

STAR TREK: DEEP SPACE NINE

12x08 - "Dinner at Eight."

Screenplay by Martyn Dunn

Based on characters from the series

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine

and on the *Star Trek* tie-in novels
by Pocket Books

TNG 17x08 - "THE ILLUSION OF CHOICE"

Enterprise is at Vulcan, attending the opening of the Sarek School of Diplomacy. Picard meets a strange woman who makes odd pronouncements of doom. Ship's counsellor T'Lana is also there, but she and Picard do not get along - she has disagreed with his every decision since she took the job. Once the crowds have gone, Spock arrives as well, and Picard invites him onboard. Picard tells Crusher about the strange woman's predictions, but she shrugs it off. T'Lana encounters Spock in *Enterprise's* lounge, and asks him how he resolves the path of logic with his lifelong friendship with humans, since she finds the two completely incompatible. One final consecration ceremony for the School is disrupted by the arrival of a small vessel, which drops off Seven of Nine. Picard demands an explanation. "Kathryn Janeway and all of humanity are in mortal danger from the Borg," Seven replies. "Is this an inappropriate time?"

TTN 1x08 - "CIRCLE OF LIFE"

Riker is horrified at the idea of killing the star-jellies and reanimating their corpses as weapons, but Pa'haquel leader Qui'hibra insists that it is necessary. Riker offers to mediate, but they need to contact the jellies first. Keru speaks to Tellarite counsellor Haaj about his extreme reaction to Torvig's innocent experiments. Troi pulls together all *Titan's* telepaths in an attempt to reach out to the jellies. The creatures are sceptical, but they remember *Enterprise's* help at Farpoint so they are willing to listen. Unfortunately the Pa'haquel use this as an opportunity for an ambush, and many jellies are killed. *Titan* manages to escape with one unclaimed body, and takes it back to the jellies' breeding world, where it is 'recycled' to create a new jelly-baby. But the jellies take telepathic control of Tuvok, making him steal *Titan's* sensor data on how to distinguish between live jellies and dead ones - now they can fight back.

VOY 10x08 - "ANN"

Seven of Nine wakes screaming, certain that something is wrong on the dead Borg ship. [Admiral Jellico](#) calls *Einstein*, which reports no problems... even though Janeway is right there as

the new Queen. The entire ship and crew have already been assimilated. On *Voyager*, Chakotay worries that Janeway has not returned his call. Paris assures him she can handle anything that might happen. Seven arranges private passage to Sector 10 with freighter captain Antin Vargo. [*Thunderchild*](#) tries to stop her, but Vargo has his tricks and gets away. Seven reluctantly explains everything, and begs Vargo that if he will not go to Sector 10, then at least take her to Vulcan. On the cube, the female Q returns to talk to Janeway, wondering how she was assimilated with no drones onboard. It was the cube itself - it is alive. Janeway threatens even the Q with assimilation - once she is done with the Federation.

TEASER

FADE IN:

1 EXT. DEEP SPACE NINE

Standard establishing shot, the *Defiant* in place.

2 INT. DS9 - RO'S QUARTERS

Last seen [DS9 11x11 "The Crucible"](#). Beginning at the REPLICATOR, which whirs its maelstrom of golden particles to create a glass bowl of SALAD.

RO LAREN reaches in to pick it up, and carries it across to place on the dining table. QUARK is already there, filling a pair of tumblers with WATER.

Both are wearing civilian clothing - no uniforms or formal business suits. Stay tight on these two for now, as Quark looks down at the bowl of salad, unimpressed.

QUARK

I hope that's not all you're serving.

RO

(playful)

Not everyone loves tube grubs, Quark. Besides, you're the one pouring water. I thought this was supposed to be a party.

QUARK

When you're a bartender, you learn the value of pacing yourself. Wouldn't want anyone to get too drunk too quickly, would we?

They smile flirtily at each other - they are in a better place together than at the end of the previous episode.

FOLLOW as Ro heads back across the room towards the replicator. Instead she opens a small cabinet in the wall, reaches in and pulls out a small pile of PLACE MATS. She looks down at them in her hands, chuckles.

RO

I never use these. The rare times I even eat anything in here, it's usually a quick snack on the run before I'm back out the door to handle the latest crisis. I sure don't put out place mats. I tend to forget I even have them.

Shaking her head in amusement, she brings the mats back over towards the table and starts laying them out.

QUARK

Well, this is a special occasion, isn't it? You deserve to treat yourself every now and then.

RO

I do, don't I?

They continue to lay things out on the table, mostly out of sight of the camera - we don't need to focus on it.

RO

You know what? I'm actually looking forward to this.

QUARK

You're not nervous?

RO

(considers it)

No. I think it'll be good for us. It was a good idea, Quark.

QUARK

You said we needed to get to know each other better. What better way than over an intimate dinner in your quarters?

RO

Exactly.

QUARK

So... you've been thinking about this for a while, then?

RO

(shrug)

We're supposed to be a team. A unit. I know we've been together for a while now, but I still don't really feel like we're there yet, you know? And I kinda feel like it's my job to get us there.

Quark pauses, looks at her honestly.

QUARK

It's not all on your shoulders, Laren. You can't be expected to fix everything by yourself.

RO

I know. But I should at least make the effort.

QUARK

Well, I hope they appreciate it. I know I would.

RO

Okay. Finished. How does it look?

Finally OPEN OUT, and we see they have not been setting a small table for two. They have been setting a LONG TABLE for nine - four down each side and one at the top.

Each place has a place setting, glasses, cutlery, and enough room left over for lots and lots of food to be placed. Ro and Quark look at it with satisfaction.

