"Lower Decks"
FADE IN:

1 INT. TEN FORWARD

TROI and RIKER are sitting at a table looking over a PADD. The usual compliment of N.D's fill the room.

A waiter stands at a nearby table, wiping it clean. His name is BEN, and though Riker and Troi don't notice, he's eavesdropping on their conversation.

RIKER
Geordi needs a new TECH officer --
(off PADD)
He's recommended Fletcher and Carstairs.

TROI
(considers)
I'd go with Carstairs for a supervisory position -- she's better with people.

RIKER
I agree...
(work the PADD)
That takes care of Engineering.

Riker leans back and rubs his eyes as if they're tired.

RIKER
Didn't we just finish a Crew Evaluation Report?

TROI
(smiles)
That was three months ago.

RIKER
Feels like three weeks. Maybe we should just give everyone a promotion and call it a night.
(smiles)
What do you say... Commander?

TROI
(smiles)
Fine with me... Captain.
revealing a table in the corner from which four junior officers are watching Riker and Troi -- who can be seen in the background laughing over something one of them has said.

Two of them are recognizable: ALYSSA OGAWA, Beverly's Nurse, and Ensign SITO JAXA, the young Bajoran woman from "First Duty." As we'll see, the Nova Squadron incident has left Sito a little unsure of herself; determined to get her career back on track but desperate to avoid making another mistake, she's become very cautious, very by-the-book.

The group is rounded out by a Vulcan male named TAURIK and a human male named LAUELLE. Like Sito, they are both in their mid to late twenties. Lavelle is bright, handsome and personable -- think of Riker twelve years ago. Taurik is extremely intelligent and knows it -- he has enormous confidence in his own abilities.

LAUELLE
Why do they keep laughing? What's so funny about Crew Evaluations?

OGAWA
Don't worry about it, Sam.

SITO
Let's just try and have a good time.

LAUELLE
How can I have a good time when my career's being decided across the room?

Lavelle crosses his fingers, closes his eyes...

LAUELLE
(quiet)
Think promotion... promotion... promotion...

Taurik regards him curiously.

TAURIK
I fail to see the logic in what you are doing.

Lavelle ignores him, keeps up his quiet chant.

(Continued)
CONTINUED:

TAURIK
You can not seriously believe that this behavior will influence the outcome of your evaluation?

LAUELLE
Promote me, please -- so I can have my own room.

Taurik reacts --

TAURIK
Are you saying you are displeased to be my roommate...?

Lauelle and the others share a smile over their Vulcan friend's failure to get the joke. Suddenly Sito sees something across the room:

SITO
Look, there's Ben --

ON RIKER AND TROI
Ben is approaching them with TWO COFFEES.

RIKER
About this promotion to Ops --

TROI
The new night duty officer?

RIKER
(acknowledges)
Lauelle's an obvious candidate, but I'm thinking about Ensign Sito as well.

TROI
Isn't she a Security Officer?

Ben starts to set the coffees down.

RIKER
(nods)
It's a little unusual to transfer someone out of their division, but Worf recommended her personally.

BEN
There you go...

Riker acknowledges with a nod.

(CONTINUED)
TROI

Thanks.

Ben moves off, and we FOLLOW HIM as he approaches the junior officer's table.

Ben is about the same age as the others; has an easy smile and wit. He signed aboard a Starship for fun and adventure, and as a civilian, isn't subject to the pressures of Starfleet. He likes nothing more than to kid his friends about how seriously they take everything.

LAUELLE
Are they working on the crew evaluations?

Yep.

SITO
Who were they talking about?

BEN
(to Sito)

You.

SITO
(alarmed)

Me?

LAUELLE
(to Sito; reassuring)
That's not necessarily bad.

BEN
(to Lauelle)
You too, Sam.

Lauelle is suddenly just as alarmed as Sito.

LAUELLE
What were they saying?

BEN
I'm not sure you're going to like it...

Now they're really alarmed.

BEN
Apparently... you're both up for the same job...

(CONTINUED)
Everyone reacts. Sito and Lauelle look at each other... wondering how this will affect their friendship... Off this moment we...

FADE OUT.

END OF TEASER
ACT ONE

FADE IN:

(NOTE: Episode credits fall over opening scenes.)

INT. BRIDGE

Sito is at Tactical, Lauelle at the Conn -- Riker is giving them a series of rapid-fire orders from the Command Area. DATA is at Ops, Worf at an aft-station -- various N.D's as needed.

RIKER
Lock phasers on target --

SITO
(works)
Phasers locked --

DATA
(off console)
The enemy vessel is firing.

RIKER
Helm, hard to starboard!

LAUELLE
(works)
Hard starboard --
The ship banks hard and everyone leans into the turn.

RIKER
Fire phasers!

Sito works the console but it takes her a moment to comply -- Worf turns from the aft station to watch as she recovers and fires.

SITO
Firing --

We hear the SOUND of phasers firing.

DATA
Target is destroyed.

RIKER
Very good. Terminate simulation sequence and secure from drill maneuvers.

(turns to Sito)
What happened back there, Ensign?

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

Sito explains, a little nervously.

SITO
I'm sorry, sir. When we changed course I had to re-lock the phasers before I could fire.

Worf shows her something on the Tactical console:

WORF
Next time allow the locking relay to float until the actual order to fire is given.

Worf's tone is less harsh than we sometimes see -- as if he means his comment to be constructive, not critical.

RIKER
They may not teach that trick at the Academy, but it works.

SITO
Thank you, sir.

Riker turns to Lavelle.

RIKER
Lavelle...

LAUELLE
Sir?

