

STAR TREK: DEEP SPACE NINE

9x09 - "Paradigm."

Screenplay by Martyn Dunn

Based on the novella

"Paradigm"
by Heather Jarman

appearing in

Star Trek: Worlds of Deep Space Nine
Book 1 - Cardassia / Andor

TEASER

FADE IN:

1 EXT. THELASA-VEI MARKET - NIGHT

The open-air market is now one big free-for-all party. Andorians and other aliens, all dressed in elaborate Spring Water Festival outfits, carouse and celebrate all over the place. Loud MUSIC plays, coloured STREAMERS fly in the wind, FIREWORKS explode in bright colours in the sky. The adverse weather has not dulled the party spirit at all.

SHAR and PRYNN trot into the throng, both excited by the spectacle, and by the fact that they have basically run away from home. Both still wear their plain *ceara* outfits.

PRYNN

This place is amazing, Shar! Why would you ever want to be away from here? Well... I mean, apart from your mom and all that...

(beat)

Never mind.

SHAR

It is unfortunate circumstances have to be so complicated.

PRYNN

Especially when it means giving up all this!

(changing subject)

So... now that we're fugitives from the law, what do you think of our career options? Me, I'd like to be a pirate. Establish a base in the Badlands.

Shar isn't sure for a moment whether she is kidding. But he figures it out, and plays along with a smirk.

SHAR

The Orion Syndicate is always looking for good pilots.

PRYNN

Why bother with them? They're yesterday's bad guys. We should go into business for ourselves.

SHAR

But how could a scientist help a pirate?

PRYNN

Are you kidding me? Ensuring the purity of whatever we smuggle. Devising clever new products to sell on the black market.

SHAR

Make a contribution to civilisation, in other words.

PRYNN

(grin)

That sarcasm thing's coming on great, Shar.

(pulls at clothes)

You know what, I'm getting kinda hot in this crowd. Wait there.

Prynn dodges sideways into an alley. A few moments later she emerges with her clothes rearranged - the pants ripped off into short shorts, and the shirt tied up into a halter-top that reveals her stomach and shoulders.

She shakes her hair out and comes back to Shar, spinning to show him every angle. He stands transfixed, gazing at her.

PRYNN

So is some Andorian purist going to assault me for wearing the ceara wrong, or is this okay?

(no answer)

Shar? Is it okay? I can change it back if you want.

SHAR

You are... lovely.

PRYNN

(blushes)

I wasn't fishing for compliments,
but I'll take it.

She reaches for his hand and pulls him back into the crowd.

Joining the party, Shar leads Prynn to a booth selling drinks. The vendor gives them a cup each in exchange for some currency (it is the same vendor as in 9x08, but they don't notice that for now). They begin to sip at the drinks, and Prynn looks out at the people in the crowd.

PRYNN

So tell me. What do all these
different costumes mean?

SHAR

They are the traditional clothing
of the four sexes.

He points to a male wearing the same kind of armour as the door guards at the Keep, if more party-appropriate. He is holding hands with another male in a loose chainmail shirt and leather kilt.

SHAR

That one, in warrior's attire, is
chan. My kind. Those ones in the
chainmail, they are *thaan*.

PRYNN

Like Anichent.

Shar then points to a female dressed like Thia was in 9x08.

SHAR

The embroidered *ceara* and face-
paint indicates that she is *zhen*.

PRYNN

You mean like...
(don't mention
Thriss)
...Thia.

SHAR

Yes. And the *shen* would wear a similar outfit, except with her entire back bared to reveal her fertility to the Water Guardian.

Becoming bolder and bolder, Prynn turns seductively again, making sure to reveal her own naked back to Shar. Getting the message, Shar openly admires her. Heightened by the party atmosphere, their inhibitions are starting to loosen.

PRYNN

Let's dance.

Prynn knocks the remainder of her drink back, grabs Shar's hand again, and pulls him deeper into the gyrating crowd. He finishes his own drink and follows her readily. Once in the middle, they start to move rhythmically to the music.

It isn't long before they get a little closer, and closer still, flashing flirtatious eye contact and body movements. Prynn shakes her head a bit, as if clearing a fuzzy brain.

PRYNN'S POV

Shar, excited by the dance, looking amorous and sweaty and alluring. But the edges are blurring, the colours blending together, sounds becoming muddy, losing focus. Shar is also affected, confused and unfocused. Prynn reaches out to him.

PRYNN

Shar... something's wrong...

BACK TO SCENE

Both stumble even as they continue to dance. Heartbeats rush, breath heaves, movements more explicit all the time.

Alarmed and confused, Prynn holds on to Shar to steady herself. Still, through it all, the attraction to Shar and the lack of inhibitions grow stronger and harder to deny.

Prynn turns her head and manages to focus on...

ANOTHER ANGLE

...showing the vendor at his stall, laughing while handing more drinks out to partiers.

FLASHBACK - 9x08 "NO PLACE LIKE HOME"

The vendor making his transaction with Counsellor Matthias.

MATTHIAS
(v.o., from 9x08)
Saf is a powerful aphrodisiac...

FLASHBACK

As the vendor hands Shar and Prynn their own drinks...

MATTHIAS
(v.o., from 9x08)
The overdose threshold is
alarmingly low...

BACK TO SCENE

As Prynn realises what has happened...

PRYNN
Saf... he gave us *saf...*

Prynn's movements are getting rougher and more unbalanced, and Shar is not far behind.

PRYNN'S POV

Shar's blurred worried face looms over her as Prynn collapses to the ground. She is losing consciousness, and the last thing we see is Shar trying to reach out to her as he begins to fall too, and then Prynn blacks out.

BLACK OUT:

END OF TEASER

ACT ONE

FADE IN:

2 INT. KEEP - SLEEPING AREA

Prynn lies unconscious on her bedroll. She comes to very gradually, testing her eyelids and instantly regretting it. Every movement is agony, so it's best to just stay still.

MATTHIAS (o.s.)

Prynn?

MATTHIAS crouches gently by her bedside, worried but relieved to have Prynn back safe.

PRYNN

(croaking)

Yeah. I think so. But considering that I feel like my skin has been turned inside out and my organs are hanging on the outside, I can't be certain.

MATTHIAS

(soft chuckle)

I've had other patients tell me same thing after a *saf* overdose. Consider yourself lucky.

PRYNN

Yeah... sure feel lucky.

MATTHIAS

I'm serious. Luckily, Andorians have learned how to deal with accidental overdoses, especially for their off-world guests. But the treatments will take a few hours. Until your body rebalances itself, you'll feel -

PRYNN

Like I've been stampeded by a rampaging targ? Yeah, that about covers it. What about Shar?

MATTHIAS
(uncomfortable pause)
Shar's fine. A lot has happened.

PRYNN
I know. We stole the shuttle -

MATTHIAS
The shuttle's recovered. All that
will be dealt with in due time.