QUARK

Perfect.

Ro chuckles again.

QUARK

What's wrong?

RO

Nothing. Just the idea of me setting a table, throwing a dinner party, owning place mats. I spent half my life in a cave.

QUARK

I can always throw mud in your face during the main course if it'll make you feel any better.

RO

Try it and you'll be the main course.

QUARK

(smirk)

Promise?

Before she can respond, the door CHIME sounds. Ro and Quark look to each other - ready? Ready.

RO

Come in.

The door opens, and EVIK NATH stands there, also in civilian clothing, and carrying a covered dish of his own.

EVIK

Oh, I'm the first one here. Hope I'm not too early.

RO

Don't worry about it, Nath. Come on in!

He does, bringing his dish to the table. Once it is placed, he tears off the cover with a flourish. Ro leans forward and breathes deep with a gasp of amazement...

RO

Maltiv stew? How did you -

QUARK

What's maltiv stew?

RO

Maltiv were these little brush creatures on Valo Two. We used to eat 'em. One of the few things I miss about that place, actually. But how did you get hold of it?

EVIK

I still have a few friends back home. They send me a package every couple of months. I keep it for special occasions.

Ro hugs Evik in delight. Then the door CHIMES again.

RO

Come in!

The door opens again, and NOG is there, CANDLEWOOD and TENMEI just behind him. All of them are carrying their own covered dishes. Candlewood shouts over their shoulders...

CANDLEWOOD

Partaaaaay!!!

Ro sighs, chuckles and beckons them all in. They file into the room.

Before the door can close, BASHIR and MATTHIAS are also there, each with their own dishes, stepping over the threshold. And finally Major CENN, somewhat more reserved than the others but here nevertheless.

As they all file into the room, arranging their various home-cooked dishes onto the table, Ro watches over the entire crowd, smiling with pride...

FADE OUT

END OF TEASER

ACT ONE

FADE IN

3 INT. DS9 - RO'S QUARTERS

Picking back up where we left it. Everyone files into the room until there are NINE people milling - Ro, Quark, Evik, Cenn, Bashir, Matthias, Nog, Candlewood and Tenmei. Every one is in civilian clothing, no uniforms.

Ro calls over the rest...

RO

Everyone put whatever you brought
on the table, there's room.

As they shuffle the dishes around the table, making sure they all fit, Matthias nosey-pokes at Bashir's selection...

MATTHIAS

Ooh, they look good.

BASHIR

Roasted calavian peppers and
onions, balsamic vinaigrette and
my own private blend of Nepalese
herbs. I wasn't sure anyone else
would bring a vegetarian option.

MATTHIAS

Well, as it happens...

(uncovers her
own dish)

...Centauri frond cakes, spiced
with just a hint of tarragon.

TENMEI

Trust the medical professionals to
be all body-conscious. Luckily for
those who crave more carbs than
the body can handle... voilà!

(presents her
own dish)

Authentic Italian spaghetti
vongole! Mwwaa!

She leans over her own dish, wafting the aroma into her nose with a blissful flourish.

CANDLEWOOD

Oh, please. You people don't know good cooking till you grow up with a Jewish mother. Let me show you how it's done.

He unwraps his own enormous offering - which is revealed to actually be three dishes rather than one, each overflowing.

CANDLEWOOD

Traditional matzoh ball soup to start, a good ol' juicy brisket made to a classic Chicago recipe passed down through about a dozen generations, and challah bread to mop up all the thick, meaty gravy.

RO

(w/ good humour)

Alright, alright. Let's not turn this into a contest already. I'm sure they're all delicious. The starters aren't quite ready yet so grab a drink - Quark brought the good stuff from the bar.

A bit at a time, they all drift across to Quark's makeshift drinks station - Ro's bank of computer consoles, draped with a patterned sheet and then arrayed with bottles of various colours and shapes and sizes.

QUARK

One at a time!

As people place their orders MOS, Quark begins mixing drinks with panache - the full "Cocktail" extravaganza.

Meanwhile Ro approaches Major Cenn, who has been hovering back, not really engaging. She tries to engage him.

RO

So what did you bring?

CENN

Oh, it's a... it's just a jumja soufflé. Nothing fancy. Just... you said to bring food from our homes, and I used to make this in our village in Jo'kala.

RO

I didn't know you were from Jo'kala! I was born in Jo'kala! How did I not know that?

CENN

(meekly)

You never asked.

RO

Well, you know what? That's what this whole night is about.

She turns back to the room, and calls over the hubbub...

RO

Everyone...?

(they turn to her)

I just wanted to say thank you for coming. We are the senior staff of this important Starfleet facility, and I thought it was time we all get to know each other better. So there are three rules.

(holds up finger)

First - no titles, ranks or family names. Given names only.

(second finger)

Second - no shop talk. Just for tonight, I don't want us to be officers or work colleagues - I want us to be friends.

(third finger)

And third... every one of us has to tell someone something. Doesn't have to be a big announcement or anything world-shattering. Just something you never said before.

Everyone ponders this, wondering what they will say. By now they all have drinks, Ro included.

RO

Aside from that, just relax and enjoy. We're all here to have a good time.

EVIK

Hear hear! And let me begin by thanking you, Laren...
(turns to Quark)
...and the bartender, of course...
(back to room)
...for inviting us into your home.

NOG

And thanks to Lieutenant Bowers for running Ops with a crew full of ensigns so we could all have the night off.

CANDLEWOOD

(raises glass)
Cheers to that.

They all raise their glasses and toast the evening to come. That done, they go back to mingling.

Prynn approaches Counsellor Matthias, who is hovering near the table, inspecting the food.