There is a moment of anticipation on Lavelle's face, as if he's hoping to be complimented.

RIKER
Resume previous course and speed.

A flicker of disappointment crosses Lavelle's features.

LAUELLE
(all business)
Aye, aye sir.

RIKER
One "aye" is sufficient acknowledgment, Ensign.

Lavelle's face flushes with embarrassment. Picard enters from the Ready Room and approaches Riker.

(CONTINUED)
PICARD
Helm, change course for the Argaya system -- maximum warp.

LAUELLE
Aye, sir.

RIKER
What about our rendezvous with the Clement?

PICARD
I've just received new orders from Starfleet. We'll discuss it in the Observation Lounge.
(to Worf)
Have the rest of the senior staff join us as soon as possible.

Worf works his console. Data stands to join Picard and Riker as they cross toward the Observation Lounge. Lauelle looks over at Data's vacant chair -- someone is going to have to man Ops and he hopes he is chosen. Riker glances at him, then back toward Sito.

RIKER
Ensign Sito, you'll fill in at Ops.
Lauelle tries not to show his disappointment.

SITO
Yes, sir.

She crosses toward the chair as the senior officers EXIT into the Obs Lounge.

She takes a seat and orients herself, pushes a few controls. It's an awkward moment; the two friends are still grappling with the fact that they're competitors, and now they have to sit side by side. She senses Lauelle's disappointment that he wasn't chosen and tries to steer the conversation elsewhere.

SITO
(quiet)
The Argaya system is close to the Cardassian border; I wonder why we're going there.

He shrugs, doesn't join in her speculation.

(Continued)
CONTINUED: (3)

SITO
How would you like to be a spider under that table?

LAUELLE
(turns to her)
What?

SITO
(gesturing back toward the Obs lounge)
A spider under the table --

LAUELLE
Is that like a fly on the wall?

SITO
(smiles)
I guess so.

He smiles — the awkwardness between them evaporates.
(NOTE: as they talk, they should occasionally work their controls)

SITO
You did really well during the drill.

LAUELLE
Apparently Commander Riker didn't think so. I swear he's got it in for me.

SITO
You're imagining things.

LAUELLE
Oh, yeah? Then how come you're sitting in that chair instead of me?

Sito tries to make light of it.

SITO
Maybe he figured I need more practice than you do.

He smiles and they turn their attentions to their consoles... Off this moment...

EXT. SPACE - THE ENTERPRISE (OPTICAL)

as it moves at warp.
INT. ENGINEERING

Taurik is working at the pool table; Geordi enters and crosses past -- but a readout catches his eye:

GEORDI
Wait a minute...
   (works console)
The warp-field shouldn't be
TECHING like that...
   (off console)
The TECH flow in the nacelles is
out of sync.

Geordi starts working the console to fix the problem.

TAURIK
Actually, sir, that was done
deliberately.

Geordi reacts, stops what he's doing.

TAURIK
As you can see, this configuration
has increased overall warp-field
integrity by seven percent.

GEORDI
   (off console)
You're right...

TAURIK
Doctor Nils Diaz has been
experimenting with this technique
at the Tanaline Propulsion
Laboratory.

Geordi is studying the read-outs

GEORDI
I know his work, but I never heard
anything about this...

TAURIK
His findings were just released.
I anticipate that his ideas will
be standard practice throughout
the fleet within the year.

GEORDI
When you ran the TECH test, did
you notice if the TECH TECHED?

(CONTINUED)
TAURIK
My simulations revealed no problems with the technique. I did not feel it was necessary to run a TECH test.

Geordi reacts --

GEORDI
There could be variables here your simulation didn't account for.

Taurik considers the possibility.

TAURIK
I do not think so.

Geordi loses patience with him.

GEORDI
Ensign, until I've had a chance to run some tests, you'll keep the nacelles aligned. Is that clear?

TAURIK
(unfazed)
Yes, sir.

GEORDI
Good. And if you have any other ideas for improving efficiency, run them by me first.

TAURIK
As a matter of fact, sir, I do -- when would be a good time to discuss them?

The only reason Geordi restricts himself is because he asked for it.

GEORDI
I'll get back to you on that...

Geordi moves off; Taurik watches him go for a beat before setting to work...

INT. SICKBAY

Ogawa ministers to an N.D. PATIENT on a bio-bed, then moves toward Beverly's Office. She stops at the door and waits for Beverly to look up from her desk.
INT. BEVERLY'S OFFICE

Beverly sees her and smiles.

BEVERLY
If you're wondering about your evaluation, it couldn't be better.

OGAWA
(smiles)
Actually, that's not it... but thank you.

Ogawa moves inside; their manner with each other conveys an obvious warmth between them.

OGAWA
I don't know if you've noticed that I've been doing some work on my own time.

BEVERLY
I've been wondering what you were up to.

OGAWA
I've been studying memory storage patterns in the brain; I think I've isolated the mechanism for VERY SPECIFIC TECH.

BEVERLY
Sounds interesting.

OGAWA
I was thinking of submitting my findings for publication...

BEVERLY
And you want me to review them for you first.

Ogawa smiles apologetically.

OGAWA
I didn't want to ask because of what happened last time.

BEVERLY
(smiles)
Alyssa, anyone can make a mistake setting up a research protocol. Your last project had a lot of merit; it's a shame it didn't work out.

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:
Ogawa can't hide her excitement.

OGAWA
I really think this one will. I set up a double-blind just like you recommended.

BEVERLY
Good. I look forward to seeing what you've done.

OGAWA
(smiles)
Thanks, Doctor. I really appreciate it.

Ogawa turns and EXITS. When she's gone, Beverly's smile fades from her face. Clearly something is on her mind...