PRYNN
Then what?

MATTHIAS
Vretha is missing. She's been
kidnapped.

Prynn JERKS upright and is immediately assaulted by nausea
and dizziness. Matthias gently pushes her back down.

MATTHIAS
You can't do anything about it. As
soon as I have more information...

PRYNN
But I have to -

MATTHIAS
No. You have to rest, and sleep
off the effects a bit longer.
You're both extremely lucky, you
know. If it weren't for Anichent,
you, at least, would be dead.

PRYNN
Anichent...?

MATTHIAS
He followed you when you ran away.
And he saved your life.

Emotions whirling again - worry, guilt, gratitude - Prynn
drifts off back into drugged unconsciousness.

3 **INT. CAVES**

Lying on the rough stone floor, Charivretha zh'Thane (aka VRETHA) gradually comes back to consciousness, in much the same state as Prynn. The edges of the cave are in darkness, but we can see two Andorian figures crouched in the shadow.

THAAN

Welcome back, Councillor.

Vretha spits on the ground at their feet.

THAAN

Temper. Such theatrics might work in the council chamber, but here it's just the three of us.

VRETHA

Are you going to kill me?

In response to her dry, croaky voice, the *chan* approaches and pushes a water bottle to her lips. She hesitates.

CHAN

It's not poisoned.

To prove it, he drinks from the bottle himself, then hands it back to Vretha. She takes a few hearty gulps.

THAAN

The important question is, would killing you best serve our cause? The answer to that, Councillor, has yet to be determined.

Vretha refuses to give anything away...

4 **INT. KEEP - THANTIS'S WORKSHOP**

Shar SLAMS Thia hard against the wall, disturbing the tapestries hanging there. The scream dies in her throat as he grips her hard with one hand, while the other is pulled back ready to drive it right through her eyes.

Behind them, keep guard CH'SHAL pulls his ceremonial blade, fully prepared to use it. THANTIS holds the guard back.

THANTIS
Guard, stand down!

MATTHIAS
Shar! It's not what you think!

SHAR
It was you. You used *saf* on
Charivretha. That's how you got
her. And you were behind what
happened to Prynn and me, weren't
you? You nearly killed her!

Thantis comes close to him, takes his face between her hands, forces him to look at her and see her own sadness.

THANTIS
Thirishar, please. You must
listen. Do not do this thing.

But it's only the unexpected sound of a small baby CRYING that finally breaks Shar's deadly stare. He looks down in confusion and sees that Thia's baby is inside her pouch. He lets her go with a shock, stumbling backwards.

Thia drops, and Matthias rushes to support her. Shar retreats to a couch across the room, ashamed. Guard Ch'Shal subtly places a hand on his shoulder, simultaneous comfort and warning. As Thia recovers, Shar stares.

SHAR
Is Charivretha dead?

THANTIS
We have every reason to believe
she still lives. But you must
listen. Will you?
(Shar nods)
Arenthialeh did not take the *saf* -

THIA
No. I ask your forgiveness, *Zha*,
but I will speak for myself.
(to Shar)

My bondmates stole *zha* Matthias's *saf*. But it was only because of me that they learned she had it. She told me of her plans to acquire it during our conversation aboard the shuttle. And I told them, as bondmates do. I meant nothing by it. But my *th'se* and my *ch'te*...

THANTIS

They are strong believers in the Visionist party's doctrine.

SHAR

(to Thantis)

Were you part of this?

THANTIS

No, Thirishar. Whatever else you believe about me, believe that. I knew nothing. But I know the two in question. Arenthialeh's *ch'te* even works on my sentinel detail.

FLASHBACK - 9x08 "NO PLACE LIKE HOME"

As *ch'Shal* escorts Prynn and Shar to the Enclave, we see that the second guard is the same *chan* now holding Vretha.

BACK TO SCENE

THIA

They saw your visit here as too great an opportunity to miss. We all knew you were coming to Andor. Your detour to Cheen-Thitar gave them unexpected access. But then when Vretha appeared... she was just too great a target to ignore.

MATTHIAS

I don't understand. What do they have against Shar?

THIA

The Yrythny eggs, of course.

MATTHIAS

What about them?

THANTIS

They are the focus of my party's protests against Charivretha. Her *chei* brought home the eggs, and now his friends in the Science Institute are using them in their experiments into our biology. Some say the experiments are immoral, an abomination. But these two took it further than I ever expected.

CH'SHAL

(holds up an
isolinear chip)

They left this in your belongings, Thirishar. Presumably they hoped to exploit the emotional effects. It explains their goals.

THIA

I don't like what the Science Institute is doing, but I tried convincing my bondmates that this was not the way to address their concerns. I truly believed it was just talk. Clearly, I was wrong. Now I must pay for that mistake.

CH'SHAL

Your cooperation will make a considerable difference in the consequences you'll face, *zha*.

THIA

It is not the consequences meted out by the judiciary or the parliament that concern me, *cha*. It is what my bondmates will do when they learn I betrayed them.

(tearful pause)

I believe I may know where they may have taken her.

CH' SHAL

How?

THIA

I have extensive records of a botanical expedition I made into the Cheshras Reserve three years ago. Those records were recently accessed using my *ch'te's* codes.

CH' SHAL

I'll need your data.

THIA

It won't be easy to find anyone in the Reserve. The minerals in the terrain confuse sensors. That's why we still perform scientific surveys the old-fashioned way.

CH' SHAL

An overt attack from the air will not go unnoticed, and will likely cost Charivretha her life. If there's to be a rescue mission, the Andorian Guard will have to go in on foot.

MATTHIAS

When are they expected to be here?

CH' SHAL

Three hours.

SHAR

(suddenly standing)

Too long. I'm leaving, right now.

CH' SHAL

Consider what you're saying, Thirishar.

SHAR

I am an experienced Starfleet officer, and I will not entrust my

zhavey's life to another while I
wait idly by.

MATTHIAS
I'm coming with you too.

SHAR
Phillipa...

MATTHIAS
(stern)
I'm the ranking Starfleet officer
here, Ensign. And I say this isn't
open to discussion.

A small smile softens her tone, and Shar smiles gratefully.

PRYNN (o.s.)
Count me in too.

They all turn to see Prynn standing in the doorway, still
looking distinctly rough and holding onto the wall.

PRYNN
(croaky)
You were right about those
treatments, Commander. I feel like
a new woman. My compliments to
your physician, zha Sessethantis.

SHAR
Prynn, I think we can -

PRYNN
Use my help? Good, I knew you'd
see it my way.

Shar smiles, touched by Prynn's determination to stand by
him, even while she is swaying in the doorway.

CH'SHAL
(exasperated)
This is unwise and dangerous. I
don't doubt your skills, but none
of you has any experience in the
Reserve, not even Thirishar.

THIA

But I do. I'll guide them.

THANTIS

Thia. You must think of your *thei*.

