

**A Deep Space Nine
Short Story**

IMPLANT



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Julian Bashir strode into Captain Sisko's office with a light step. This wasn't a formal staff briefing, and so Julian had no idea why he had been summoned. He just felt that this was a casual meeting and he enjoyed speaking with the captain, especially outside of any formal meeting where he might spy a glimpse of Captain Sisko's true self. He felt that he and the captain were kindred spirits, both being high-functioning professionals. Not that the rest of the staff weren't competent, no, not at all. It's just that Julian liked to think that he and the captain were on a level just slightly above the rest.

"You wanted to see me, sir?" Julian said. He enjoyed the formalities, the 'sirs', the nods of deference, the uniforms. There was comfort in the structure. But he liked the departure of all things formal once all of the ceremonial steps had been accomplished and he expected the captain to break into a grin and motion him over to the small couch next to his commanding, formal desk.

"Please, take a seat, doctor," Sisko said. He didn't indicate the couch, but one of the chairs that fronted his desk console.

Julian nodded. So, this was not to be as informal as he had first thought. "What can I do for you, Captain?"

Sisko sat as well, with the expanse of the desk between them. The captain leaned forward, placing his elbows on the desk and interlacing his fingers. His brows lowered. "Have you heard of the L'Tem?"

For a moment, Julian didn't know if "L'Tem" referred to a planet, a people, a social club, or even a Federation agency for that matter. But then something tugged at the corner of his thoughts, and he met Sisko's steady gaze. "Wait," he said slowly. "From the Gamma Quadrant. Traders of a sort, if memory serves."

Sisko nodded. "Yes, traders, of a sort. Not much like the Ferengi, however."

"So, honest traders, then?" Julian allowed himself a grin. Both were always ready with a cutting comment, especially where the Ferengi were concerned.

Sisko did not return Julian's grin, which made the doctor regret his comment. This was obviously a serious matter.

"They don't deal in commodities," the captain said. "They only engage in trade if they own the intellectual rights to what they are selling."

Julian furrowed his brow and held up a finger. "I recall now. They've been said to have purchased the rights to transporter-based mining technology which the Federation wants to use."

"Yes, precisely. But they own other technology. Medical implants, for example."

So that's where this conversation was going. "Implants," Julian said, adding a nod. "Ah, yes! They have created medical implants that address a variety of diseases and neuro-convulsive disorders. I have read some of the literature, but, Captain, the L'Tem do not allow anyone, scientist or otherwise, to review their research or validate their techniques. Most unusual in medical circles."

Sisko nodded. "I understand it's part of their culture and how they protect their investments. Not unlike the way the Romulans protect their cloaking technology."

"This is dangerous, Captain. Science relies on peer review to validate findings. When we share results, we all gain, and our knowledge grows all the quicker when secrecy is removed. All members of the Federation uphold these basic principles."

"I am aware, Doctor," Sisko said in his deep baritone. "In this instance, we're not being asked to validate their technology, but merely to provide them with room to conduct an implant." Sisko opened his hands, palms facing Julian. "That's all."

Julian stiffened. "Here? On this station? In my medical bay?"

Sisko nodded. "Yes, Doctor. The Federation has already given its approval. The L'Tem will be coming through the

wormhole tomorrow. The patient will be arriving later today.”

“And may I know who this patient is?”

Sisko swiveled his desk monitor so Julian could view the image of a human woman. “She is Yonce Trizore, a Federation diplomat of some renown. She was pivotal in the renegotiation of the Aquera system treaty.”

Julian nodded. The image on the captain’s screen showed a mature woman, obviously human, with sharp green eyes and perhaps the hint of a grin on her narrow lips. Altogether, the image was that of a person you could trust; a professional who, nonetheless, enjoyed a good joke. “I recall,” he said as his eyes looked down in thought. “So, Mitarre’s disease, then? The L’Tem have a cure for the terminal neural disorder?”

Sisko hiked his eyebrows. “Yes, precisely. I understand that it’s always fatal.”

“Yes. It usually afflicts people later in life. It attacks their brain stem and is quite thorough in its destruction.” Julian leaned forward and met Sisko’s gaze. “The L’Tem have an implant that will address Mitarre’s disease?”

“So I’m told.”

He leaned back, his eyes searching the dark ceiling for some way to make sense of this revelation. “The medical community would welcome this advance, of course. I would appreciate an opportunity to learn about their process.”