TENMEI

Good evening, "Philippa".

MATTHIAS

Good evening, "Prynn".

They cheers their glasses together at the strangeness of calling each other by their first names.

TENMEI

So how's the family?

MATTHIAS

They're all wonderful, thank you.
The kids are both doing great in
school.

TENMEI

Arios must be almost ten by now?

MATTHIAS

Yep. And becoming more of a
teenager by the day.

TENMEI

Oh joy. Well, never mind, they
grow out of it eventually.

They notice Candlewood at the opposite end of the table,
futzing around with his own food - he burns his finger and
whips it away with a sharp "Ow!" Tenmei shakes her head.

TENMEI

It might take thirty years or so,
but sooner or later, I'm hoping...

MATTHIAS

To be honest, it's nice to have a
night out on my own. Don't tell
them I said this, obviously I love
'em all to bits. But I am looking
forward to just being Philippa for
a night, instead of "mom".

TENMEI

I'm willing to give baby-sitting a
shot if you want a night off some
time. I've looked after Pif's
puppies, how hard can it be?

MATTHIAS

I'll remind you you said that when
you're cleaning paint out of your
hair. And what about you - no sign
of babies in your future?

TENMEI

Honestly, it never even occurred
to me. Is that weird?

MATTHIAS

Of course not. Parenting isn't for everyone. And nobody should be made to feel bad for that.

TENMEI

It's not like I had the most normal family life growing up. Plus I'd have to find a man who isn't a complete idiot first.

MATTHIAS

They're out there, Prynn. Don't give up hope. It's like Morn said in his advice column - it's a big and crazy galaxy...

(taps her own vaguely
Vulcan-esque ears)

...especially when even being a different species is no barrier.

PRYNN

You read Morn's advice column? I read Morn's advice column!

MATTHIAS

Who doesn't? I mean he went on for a while after that, I drifted off. He gets a bit speechy. But he's not wrong. For example...

With a smirk, she nods subtly over towards the drinks station, where Ro and Quark are chatting chummily...

RO

Seems to be going well so far, don't you think?

QUARK

How could it not? I am the host.

RO

Yeah, we'll see who gets stuck with the clean-up.

QUARK

I'll stay.

RO

You will?

QUARK

Of course. Assuming you're not too tired.

RO

Too tired for what?

QUARK

(innocent)

For company. And tidying.

RO

(wary)

Oh. Okay.

Suddenly Candlewood approaches them both.

CANDLEWOOD

I see you haven't put anything on the table yet, Laren.

Ro looks askance at Candlewood - apparently the sass-mouth is out already. But she did ask for it.

RO

If you must know, those starters I mentioned should be ready any minute now.

CANDLEWOOD

Ooh, what have you got what have you got what have you got?

RO

Spicy Jo'kala hasperat. The real stuff, not that weak, Federation-friendly replicated kind you get these days. This one'll knock your Jewish mother's socks off.

CANDLEWOOD

Challenge accepted! What about you, Quark?

QUARK

You think that Aldebaran whisky in your glass just materialised out of thin air? You're welcome.

CANDLEWOOD

Fair enough. Speaking of which, it would have been nice if I could have brought Hetik along to this shindig. We are a couple, y'know.

RO

Yes, you've made that abundantly, graphically clear, John.

CANDLEWOOD

Do you have a problem with Hetik?

RO

Of course not! In fact I think he's a sweet kid and he's come a long way. But this wasn't a night for bringing partners. Philippa hasn't brought Sibias, has she? And none of the rest of them even have partners that I'm aware of.

CANDLEWOOD

Well, I'm just saying it seems a little unfair to me. I mean, you get to bring your partner -

(re Quark)

- why not the rest of us?

As Ro and Quark both blanch at that, a small BEEP sounds from the replicator.

CANDLEWOOD

Hasperat!

...and Candlewood wanders away, distracted by the thought of imminent food.

Leaving Ro and Quark staring at each other, Candlewood having just pointed out the elephant in the room.

Are Ro and Quark 'partners' ? Neither of them know for sure. They haven't discussed it, and this is not the time to discuss it now. Ro laughs it off...

RO

Children!

And she turns away to follow after Candlewood. But it is clear on both their faces that he has touched a nerve...

FADE OUT

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

FADE IN

4 INT. DS9 - RO'S QUARTERS

Nine platefuls of hasperat - a kind of burrito made with bread, vegetables and pickled in a spicy brine - are handed out around the table, at which all nine guests now sit.

RO

Hasperat à la Ro - my father made the best hasperat I ever tasted. He passed the recipe down to me. This stuff got me into the Maquis, it's that good.

Matthias politely waits for permission to continue. Nog picks up the hasperat and sniffs at it nervously. Cenn gazes at his plate, a faint smile on his face and his hands in a meditative pose, as if he is saying Bajoran grace. Candlewood drums his fingers on the table in anticipation.

Ro takes the last seat at the head of the table - the mother of this family - and watches them all warmly.

RO

Well go on, eat up - it's only good when it's warm.

Everyone digs in, some more enthusiastically than others. Evik takes a big bite, and swoons in bliss.

EVIK

I don't know what it is about replicators, but they never quite get it right. No offence, Quark, but this is the real thing.

(another bite)

Takes me right back to sitting around a fire, listening to my mother read from the Prophecies.

QUARK

Make it a nice snail steak, washed down with plenty of Sluggo-Cola,

and moogie reading me the Rules,
and I'd be right there with you.

NOG

Finish your hasperat and you can
have all the snail steak you want.
That's exactly what I brought.

QUARK

You're a good boy, Nog.

Candlewood is fanning his face, eyes watering.