THIA

My *sh'za* will take him. She was not part of their plans either. I must do this. My *th'se* and my *ch'te* may listen to me when they will listen to no other. I might be their best hope, as well as Charivretha's. I doubt if any member of the Guard would hesitate if forced to choose between our Federation Councillor and them. Perhaps I can assure that such a choice won't be necessary.

Shar looks closely at Thia. After hating her moments ago, he doesn't know how to feel about her now. She looks at him too, and he approaches her. He holds his hand out, and she does likewise, touching her palm to his.

SHAR

Whatever happens, I wish to thank you for helping us. And to tell you I'm sorry.

THIA

As am I.

Shar and Thia seem to have come to some *détente*. From the doorway, Prynn looks on, just the tiniest bit jealous.

FADE OUT:

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

FADE IN:

5 EXT. CHESHTRAS RESERVE - RIVERBED - DAY

A sweeping wilderness of Andorian jungle. Not particularly dense or difficult, but remote enough that people very rarely come here. It's a bright day with hot sun now.

An old river bed has dried into sand - here Shar, Prynn, Thia and Matthias walk. They wear Surface Operation Blacks (as in 5x04 "Nor the Battle...") and carry heavy backpacks.

Shar walks ahead, eager to reach their destination. Thia is close behind, her hair tied up in a plain turban. Prynn is further back, smarting that Shar is not paying her much attention. Matthias is beside her, enjoying the scenery.

MATTHIAS

Thia, I was wondering... why did you change your hair? I quite liked how you had it last night.

THIA

The Reserve is sacred ground, counsellor. I would not offend the Guardians by appearing vain or disrespectful.

Prynn stifles a groan and rolls her eyes. Matthias throws a withering glare at her, warning her. Thia points...

THIA

We scale that rock formation, on a path parallel to the waterfall. The canyon where I believe they've taken Vretha is a few kilometres past there. Are we ready?

PRYNN

(snort)
Of course.

Prynn hitches her backpack, adjusting the straps.

THIA

There will be a resting place a kilometre from here. Otherwise, I can assume part of your load. I assure you it would be no burden.

PRYNN

I'm perfectly capable of carrying twenty kilos more than this.

THIA

But after a *saf* overdose?

Prynn bites her tongue. Aware of the tension, Matthias positions herself between Prynn and Thia.

MATTHIAS

Let's be on our way, shall we?

The group moves towards the direction where Thia pointed. But Matthias turns back to Prynn and mutters...

MATTHIAS

Don't make me regret allowing you to join this mission, Ensign Tenmei. You might technically be on leave, but as far as I'm concerned you're a Starfleet officer under my direct command. Conduct yourself accordingly.

PRYNN

I don't trust her. She could still be working with her bondmates.

MATTHIAS

I realise that. So keep an eye on her and keep your phaser within easy reach. But don't make things worse than they are. Am I clear?

PRYNN

(deep breath)

Yes, sir.

And they return to their path.

EXT. CHESHTRAS RESERVE - ROCKFACE - DAY

Using rock-climbing equipment, the team scale the rockface. Shar and Thia are already at the top; Prynn is about to reach it. Thia holds out a hand to help her over the edge; Prynn hesitates out of pure spite, but eventually takes it.

Once safe at the top, Prynn looks back and beckons Matthias to begin her own ascent. Things go fine for Matthias until about halfway up the rockface. Then her grip on the rope SLIPS, and she DROPS a few feet, swinging hard against the surface of the rock and scrabbling to regain her hold.

SHAR

Counsellor! Are you safe?

MATTHIAS

I think so. Just... give me a minute here...

She steadily rights herself and begins her climb again, taking a bit more care. When she finally gets to the top, all three help her over the edge. She rubs her arm where it hit the wall, and absently scratches at her face.

THIA

Can you continue?

MATTHIAS

Yes, yes, I'll be fine. Don't let me stop you. Ow.

Starting to walk through the wilderness again, Prynn takes the opportunity to be at Shar's side. And we're walking...

PRYNN

Shar? Are you okay? You haven't said much.

SHAR

Forgive me, Prynn. I am distracted by thoughts of my *zhavey*.

PRYNN

Of course, I'm sorry. I can't believe these people would go to such lengths just over a few silly experiments.

SHAR

The media and the Visionist party have done excellent work whipping the public into hysterics. They claim my zhavey is involved in a conspiracy with my colleagues at the Science Institute to pervert Andorian nature. That the Yrythny experiments will lead to the elimination of the four-gender paradigm and its replacement with two new compatible genders.

PRYNN

That's ridiculous, surely.

SHAR

Perhaps it is not so difficult to believe. You see, Prynn, the four-gendered paradigm of the Andorian species is not only unique in the Federation. It is unique on our own planet. No other life-form, plant or animal, has such a complex reproductive system.

PRYNN

How can that be?

SHAR

It is a question that has puzzled our scientists throughout our entire history. Some have wondered if we didn't evolve on this world, but rather were transplanted here by some ancient race, such as the Preservers.

(beat)

Others... have wondered if we were ever really meant to exist at all.

PRYNN

Shar... Surely you don't think the entire Andorian species is just a mistake of nature.

SHAR

What I think... is that everyone always talks about how evolution is a matter of survival of the fittest. But what they neglect to remember is that not everyone is among the fittest. And not everyone gets to survive.

Prynn is shaken by his defeated tone. But Thia has heard every word anyway, and speaks up. Meanwhile, unnoticed in the background, Matthias is still scratching her face.

THIA

Where is your faith, Thirishar? You believe that science will save our people, but you aren't so foolish as to claim to understand all its mysteries. That is faith, is it not?

SHAR

Let me anticipate. You believe the Infinite will save us.

THIA

I believe that when we, as bonds and as a people, become Whole, then we will find our answers.

PRYNN

(can't stop herself)

Well, from a purely outsider point of view, all this forcing together of bonds to be "whole" doesn't appear to be working out too well.

THIA

(tensing)

I would have thought a Starfleet officer would be more inclined to

withhold judgement of a culture she clearly does not understand. The policy of forming bonds by design evolved only in response to our current circumstances, and in the absence of a more permanent solution. It is a responsibility we embrace joyfully.

PRYNN

Most of you, maybe. But that kind of cultural mindset doesn't leave much room to manoeuvre, does it? A single health crisis or fatality before children can be conceived, and four lives are ruined. One break in the chain, for any reason, and it all comes apart.

MATTHIAS

That's enough, Prynn.

Thia stops and turns on Prynn, who does not back down. The discussion is getting hotter and tenser all the time.

THIA

How dare you. How dare you presume to judge us, you whose kind has never had to face such choices. By what right do you condemn us?

PRYNN

I don't condemn you. And maybe you are buying the time your species needs. But from what I've seen since getting to know Shar, since coming here, I think you're all fighting for the future by giving up the present. All the pressure you put on yourselves, all the self-inflicted stress, it's a miracle you aren't all suicidal.