“I’m afraid, Doctor, that this will not be possible.”

“What do you mean?” He leaned forward and for an instant he wondered if he had sounded too sharp with his captain. Sometimes, he knew, his thirst for knowledge rode roughshod over his sense of professional demeanor.

“Your responsibility will be limited to seeing to the patient’s vital signs during the procedure and nothing more.” His captain’s tone didn’t betray any irritability.

“So, if something goes wrong, it will be on my conscience? Captain, this is extremely unusual and I’m afraid, without more information, I cannot allow this procedure to take place in my medical bay. I’m certain you understand.”

Julian watched with dread as the captain’s jaw muscles tighten. The doctor felt his own defenses rise as he anticipated Sisko’s response.

“Doctor,” the captain said, his voice firm, but low. “This has the approval of the Federation and the backing of Starfleet Command, as well as the Bajoran government. Let me assure you that this procedure will occur, and it will take place on the *station’s* medical bay.” His emphasis on the medical bay belonging to the station and not to its chief medical officer wasn’t lost on Julian.

“I see,” Julian said. He took a breath to calm himself. What he was about to say might place his entire Starfleet career at risk. “I’m afraid I cannot participate, Captain. I am not familiar with the technology or with the procedure itself. I don’t even know the theoretical basis for this cure.

If I could just see the implant, scan it, learn about its functioning—”

“Impossible,” Sisko interrupted with irritation plain in his voice. “The L’Tem protect their technology very well. The implant is shielded against all forms of sensor probes. They will not tolerate any attempt to penetrate their device security. I have been assured of that. In fact, the L’Tem see any attempt to probe any of their technologies as an act of war.”

Julian nodded slowly as he considered airing his next point, but he felt he had to have his say. “And the fact that the Federation wants to use their mining technology has nothing to do with this questionable decision?” Julian felt the heat rise in his chest. He had to breathe deeply to maintain outward control. This was, after all, his commander he was speaking with.

With an arched brow, Sisko continued, his voice smooth, but his eyes riveted to Bashir. “No doubt other issues tie into this. But there’s one thing that overrides all else.”

“And that would be?”

Sisko leaned forward, his eyes fixed on the doctor. “I am giving you a direct order to participate in monitoring the patient.”

Julian swallowed. He had hoped to strengthen his bond with the captain, but that hope vanished in an instant. To violate a direct order would, indeed, affect his career. While

he was a medical officer, the word 'officer' meant that he had certain obligations to his chain of command.

After clearing his throat, Julian nodded. "I understand, sir." He fought hard to keep his tone flat.

A sea of people swelled around and past the small, round table occupied by Julian and Miles O'Brien, the station's chief engineer and a close friend of the doctor. Both were in their Starfleet uniforms, having just ended their shifts. Cries of "Dabo!" punctuated the din every few minutes, overwhelming the already-loud background noise that was ever-present most times at Quark's establishment.

"It's so frustrating, chief," Julian said as he stared down at his drink. Bajorans, a few Klingons, humans, and a dizzying variety of other aliens streamed through the tables at Quark's, all looking for a good time. "Here we are, admittedly one of the most advanced societies in the known universe, and I can't get a glimpse of what may be an enormous development in medical science. Me!"

Miles lifted his beer stein and took a very long pull as his eyes scanned the room as if looking for an escape. A lithe Dabo girl sauntered past, caught his eye, which caused him to suddenly look away.

"It isn't right, chief. Medical science advances when breakthroughs are shared with other scientists. Why, in the hands of enough scientists, any moderate advance can be

catapulted into an entirely new discipline.” Julian ignored his beer. “But keeping a discovery a secret to protect profits is obscene. Medical science isn’t supposed to be a profit-seeking venture. We’re meant to help others.”

Mile nodded. “Engineering is a lot like that. Where would we be if societies hadn’t shared warp drive developments?”

“Exactly!” Julian lifted his face to look into the eye of his drinking partner. “You understand my frustration! Keeping these developments shrouded in secrecy is wrong. It’s wrong!”

Miles took another pull of his beer. “Unless you look at it through the eyes of another species. Take the Ferengi. Suppose they had some technology that no one else had. What would they do with it?”

Julian groaned. “Please, let’s not drag those greedy trolls into this discussion.”

“All I’m saying is that some cultures don’t share our ethics. They are raised with a different set of governing rules, sort of like a different operating system. As much as we hate to admit it, we make allowances for these differences. It’s all part of getting along.” Miles finished his beer and plunked the stein down onto the table. “I’m heading home to get some sleep.”