INT. TEN FORWARD

Sito is standing at the bar talking with Worf. A smaller than usual number of N.D's are in the room.

SITO
It seems like everything that happens on the ship goes through the Ops console -- I had to TECH the main deflector dish, re-route a turbo-lift traffic jam, and use the internal sensors to find a lost puppy.

WORF
You did well. Ops is a very different challenge from Tactical.

SITO
I can't figure out why I'm even being considered for the assignment...

Worf regards her for a beat.

WORF
I recommended you.

Sito is surprised and gratified to hear this.

SITO
I'll try not to let you down, sir.
ON LAUELLE, TAURIK AND BEN

who are at the same table we saw them at before, watching Sito and Worf. Ben stands with an empty tray -- there aren't many people in Ten Forward so he has time to talk.

LAUELLE
What could they be talking about?

BEN
Looks like Worf's chewing her out.

LAUELLE
No, he always looks like that.

There's a trace of envy in Luelle's voice:

LAUELLE
I bet he's giving her pointers on how to land the Ops position.

The door OPENS and Riker ENTERS; he glances their way when he crosses past their table.

BEN
Hi, Wil.

RIKER
(a greeting)
Ben...

When Riker crosses away Luelle looks at Ben in disbelief.

LAUELLE
You call him Wil?

BEN
Why not?

LAUELLE
He's second in command of this ship, that's why not.

BEN
I'm not an officer; I'm just a regular guy. And when he's in here, so is he.

LAUELLE
Riker? I bet he sleeps in his uniform.

(CONTINUED)
BEN
You only think that because he's your C.O. If you got to know him --

LAUELLE
(dismissing this)
Right.

Ben isn't sure why Lauelle's reacting like this.

TAURIK
(to Ben)
He is convinced that Commander Riker does not "like" him.

BEN
That's ridiculous. You should go talk to him; let him know you're not just some kid who can't fly the ship straight.

LAUELLE
Maybe you're right... but what am I going to talk to him about?

BEN
Keep it casual. He likes Jazz... outdoors type stuff -- he's from Canada, you know.

LAUELLE
Yeah? My grandfather was Canadian.

TAURIK
How fortunate. You have something in common.

Sito approaches the table; in the background, we see that Worf is EXITING Ten Forward.

SITO
Hi guys --

She sees that there's no chair for her.

LAUELLE
Here...

He stands and frees his chair for her.

LAUELLE
I've got to go talk to somebody.

(CONTINUED)
BEN
(encouraging him)
All right, Sam.

We follow Laulelle as he moves off, drink in hand. He steals himself, then moves to the bar next to Riker. Riker is working on a PADD and doesn't notice him.

LAUELLE
Good evening, sir...

Riker turns toward him.

RIKER
Laulelle...

Laulelle smiles awkwardly, unsure what to say. Riker regards him for a beat, wondering if he wants something.

RIKER
Can I do something for you?

LAUELLE
No, sir. I... just came to get myself another drink.

Riker glances down at the drink Laulelle's already holding in his hand -- it's nearly full.

RIKER
Something wrong with that one?

LAUELLE
Actually, I... what are you having?

RIKER
Trakian Ale.

LAUELLE
Good choice. Maybe I'll have one, too.

Laulelle smiles to hide his discomfort; Riker nods vaguely and returns to his PADD. The BARTENDER approaches.

LAUELLE
You know what, I think I'll have a cold Canadian beer instead.

The bartender nods and moves off. After a beat:

(Continued)
LAUELLE
My Grandfather was Canadian, you know.

RIKER
Really...

LAUELLE
Aren't you one, too?

RIKER
A grandfather?

Lauelle laughs, maybe a little too much.

LAUELLE
Canadian, sir. Canadian.

RIKER
No. I grew up in Alaska.

Lauelle's smile fades as he realizes his plan is collapsing.

LAUELLE
Oh. Well... they both... get a lot of snow.

Riker isn't sure what to say to this; he returns to his PADD. An awkward beat as Lauelle decides to get out before he gets himself in any deeper.

LAUELLE
Good talking to you, sir.

Lauelle moves off, mortified by the whole encounter -- a beat later the bartender arrives with his beer. He looks at Riker, who glances after Lauelle and shakes his head.

11 EXT. SPACE - THE ENTERPRISE (OPTICAL)
as it drops out of warp.

12 INT. BRIDGE
as Picard ENTERS from the Ready Room. Riker is in the command area, Worf is at Tactical, Lauelle at the Conn, Data at Ops.

RIKER
We've entered the Argaya System.

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

Picard acknowledges, turns to Worf.

PICARD

Anything?

WORF
(off console)
No, sir. I detect no vessels in the vicinity.

Picard and Riker exchange a concerned look.

PICARD

How close are we to the Cardassian border?

DATA
(off console)
Less than five thousand kilometers.

To Lauelle this all sounds very mysterious.

WORF
(off console)
Sir... I am detecting an object... five meters in length.

(beat)

It appears to be an escape pod.

RIKER

They must have been forced to abandon ship.

WORF

It is just inside Cardassian space...

Picard and Riker share a grim look.

PICARD

How the hell are we going to get it out of there...?

Off Lauelle's face -- he doesn't know what this mysterious escape pod contains, but clearly it's important to us...

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT ONE
FADE IN:

13 INT. BRIDGE

Moments later.

RIKER
How long before the pod's inertia brings it into Federation space?

DATA
(works)
Seventeen minutes.
(beat)
However life-signs are very weak... the pod's life-support systems seems to be failing.

RIKER
(to Worf)
Notify Doctor Crusher --

PICARD
Can we get within transporter range without crossing into Cardassian territory?