Prynn regrets the words the moment they are out of her mouth. She turns to Shar, horrified at herself.

PRYNN

Oh God, I'm sorry, Shar, I...

SHAR

(calm, intrigued)

Is that what you really think?

PRYNN

Yeah... yeah, it is.

SHAR

Then don't be sorry.

THIA

(incensed)

Is that all you have to say?

SHAR

I could remark on the irony of hearing my own arguments with my zhavey repeated by two other individuals, but otherwise...

THIA

But how can you allow an off-worlder to speak of Shathrissia in such a manner?

MATTHIAS

(taking charge)

That's enough, all of you. This is not the time or the place. It's counterproductive to our mission, and it's going to stop.

They turn to look at Matthias, who is still SCRATCHING at her face and arm, getting more irritated by the itch. Thia looks closer at Matthias, alarmed. Small black LUMPS are erupting on Matthias's skin, a rash creeping down her neck.

THIA

We have more immediate problems.

Pulling her hand away, Matthias sees BLOOD mixed with black smudges. She is starting to feel a little woozy, dizzy.

SHAR

I see them.

MATTHIAS

See what?

THIA

Shax. You must have disturbed them when you crashed into the rock face. *Shax* are poisonous. They lay their eggs just inside your skin.

Thia comes forward, helps Matthias take off her backpack. Matthias pulls down the edge of her uniform and sees that the nests are on her upper chest and arms too. Thia is rummaging in Matthias's backpack.

MATTHIAS

Is this something I need to... worry about?

THIA

Only if we didn't have a medical kit. One dose of the serum will -

She pauses, deflated. Pulls out a smashed medical kit. They all look suitably worried, but then Thia snaps into action.

THIA

Shar, I need you to find a plant for me. Look underneath rocky outcroppings for small clusters. It's furry, mosslike, with little yellow and white flowers.

SHAR

Is it Shanchen's Mantle?

THIA

Yes. Gather as much as you can. Prynn, we're going to need hot water, at least two litres. And several sharp, narrow pieces of metal. The points will need to be made quite hot.

Nodding, they rush off into the woods to do their jobs.
Thia turns back to Matthias, helps her down to the ground.

MATTHIAS

Be honest. What's going to happen?

THIA

Very shortly, you're going to feel
pain throughout your body. As if
someone were skinning you.

MATTHIAS

And then?

THIA

If I can't devise a poultice for
you, you'll develop a high fever,
the poison will break down the
clotting factor in your blood, and
you'll haemorrhage.

As Matthias collapses worried and dizzy to the ground...

7 MONTAGE

-- Shar rummaging in the underbrush for the plant.

-- Prynn scooping up water from a nearby stream into the
canteen from her backpack.

-- Thia unwinds her turban and uses it to mop Matthias's
feverish brow.

-- Thia adds pieces of Shar's plants into the water in a
bowl, which is placed on some nearby rocks. Prynn uses her
phaser to heat the rocks and boil the water.

-- Prynn uses her phaser to cut up the canteen into slivers
of metal.

-- Thia touches the hot metal to Matthias's skin, singeing
out the *shax* nests.

-- Matthias shudders in semi-consciousness from the pain.

-- Prynn covers her mouth at the smell of burning flesh.

Matthias lies unconscious on a Starfleet blanket, stripped and covered in Thia's turban material. She then reaches behind herself and scratches her back. Shar is alarmed...

THIA

It is not *shax*. Since I began weaning my *thei*, the pouch is drying up more quickly than is comfortable. The sensation is... itchy. But I will be fine.

SHAR

If you will allow me, I can help.

THIA

I would greatly appreciate that, Thirishar. But I am uncertain as to the propriety of the situation. It forces intimacy that should not be shared outside the bond.

SHAR

It is no worry. I suspect you would not be comfortable asking Prynn to help you in this way.

Thia lies face down on the ground. Shar reaches into her backpack, finds a bottle of moisturising oil. He gently lifts up the edge of her shirt, where the birth pouch wraps all around her lower abdomen, looking dry and inflamed.

Drizzling the oil into his hands, Shar hesitantly begins to massage Thia's skin with it. It is intimate, rather awkward but also distinctly sensual. Thia relaxes under Shar's ministrations, and he too is getting into the rhythm.

THIA

I do not regret letting you ease my discomfort, Shar, but... I feel as if I am robbing you of the chance to share this first within a bond of your own.

SHAR

I have relinquished my place in my
bondgroup to another.

THIA

I know you have lost Shathrissia,
but why separate yourself from
those you love?

Shar continues rubbing her back, trying not to think about
the emotions she is bringing up for him.

THIA

I know we see things differently,
Shar. But do not punish yourself
for Shathrissia's choice. Do not
deny yourself your birthright -
the *shelthreth*. There is no
greater joy you can experience
than when the four become Whole.

Shar's hands stop moving as his emotional shields begin to
crumble. Sensing his distress, she sits back up and turns
to him. She reaches out to him compassionately, and he
crumples forward into her arms, crying.

PAN AROUND to the woods, and we see that Prynn has stopped
just outside the area where Thia and Shar lie. Partially
hidden by the bushes and trees, they have not noticed her.
But she has seen them - the intimacy, the tenderness.

Her heart pounding, tears threatening, Prynn turns and
rushes away into the depths of the woods.

FADE OUT:

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

FADE IN:

9 EXT. CHESHTRAS RESERVE - WOODS - DUSK

Shar and Prynn trudge through the woods, trying to be as quiet and subtle as the undergrowth allows. It is edging towards DUSK now. The awkwardness is still between them.

SHAR

Prynn?

PRYNN

Hmmm?

SHAR

We have little time, and I've been wrong to avoid speaking with you before now. I've been unfair.

PRYNN

What do you mean, exactly?

SHAR

I am sorry for what happened at the Spring Water Festival. I was angry at my zhavey... and those things I do in anger are rarely good. I compromised your safety. You could have been killed.

PRYNN

Damn straight I could. I get that this is a difficult time for you. More than difficult - impossible. But I've been plenty supportive, while you've been pretty clueless.

SHAR

What can I say? Without you...

PRYNN

(spins, angry)

Why were you massaging Thia?

SHAR

She needed help. It's what's done.
It's what *chan* does for *zhen*.

PRYNN

Since when does Thirishar ch'Thane
do what *chan* does for *zhen*?

SHAR

(sigh)

I am part of the Whole, whether I
like it or not. This trip, these
events... I have reconnected with
a part of me that I thought I had
given up forever.

PRYNN

So what does that mean, Shar? I
would do anything for you. But is
there a place for me - for us - in
the "whole" ?

Shar is caught between the two - his need for his culture,
and his growing feelings for Prynn. He comes close to her.

SHAR

There will always be a place for
you in my life.

PRYNN

I want to believe that.