CANDLEWOOD

Wow. Holy... Lord in... Wow. That
is some powerful stuff.

RO

Good?

CANDLEWOOD

Definitely. My compliments to your
dad. Maybe my mom has competition
after all. We should get them
together to compare recipes.

A moment of awkward silence. Candlewood sags.

CANDLEWOOD

Oy. I did it again, didn't I?
(to Ro)

With every fibre of my being, I
apologise. I wasn't thinking.

RO

You know what? It's okay. I chose
this food precisely because it
reminds me of him.

CANDLEWOOD

But seriously though, how do you
do that? How do you get through a
day without insulting every single
person you meet? Because obviously
I've never figured it out.

TENMEI

You're supposed to tell us something we don't already know, John. We all knew that.

CANDLEWOOD

That doesn't help.

MATTHIAS

You are who you are, John. Don't apologise for it.

CANDLEWOOD

What if who I am is awkward and annoying?

EVIK

"Offer it up." That's what my mother always said if there was ever something out of my control. "Offer it up to the Prophets to worry about. Offer it up, child!"

RO

What about you, Desca? Hasperat bringing back memories of Jo'kala?

CENN

A little, yes. Hasperat wasn't a big thing in my family, but it's certainly tasty. Thanks.

Okay, so apparently she's not getting any more than that. A bit disappointed, she turns instead to Bashir.

RO

Julian - have you heard anything from Garak recently? How's he doing back on Earth?

BASHIR

I haven't had a letter in a while, actually. Last was a few months ago now - mentioned he'd run into Rugal again, after all this time.

Blank looks around the table - they don't know who that is.
Bashir sighs inwardly with disappointment.

BASHIR

Never mind. Anyway, no, not really
heard from him. Or from Miles, for
that matter.

NOG

Oh, I heard from the chief only
last week.

BASHIR

...Really.

NOG

Yeah, he was teaching a class on
subspace stress for warp-capable
shuttles, and he wanted to know if
we had any readings from the
wormhole that might be useful. We
chatted for a while. He's doing
fine at the Academy.

BASHIR

Good. Good.

NOG

Why don't you call him if you want
to catch up? I'm sure he'd love to
hear from you.

BASHIR

I do miss our regular holosuite
dates. Don't really have anyone to
share philosophical debate with
over lunch these days, either. Or
to go dancing with in Vic's.

(looks down at
empty plate)

I suppose that's my confession for
the evening. I'm... lonely.

RO

Julian, I'm sorry. I had no idea.

BASHIR

People move on. Can't be helped.

TENMEI

Hey, if you ever want to go wind-surfing or kayaking, I'm your girl. I'd love to have someone to jump off cliffs with.

BASHIR

Thanks, Prynn. But I'm not asking for sympathy dates. Don't worry about it, it's my problem.

EVIK

That's not true, Julian. The whole purpose of this evening is to forge bonds between us. Your happiness is important.

BASHIR

Well, sorry to be a party-pooper, but I'm not sure friendship can be forced. It either is or it isn't.

TENMEI

Maybe. Maybe sometimes it just takes a bit of work.

Reaction shot of Ro and Quark, as they share a look - does this apply to them? Meanwhile Tenmei nudges Candlewood.

TENMEI (cont)

Or a lot of work.

CANDLEWOOD

Why the meanness?

EVIK

Well, I'll give you my confession here and now - that was the best hasperat I've ever had.

RO

I thank you. Not too filling, I hope, plenty more to go around.

CANDLEWOOD

Bring it on!

Quark gets up from the table and begins collecting empty plates - or in Nog's case, a plate with a barely touched hasperat. Quark gives him a sly look - I won't tell.

Not noticing this, Ro passes out plates and bowls for the main course - which is the buffet of everything.

RO

Okay - rule four! No-one is allowed to only eat what they brought. You have to at least try something someone else brought. Dig in whenever you're ready.

Quark is still at the replicator, dematerialising the dirty plates. Ro heads over to him, where they speak quietly.

RO

You alright?

QUARK

Of course.

RO

Quark... I think we need to talk, don't you? Not now, obviously - later. Once everyone's gone.

QUARK

If you want. You're in charge.

Ro smiles warmly and heads back to her seat.

QUARK

(to himself)

You always have been.

Then he follows her back and takes his seat beside her.

Meanwhile everyone is digging in, passing plates back and forth. Candlewood ladles out some soup for himself.

TENMEI

Nog, Quark, you need to try my spaghetti *vongole*.

QUARK

Uhhh, I don't know...

TENMEI

Honestly, it's the nearest thing to Ferengi food here. The *vongole* part is clams, a shellfish not a million miles from snails.

RO

Go on, Quark. Take a chance.

He looks at her again - is this mixed signals now? Still confused, he accepts Prynn's offer of the dish.

QUARK

I suppose there is a doctor in the house...

Warily, he doles out a small portion. Everyone is tucking in. For example, Nog is slicing off a nice big chunk of grey and wobbly snail steak.

NOG

Alright, here's something I've never admitted to before. When I was at the Academy, I used to sneak down to the Embarcadero all by myself and gorge on all the seafood. Oysters, clams, shrimp, crayfish... whatever I could find. It made me feel less homesick.

MATTHIAS

Food has a lot of associations like that. These frond cakes were the first things I ever cooked for Sibias. I'll never forget the look on his face. He absolutely hated them, but he kept eating. That's when I knew he was a keeper.

TENMEI

Where's Sibias from, actually? I know he's Bajoran obviously, but whereabouts?

MATTHIAS

That's part of the reason we moved back to Bajor - to find that out. He knew he spent some time in the Karnoth resettlement camp, but where he came from before that, he was too young to remember.