DATA
(works)
We would need to boost the gain on the containment beam by at least seven percent.

PICARD
(to com)
Mister La Forge?

14 INT. ENGINEERING

where Taurik and Geordi are working.

GEORDI
I'm on it, sir.

Geordi works a console.

GEORDI
(to Taurik)
See if the TECH is high enough...

(CONTINUED)
TAURIK
(work)
The pod is still outside
transporter range...

GEORDI
I'm going to try TECHing the
TECH...

Geordi sets to work. Taurik studies his console for a moment.

TAURIK
Sir, life-signs are weakening.

GEORDI
(sharp)
I didn't ask you to scan for life-
signs, Ensign.

Taurik reacts -- Geordi keeps working.

GEORDI
There, that should do it...

TAURIK
(off console)
Containment TECH at one hundred
nine percent of normal.

GEORDI
(hits combadge)
Transporter room -- you should be
able to get a lock now.

INT. BRIDGE

where they are monitoring the conversation.

VOICE
Aye, sir --

PICARD
(to com)
Doctor, are you ready?

INT. SICKBAY

where Ogawa is helping Beverly prepare a bio-bed.

(Continued)
BEVERLY
(hits combadge)
Stand by.

BEVERLY
Alyssa, I'm afraid I'm going to
have to ask you to leave.

Ogawa reacts to this unexpected request.

OGAWA
Yes, Doctor.

With a last glance around to make sure everything's
ready, she EXITS.

BEVERLY
(to com)
Transporter room. go ahead.

A figure begins to MATERIALIZE on the bio-bed. We cut
out before we can recognize whether it is human or
alien.

INT. CORRIDOR

as Ogawa EXITS to find Sito posted at the door.

OGAWA
What are you doing here?

SITO
I'm not supposed to let anyone but
the senior officers inside
Sickbay.

OGAWA
Do you have any idea what's going
on?

SITO
No. Do you?

Ogawa shrugs. In the background we see Picard round a
corner and head their way.

OGAWA
(sotto)
I better go.

She EXITS down the corridor. Picard approaches and
nods to Sito as he passes.

(CONTINUED)
PICARD

Ensign...

She acknowledges and the door OPENS to admit him. But he stops before going in, turns back to look at Sito. He regards her for a beat without saying anything, then turns and EXITS to Sickbay. Sito is left wondering what the look might have meant...

INT. BRIDGE

Riker is near an aft station; Data, Worf and Lauelle are at their posts. A group of N.D's ENTER from the Turbolift to take their posts. Riker glances to see if everyone's present, then announces:

RIKER

Twelve hundred hours -- alpha shift is relieved...

The N.D's move from their posts and EXIT to the Turbolifts. There is a look between Lauelle and the Officer who is to take the Ops position -- then Lauelle approaches Riker.

LAUELLE

Excuse me, sir.

Riker turns to him.

LAUELLE

Lieutenant Drake offered to supervise me at Ops. If it's all right with you, I'd like to stay on for another shift.

RIKER

Now's not the best time.

LAUELLE

I'd appreciate the training --

RIKER

No, Ensign.

Lauelle realizes he pushed too hard.

LAUELLE

Yes, sir.

Lauelle moves to the turbo-lift... it OPENS and he goes inside. As the door closes, we catch a glimpse of his frustrated expression...
19 INT. CORRIDOR
where Sito is posted. She stands silently for a beat until the door to Sickbay OPENS and Picard steps out -- without breaking stride:

PICARD
Ensign, you're with me.

Surprised by his request, it takes her a beat to follow in step. They move down the corridor in silence, and stop when they reach the turbo-lift door. After a moment it OPENS and Lavelle and another N.D EXIT.

Lavelle's surprised to see her with Picard, and he and Sito exchange a look as the pass each other.

20 INT. TURBO-LIFT
as the door closes behind them.

PICARD
Bridge.

Picard is clearly preoccupied with whatever their mysterious mission is and says nothing else. For Sito, the next few moments are among the longest of her life. Finally:

PICARD
You're a certified pilot, aren't you?

SITO
Yes, sir.

Picard nods vaguely and returns to his inscrutable thoughts. Sito can only wonder what the question might portend.

21 INT. READY ROOM

as Picard and Sito ENTER. He moves directly to his desk without offering her a seat. He seats himself and turns to regard her for a beat.

PICARD
How long have you served on the Enterprise?

SITO
Seven months, sir.

(CONTINUED)
Despite her nervousness, Picard does nothing to make her feel more at ease.

PICARD
I see... I understand Mister Worf has recommended you for Ops.

SITO
Yes, sir.

PICARD
That's a position of great responsibility. Do you think you're up to it?

SITO
I do, sir.

Picard regards her evenly.

PICARD
I'm not so sure. Your record concerns me.

Sito blanches, isn't sure what to say.

PICARD
Tell me, Ensign, what lesson did you learn from the... incident you were involved in at the Academy?

Sito stammers a bit as she replies.

SITO
I can tell you that I would never, never jeopardize lives by participating in any kind of --

PICARD
(cutting her off)
I'm sorry, but if you're going to tell me that you would never again take part in a... dare-devil stunt -- that's not good enough.

From Sito's point of view she's being dressed-down; but Picard's tone, the fact that he so uncharacteristically interrupted her, is indicative that there is more going on here. He's testing her mettle, much like he did Hugh's in "I, Borg." Why he's doing it remains a mystery.

(CONTINUED)
PICARD
What concerns me more is that you colluded in a cover-up that impeded an official investigation into the death of a cadet.