10 **INT. CAVES**

Vretha sits huddled against a wall with her wrists and
ankles tied. She has been sitting like this for hours, and
is tired and hungry and uncomfortable and scared.

The *thaan* is nearby, crouching in the low headroom. The
chan is nowhere to be seen. A small portable light makes
little difference to the encroaching darkness in the cave.

VRETHA

How long is this ridiculous
charade going to take?

THAAN

(official speech)

Those of us in the Visionist party have struggled to draw attention to the egregious mistakes being made by the Science Institute -

VRETHA

(dismissing him)

These kinds of accusations are repetitive. Over the course of my political career, I've seen -

THAAN

You don't understand. I've seen the documentation with my own eyes. I know that I speak the truth. See for yourself.

He shoves a padd up to her face, with rapidly scrolling pages of technical information and DNA diagrams. Vretha doesn't understand a word.

VRETHA

I am no scientist. But if you give me a copy, I will look into it. I promise I will help you.

THAAN

Promise? The way that you promised to take our crisis to the greatest minds in the Federation? The way you assured us, repeatedly, that we would not be forgotten?

VRETHA

Federation scientists are as baffled by our dilemma as we are. To say nothing of the fact that the war has stretched resources to the limit. There are many worlds in far worse -

THAAN

Politics!

VRETHA

Isn't kidnapping a high-ranking official a political act? If you are so sure of your accusations, why have you not gone to the media? Why go to this extreme?

THAAN

I tried. The media wouldn't touch it because I could not verify my data. And of course the Science Institute denied everything.

(sneer)

And it was your chei who provided the Yrythny eggs to the Institute for their research.

VRETHA

My *chei* has no part in any such research.

THAAN

Let's say you're right. That your Thirishar is innocent. The fact remains that without his gift, the evil would not be possible.

VRETHA

You keep calling this alleged research evil. But what of our plight? Our people are dying! If it is a choice between continued existence as two sexes and total extinction, where is the choice?

THAAN

In remaining Andorians! Our four identities as *chan*, *zhen*, *shen* and *thaan* are the very foundation of our existence. Altering that will destroy who we are!

Before the argument can escalate further, there is the sound of an EXPLOSION (only the sound though - no falling rocks). At the same time, the portable light flickers and dies. The *thaan* jerks, looking to the mouth of the cave.

THAAN

Wemeth! Are you alright?

(no answer;
to Vretha)

Don't move.

Worried for his partner, the *thaan* half-stands and begins to move off, pulling out a DAGGER as he creeps forward. In the dim light, something GLINTS on the ground. Crouching, he sees a small device - the dummy that made the sound of an explosion plus an E-M pulse. He growls with anger.

Two joined fists come down and SLAM the *thaan* on the back of the neck, and he crumples to the ground, his dagger clattering. Shar is standing over him, wearing his black surface suit. He hisses with satisfaction, then turns to look deeper into the cave. Close-up on his antennae:

SHAR'S ANTENNAE POV

A night-vision perspective, showing the cold, jagged shapes of the cave, and a warmer humanoid figure sat huddled in the distance - clearly Vretha.

PRYNN (o.s.)

Shar. Go. I'll keep watch.

BACK TO SCENE

Shar dashes forward into the cave. Prynn, also in her black surface suit and with night-vision goggles, stands watch with her phaser drawn.

Shar picks his way carefully over the rough ground, until he reaches Vretha, who is sat scared in the near-total darkness. Shar places a re-breather unit over Vretha's face, and brings out his own knife to slit her bonds.

SHAR

(whisper)

Zhavey. It is Thirishar. You are safe now. Stay silent.

Vretha nods gratefully as she struggles to her feet on unreliable legs. Shar supports her as they move back towards the mouth of the cave, where Prynn waits.

PRYNN

(whisper)

The other one's still out there
somewhere. The *chan*.

SHAR

Does your tricorder work?

Prynn pulls her tricorder from her backpack, tries it.

PRYNN

Nothing. Too much interference.

SHAR

We'll have to risk it.

They edge forward again. But after a few steps, Shar stops.

SHAR

Wait...

SHAR'S ANTENNAE POV

The shape of the mouth of the cave is clear in the night-vision image, as is the shape of another humanoid standing in its opening against the darkness outside.

SHAR (o.s.)

He's there.

BACK TO SCENE

They tense as they try to decide what to do.

PRYNN

He's got the perfect advantage.
There's only one way out of here
and he's got it covered.

SHAR

And he can see us as well as I can
see him.

ANOTHER ANGLE

Looking from the opening into the depths of the cave. The *chan* stands tense, a phaser raised at attention. He hears Prynn's voice echoing out from the darkness.

PRYNN (o.s.)

I know you're out there.

(pause)

Councillor zh'Thane is wounded.

I'll pass over my weapon if you will help her. Please help me!

I'll negotiate for our safety!

Distrustful, the *chan* edges forward, holding his phaser out before him. In the darkness, he can just make out Prynn, and Vretha sit-leaning against the cave wall. But no sign of Shar. The *chan* warily scans the darkness for him.

CHAN

You're a fool, human.

PRYNN

I don't really give a damn what you think of me. But we don't stand a chance of escaping, and I'd like to avoid being a corpse.

CHAN

What makes you think we'll help you after the inconvenience you've caused us?

PRYNN

Because you already know that if we're here, somebody else knows you're here. If we don't reach our contact point at the designated time, the Andorian Guard will come looking for us. And if they find us dead, you can kiss any chance of advancing your cause goodbye.

Forced to accept her logic, the *chan* edges further forward, his weapon still trained on Prynn and Vretha.

CHAN

Drop your weapon.

Prynn takes her phaser out of its hip holster and drops it onto the stony ground. Kicks it away.

PRYNN

There. Now will you help me?
Please?

Edging closer, the *chan* keeps his phaser trained while reaching down to pick up Prynn's. As he is distracted, Shar appears from behind a wall and FIRES his phaser. The shot only hits the *chan* in the side, not enough to put him down.

He turns towards Shar, his own phaser raising. But Prynn reaches out, grabs him by the antennae and sharply pulls his head down towards her raised knee, SMASHing his nose.

He stumbles to the ground, bleeding, and Prynn grabs him, dragging him to his feet with her arm around his neck.

PRYNN

Shar, help Vretha. She really has sprained her ankle. You'll have to carry her.

Shar rushes up to Vretha, assessing her injuries, elated at her rescue.

SHAR

You're fine, you're fine... we will be alright, *zhavey*. We will. I promise. But we must move.

PRYNN (o.s.)

(strained)

Shar...

Shar turns and sees that while his back was turned, the *thaan* has regained consciousness and is now holding Prynn tight against him, his DAGGER at her throat. Blood trickles from the shallow cut. The *chan* crawls away into the darkness, cradling his bloody nose. Shar hisses with fury.

THAAN

I'll kill her.

SHAR

Kill any one of us and you've handed victory to your enemies.