RO

I helped narrow it down to the Tilar Peninsula at least, based off the markings on his earring.

MATTHIAS

Yes, but we've never gotten any closer than that.

CANDLEWOOD

That just seems so weird to me. My family, where I grew up, they're a huge part of who I am as a person. I honestly can't imagine what it must be like to have no idea where you come from. I mean, Hetik grew up in an orphanage. I've tried to ask him about it, and it's like a whole other kind of existence.

TENMEI

John...

MATTHIAS

I do worry about Sibias sometimes. It's like he's always searching for something that he knows he's never going to find. Some kind of history. That's probably why he went into archaeology.

BASHIR

I moved around a lot as a child.

TENMEI

Me too.

NOG

And me.

QUARK

I couldn't wait to leave home.

CANDLEWOOD

Am I really so unusual that I had a relatively normal upbringing? I mean, here we are - three Bajorans in the room right now, two more of us have Bajoran partners. Then a service brat, a man on the run, two others dreaming of latinum in the stars -

Suddenly Major Cenn, who has been eating quietly all this time, gets to his feet.

CENN

Excuse me - I need to use the facilities.

RO

Just through the bedroom.

Candlewood keeps on talking in BACKGROUND WALLA. But Ro is watching Cenn as he passes her towards her bedroom.

She notices him wiping his eyes a little, as if trying to hold back tears. What is wrong with Cenn?

FADE OUT

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

FADE IN

5 INT. DS9 - RO'S QUARTERS

Ro RIPS off a piece of Candlewood's challah bread and DUNKS it into the last of Evik's stew, lovingly swishing it around. Then she pops it in her mouth and swoons.

RO

Nath - this stew was so good.

EVIK

Consider it payment in full for the hasperat.

Candlewood has eaten a ton and is looking rather stuffed. He sits back and pats his stomach with a satisfied sigh.

CANDLEWOOD

I gotta say, I'm learning there are a lot of good cooks on this station tonight. I couldn't eat another thing. I'm stuffed.

(beat)

Any more of those seaweed thingies?

Matthias smiles indulgently and passes him the last of her Centauri frond cakes. Candlewood takes it and gives it a hearty munch.

CANDLEWOOD

Mmm... food. I love food. Don't you just love food? I do. Food is the best.

TENMEI

The amount you've been packing away tonight, you'd better be careful you don't lose that svelte figure for Hetik.

CANDLEWOOD

Yeah yeah, I'll do a few extra laps of the pool tomorrow. Anyway, he loves me for my mind.

Evik is sat next to the now returned Cenn, who is also finishing off his stew, if rather more delicately.

EVIK

Did you enjoy the stew, Desca?

CENN

Actually, I really did. I'm not just saying that - it's delicious.

EVIK

Good, I'm glad. Everything okay? You haven't spoken much tonight.

CENN

Yeah, just... feels a bit strange. I'm not used to socialising with this many people. My pastimes tend to be rather solitary pursuits.

EVIK

Such as what?

CENN

I like to read. I've been trying to broaden my perspective, read things from different cultures around the Federation. As much as I love the Prophecies, reading them over and over again gets a little redundant after a while.

Ro nods with her mouth full, impressed that Cenn is going to that effort. But Quark scoffs through his clams...

QUARK

Well, that makes a change. You'd been on this station three months before you even set foot in my bar. Too many aliens, you said.

CENN

Look, I came from a small village in Jo'kala, only left the planet's surface three times before I came here. It took me a while to get used to the change, that's all.

QUARK

Everybody comes to Quark's sooner or later.

RO

You have a magnetic pull.

NOG

Or maybe it's just the bar is at the literal centre of the station and is pretty much unavoidable.

QUARK

You make it sound like that wasn't deliberate. Look at how many other businesses have come and gone on the Promenade over the years. Who is the only one that has lasted through two decades and multiple governments? Me, that's who.

EVIK

Because you had the foresight to set up shop in the biggest, most central location on the station.

QUARK

Exactly. The investment was huge, and people told me it would never work, but I knew in my lobes it would pay off in the long run.

(re clams)

These were really good.

Prynn smiles, proud that she has made a convert. By now, everyone's plates are empty.

RO

Has everyone had enough?

BASHIR

Definitely.

NOG

Did you try the snail steak?

BASHIR

It looked like jelly with veins.
Besides, vegetarian, remember?

NOG

Well somebody had some - I didn't
eat the whole thing.

EVIK

That was me. I'm already familiar
with human and Bajoran food,
obviously. Seems in the spirit of
the evening that I should try
Ferengi food as well.

QUARK

And?

EVIK

It was... ah... interesting.
Perhaps it's an acquired taste.

Low chuckles around the room.

RO

(standing)

Shall we retire to the living room
for dessert? Desca brought a home-
made jumja soufflé. Leave your
plates for now.

Most slowly manoeuvre themselves up from table, carrying
their drinks over to the couches and sitting area.

But Cenn hovers as Ro brings the soufflé to the table and
begins portioning it out. Ro notices him watching her...

RO

What? Am I not doing it right?

CENN

Oh no, I'm just... nothing.

Unsure what's going on there, Ro just carries some bowls across to the others sitting down. Cenn carries more.

CANDLEWOOD

Ooh, yummy!

TENMEI

What happened to you not eating another thing?

CANDLEWOOD

That doesn't count for dessert!
There's always room for dessert.
What kind of inhuman monster do you think I am?

Ro perches on an arm next to Quark, and everyone begins tucking into their soufflé. Evik takes a mouthful.

EVIK

(wide eyes)

Woo, that's sweet.

