admirals Cox, Vushu and n'Battar hadn't been nearly as fortunate. They had still been in conference on the top floor of the fifteen-story building. What was left of the Admiralty now stood only two stories high. He made his way over to the wreckage and began searching for survivors.

Superintendent Bell, Head of Starfleet Academy, stared at Pike Memorial Hall in horror, unnoticed tears running down her face. The building had taken a direct hit and black, gritty smoke billowed out of the hole in the roof. She knew what that smoke was made of. Some of the cadets who'd chosen to remain on campus during the holiday break had put together a Christmas choral performance for their fellow students. It had been in full swing at the Hall when the attack began, attended by hundreds. In shock, dazed and slightly sickened by the odor of burning meat that hung in the air, she stumbled backwards. Her legs bumped against one of the stone benches that were scattered throughout the Academy gardens, and she sat down abruptly. Tearing her eyes away from the soul-searing view in front of her, she looked instead at the gardens for a moment of peace amidst the chaos. She saw a chunk of masonry crushing flowers in a nearby flower bed. "Boothby isn't going to be too happy about that," an incongruous part of her mind thought.

In orbit, Picard sat in his darkened Ready Room, hands on his knees. He was facing his fish tank, but he didn't see it. He was seeing instead, over and over, the fire from the infiltrated Orbital Defense Platform as it tore ship after ship apart. In his mind's eye the scene was backlit by the detonations on the Earth's surface from the Breen bombardment. Again, he saw the *Choctaw* moving in support of *Enterprise* as they attempted to silence the Platform's traitorous guns. Again, he watched helplessly as *Enterprise's* sister ship, mortally wounded, rammed the satellite to finally silence it. Whole families had died in that moment. The *Choctaw* had only been in the Sol system to drop off dependents in accordance with the War Footing directive. Children had given their lives so that soldiers aboard other ships would live. His black reverie was broken by a chirp from his combadge.

"Picard here."

"Captain, the preliminary casualty reports are coming in from Starfleet Command." Riker's voice sounded strained. "I'm forwarding them to your desk now." Picard nodded his head dismally, although there was no one to see.

"Very good, Number One," he replied, turning to his screen. He began to run through the depressing litany until one name caught his eye in passing. He hurriedly scrolled back up and then stopped. He rocked back in his chair, stunned. "Dear God, no!" he whispered.

## A FEW HOURS BEFORE...

Superintendent Bell was addressing a mixed group of cadets and faculty on the Academy parade grounds.

"...and *Enterprise* have all begun beaming down every last person they can spare for S&R. The *Rainier*, the *Cochrane* and the *Lao Chin* have sent every geology expert they have to Mexico City to begin inspection of the geostabilizers. They'll need to make sure the initial quake didn't damage them as we're expecting aftershocks for some time to come. Emergency medical facilities have been established in the bays of Tucker Memo- "

"Commodore Bell! Commodore Bell!" The Bolian cadet ran up to her, panting and gasping.

"What is it, Cadet?" Bell asked.

The girl got her breathing under control. "Captain Murat needs you to meet him over by the Mess Hall. North entrance. He said it was important."

Bell nodded to her. "Ok, Cadet. I'll have *Enterprise* beam me over." Raising her voice, she called out to the assembled crowd, "You have your assignments, people! Get a move on!"

Tapping her combadge she said, “Bell to *Enterprise*, I need a sight-to-sight transport to the north entrance of the Academy Mess Hall.”

A distant voice replied, “Yes, Commodore.”

She dematerialized, only to re-appear a fraction of a second later in the midst of a somber cluster of Fleet personnel. No one spoke as she strode over to Captain Murat. His usually bland Vulcan expression was overlaid with a mask of stone. Before she could speak, he pointed towards the crumbled ruin of the entranceway. She looked towards the body half-buried in the doorway. The tears that she’d been holding back through grim necessity suddenly doubled their efforts to burst forth. Her knees wavered momentarily, and she felt Murat’s hand on her shoulder, steadying her. She covered her face with her hands in grief.