“Hold on a second, Chief, please,” Julian said.

“Julian,” he pleaded. “Let this go. There’s nothing you can do about it.”

"Chief, I'm responsible for my patient. Would you agree with that statement?"

Miles shrugged and looked at Julian through narrowed eyes. "I guess so."

Leaning forward, Julian continued. "As a physician, it's my responsibility to know what is happening with my patient at all times. I can handle most of that responsibility with the tools I have available in the medical bay, but," now Julian's eyes became intense, and Miles returned his gaze. "I can't exercise my responsibility in one crucial area."

"The implant," Miles said.

"The implant. How am I going to ensure my patient's well-being if I am completely blind to the one crucial element of this procedure that is critical to success? How, Chief?"

Miles shrugged. "I have no idea. But that's not your problem. You have your orders, and you can only function within those parameters."

Julian lowered his head. He had hoped to coax out Miles' problem-solving enthusiasm that had served the chief's career so well. "I can't leave it at that. I took an oath, and I simply can't and won't draw a line around my responsibilities, a line that tells me that my professionalism and my sense of responsibility stops here."

"I don't know what I can say that will help, Julian."

Maybe a direct approach would work better. "Chief," he said, leaning forward. "Can't you modify the medical bay's

existing sensors and diagnostic equipment to focus on the implant and record whatever might be present? Maybe there's something I can see that will help me care for my patient."

"I suppose I could focus the linear oscillator arrays into a tighter beam and maybe that would give you something," he said.

Julian smiled. "How quickly can you make the modifications?" As soon as O'Brien's eyes met his, Julian knew the answer.

"Doctor," Miles said, "I can't do that without authorization and the captain would never agree. We'd violate half a dozen regulations, not to mention destroy any possibility of a relationship with the L'Tem. You know that."

Julian allowed his shoulders to drop in defeat. He felt exhausted, and yet he had to press on; he had to find a way. But how? He looked into his friend's eyes and knew he couldn't ask him to help. Involving Miles would place his career with Starfleet at risk and Julian had no right to do that.

"I recall," Julian began, "that the linear oscillators are located directly behind the tachyon baffles. Isn't that right, Chief?"

Miles cocked his head. "Yes. Those oscillators are adjustable, through software, of course, but only within certain hard-set parameters," he said. "The thing I won't do

is adjust the oscillators with a pulse driver at their T1 and T2 junctures. Doing that would increase their sensitivity."

"Oh, of course, you wouldn't do that, Chief. What else, in order, would you not do?"

Julian considered giving himself a small injection of adrenalin but decided against any artificial stimulants other than twice as many cups of Raktajino. After having been up all night modifying the sensors in the medical bay, he needed something to keep him reasonably sharp as he waited for his patient. The shuttle carrying Yonce Trizore had already docked with the station, and it would only be a matter of a few minutes before she arrived. As he waited, he strode the length of sickbay, back and forth, avoiding a busy technician from time to time and he only occasionally lifted his eyes to the sensor panels overhead. Initial tests indicated that he had properly followed O'Brien's instructions, giving the sensors a sensitivity that simply wouldn't work in normal situations; they'd reach right through a patient and focus on the bulkhead below because of their new intensity. But Julian hoped that his late-night work would help him satisfy his medical doubts and relieve his concerns.

He turned towards the entrance of the medical bay when he heard the telltale hum of the anti-grav stretcher. The bed hovered over the deck plates, gliding smoothly,

responding to a medical technician's guiding hand. Julian stepped forward as the technician slipped the stretcher into position under the array of medical sensors. With a touch of a button, the anti-grav stretcher lowered to the deck where it would be stable.

Julian suppressed the look of pity as he warmly met the ambassador's gaze. She bore little resemblance to her file images. Her eyes were sunken, but there was a spark in her green eyes, the remnants of her former life lived with such vigor. But the rest of her betrayed the seriousness of her condition. While the disease was neurological, it also drained the life out of her tissues, leaving her skin loose and jaundiced, her cheeks, so prominent in the images he had seen in her file, now sunken and shriveled.

Julian flashed a smile. "A pleasure to meet you, Ambassador," he said, hoping his grin convinced her of his sincerity.

"This is where," she said in a barely audible whisper, "I'm supposed to say, 'the pleasure is all mine,' but I must confess that I have not felt any pleasure whatsoever since this disease destroyed all joy in me." Her dry, cracked lips did not even offer a courteous smile.