This is exactly what Sito has always feared, that people will always see her as she was three years ago. She stammers as she tries to explain.

SITO
I... that was a mistake. And we did admit what we'd done.

PICARD
Only after it became clear that one of the cadets involved in the incident was going to come clean.

Sito doesn't know what to say to this.

PICARD
If he hadn't, I have to wonder if you'd have continued pretending that what happened was nothing more than an accident.

SITO
Sir, believe me. Part of me wanted to tell the truth right from the start.

PICARD
But you didn't. You went along with what everyone else wanted to do. What do you suppose that tells me about your character?

She's completely flustered now.

SITO
I... I don't know. But I am sorry. I can't tell you how sorry I am --

Picard dismisses her apology.

PICARD
In my day, a cadet would have been expelled for what you did.

(beat)
Quite frankly, Ensign, I don't know how you made it onto my ship.

(CONTINUED)
He leans back, waits for her to defend herself. But she's so rattled by what he's said, she can't. Picard regards her for a long moment... then, almost as if he's disappointed by her inability to reply:

PICARD

You're dismissed...

She turns and EXITS. Off Picard's expression as he watches her go...

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT TWO
ACT THREE

FADE IN:

INT. SHUTTLEBAY (OPTICAL)

Taurik is taking aim with a PHASER RIFLE. He FIRES and we reveal that he is shooting at a SHUTTLECRAFT sitting in the bay. Geordi stands nearby with a TRICORDER and watches as the BEAM hits the shuttle's aft section.

GEORDI
Two more seconds...
(beat)
That's enough.

A SCORCH MARK now mars the shuttle's stern. Geordi scans it with the tricorder. Other scorch marks are visible on the hull.

GEORDI
All right... we need to test hull resiliency on the nacelles as well. Give me a four second burst right about here... let's see how the TECH holds up.

He indicates a point on the nacelle. Taurik moves to take up position.

GEORDI
Actually, fire from over there.

Geordi indicates that Taurik take up position a few yards in another direction.

TAURIK
That would be consistent...

Geordi turns and looks at Taurik.

GEORDI
Consistent with what?

Taurik considers a beat before replying.

TAURIK
With making it appear that this shuttle fled an attack.

Geordi can't help but frown when he realizes Taurik knows exactly what they're really up to.

(CONTINUED)
GEORDI
What makes you think that's what we're doing?

TAURIK
The pattern and angle of fire you have asked for is similar to what would result if the shuttle were fleeing an attacker while engaging in standard evasive maneuvers.

Geordi eyes him with a poker-face.

GEORDI
That's an amazing coincidence...

Taurik understands that Geordi is asking him to stop asking questions and go along with the official story.

TAURIK
Yes, sir. It is indeed. Shall we proceed with the testing?

Geordi face shows that he's glad that Taurik understands.

GEORDI
Yes, Ensign. Thank you.

As Taurik takes up position for the next phaser shot...

INT. SICKBAY

as Ogawa ENTERS. Beverly approaches her with a certain amount of urgency.

BEVERLY
Alyssa... thanks for coming so quickly.

They start toward the main room.

BEVERLY
We need to prepare for surgery. We have a comatose patient with a subdural hematoma (TECH).

OGAWA
Yes, Doctor.

Beverly stops, turns to her. (CONTINUED)
BEVERLY
I want to make it clear that you are not to discuss what you see here with anyone.

OGAWA
I understand.

When they cross into the main room Ogawa reacts to what she sees on the center bio-bed -- an unconscious Cardassian male of about forty.

BEVERLY
We'll also need at least a liter of Cardassian blood-plasma...

It takes Ogawa a beat to recover, then she and Beverly set to work...

EXT. SPACE - THE ENTERPRISE (OPTICAL)
as it hangs in space.

INT. THE QUARTERS SHARED BY LAUELLE AND TAURIK

where Sito, Ogawa, Lauelle, Taurik and Ben are playing five-card stud at a table in the middle of the room.

This is a re-dress of our windowless quarters, and we should get the feeling that they're smaller than Worf's or Geordi's. The two men have pretty much divided the room in two, with their beds against opposite walls.

Taurik's half is neat and orderly, with Vulcan artifacts displayed. Lauelle's half is a bit of a mess -- a soccer ball, an Anbo-jitsu stick, and other trappings of a single man are carelessly strewn about.

Ben expertly shuffles the deck and deals one card down, then one up -- starting with Lauelle, then to Ogawa, Taurik and finally Sito. While he deals they each assess their hand and the following conversation plays:

BEN
What I can't figure is why we're just sitting here so close to the Cardassian border.

LAUELLE
It must have something to do with that escape pod we picked up.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)
25 CONTINUED:

LAUELLE (Cont'd)
(to Sito)
Don't you think?

Sito shrugs that she doesn't know.

SITO

Maybe...

She's still reeling from her encounter with Picard; her friends have noticed that her mind is elsewhere, but they don't know why.

LAUELLE
(to Ogawa)
Did you see anything when you went to Sickbay?

For possibly the first time, Ogawa is having to keep something from her friends.

OGAWA
No... Doctor Crusher just wanted to talk to me about my research project.

TAURIK
(to Ogawa)
Do you think she is going to recommend it for publication?

OGAWA
I hope so. I worked really hard on it.

Ben turns to Lauelle, who is showing the highest card.

BEN
It's your bet, Sam.

CUT TO:

26 INT. RIKER'S QUARTERS

where Riker, Beverly, Troi, Worf and Geordi are also playing poker.

WORF
(bets)
Twenty.

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

The others match his bet, and Geordi deals another card face up to each player (they too show one down and one up).

TROI
(to Beverly)
Does Ogawa's mistake invalidate her entire proposal?