THAAN

You think in too small terms, *chei* of zh'Thane. Our cause is greater than politics. This is about morality! Toying with Andorian genetics and claiming it is in our best interests. And about what you have done to help them!

SHAR

I saw the statements you left. They were preposterous. I had nothing to do with them. Why would you think such a thing?

VRETHA

(croaky)

He claims he has proof, Thirishar.

Shar stops, confused. He turns back to the *thaan*.

SHAR

Show me.

Making sure to keep his knife at Pryn's throat, the *thaan* hands his padd to Shar. Shar reads it for a few moments, the certainty dropping from his face with each line.

After a moment, the padd drops from his hand and CLATTERS to the ground as he gazes in amazement and horror.

SHAR

If this is true... I'll help you. But not like this. We'll get back, and then I'll find out if this abomination is real or not.

THAAN

You expect me to trust you?

SHAR

You have my word as a Starfleet officer. And something else.

He reaches into a pocket and brings out Thia's *shapla*, holding it out to the *thaan*.

SHAR

I offer this as proof we can be trusted.

The *thaan* recognises it. The knife falls from his hand. He lunges at Shar in a fury, ripping the *shapla* from his hand.

THAAN

You took it from her! You killed her and took this from her!

SHAR

She gave it to us. She waits out in the Reserve, looking after another member of our team. Send your companion while we wait here, if you wish. Thia will affirm my claims.

The *thaan* crumples to the ground, wailing, cradling the *shapla*. Prynn goes to Shar, and they help Vretha up from the wall and out of the cave, leaving the *thaan* to cry.

FADE OUT:

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

FADE IN:

11 EXT. ANDOR CAPITAL CITY - ESTABLISHING

The establishing shot of Zhevra city from ep 9x08.

12 INT. SCIENCE INSTITUTE - CLASSROOM

Shar stands, back in his standard uniform, in a classroom filled with various advanced scientific equipment. He is happy here - this is where he feels comfortable. His old teacher, an older *shen* named SH'VEILETH, greets him warmly.

SH'VEILETH

Thirishar! My star student returns to the fold. So what did you bring for me this time?

Shar holds out a canister to sh'Veileth, who takes it, unscrewing the top with an interested look and sniff.

SHAR

When I was out in the Cheshras Reserve recently, I had cause to gather some samples of Shanchen's Mantle. The botanist I was with told me that these are a different strain from what is normally found elsewhere on Andor. I wondered if perhaps you could run an analysis.

SH'VEILETH

(sniffs, grimaces)

Certainly is pungent. How did you manage to get to the Reserve? I've been trying to get them to fund my own trip for years.

SHAR

A long story. I'm sure it will be released to the media soon.

SH'VEILETH

Well, I'll take a look and let you know whatever I find.

SHAR

Thank you, Professor sh'Veileth.
(tensing)

I do have another reason for my visit. I was hoping for an update on your work with the Yrythny ova.

SH'VEILETH

Oh, of course! How foolish, I should have thought to have it ready for you. Follow me. I think you'll be very pleased.

sh'Veileth leads him over to a computer screen. She taps various entries, brings up a series of diagrams and data. It is a chromosomal diagram - sh'Veileth taps the screen.

SH'VEILETH

Chromosome seventeen - where most Andorian geneticists believe our fertility problems stem from. Now watch.

She taps some more instructions, and the diagram changes. Blinking yellow dots appear at half a dozen places.

SH'VEILETH

Inserting specific segments from the Yrythny DNA here, here and here, changes the expression of the Andorian genes.

SHAR

And?

SH'VEILETH

While it doesn't resolve all our problems, this is a very promising start. Gene therapy developed from the Yrythny DNA has the potential to increase the window of Andorian fertility by two cycles or more.

SHAR

More cycles, more opportunities to conceive. That's wonderful!

SH'VEILETH

Now for the best part. A slight modification to the therapy has the potential to increase the numbers of viable gametes produced by the four partners.

SHAR

You mean more than one infant at a time? We haven't had multiple births on Andor since...

SH'VEILETH

More than a century, I know. This could dramatically shift the population dynamics in a relatively short time.

SHAR

(almost overcome)

Oh, Professor. You've done it. You've opened a window of hope for our people.

SH'VEILETH

I am honoured to be the vessel of your faith. But it could never have been done without you.

SHAR

I regret that I must bring up an unpleasant subject. Are the ova being used in any other research here, besides your own?

SH'VEILETH

Ah. Clearly you've heard the Visionist propaganda. Other teams are using the ova, but I do not know the nature of their research.

Shar hands her the padd that Vretha's captor gave him. She reads through it, the excitement fading from her face.

SH'VEILETH

Let me see what I can learn.

13 **INT. VRETHA'S OFFICE**

Vretha sits staring out of the window at the view of the capital city, at the world she represents. She is physically recovered, but her heart is broken.

Behind her, the door to her office opens and Shar enters, head held high, excited to tell her his news.

SHAR

Zhavey, I have an incredible report from Professor sh'Veileth at the Science Institute. She's made a breakthrough with the Yrythny ova...

(notices her state)

Zhavey? What is it?

Vretha turns in her chair and pushes a padd across the table towards him. She is barely able to face it.

VRETHA

See for yourself.

SHAR

(takes the padd)

This is also from sh'Veileth.

VRETHA

Yes. She was able to find the answers to your questions. She thought I should know at once.

He sits opposite her, reading through the padd. Once again, his excited expression drops away with every word.

SHAR

So it's true.

VRETHA

Yes. The research, authorised in secret, was rationalised as "an attempt to pursue any and all options to prevent Andorian extinction." That's how Doctor th'Sarash phrased it when I confronted him moments ago.

SHAR

And there is no question that -

VRETHA

None. Our own scientists decided they should engineer our species out of all recognition. I was so sure I knew our people better than that. That we were not capable of such a thing.

SHAR

So, what now?

VRETHA

The people of Andor need to hear the truth from me. That in our desperation, there were those among us who believed they knew what was right for our people, no matter the cost. Blinded by their devotion to our world, they made unacceptable decisions.

SHAR

Do you speak of the scientists... or of yourself?

VRETHA

Both. I will face our people and tell them that, while it has been my pleasure to serve them, I will request that the Parliament nominate another to be Andor's representative to the Federation. If you choose not to stand with me, I will understand.

Shar stands from his seat, walks gently to her side of the table, crouches down by her and holds his palm out to hers.

SHAR

You could be speaking of me as well, *Zhavey*. I will face them with you. It is not the way of our people to be alone.

14 **EXT. CHEEN-THITAR KEEP - DAY**

Outside the castle on the hill. It is day now, and the wind has died down a fair bit.

15 **INT. KEEP - CORRIDORS**

Prynn walks again through the maze of corridors, trying to find a particular place and having no idea how to do so. She comes again to the big crossroads of corridors, turns around, and throws her arms up in frustration.