"That's understandable." Julian searched for something positive to say. "It must be gratifying to know that soon you'll be cured of the disease, thanks to the L'Tem's technology."

"A technology you covet, no doubt, Doctor."

Julian stiffened. "I assure you that your health and safety are my primary concerns." While he meant that and always had, he admitted to himself that his desire for the secret knowledge of the L'Tem drove him to extremes. Oh, the suffering this technology could relieve! It seemed criminal to hold the knowledge in service to one race's commercial interests.

"Relax, Doctor Bashir," she whispered, her voice as thin as Allusian membrane. "You wouldn't be a competent physician if you weren't curious about the implant technology. I imagine being denied this knowledge is tearing you apart behind your friendly visage."

Flashing another grin, Doctor Bashir said, "Only on the inside, Ambassador."

"You and every member of the Federation. The L'Tem hold their technology tightly."

"So I've been told," he blurted.

"Ah. Do I detect some bitterness?" She squinted her eyes at him. "You're not in favor of this, are you?"

Julian hesitated. He did not especially want to burden the sickly ambassador with his concerns, but... "As a physician, I deplore black box technology. If I don't know what the device does and how, then I can't, with all professionalism, approve."

"That was the Federation's initial response when I told them of the L'Tem's technology and how it could manage my disease. They refused at first, and so you're not alone in

your reluctance.” Her voice grew even more strained and faint.

“But you managed to convince them, obviously.”

“They would have allowed me to die rather than allow the L’Tem to help me. After my decades of selfless service for the Federation, they’d let me die of this wretched disease.” Her eyes hardened for a moment. “I felt betrayed, as I’m sure you understand. It’s then that I used my diplomatic skills to broker an agreement. The L’Tem would agree to license their impressive transporter mining technology, but only if they were allowed to use the implant to save my life.”

Julian raised an eyebrow. “You inserted yourself into the middle of negotiations?” He paused. “You negotiated an agreement which permitted you to benefit from it.”

The ambassador tried to lift her head but couldn’t. “Listen carefully, Doctor. The Federation abandoned me until I had something they valued. Clearly, they didn’t value my life, so I forced their hand. Self-serving? Of course. But entirely necessary because of the Federation’s callous decision.”

Bashir nodded. “I see your point.”

He wasn’t at all convinced that he did understand but had to admit that her life hung in the balance of the agreement, and it wasn’t unusual for personal ethics to fall away when your life was at stake.

"Well, let's get on with the medical evaluation if that's all right with you?"

The ambassador nodded.

The following day, Julian waited for the L'Tem in the medical bay, with the ambassador ready, looking gaunt as she lay motionless on the bed, her eyes slowly scanning her surroundings.

The medical bay doors hissed open and three L'Tem shuffled in. They were a small species, perhaps half of Julian's height, and tended to wear bright primary colors and voluminous robes with endless folds. Their heads curved up from their narrow shoulders, riding on an elongated neck that thrust their tapered heads ahead of their body. The head itself tapered to a narrow peak where rows of furrows looked much like gathered, loose flesh. A slit of a mouth ran from side to side, twice as wide as the typical human mouth. Above the mouth, large, oval eyes, black as midnight, stared, their green-tinted lids twitching every second. Two pairs of slits just under their jawline opened and closed, providing oxygen to their bodies. Julian had learned that the L'Tem could be male or female depending on their age, and that there was no way to determine their sex by simply glancing at them.

Julian came around from his console to greet the L'Tem. "Welcome to Deep Space Nine," he said, adding a smile. They ignored him and kept their attention on the

ambassador. They didn't speak, not even to each other, but busied themselves by removing several instruments from a pair of grey cases carried by one of the L'Tem. Julian came closer, focusing on the instruments. One of the L'Tem placed a curved, smooth shield with no external accoutrements over the patient's head, and immediately the instrument came to life with unfamiliar symbols crawling along a side display. He noticed that the ambassador had slipped into unconsciousness.

"You may monitor the patient's vital signs," one of the L'Tem said, meeting Julian's gaze for a second and then turning away. "It is unnecessary, but we understand your desire to participate."

Standing at the monitoring station, Julian inspected the ambassador's vital signs again. Alarming because of her deteriorated state, but, for the moment, acceptably stable. As he glanced at the readouts, he heard a faint hum, and when he turned to watch the procedure, the L'Tem busied themselves at removing their equipment.