BEVERLY
She didn't set up her protocol properly. None of her results are verifiable.

RIKER
Hasn't this happened before -- with another project?

BEVERLY
Yes, last year. She's the best Nurse I've ever had... but I don't think she's cut out for research. I just don't know how to break it to her.

Beverly clearly isn't looking forward to this.

RIKER
I know what you mean. I'm going have to tell Ensign Sito I don't think she's ready for the Ops position.

This is the first Worf has heard of this and he's not happy.

WORF
May I ask why you have come to this conclusion?

RIKER
The Captain mentioned something about her to me.

GEORDI
(to Troi)
It's your bet.

WORF
What did he say?

(CONTINUED)
26 CONTINUED: (2)

TROI
(fingering her chips)
It'll cost you...

CUT TO:

27 INT. LAUELLE/TAURIK'S QUARTERS

OGAWA
-- Twenty to stay in.

She tosses in a chip.

TAURIK
(to Sito)
It would be illogical for the
Captain to deny you a promotion
because of something you did as a
cadet.

These are difficult things for Sito to talk about.

SITO
He said it didn't matter how long
ago it was; that what I did shows
I don't have character.

OGAWA
What did you say?

SITO
What could I say?
(quiet)
He's right --

Lauelle reacts strongly to this.

LAUELLE
Come off it. You're a damn fine
officer and you deserve that post
as much as anyone.

This is the kind of thing she needs to hear and it
helps her shake her gloom a little.

LAUELLE
(wry)
Not that either of us is going to
get it.

OGAWA
Why do you say that?

(CONTINUED)
BEN
Excuse me, this isn't career day --
we're playing poker. Ante up or
you're out.

Lauelle leans in toward Ogawa to say one last thing:

LAUELLE
(sotto)
Because, Riker hates me.

TAURIK
I will see your fifty --

INT. RIKER'S QUARTERS

GEORDI
And raise you twenty more.

He tosses in a chip.

WORF
(to Riker)
I would ask you to give her a
chance to redeem herself. I feel
certain Ensign Sito will not
disappoint you.

RIKER
All right, Worf. I respect your
opinion; I'll keep her in the
running.

(beat)
Besides, I have my doubts about
Lauelle.

TROI
(surprised)
Really? Why?

RIKER
He's too... eager to please. He
knows he's up for this position --
he keeps trying to ingratiate
himself to me.

TROI
Why do you have to assume he's
doing it just to get the job?
Maybe he genuinely likes you --

(CONTINUED)
Riker smiles wryly, as if he doesn't believe that for a minute.

RIKER
(to Geordi)
I'll see your fifty and raise you a hundred.

TROI
After all, the two of you have a lot in common.

RIKER
What? We're nothing alike.

GEORDI
(to Riker)
You're bluffing.

RIKER
(to Geordi)
Think so?

INT. LAUELLE/TAURIK'S QUARTERS

BEN
(to Lauelle)
Absolutely -- you're bluffing.

LAUELLE
Whatever you say. It'll still cost you fifty to stay in.

Ben regards him for a beat, then bets.

BEN
I'm not gonna let you get away with it.

OGAWA
(to Lauelle)
You know, Sam, maybe you shouldn't try so hard with Riker. It doesn't matter if he doesn't like you... as long as he respects you.

SITO
And he must... otherwise you wouldn't even be in the running for the Ops position.

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

Sam considers their words for a moment.

LAUELLE
You're probably right... maybe I'm just telling myself he hates me so if I don't get promoted I'll have an excuse.
(beat)
It's just that... I really would like to get to know the guy.

Lauelle is sincere about this, and Sito acknowledges his sentiment.

BEN
(to Taurik)
Well? You in or not?

Taurik is studying his cards intently.

TAURIK
At this juncture, the odds of my winning this hand are less than thirty-nine to one. Logically, I should fold.

He sets his cards down.

BEN
(to Lauelle)
Looks like it's just you and me, buddy. You in for another fifty?

CUT TO:

INT. RIKER'S QUARTERS

GEORDI
Give me a minute. I'm thinking.

Geordi studies Riker's face to see if he's bluffing.

TROI
I'm telling you, Wil. You were a lot like Lauelle twelve years ago.

RIKER
I can't believe you're saying that.

(CONTINUED)
TROI
Didn't you tell me you took up poker so you could get into the officer's game on the Potemkin?

RIKER
I happen to like poker.

TROI
But your senior officers might have thought you were trying to gratitate yourself -- I guess they realized you were just young and inexperienced and didn't hold it against you.

Riker is struck by her words; he regards Troi for a moment, then nods that he sees her point.

RIKER
Maybe I am being too hard on him...

WORF
(to Geordi)
I do not believe he is bluffing.

GEORDI
I don't either. I'll fold.

Riker plays the moment for all it's worth, then shows his cards -- he doesn't have anything.

GEORDI
I had two pair! I can't believe this.

RIKER
(as he takes in the chips)
Believe it.

Geordi shakes his head in dismay.

GEORDI
That's it for me... I think I'll call it a night.

RIKER
You're not going to quit just because of one little bluff?

Geordi smiles that that's not it, stands.

(Continued)
GEORDI
No... I want to do some reading on this new technique that involves running the nacelles out of sync.

RIKER
Never heard anything about it.

GEORDI
Me neither. Ensign Taurik brought it up and I didn't have any idea what he was talking about. It was embarrassing.

BEVERLY
You can't be an expert on everything, Geordi.

GEORDI
(smiles)
I can try.

RIKER
Why not let Taurik give you a quick run-down on it tomorrow? It'll take less time than reading the whole paper.