TENMEI

But is it sweet enough to get the taste of snail out of your mouth?

EVIK

Not necessary, Prynn. There isn't a thing here tonight I haven't enjoyed eating. The soufflé is wonderful, and the snail steak was a new and fascinating experience if nothing else.

CANDLEWOOD

Hey, you can't change your answer now. You already said the hasperat was "the best you ever tasted". Not much of a confession, that, by the way.

EVIK

Don't underestimate a compliment to the hasperat, John. Every region of Bajor has its own variation. To honour someone else's regional recipe over your own is nothing to take lightly.

CANDLEWOOD

I do admire how you do that.

EVIK

Do what?

CANDLEWOOD

Be everyone's best friend.

EVIK

There's no special trick to it, John. It's only a matter of being open to experience, and accepting it when it comes.

CANDLEWOOD

But you do it so well! I can barely say hello without starting an interstellar incident, and here you are giving compliments to the hasperat and being nice about snail steak like it's the easiest thing in the galaxy.

(sigh)

Okay, Candlewood confession time, I guess - I want to be like you when I grow up.

EVIK

Well that's a lovely compliment, John. I'd be honoured to think I was a role model. But I don't think you give yourself enough credit. There's room in this universe for all kinds of people. You should work on being the best version of you, not a copy of me.

TENMEI

The ultimate version of John
Candlewood. Wow. I can't even
imagine what that would be like.

CANDLEWOOD

Hush, you.

People chuckle again at the playful banter. But not Cenn -
he is looking down into his bowl at his own soufflé, eating
only in tiny nibbles.

Ro sees this from her perch next to Quark, so she quietly
gets up and takes a spare seat right next to Cenn. He looks
up and smiles a little at her arrival, and she sees that
his eyes are wet again. He is just holding back tears.

RO

(quiet, intimate)

Desca... what's wrong?

CENN

Nothing, I'm fine. Are you
enjoying the soufflé?

RO

It's amazing. But this is the
second time I've seen you in tears
tonight. What is it?

MATTHIAS

Laren...

Ro looks across to Counsellor Matthias, who gives her a
subtle shake of the head. Leave it be, don't push him. But
Ro feels a responsibility.

RO

Desca, I'm sorry but something's
obviously wrong. You're my first
officer... you're my friend. If
there's anything I can do to
help... I want to.

(no response)

Whatever it is, you can say it.
You're among friends here.

Cenn looks up, looks around at the room. They are all aware of the strange turn the evening has taken, but avert their eyes, not wanting to pry. Cenn smiles sadly.

CENN
It's the soufflé.

RO
What about it?

CENN
I told you I made it back home in
Jo'kala... but I didn't tell you
who I made it for.

RO
(not sure where
this is going)
I assumed your family. Your
parents...

CENN
Family, yes. But not my parents.
(beat, deep
breath)
I made it for my wife and
daughter... before they died.

Off everyone's stunned reactions to that...

FADE OUT

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

FADE IN

6 INT. DS9 - RO'S QUARTERS

Picking up where we left it - with Cenn's unexpected declaration and everyone's silent amazement.

RO
Desca... I never knew...

CENN
No-one did.
 (as if just
 realising)
Almost twelve years... and I never
even let myself say their names. I
couldn't bear it.

Everyone in the room is suitably gentle and sensitive - even Candlewood knows to be quiet.

EVIK
 (softly)
What were their names? Say them.
Remember them.

CENN
 (tearful smile)
Lesedi. That's my wife. And my
daughter was...
 (sniffle)
...Tamani.

RO
Jo'kalan for "precious".
 (Cenn nods)
You don't have to...

CENN
I've come this far. Maybe it's
time. We'd been married two years.
Lived in that same tiny village in
Jo'kala all our lives. We were of
no interest to anyone.

RO

You mean, to...

CENN

To the Cardassians. We were so far from the cities, had no particular resources they were interested in. It was almost like we didn't exist to them. But we still knew they were there.

(beat)

I heard rumours some others in the village had run off to join the Resistance. I only ever wanted to slice off a little piece of this horrible world and raise a family in safety. If I kept my head down, didn't bother anybody, made jumja soufflés just for the three of us... we could get through it.

NOG

What happened?

CENN

We heard stories the Cardassians had been packing up their things. Like they were getting ready to leave. I didn't believe it. They'd been here all my life, I saw no reason they wouldn't always be here. So I just carried on.

(beat)

And then one day, there they were. A whole garrison of Cardassian soldiers... They laughed about how they were going back to Terok Nor and then off this stinking dirt ball of a planet... but they were going to have as much fun as they could before they left.

TENMEI

Oh my god...

CENN

They burned everything. Lesedi tried to fight them... so they pinned me down and made me watch while they split her open with a knife and set our house on fire with Tamani still inside it. And then they left... still laughing. I'd done nothing. Not for them, not against them. And they still came and destroyed my life anyway... because they could.

(beat)

So I just sat there. There was no-one to fight. They'd gone already. Nothing I could do but... try to grasp what had happened and figure out what the hell I was supposed to do next. And then two weeks later, somebody said Starfleet was here to help. And I thought... what use is that?

CANDLEWOOD

I guess that explains why you resented Starfleet so much.

Prynn silently rolls her eyes at Candlewood breaking the spell, but Cenn carries on...

CENN

Not resented so much as just... Why couldn't you have come two weeks sooner and actually made a difference? Oh I know, you helped thousands, millions of Bajorans put their lives back together... But not me. Somehow all that Federation generosity never made it to my little village any more than the Cardassians did.

RO

Oh Desca... I'm so sorry.