"Is it done?" Bashir asked, unable to keep incredulity from his voice.

"Yes," said one of the L'Tem.

No incision. No injection. No doubt it was part of their advanced transporter technology, Julian surmised. His desire to acquire the technology grew even stronger. The advances that would be possible with their technology!

The L'Tem said, "The body will immediately begin to repair the damage of her disease at what you would consider an accelerated rate. Within three hours she will regain consciousness. Her afflicted systems will correct all anomalies. She can travel whenever you desire. No harm will come to her." And with that, the L'Tem left the medical bay.

After the doctor had seen to his patient, having moved her to a more comfortable bed, he sequestered himself in his office and prepared to review the sensor information. With a few taps of his fingers, he set the sensor replay to the moment of the procedure. Overhead monitors leapt to life, although the shapes were indiscernible to the untrained eye, showing the world beyond the surface of things. Julian studied the moving images, having identified the insertion point, a place just above the limbic section of her brain. And then, there was a burst of energy, tightly focused, and the implant appeared. The modified sensors successfully pierced the implant's outer shell for a flash of a moment, a pinpoint of time when the implant was not yet fully formed and its shielding vulnerable, and what Julian saw revealed in that instant made him press closer to the monitor. His fingers deftly commanded the playback to repeat, again and again, and each time Julian's gaze hardened. He reviewed that pinpoint of revelation over and

over, for several hours, running scenarios in his mind and querying the computer for assistance.

“How certain are you of your findings, doctor?” Sisko said, his deep voice reverberating through the captain’s office. Dr. Bashir stood ramrod straight before the captain’s desk as if waiting for the firing squad. Admitting his subversion of the L’Tem’s protected technology would not be met with warmth, of that he was certain. The fact that other senior officers would witness his violation of regulations only served to amplify his dread.

Worf, his expression neutral, stood next to Jadzia, to the side of the desk; Major Kira stood at the other side.

Dr. Bashir glanced at Jadzia and then at Worf. “It’s clear to me. The implant performs its medical function well. Apparently, it communicates on a quantum level to the cells, instructing them to repair and cease further damage. It’s a wonderful technology and if the Federation could duplicate it, there’s no telling what diseases we could cure.” He focused his gaze on the stern face of the captain. “But there’s another segment of the implant, a separate and discreet series of connections to serve as a communication device that’s intended to send a signal not inward to the cells, but outward to the world. By analyzing the configuration of the main portion of the implant, I was able to infer the function of the other, more hidden element.”

Jadzia cocked her head. "I'm not sure I understand what purpose that could provide. Surely the signal originating on the quantum level isn't powerful enough to travel through normal space."

"I would think not," Julian said. "However, that portion of the implant apparently accepts signals from her visual and audio cortex."

"Meaning?" Sisko asked, his voice expressing curiosity and not yet the rebuke Julian feared would come.

"Espionage," Worf said. Sisko turned to face the Klingon. Worf continued. "What other purpose would explain a connection from the visual and audio portions of the brain to a broadcast component?"

"My thoughts as well, Captain," Julian said. "That's why I've brought this to your attention. The implications are staggering."

Jadzia nodded slowly. "Benjamin, if they've found a way to monitor an ambassador's sight and hearing, they'd know exactly what goes on behind closed doors."

"And not just any ambassador," Sisko said, "But the ambassador to the L'Tem." For a moment, Sisko fell silent, his eyes glinting. "When are the L'Tem scheduled to leave for their homeworld?"

"Within the hour," Jadzia said.

"Commander Worf, have them taken into custody."

"Immediately," Worf said and strode out of the captain's office.

Sisko turned to Julian. "Doctor, see to your patient. I'd hate to see her harmed in any way as we attempt to arrest the L'Tem."

"Of course," Julian said as he moved towards the door.

He heard the captain ask Jadzia to remain, and then the door closed behind him as he made his way to the medical bay, relieved that the captain's impending anger at his violation of regulations was placed on hold for the moment.

Julian slipped to the side of the ambassador's bed. Already, she looked much better. Her yellowed skin had returned to a healthy hue, and her cheeks, formerly so sunken, now puffed with health. Staggering.

"What's wrong?" she said, her voice already regaining some of its former strength. "I can see it on your usually composed face."

Julian smiled. "Your implant has reversed your disease, Ambassador."