TROI
That way you can play another hand or two.

Geordi considers for a beat.

GEORDI
I think I'll just go ahead and do the reading tonight. See you tomorrow, everybody.

As the others reply --

CUT TO:

31 INT. LAUELLE/TAURIK'S QUARTERS

LAUELLE
(to Ben)
How'd you know I was bluffing?

Ben is shuffling the cards for another hand.

BEN
You think I'm going to tell you?

(CONTINUED)
OGAWA
(to Taurik)
I don't know, Taurik. I can understand why Commander La Forge would want to run tests first.

TAURIK
As can I. What I do not understand is his reaction when he realized that what I had done was actually more efficient. He seemed...

Taurik is unsure how to describe the emotion he observed.

BAK
-- annoyed.

BEN
Of course he was. You showed him up.

TAURIK
"Showed him up"...?

SITO
He didn't like the fact that you knew something he didn't.

TAURIK
Taurik tries to understand this strange emotion.

Do you think I have damaged my relationship with him irreparably?

LAUELLE
It depends on what kind of guy he is.

Taurik doesn't know what to make of all this. Suddenly the door CHIMES.

LAUELLE
Come in.

The door OPENS to reveal Geordi -- much to everyone's surprise.

LAUELLE
Commander --

The junior officers all start to stand up, but Geordi gestures it's OK.

(CONTINUED)
GEORDI
Don't get up. I just dropped by
to see Taurik.

Taurik stands and approaches him.

TAURIK
What can I do for you, sir?

GEORDI
I was just heading down to
Engineering to run some tests on
that technique you showed me the
other day. I thought you might
want to walk me through it.

TAURIK
I would, sir.

GEORDI
Great. Let's go.

Geordi waves goodnight to the others, then he and
Taurik turn and EXIT.

The others look at each other a little sheepishly as
they realize they misjudged Taurik's situation with
Geordi.

BEN
Ante up everybody.

SITO
It's late, maybe we should all get
some sleep.

OGAWA
I've got some things I want to do
before Doctor Crusher comes in the
morning.

Sito and Ogawa start to stand.

BEN
Come on, it's not that late --
you're only young once.

Lauelle stands and starts cleaning up.

BEN
In a few years, you guys are going
to be senior officers and you
won't have any time to have fun.

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED: (3)

SITO
Come on, Ben. Let's go.

He tosses down the cards in disappointment.

BEN
All right...

They all start for the door...

SITO
(to Lauelle)

Night.

OGAWA

Bye.

LAUELLE

See you tomorrow...

They EXIT.

INT. CORRIDOR

as the three friends come to a juncture and part ways.

BEN

Good night.

They wave as Ben heads off in another direction.

INT. ANOTHER CORRIDOR

as Ben rounds a corner and heads down the corridor. He stops outside a door and rings.

INT. RIKER'S QUARTERS

as the door OPENS and Ben ENTERS to find the senior officers laughing about something someone has just said.

RIKER

Ben --

BEN

I thought you guys might still be up.

RIKER

Pull up a chair.

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

BEN

Thanks --

Off this moment we...

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT THREE
FADE IN:

INT. SHIP'S GYMNASIUM

Sito, Lauelle and a few N.D's are filing out the door after a martial arts class led by Worf -- all are in gis.

WORF

Ensign Sito --

She stops, turns.

WORF

I also teach an advanced class --
I believe you may be ready to participate.

Sito allows herself only a brief smile before she looks down, embarrassed by his compliment.

WORF

Before you can join the group, however, you must pass the...
gik'tal challenge.

SITO

The gik'tal challenge? I've never heard of it.

WORF

No... it is a very ancient, very secret Klingon ritual. It tests your knowledge of the forms of the mok'bara.

SITO

I'll practice; when did you want to --

WORF

No. No practice. That is part of the ritual -- that the test be... unannounced. Now is the time.

Sito is a little nervous about the suddenness of it, but she manages a nod.

WORF

Come.

(CONTINUED)
They move to the center of the room. To her surprise, Worf takes a SCARF and wraps it around her head, effectively covering her eyes.

WORF
Can you see?

SITO
No...

(beat)
Are you going to wear one, too?

WORF
No.

Sito is a little taken aback by this, but doesn't say anything.

WORF
The gik'tal has begun. Defend yourself!

She assumes a defensive posture -- feet planted apart, knees bent, arms raised before her chest. Worf moves around behind her -- he purposely drags his feet a bit, giving her a sound clue that allows her to pivot around and face him...

WORF
Good... listen... let the sound guide you...

He moves around her again, this time taking care to be quiet -- she loses him, pivots one way then the other. He moves in and with little difficulty takes her down to the mat with a fluid move.

WORF
You must anticipate my attack.

He helps her up.

WORF
You should have defended yourself with the koro'val block...

Because she doesn't see how this could be possible when blindfolded, her reply is less than convincing.

SITO
Yes, sir...

She takes a defensive posture; Worf stays very still for a beat, then makes a sound by moving one foot.

(CONTINUED)
Sito pivots around, thinking he's moved behind her. Once again, he moves in and takes her down -- this time sending her down onto her behind with a thud that clearly smarts.

WORF
Are you listening, Ensign?

Sito's face shows her frustration.

SITO
Yes, but --

WORF
No buts -- defend yourself!

She scrambles into a defensive posture. Worf moves around behind her without making a sound. Suddenly Sito lunges forward, as if she thinks he might still be in front of her.

It's a bold but futile move, and she has trouble recovering from its failure -- she takes her defensive stand, but she's breathing hard, a bit panicked because she has no idea where he is. Worf has no trouble moving in and taking her down -- this time he smacks her down on her butt hard.