But then she notices a male, a *thaan* approaching down one of the corridors. She catches her breath, and realises that it is ANICHENT, Shar's bondmate. He hasn't noticed her yet, and she doesn't know if she should speak to him or not. But she takes a deep breath and walks towards him.

PRYNN

Anichent...

He looks up, surprised. He takes a second to recognise her, but then he gives a shallow, polite bow.

ANICHENT

Ensign Tenmei. May I help you?

PRYNN

I don't know if this is the right thing to do, but where I come from, acknowledging a debt, especially one of this magnitude, is just good manners. The truth is I - and Shar - we would have died if you didn't -

ANICHENT

I did what was required. One alone cannot be Whole, nor two, nor three. Even under the present circumstances, Shar remains a part of my Whole.

He is quite calm, almost friendly. Prynn is surprised, not sure what to say. She hopes her face says it all.

ANICHENT

My feelings for Shar have never changed. They are shaded by our trouble, perhaps... but enduring.

PRYNN

Anichent... I'm so sorry. About Thriss. And about Shar.

ANICHENT

As am I, Prynn Tenmei. But I rejoice for my mate... and any who bring him happiness.

Anichent bows again, and carries on the way he was going, leaving Prynn more torn than ever.

16 INT. KEEP - CRECHE

Prynn enters quietly, finally having found the room she was looking for. Thia sits on the ground beside a baby-changing mat, only now the mat is empty. She wears a long-sleeved ceara, staring blankly at the empty baby-less space. At Prynn's arrival, she tries to rouse herself.

PRYNN

Thia...?

THIA

Ensign Tenmei... Prynn. It is good that you are safe. I have been less than gracious to you, and...

As she tries to stand, she stumbles, falling forward. Prynn rushes up to catch her, helping her sit against the wall.

Thia is dizzy, unfocused. Prynn reaches down to hold her wrist, testing for her pulse, and finds a trickle of blue BLOOD running down her arm. Gasping in shock, Prynn pushes up Thia's sleeve and sees angry, deep slashes in her flesh.

PRYNN

Oh god no, not again... Thia, what happened? You've been hurt.

Prynn quickly checks the rest of Thia's body, and the arm slashes seem to be the worst of it.

PRYNN

Are you still dizzy? Have you eaten anything?

(Thia shakes
her head)

Anything at all? Have you slept?

THIA

It... has been a difficult time since we returned from the Reserve. I have been occupied with many concerns.

PRYNN

(exasperated)

You Andorians, could you make it any harder on yourselves? I'm getting a doctor.

THIA

(grabs her)

No. Don't. I can take care of it. Please leave me.

PRYNN

They're self-inflicted, aren't they? Those wounds on your arms. You did this.

Hugging herself on the floor, Thia begins to sniffle, trying to stop herself from breaking into tears.

THIA

They left me...

PRYNN

Who did?

(realises)

Your bondmates...

THIA

My *th'se* and my *ch'te*... because I helped you, they say I betrayed them...

(crying)

My *sh'za*, she sided with them. She took my child. They have invoked the Whole Vessel Law and removed me from the bond...

(crumbling)

They left me... I am alone. I am alone...

Thia is devastated, hugging herself tight and rocking back and forth, whispering over and over again to herself. Prynn can only hold her and comfort her as best she can.

FADE OUT:

END OF ACT FOUR

ACT FIVE

FADE IN:

17 INT. KEEP - COFFIN ROOM

Close-up on THRISS, lying in repose in her clear-lidded coffin, swathed in gentle blue light. A hand - Shar's - reaches in to touch the glass, as if stroking her face.

SHAR (v.o.)
I am here, *Zhadi*.

18 INT. KEEP - THANTIS'S WORKSHOP

Thantis stands quietly in the dim room, already wearing traditional *zhen* mourning robes. Her completed grief mask lies on the desk before her. Scabs cover her one real arm, where she has also been clawing at herself.

Shar stands at the doorway. Without looking at him, she directs him towards the couch. It is a while before Thantis can bring herself to speak.

THANTIS
I have asked you here, Thirishar,
to be part of the Rite of Memory.

SHAR
(quiet)
What? But you had asked Counsellor
Matthias...

THANTIS
I was wrong. I allowed everyone to
believe I had excluded you from
the ritual because I blamed you
for Thriss's death. But that is a
lie. I am punishing my *zhei* for
the sake of my own pride. To send
her to the next life without you -
you of all, Thirishar - is a most
selfish act.
(tearful)
I plead for your forgiveness.

SHAR

Forgive you? *Zhadi*, the mistakes were mine. I blame no-one but myself.

THANTIS

That is because you do not know what I have concealed from you - and from Anichent and Dizhei. You all deserved to know, but I hid the truth out of my own shame...

(pause)

I knew how to save Thriss... and chose not to.

Shar looks with confusion into Thantis's pleading eyes...

19 INT. KEEP - COFFIN ROOM

Now we see that it is Shar, gazing down with tearful eyes at his dead love...

We zoom in ECU on his eyes, fading...

20 INT. BETAZED HALL - POV SHOT

A destroyed room, FIRES burning, electrics SPARKing, walls and columns collapsed, plaster tumbling from the ceiling. We are seeing Thantis's POV throughout the scene. We are on the ground, pinned, looking up at the devastation in fear and confusion. Fast panicked breaths and heartbeats sound.

We turn one way, see Thantis's left arm. She stretches her fingers, testing them. She looks the other way, but cannot see her other arm, buried under rubble. Elsewhere in the room, we hear running, shuffling feet and urgent voices.

THRISS (o.s.)

Zhavey! Zhavey!

We see THRISS, alive and well, crouch down into POV. She looks into camera, upset and scared but determined.

THRISS

We heard the Art Academy was hit in the last Jem'Hadar assault. I

ordered this team together. We'll
get you out of here.

(to the side)

Reshus! Leilo! Get over here!

A Betazoid man and a Bolian woman enter POV, trying to lift the rubble off of Thantis's body. She tries to move...

THRISS

Oh no you don't. Not until we can
free your other arm.

The three medics struggle for a while longer. We turn to the right and see a pool of blue blood running from under a broken piece of statue that hides Thantis's right arm.

Thriss brings out a tricorder and scans. She sighs tearfully, reaching out to hold Thantis's free hand.

THRISS

Zhavey... your arm, I... I cannot
save it. Perhaps if I were a
physician, if those who came with
me were more than orderlies...

The heartbeat and breathing increase - amputation. Thriss leans in close, upset but forcibly keeping herself focused and in control. Strangely, Thriss is in her element here.

THRISS

I'm so sorry, *zhavey*. I will
explain the procedure. I assure
you, you will feel no pain...

Thriss prepares a hypospray and leans in, injecting the hypospray into Thantis's neck. With a hiss, the POV begins to fog and fade as Thantis loses consciousness...