She nodded. "Then why the troubled look?"

Julian tried to smile to reassure her, but he knew she would see through it. She didn't become one of the Federation's best negotiators by failing to read faces—at least the human ones.

He sighed. "I have some disturbing news."

But before he could explain what he had discovered, Worf's voice thundered over the intercom. "Dr. Bashir,

please be cautious. I have only apprehended two of the L'Tem and we are seeking the third. Internal ship's sensors are unable to locate the remaining L'Tem. No doubt their technology is responsible. I am sending a security detail to the medical bay."

Just as Worf completed his warning, the unapprehended L'Tem rushed into the medical bay. It held a two-pronged device in its hand and pointed it at Bashir.

"Don't give me a reason to use this, Doctor." The alien moved closer and waved the weapon at the ambassador. "Get up. I know you can, even if it's difficult."

"Now hold on," Julian said as he placed a protecting hand on her shoulder. "She's in no condition to get up."

"Trust me, Doctor, she is. The implant's healing effects begin immediately and has probably restored at least half of her physical abilities." The alien's nasal slits opened and closed at a frantic pace. Julian assumed that the L'Tem was exceedingly stressed. Understandable, given that its freedom was at stake, if not its life.

The alien continued. "I know how well our technology works." He focused on the ambassador. "Get up, or I'll kill you, and what a tragic loss of technology that would be."

"Your compassion knows no bounds," Bashir said as he helped the ambassador to her feet. She needed his support and leaned heavily on him. "What are your intentions?"

"To escape, of course," it said. "We have no desire to become the prisoners of your Federation. This way," he

said, motioning them towards the entrance with a wave of the weapon.

Julian glanced at the pistol and the distance between him and the alien. He was not averse to taking a risk with his own life, but he had a patient to consider. He would wait until a better opportunity presented itself. He slipped his arm around the ambassador's waist to better support her as they moved towards the door of the medical bay. As the doors slid open, two armed security personnel, both human males, raised their weapons to fire on the L'Tem, but the alien rushed towards Julian, shoved him aside with surprising force, and placed the tip of its double-pronged weapon into the ambassador's back. The L'Tem grasped the ambassador's arm and pulled her close to its side using his other hand.

"Withdraw or she dies," the L'Tem said.

The two security personnel exchanged concerned glances and hesitated, no doubt taking measure of the situation and the potential risk of violence.

"Please withdraw," Julian said, using his calming, doctor voice. "I have no doubt it will kill her if you don't."

He knew the alien would kill if for no other reason than to remove all evidence of the implant. He watched, relieved, as the men slowly retreated out of the bay doors and out of sight. The doors hissed closed.

Julian glanced to the alien and then into the ambassador's surprisingly alert eyes. "There's no way out

of this for you or your compatriots. You have no way to leave Deep Space Nine."

"I wouldn't be too certain of that. Your species maintains a ridiculously high regard for individual life. It's a flaw that will condemn your species. For now, the unreasonable value your kind invests in the safety of others serves our purpose." The L'Tem nodded towards the closed medical bay doors. "Through the door, Doctor, ahead of me and the Ambassador."

Julian calculated the distance between himself and the alien and found that the gap rendered a quick, bold move unlikely to succeed; the L'Tem would tug on the trigger well before the doctor could seize the weapon. After a moment's hesitation, Dr. Bashir strode towards the doors, which opened upon his approach.

The same two security personnel waited, weapons ready, in the corridor, their expressions puzzled as they eyed the doctor.

"The L'Tem still has a hostage," Bashir said, nodding over his shoulders. The pair of guards glanced beyond Dr. Bashir's shoulder. "I imagine we're heading to the docking ring so they can escape."

Dr. Bashir heard the pounding of heavy footfalls on the deck plates and surmised who would round the corridor.

"Lt. Worf," Bashir said, holding out one hand towards the formidable Klingon, "please don't interfere; the alien has the Ambassador hostage."

Worf met the doctor's gaze and let his hand fall away from his holstered phaser. "I see," Worf said, his deep voice filling the corridor. He turned his eyes to the two security personnel. "Put away your weapons and take two steps back."

They did as they were ordered and stood uselessly ten meters from the door.

Major Kira, taking long strides, joined the Klingon, who whispered to her: "The Ambassador is now a hostage of a single L'Tem." Kira nodded.

The L'Tem moved in behind Dr. Bashir, still pressing a weapon into the Ambassador's back. "Move very slowly, Doctor," the L'Tem said. "We will make our way to my vessel. Do you understand?"