Through the tears, Cenn takes another mouthful of soufflé.

MATTHIAS

If I may, Major... Desca... I think maybe you must have felt like it was time to talk about it at last... or else you wouldn't have made the soufflé.

CANDLEWOOD

Can I say something?

TENMEI

John...

CENN

No, that's okay. What is it, John?

CANDLEWOOD

Tonight, we've all revealed parts of ourselves nobody's ever seen.

(closes eyes)

That sounded wrong. What I mean is, we've talked about our own problems. Our own insecurities, our own tragic pasts. We've all got them.

TENMEI

(face palm)

John, please stop...

CANDLEWOOD

No, wait. I'm not saying that to diminish what you went through, Desca. I can't even imagine. I'm just saying that we've all been through things, and that means we all understand. You can talk to any one of us, and we'll all know what you're talking about.

RO

He's right, Desca. We're all here for you, if you need help. You're not on your own.

CANDLEWOOD

And the soufflé really is great.

A tiny joke to break the tension... and it works.

CENN

Thanks, John. Thank you all. I appreciate the support.

QUARK

Alright. Now, does anyone need another drink?

Quark gets up to head back to the drinks station. Nog and Evik follow to help out.

Matthias gives Ro a silent look. Ro nods and stands up - Matthias takes her place. Ro instead goes to sit by Bashir.

Meanwhile Tenmei comes to sit next to Candlewood, forcing him to budge up on the couch.

CANDLEWOOD

Prynn, have I done something to upset you lately?

TENMEI

No more than you normally do.

CANDLEWOOD

See, right there. You've been taking pot shots at me all night. Shutting me down every time I've tried to say anything.

TENMEI

Just wanted somebody else to get a word in edgeways.

(off his look)

I'm only joking, John.

CANDLEWOOD

Are you, really? Because after a while I'm not sure I can tell the difference anymore.

TENMEI

Oh, so you're allowed to say funny things but I'm not?

CANDLEWOOD

At least I'm not malicious with it. I say stupid stuff because I'm stupid, not because I'm cruel.

TENMEI

(deflating)

You're not stupid, John. Yes, you may be "awkward and annoying." But we love you that way. And I'm not being cruel - or at least I'm not trying to be. I'm just playing.

(beat)

In fact, here goes. My thing I've never said out loud. You are my best friend, John. You and Nog both - there's nobody I enjoy spending time with more. I think we make a hell of a team, and I wouldn't change either of you.

CANDLEWOOD

Then maybe you could cut back on the witty barbs aimed directly at all my biggest buttons and just be nice to me every once in a while?

TENMEI

Ugh - fine. If I must.

CANDLEWOOD

You must.

(beat)

Love you too.

They smile shyly, and then Tenmei looks across the room to where Nog is chatting with Quark and Evik.

TENMEI

(calls out)

Nog...

NOG

What?

TENMEI / CANDLEWOOD

(sing-song)

We loooove youuu!

Nog smiles awkwardly, quietly horrified and embarrassed. It's clear that his friends are a bit drunk at this point.

NOG

That's great, thanks.

TENMEI / CANDLEWOOD

(louder)

We loooooooooove yooooouuu!!!

As if of the same mind, they get up and dash across the room, chasing Nog with giggles and air-kisses, while he runs in horror. Ro and Bashir watch, amused.

BASHIR

Children.

RO

That's exactly what I was saying!

BASHIR

It's strange... when I first came aboard this station, I was that age. When did I stop being the green, untested baby of the crew and become the elder statesman?

RO

I know what you mean. How did the rebellious troublemaker end up as a respectable commander in charge of other rebellious troublemakers?

They both look wistfully across the room at the play-fighting junior officers, almost wrestling as they try to pepper Nog with kisses and he bats them away in disgust, while an annoyed Quark just tries to make sure his bottles don't get knocked over.

BASHIR

I kind of miss that innocence.

RO

The youthful exuberance of those who haven't yet been beaten up by the universe a few dozen times and been ground down by unescapable reality, you mean? Yeah.

BASHIR

Here's to being the grumpy and cynical elder statesmen.

RO

Cheers.

They chink their glasses together. Ro looks around the room, everyone chatting happily or at least content. Quark and Evik. Tenmei, Nog and Candlewood. Cenn and Matthias. And herself and Bashir. She smiles.

BASHIR

What?

RO

Just that... I think it worked.

Off Ro's proud smile...

FADE OUT

END OF ACT FOUR

ACT FIVE

FADE IN

7 INT. DS9 - RO'S QUARTERS

Ro HUGS Evik warmly. Around them, the evening is winding down for everyone.

EVIK

Thank you for a lovely evening,
Laren. I genuinely enjoyed myself.

RO

I'm glad you could come, Nath. We
should do this again sometime!

EVIK

My quarters next time?

RO

If you want.

Evik picks up his empty dish of maltiv stew off the table.

EVIK

Well, a good evening to you all.
I'll see you bright and early
tomorrow for the senior staff
briefing.

A GROAN goes around the room at the thought of having to get up in the morning. Evik chuckles, and heads out to go home. The door closes behind him. Bashir stands as well.

BASHIR

Right, I suppose I'd better be off
as well.

MATTHIAS

I'll join you. I've got young ones
to kiss goodnight.

Matthias and Bashir both head to the table to pick up their own empty dishes and pay their respects to the hosts.

RO

Julian, you and I should get together and have a drink. Make fun of the young ones together.

CANDLEWOOD

Hey...

BASHIR

That might take a lot of drinks.

CANDLEWOOD

Hey!

As Bashir heads towards the door, Matthias heads towards Cenn, who is likewise gathering up his stuff.