## DEEP SPACE 9, DENORIOS BELT, BAJORAN SYSTEM.

The Promenade usually bustled with activity and echoed with voices, but as the news came in, quiet groups of people huddled around the communication screens on the walls. No one hawked their wares, nobody shopped, no one played the role of gawking tourist. They all just watched the Starfleet News Service broadcast from Earth.

In his office, Sisko watched along with everyone else. A young, blond human female was speaking. “And now we go live to the parade grounds at Starfleet Academy where Admiral Owen Paris is about to make a statement about this morning’s attack.” The camera panned towards a podium set up on a small riser. It was an hour or two before sunset and Paris was bathed in its golden light. He was flanked on one side by the UFP flag, on the other by the flag of Earth. Sisko noticed that he had a bandage, like a misplaced eye patch, above one eye. “At seven forty-five AM Pacific time five Breen ships de-cloaked in Earth orbit. With the help of a Changeling infiltrator on board one of our Orbital Defense Platforms they attacked the cities of Earth. Although nearby Starfleet vessels responded immediately, the Breen vessels were able to get off several rounds each. This was due in part to the weapons fire of the subverted ODP, which held our ships off for crucial seconds. The platform was finally destroyed when Captain Setahl of the *USS Choctaw* sacrificed his ship and crew to remove the threat.”

Sisko heard a wail come through his doors from Ops. Flipping the broadcast to ‘Mute’, he went to investigate. What he saw surprised him. Ezri Dax, one of his most resilient officers, was crumpled into a heap behind the Tactical station sobbing uncontrollably. Kira was trying to comfort her although that wasn’t really one of her strengths. “What happened to her?” Sisko asked, bewildered.

"I don't know," Kira replied, "She was going over the preliminary casualty reports, checking for relatives of station personnel and...." She trailed off, still kneeling next to Dax.

Sisko cocked his head slightly and stepped over to Dax's console. The listing Dax had been looking at was still on the screen, paused. He examined it for a moment, then his eyes widened with surprise. "Boothby," he breathed.

Dax just kept crying in Kira's arms.

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Sisko was looking up at the hulking Klingon on the Ops viewscreen. Kira stood next to him. "General Martok, while we're gone, you'll be in command of all defensive forces in this sector. All offensive operations have been suspended for the next few days to accommodate the volume of temporary leaves requested. I hope you understand, with so many command-level officers absent, any Federation vessels you call on are likely being run by junior officers. Although generally competent, few if any of them have reached the level of 'miracle worker' yet. Starfleet is going to be relying on the Klingon Defense Force to hold the line."

Martok nodded sagely at him. "I'm aware of the conditions I'll be operating under. I promise you, Captain, we'll still be here when you return."

Sisko gave one of his famous grins. "Thank you, General. You've put my mind at ease." He started to turn away, but Martok wasn't finished.

"Captain Sisko, if I may." Sisko paused and looked back at him. "Captain, what is so special about this man that Starfleet would allow so many of their command officers to leave the line in a time of war to attend his funeral? It is my understanding he was just a lowly gardener."

Sisko glanced at Dax, and she gave him a sad smile. "General, he was just a 'lowly gardener', as you put it, but the flowers and plants he nurtured walk amongst the stars."

Martok gave him a long, thoughtful stare. "As you say, Captain. May he find his place amongst the honored dead in Sto'Vo'Kor."

"Thank you, General. Sisko out." When the screen went dark, he turned to Dax. "Get O'Brien and meet me aboard the *Defiant*. I have to say goodbye to Jake."

"Yes, Benjamin," she said, then headed for the lift.

Sisko sighed and picked up the small valise resting on the floor near his feet. "Major Kira?" She glanced over at him. "The station is yours. We'll see you in a few days." She nodded. He took a last look around and went to the lift himself.

## CARDASSIAN CENTRAL COMMAND, CARDASSIA PRIME, DOMINION TERRITORY.

Gul Damar strode into the meeting room. Weyoun and Legate Kal were already there waiting for him.