"Yes," Bashir said.

As Dr. Bashir stepped into the corridor, the L'Tem moved in close behind him, glancing at the guards to one side, and the Klingon and the Major on the other side.

"All will remain here, and I expect that our path from here to the docking ring will be free of security or other interference. If not," the alien paused and forcefully pressed its weapon into the Ambassador's back and she winced, "she dies."

Worf spoke: "If she dies, you no longer have any protection or leverage."

"You overestimate our future, Klingon. We have failed our mission. Worse, we have been discovered. Our

reception on our homeworld may be little better than death in the Alpha Quadrant.”

The L'Tem walked backward, watching for an attack from behind, as it motioned Julian to keep moving ahead, towards the docking ring.

After moving through empty corridors without coming across a single person, they reached the massive circular docking door.

“Open it,” the L'Tem snapped.

Julian glance at his patient. “You’ve been quiet. How do you feel?”

“Open the door, Doctor, or she soon won’t feel anything at all.”

Julian punched in the security codes and the thick door rolled back. He stepped aside and motioned for the L'Tem to enter the space between this door and the one at the opposite side of the short airlock.

“You first, Doctor,” said the L'Tem.

“You have your ship. You don’t need the Ambassador any longer.”

“I’m not yet secure inside my vessel, Doctor.”

“Just leave!” Julian demanded. “Go! You’ve done your damage and your work here is over.”

The L'Tem paused, perhaps considering options. “Open the inner door, Doctor,” it said calmly, although his air slits still fluttered excitedly.

Julian stepped to the door control panel and entered the appropriate code. The large, circular airlock door rolled back and the L'Tem glanced to his spacecraft just beyond the airlock. Without removing the weapon from the Ambassador's back, it glanced at a bracelet. Symbols glowed on its surface.

"I detect no one inside waiting for me. I'll leave you here, Doctor."

Julian glanced at the Ambassador.

The alien said, "The Ambassador can remain with you, since she is no longer of use to us. However," the L'Tem said, "I will take her with me unless I have assurances that the docking clamps will be released and I'm free to leave."

Julian pointed to his comm badge. "I can get you that assurance."

"Do so. It is fortunate for you that I believe the Federation to be scrupulously honest. A flaw, but a useful one for me."

Julian tapped his comm badge. "Doctor Bashir to Captain Sisko."

"Sisko. Go ahead, Doctor. Status?"

"Sir, the L'Tem, with the Ambassador as hostage, are at the docking doors of their vessel. The L'Tem will release the Ambassador if it receives assurances that the docking clamps will be released."

"You have my word that I will release all docking clamps."

Julian looked to the L'Tem. "You have your assurances. Now release the Ambassador and warp out of here."

The L'Tem let go of the Ambassador and stepped across the docking door's threshold and into the interior of its vessel. The ship's doors closed immediately, and then the inner docking door rolled back into place.

"Now," Julian said, "let's get you back to the medical bay."

"I'm fine, Doctor. Please don't fret about me. I feel terrific!"

He had to admit that she certainly looked healthy. He saw no obvious signs of fatigue from the disease. Still....

"I really must insist," he said.

She sighed.

As Julian escorted her towards the medical bay they were met by Commander Worf.

"I will accompany you," he said, his eyes intent.

Julian flashed a puzzled expression. "But the threat is gone, Worf. I see no need—"

"The escaping L'Tem used their advanced transporter technology to beam up the other two aliens into their ship. They are not contained and, therefore, continue to pose a threat. I will accompany you."

Julian nodded. There was no arguing with the Klingon once his mind had been set on a task. "Lead the way!"

Once back in the medical bay, and with Worf standing at the ready near the entrance, Julian had run a quick diagnostic on the Ambassador. He grinned. "No trace of the disease, I'm pleased to report." He helped her to her feet. "Still, I'll need to run a thorough diagnostic, to be absolutely certain, but it appears the disease has been eradicated."

Just then, the medical bay doors slipped open, and Captain Sisko strode in. Worf, whose hand had moved to his phaser when the doors opened, now nodded to his captain and allowed his hand to fall to his side, still at the ready.

"Commander Worf, you may stand down," Sisko said. "The L'Tem no longer pose a threat."

The Klingon cocked his head almost imperceptibly. He would not openly ask for more information, but the captain obliged.