MATTHIAS

Desca...? If you want to come and talk to me, I'm always available, okay? No pressure, that's not an order, just a friendly suggestion.

CENN

I'll think about it.

MATTHIAS

If you want a counsellor, I can be detached and professional... but I'd rather do it as a friend.

CENN

Thank you, Philippa. I appreciate the offer. And maybe I will, in a little while.

MATTHIAS

Okay. Good night.

CENN

Night.

Matthias heads to the door, joining Bashir. Ro sends her a grateful smile for offering to help Cenn, and then they are gone. Cenn rights himself and prepares to leave as well.

CENN

Thank you for everything,
Commander. I'm glad I came.

RO

(faux warning)

No - in here it's Laren.

She reaches out and hugs him. He resists it for a moment before giving in. Prynn is watching this, and remembers when she did the same for Ro, only last episode.

RO

(quiet, close)

You going to be okay?

CENN

Eventually.

They let go, and Cenn heads to the door, waving goodbye to the last remaining attendees - Nog, Candlewood and Tenmei.

TENMEI

I think that's our signal. Come
on, you two.

The three of them pick up their own dishes, offer half-hugs of thanks, and head to the door. Before they get there, however, Candlewood turns back and points at Ro and Quark.

CANDLEWOOD

Hey - you know what I just
realised? You two never said the
thing you've never said before.

Instant tension. Ro and Quark exchange awkward looks. Once again, Candlewood has blindly blundered into pointing out the elephant in the room.

CANDLEWOOD

(blithely continuing)

That's sneaky - you get everyone
else to make some grand admission
but you get away without saying
anything.

Nog and Tenmei also exchange awkward looks - they were both there for the Natima problem. They grab Candlewood by the arms and basically drag him to the door, eager to just get him out of there before he makes it any worse.

CANDLEWOOD

Hey, what are you doing? You're being very rude.

(realising
he's leaving)

...Okay g'night!

As the door closes, Prynn throws a nervous and apologetic smile towards Ro and Quark, and then they are gone.

Ro and Quark are left alone.

RO

Well! That was quite an evening.

(awkward pause)

You don't have to stay and help me clean up if you don't want.

QUARK

No, I promised I would. Besides, you said we needed to talk.

She did say that, yes. Damn it. She heads to the table and begins gathering plates, a transparent attempt to delay this uncomfortable conversation.

Quark heads across the room to pick up glasses, tidying up what barely needs any tidying. He won't push her.

QUARK

I had no idea about Cenn, did you?

RO

Not a clue. But he's never really been one to talk about himself.

QUARK

Unlike certain other people, who can't ever seem to shut up.

RO

Hard to believe we were ever that young, isn't it?

QUARK

With age comes maturity, so they say. I don't know... seems like some things are just as confusing as they always were.

He wasn't meaning to make that a point... but Ro takes it and sags a bit. She turns to face him. He realises and faces her too, from across the room.

RO

What are we, Quark?

QUARK

(no accusation)

Why ask me? I have no idea.

She turns again and carries the plates in her hands towards the replicator, where she dematerialises them away, all the while trying to put her thoughts into words. Quark waits.

RO

When I saw you with Natima, it completely took me by surprise. I had no idea how to react to it.

QUARK

You said it was fine.

RO

Yeah, well... it should have been. But it caught me off guard. Seeing you with someone you obviously cared for... I'm not even sure I would call it jealousy, but I'm not sure what else to call it.

QUARK

I'm not in love with Natima. Not anymore.

RO

The unspoken end of that sentence
being...

Quark puts down the glasses he was collecting, walks over to Ro, takes her hand and leads her back to the table. She goes with him, and they sit together.

This is less intimate than the couch or soft chairs would be, enough to give them some distance and not make it too invasive. But Quark is going to be totally honest here.

QUARK

Yes. Yes, I am in love with you.
I never said it before because I
was always pretty sure you didn't
feel the same way. But it's true.
Do you love me?

RO

Of course I love you, Quark.

QUARK

But are you in love with me? Bear
in mind that 'no' is an acceptable
answer - not because it's what I
want to hear, but because it's
what I already believe.

RO

Quark, you are the closest friend
I've ever had. I know I can always
come to you for advice, for fun,
for comfort. I've let my defences
down with you in a way I never did
with anyone... but is that love?

QUARK

I can't answer that for you.

RO

You deserve somebody to love you
that way. I feel like the worst
person ever that it can't be me.

QUARK

Nobody deserves anything, Laren. The Great Material Continuum gives, and the Great Material Continuum takes away. You try to navigate as best you can, use your talents and your instincts and your experience to guide you... but in the end, you're always at its ineffable mercy. I don't expect love. I'm just happy to get whatever flows my way.

RO

(soft chuckle)

You're not making this any easier.

All this finally out in the open, Quark takes a deep breath and sits back.

QUARK

So what do we do now?

RO

I honestly don't know.

QUARK

We could always "offer it up".

RO

Leave it for the Prophets to worry about? That might please Nath, but I'm not sure I know how to do that. I'm a worrier.

QUARK

I know. What I'm saying is, you don't have to be. Not about this. I am here for you, in whatever capacity you need. Whether I ultimately profit from that is up to the Continuum to decide, but it's not the reason I'm here. And honestly, I feel like I already have all the profit I need.

Ro snuffles through the smile, and stands.

RO
Shall we get this mess cleaned up?

QUARK
That's what I promised.

Quark stands, and they start cleaning up the room again.

As they move companionably around the room, the air much lighter now than before...

8 EXT. DEEP SPACE NINE

Pulling away from the station...

FADE OUT

END OF SHOW