"What do you have for us, Damar?" Kal sounded slightly bored.

"Our listening posts along the Federation border have been picking up some unusual intel over the last couple of days."

Weyoun's eyes narrowed. "Unusual how, Damar?" he asked.

Kal looked more attentive. "There's been a high amount of traffic between Starfleet vessels pertaining to someone or something called 'Boothby'. We've caught a few unencoded messages and the question 'Are you going to the funeral?' is common to all of them. Also, the Obsidian Order reports that a number of starship captains have left their commands to return to Earth, often taking their seconds-in-command with them. Starfleet as a whole has instituted a defensive posture along the entire border of conflict, and we haven't had a single report of an incursion by Federation forces in two days. Interestingly enough, the Klingons have actually increased their reinforcement of the Federation line."

"Boothby?" Weyoun asked. "That is interesting. I am familiar with the more prominent individuals in Starfleet and Federation circles, but I've never heard of this 'Boothby'. What do you make of it, Kal?"

"Well, after the Breen attack the Earthers are certainly busy arranging funerals about now, but I can't say I've encountered anyone named 'Boothby' either. What worries me is this shifting of Federation forces, not to mention the increased Klingon presence. And why would Starfleet recall so many top officers all at once? It doesn't make sense."

"Perhaps," Weyoun began slowly, "the Federation was more shaken up by the Breen joining us than we expected. This change in posture could be the first step towards a negotiated end to the hostilities. I think I might send a message through the Romulans to the Federation President asking if they would like to sue for peace."

"There is another possibility," interjected Kal. "This phrase, 'Are you going to the funeral?' could be a code itself. What if they are about to deploy some radical new technology or



weapon? It would make sense to recall their top officers in order to train them on its usage. Having the Klingons hold things together while they do this also seems reasonable.”

Weyoun and Damar both looked as though they had bitten into something sour.

“I hate to say it, Kal,” said Weyoun, “But you could be right.” Addressing Damar, he continued, “You might want to have the Order reach out to their contacts in the Orion Syndicate. See what they can find out about this ‘Boothby’. In the meantime, I will consult with the Founders to find out what, if anything, they may want to do about all of this.” Nervously, he exited the room.

Damar took a deep breath to calm his nerves as he looked at Kal. “I hope you’re wrong and this turns out to be nothing in the end.”

“As do I, Damar, as do I.”

## SECTOR 001. STARFLEET ACADEMY, DECEMBER 27TH, 2375

Earlier in the day there had been a memorial service for Boothby on the parade grounds. That had been the only place large enough to accommodate all of the Starfleet personnel that had attended. Admirals and ensigns, cadets and captains had all taken a few moments to relate anecdotes and stories of Boothby and their encounters with him during their time at the Academy. For the actual funeral, though, attendance had been restricted to those of commanders’ rank and above because it was being held in the Academy gardens. Command didn’t want hordes of people disrespectfully trampling Boothby’s flowers. Even so, there had to be at least a hundred people at the Grand Pavilion for the service proper. A grave had been dug in the meadow that encircled the Pavilion and Boothby’s casket, a wooden one, rested beside it. The meadow itself was ringed with trees, most of which Boothby had planted.

A tired Commander Riker looked around at the assembled funeral party. “Quite an impressive turnout,” he thought. From where he was standing, he could see a number of renowned captains, including Jellico, De Soto, Ramirez, Solok and Z’aheva. All bordered on the status of “Living Legends” in most people’s minds. Riker wasn’t sure if he’d ever seen so many admirals in one place at one time, either. Admiral Nechayev was standing at the head of the coffin preparing to perform the eulogy. Paris, Ross and Savar were near her. Even Admiral N’gana, the former Head of Starfleet, was there despite having been retired for the last twenty or so years. Riker caught a glimpse of Worf in the crowd. Instead of the Klingon uniform he wore on detached duty with the KDF he had on Starfleet dress. “I’ll have to look him up after the service,” Riker noted to himself.