31 **INT. KEEP - THANTIS'S WORKSHOP**

Shar jerks back to the real world, out of the memory. His hands are cupped before him, and Thantis's are cupped around his. Between them they hold a crystal-and-metal device that fills their palms. Small wires come off the device and are attached to Shar's temples.

As Shar catches his breath, Thantis removes her hands, reaches to disconnect the wires, and then slowly takes the device from Shar, placing it back into an elaborate box.

SHAR

(whisper)

She was so strong... I knew she had a powerful will, of course, but the commanding, confident *zhen* I saw in your memory...

THANTIS

Her medical colleagues respected her, trusted her. Among them she flowered, became stronger. Had she remained with them she would have been safe, continued to be the Thriss you saw.

(pause)

But I wanted her here with me... I insisted. You, Thirishar - you are strong enough to stand up to the pressure we put on ourselves. But that pressure... it crushed her.

Shar reaches out to Thantis. They weep for Thriss together.

32 INT. KEEP - COFFIN ROOM

Shar cries over Thriss's coffin. There is a creak of a door behind him and he turns - Prynn is standing there. She gasps to see him, because he is wearing traditional *chan* mourning clothes - the warrior's outfit, breastplate and cuirasses and dagger, but all in glittering white.

PRYNN

I almost didn't recognise you. You look... magnificent.

SHAR

I had one last task...

He opens his other hand. He is holding his *shapla* locket, tentatively, as if he has no idea what to do with it. Prynn walks quietly towards him, looks down at the coffin.

PRYNN

She looks peaceful...

SHAR

Peace has been hard to come by.

PRYNN

What was your good news?

He gives a sad chuckle. He relates the news blankly, as if it no longer matters to him.

SHAR

I almost forgot. My old teacher, Professor sh'Veileth, has had great success with the Yrythny experiments. She has devised a way of both extending our window of fertility and of producing more children within that window. Scientific trials begin soon.

PRYNN

Oh Shar... that's wonderful. I'm so happy for you.

SHAR

Also, the unusual strain of Shanchen's Mantle we discovered, the plant we used to heal Counsellor Matthias's wounds...

PRYNN

What about it?

SHAR

Thia said it was different. What makes it different... is the existence of a four-gamete fertilisation process.

PRYNN

Shar, this is incredible! It's the evidence you've wanted for centuries, isn't it?

SHAR

I suppose so...

PRYNN

(baffled)

Shar... you've just rescued your entire race from extinction. And you've proved that nature does support a four-gender paradigm. It's everything you ever wanted. So why aren't you happier?

SHAR

Look at everything it has cost me, Prynn. My zhavey lost her position on the Federation Council, Thriss lost her life... my bond is gone. Once again my decisions have hurt the people I love.

With his look at her, he clearly includes her in this. He reaches out for her, and she lets him take her hand, even though she knows it's wrong.

SHAR

When this is done, we will go away. You and I. Perhaps we will even become pirates.

PRYNN

No, Shar. Anichent and Dizhei need you. And Thia... Thia will need you too.

He is confused for a moment, until he gradually realises...

SHAR

Prynn, no. That part of my life is over. You are the one...

PRYNN

No. I understand. Truly I do. And I'm prepared to be very selfless and let you go to them. But if I stay here much longer, I might never be able to leave.

The door CREAKS again, and they both turn to see that Anichent, Dizhei and Thantis are all standing there. They are all dressed in pure white versions of the traditional clothing, and all carry their grief masks.

Dizhei GASPS, just at the sadness of the occasion and at how Shar looks in his mourning outfit.

PRYNN
(whisper)
Go to them, Shar. Go now.

She backs away, heading quietly to the door. Shar stands nervously for a moment, until Anichent steps forward and draws him into an emotional embrace. Dizhei joins them.

At the doorway, Thantis offers a polite nod to Prynn before the ensign slips out unnoticed.

33 EXT. CHEEN-THITAR KEEP - NIGHT

It is time for the Sending, at last. A crowd of mourners have gathered in two parallel lines, creating a passage from the main entrance arch and down over the hill.

Thia, Vretha and Matthias are all in line, wearing traditional *zhen* dress and grief masks. Prynn exits the building in *shen* clothes, quickly jogging into place next to Matthias. Deep, mournful BELLS sound rhythmically.

MATTHIAS
Where have you been?

PRYNN
Sorry. I came as soon I heard the summons.

With mournful MUSIC playing, the funeral party exits the building. The crowd watches as four guards carry Thriss's coffin down the passage created by the crowd.

Behind the coffin Shar, Anichent and Dizhei walk three abreast, wearing their grief masks. Behind them, Thantis and three others - Thriss's other parents, also masked. As the group walks on, the crowd turns and follows them.

PRYNN

(*sotto*)

We'll be travelling back to Deep Space Nine alone, Counsellor. Just you and me.

MATTHIAS

Are you sure? Shar didn't say anything to me.

PRYNN

That's because he hasn't worked it out for himself yet. But it's going to happen. There's not a doubt in my mind.

MATTHIAS

(*gently*)

Andorians are used to loving more than one person at once, Prynn...

PRYNN

Counsellor, don't. Please...

Matthias nods, understanding. They both turn to watch the procession, which finally reaches a flattened area of the hillside. Everyone's clothes and hair ripple in the wind.

The four carriers place the coffin onto a raised, square rock, then back away. Shar stumbles as he comes to a stop, almost unable to go on in his grief. Anichent and Dizhei support him. A PRIEST steps forward, calls out.

PRIEST

Who comes, seeking safe passage for Shathrissia?

SHAR / ANICHENT / DIZHEI

We do - her Whole.

PRIEST

From you, the Infinite, came the substance of her life. To you, the Infinite, we return her. Who will send Shathrissia home?

Thantis holds the crystal-and-metal device in her hands. She holds it out to Shar, Anichent and Dizhei. They each in turn fasten their own *shapla* lockets into notches on its sides. The fourth side is taken with Thriss's own *shapla*.

Once that is done, Thantis stands, staring at the object in her hands, unable to go on. She looks up at Shar, tearful, silently begging him to go in her place. He takes the device in his cupped palms, turns slowly and steps forward.

SHAR

I, Thirishar, hold the Cipher, and
I will send Shathrissia.

The priest steps aside, and Shar steps towards the coffin. With a last breathless look at Thriss's peaceful face, he fixes the cipher into a large notch in the foot of the coffin and steps back.

A low rumbling begins in the hillside. Suddenly, the square stone BURSTS into a tower of blazing blue fire, surrounding the coffin. It is almost too bright to look at, but Shar and the others do so anyway.

A single voice joins the mournful music, singing out loud in native Andorian. Prynn turns and sees that it is Thia. The crying *zhen* steps forward, letting the mourners hear her song. Shar, Anichent and Dizhei turn towards her. They open their arms, and all four embrace as they cry together.

Prynn looks on, trying to be strong as the blue fire burns.

FADE OUT:

THE END