Captain Sisko nodded a greeting toward the Ambassador. "You'll be happy to know that I had the Defiant waiting near the wormhole for our escapees, with orders to disable the vessel and return the L'Tem to the station."

Worf said, "Then they are on their way back to Deep Space Nine? I must prepare their—" he paused, "—accommodations."

The captain shook his head. "Unfortunately, the L'Tem fired on the Defiant, and Jadzia ordered a return volley. The L'Tem ship did not survive."

“Pity,” said Dr. Bashir. “We may have learned much more from them about the details of their plot.”

“What more do you need to know, Doctor?” The Ambassador said. “They deceived us all by implanting monitoring technology into me.” She cast her eyes downward. “My career is over. I am useless as an ambassador if I cannot maintain confidentiality in all matters.”

The doctor remained silent for a moment, then turned to Sisko. “Captain, may I suggest that you arrest the ambassador for treason?”

“Treason!” Sisko snapped. “What would possess you to suggest that?” His intense eyes leveled on Bashir.

“Simple, really,” Julian began. “I had not told you, ambassador,” he turned to face her, his expression stern, “that the implant had a monitoring feature as part of its design, and yet you knew all about that. This clearly indicates that you not only knew of the espionage device but that you freely accepted it, perhaps as a condition to receiving the cure.”

The Ambassador turned her glance at the captain. “This is ridiculous! I’m a Federation ambassador with decades of faithful service!”

“Who,” Julian said, “had received a death sentence in the form of a disease no one in the Federation could cure.”

“Captain!” the Ambassador said. “I protest! I have done nothing—”

"I agree with Dr. Bashir," he said, his tone firm. "Commander Worf, please take the Ambassador into custody."

"Aye, sir," Worf said as he moved to the Ambassador.

"And you'd better erect some shielding to ensure that her monitoring signal doesn't leave her cell."

"Yes, sir."

Julian strode into Captain Sisko's office with a heavy step. His feet seemed made of lead as he walked to the captain's formidable desk. But the captain wasn't at his desk.

"Please join me," his voice boomed.

Julian turned to his right to see the captain sitting on his couch, his back leaning restfully into the cushion. He seemed, well, completely informal. Julian couldn't help but grin.

"Gladly, sir," he said as he moved closer to the captain, who indicated a lounge chair opposite him. Julian happily sat down and faced his captain, feeling a light, airiness in his chest.

"Let's dispense with one official notification first, and then we can relax," Sisko said.

Julian nodded eagerly. "By all means, Captain."

"Starfleet just informed me that the Ambassador has pleaded guilty to a lesser charge of high corruption."

"Not treason? She did commit an act of treason, sir."

"Of that, I have no doubt, and neither is there any doubt within the Federation. However, given that the only proof we have of treason lies in her passive admission to you that she knew of the implant's secret ability, the Federation had scant additional proof."

"I can see how the lack of corroborating evidence may make conviction on treason challenging."

"Precisely," Sisko said. "In exchange for a full confession and details of the L'Tem's attempts to commit espionage, her sentence has been reduced by half."

"But how will she be allowed to leave a secure environment? The L'Tem might monitor her, even if she isn't working for them any longer."

"Ah!" the captain said as he thrust a finger into the air. "Her confession revealed that the monitoring technology requires a receiver within one thousand kilometers to boost the signal, which would mean that the L'Tem would have to operate within the Alpha Quadrant. Of course, they will not be permitted to come in through the wormhole, thus guaranteeing that they will be unable to monitor her at all."

"I see. Still, I would love to be able to probe her implant. It represents a leap in medical technology. How many people could we cure if only we could duplicate the technology?"

Sisko nodded. "And the Federation agrees and will attempt to discover its secrets over time."

“That is good news, sir.”

“On a slightly different topic, although related: I want to commend you personally on your vigilance and attention. Without you, we may never have discovered the Ambassador’s treason. Job well done.”

“Thank you, sir,” Julian said as he looked forward to a long, relaxing, and definitely information chat with his captain.

“Kira to Captain Sisko,” Came her voice through the comm.

“Sisko here.”

“We have a vessel of unknown origin just emerging from the wormhole, Captain.” Kira’s voice sounded matter of fact, but an unknown vessel could pose a threat.

“I’ll be right there.” He turned to the Doctor. “I’m afraid we’ll have to continue this some other time.”

With that, the captain stood and strode out the door, with Julian following behind.

Some other time, Julian thought as he left Ops.