Nechayev cleared her throat and the quiet murmuring of the crowd subsided. As she opened her mouth to speak a robed figure stepped through the tree line and into the meadow. The robe was a plain, off-white color and loose enough that the hood and sleeves hid any distinguishing features as the person strode towards the gathered assembly. Everyone waited until whoever it was had crossed the field to stand in front of Nechayev. The figure slowly drew back its hood and a collective gasp arose. Riker's eyes widened in surprise.

"I, too, was a friend of Boothby's many years ago. I would be honored, Admiral, if you would permit me to speak," said Ambassador Spock.

Mutely, as if afraid to say anything, Alynna Nechayev nodded her permission and stepped aside. She understood exactly what it had taken for him to journey all of the way from Romulus. Spock replaced her at the head of the casket and lifted his face to address everyone before him. "While we are mourning the loss of our friend, others are rejoicing to meet him behind the veil. He who has gone, so we but cherish his memory, abides with us, more potent, nay, more present than the living man. To live in hearts, we leave behind is not to die. What we have done for others and the world remains and is immortal." Spock looked at the many officers around him. "Years ago, when I taught at this Academy, I would walk the gardens during the breaks between classes. On many occasions I noticed one of the gardeners chatting with various students. I finally spoke with him one day and asked him why they stopped to converse. He told me that the pressures of acquiring their education sometimes forced the young people into situations where they made bad decisions or could not decide at all. He said the students sometimes found his perspective useful, since it was so different from theirs. When I asked him what this difference was, he said," here Spock closed his eyes, remembering, "Mr. Spock, all of these kids are eager to get their education over with and get out into space. They rush to their classes; they rush to finish school and they rush out into the great unknown. Sometimes they rush right into the arms of trouble. They aren't necessarily bad kids, but anyone can make a bad decision when they're in a hurry. I grow things. When you grow things there is no rushing the process, so I tend to take the long view. You need to have patience, too. I guess those traits make me a good listener. I know from years of experience that it makes me see things these kids don't. So, when they come to me with a problem I try to help. Sometimes they don't come to me. I get around this campus and I see a lot of what is going on. Call me nosy if you want. If I see someone with a problem, I'm not afraid to butt in and give them a piece of un-asked for advice." Spock opened his eyes. "Some time later I found myself with a difficult situation and I brought the problem to Boothby. His solution was both logical and effective. It was also one I had not considered. I gather from the number of people present here today that I was not the only one he helped." Spock paused for a moment and reflected. "This coffin is made of wood and will one day mix its atoms with

the soil. Boothby shall also mix with the soil and nurture these gardens in death as he did in life." He stepped back and signaled to the two assistant gardeners standing discreetly off to the side. They came forward and carefully lowered the casket into the ground. They then picked up a couple of shovels but before they could begin filling in the grave Spock pulled an American Beauty rose from his sleeve and dropped it in. Several other officers also tossed flowers in. When no one else came forward Spock nodded to the gardeners and bowed his head. The funeral party remained where it was in silent respect while the grave was filled. When the gardeners were finished, they, too, stepped back. Spock lifted his head once more. "I ask that you remain a moment longer, please," he said.

A few people seemed surprised, but everyone held their place. Spock lifted his sleeve to his mouth and murmured into it. A second later the whine of a transporter could be heard, and a large crate appeared next to him. As he began undoing its fastenings he said, "Boothby loved to grow his flowers. I think it only fitting that his final resting place be turned into a bed of flowers." The sides of the crate dropped away to reveal neatly stacked racks of flowers in tiny pots and a large box of hand tools. Spock took a trowel and a single pot and planted it right in the center of Boothby's grave. Setting the tool down, he got back up and brushed his hands together lightly. There were dirt stains on his robe. No one said a word. Then Captains Picard and Jellico, acting almost as one, walked over to get what they needed. Everyone else followed. There in the meadow, on a cold Winter's Day, these heroes of the Federation, these explorers, warriors and statesmen dressed in their very finest, they got down on their hands and knees, they turned the soil, they dug the holes, and they planted a garden in honor of their friend and mentor.