SITO
Ow!

WORF
You did not anticipate.

In a flash of temper she leaps to her feet and rips the scarf off her head.

SITO
How am I supposed to defend myself when I can't see a thing?

WORF
Stop making excuses! Replace the blindfold.

SITO
No, this isn't a fair test.

Worf holds her gaze for a moment, then a smile traces itself on his features.

WORF
Very good, Ensign. You have passed the challenge.

(CONTINUED)
It takes her a moment to realize what he's saying.

SITO
What? By taking off the blindfold?

WORF
It takes great courage to say the test is unfair.

Sito studies him for a moment.

SITO
How long would you have kept going?

WORF
The gil'tak lasts as long as is necessary. Sometimes days...

Something about his reply confuses her.

SITO
I'm sorry, sir... I thought you said it was called the gik'tal?

Worf reacts, tries to cover his mistake.

WORF
Yes... that is what I meant.

Sito sees the momentary flash of panic in his face, realizes --

SITO
Sir... are you sure there's really such a thing?

Worf realizes he's been caught and has to admit it.

WORF
No, there is not.

She studies his face for a beat, then finally smiles.

SITO
It didn't seem a fair way to judge my skills...

Worf regards her.

(CONTINUED)
WORF
Perhaps the next time you are judged unfairly, you will not have to suffer so many bruises before you protest.

Sito looks at him, realizes that this is what Worf was hoping she would come to understand... Off Worf's face as he watches her go...

INT. READY ROOM
where Sito, now in uniform, is standing before Picard.

SITO
-- you're concerned that what I did at the Academy shows I don't have character. Well I can't change what happened; no one can. But I do think I've paid for my mistake.

Picard regards her silently.

SITO
The year I repeated at the Academy was the longest year of my life. You said I should have been expelled for what I did. Believe me, sir, there were times I wish I had been. I didn't have any friends, anyone to talk to. I had to take my flight-test with the instructor because no one else would be my partner.

Her voice quavers a bit as she recounts this difficult time, but she steadies herself -- continues.

SITO
In a lot of ways it would have been easier to just walk away. But I didn't. I stuck it out. And I think that says something about my character, too.

Picard regards her for a moment before replying.

PICARD
Coming here, facing me after what I said to you... that also says something about you.

(CONTINUED)
Picard stands, moves around his desk.

PICARD
I didn't call you in here the other day to assess your qualifications for the Ops position. I was assessing you for something far more important.

SITO
I... don't understand.

PICARD
I was provoking you on purpose, Ensign, to see how you'd react. When you got flustered I decided you weren't right for what I had in mind. Now I see otherwise.

SITO
May I ask what --

He holds up a hand to stop her.

PICARD
Join the senior staff in the Observation lounge at nine hundred hours. We'll discuss it then.

SITO
Yes, sir.

She turns to go.

PICARD
And Ensign... I do know how you ended up on my ship. I asked for you.

This clearly surprises her.

PICARD
I wanted to make sure you got a fair chance to redeem yourself. (beat) And because you have... I plan to do the same for the other members of the Nova Squadron once they graduate. (smiles) I was young once, too, you know. And I made my share of mistakes.

(CONTINUED)
36 CONTINUED: (2)

She acknowledges, her face conveying gratitude to him, then she EXITS. Off Picard's face...

37 EXT. SPACE - THE ENTERPRISE (OPTICAL)
as it hangs in space.

38 INT. OBSERVATION LOUNGE

as Sito ENTERS. Riker and Worf look up and gesture that she should take a seat. Someone else is seated in the chair facing away from her, but she can't see them.

RIKER
Have a seat, Ensign.

Worf gives her a reassuring look. She moves inside, takes a chair. She glances over and sees that the unseen person in the chair is a Cardassian -- the same one Ogawa saw in Sickbay. As a Bajoran she can't help but react -- though she quickly recovers. The Cardassian has MED TECH visible, presumably from the operation Ogawa assisted in Act Two.

The DOOR OPENS -- Picard ENTERS and takes a seat.

PICARD
Before we begin, Ensign Sito needs to be briefed on the situation.

Picard gestures to the Cardassian.

PICARD
This is Joret Dal, first council to Gul Makor -- the Cardassian chief of security for this sector.

SITO
I've heard of him.

(to Joret)
You were in the escape pod we picked up?

JORET
(nods)
My ship was attacked by a Cardassian patrol as we approached the border...

(somber)
My pilot was killed. I was hurt... but I managed to get to an evacuation pod.

(CONTINUED)
PICARD
Joret risked his life to come here because the information he brings could avert a war.

RIKER
The Cardassians are planning to attack a Federation colony along the border.

JORET
It will either be Qolada Four, or Dobrea Two -- I am not certain which. Both planets were once part of Cardassia. Many of my people, Gul Makor included, have never accepted the treaty that ceded them to the Federation.

WORF
The colonies have limited defenses. An attack against either of them would be devastating.

JORET
As we speak, a Cardassian warship is en route to Dobrea. Another warship is already stationed just across the border from Qolada.

PICARD
We are presently at a point midway between the two colonies. We're to engage the Cardassians if necessary, but it is hoped that our presence on the border will avert an attack.

JORET
That is my hope as well. I believe that war with the Federation does not serve my people's interests.

PICARD
This isn't the first time that Joret has provided us with important strategic information. It is imperative that we get him safely back to Cardassian space.

(CONTINUED)
RIKER
Since his ship was destroyed he's going to have to take one of our shuttlecraft.

SITO
How is he going to explain to the Cardassian border patrol what he's doing in a Federation shuttle?

WORF
The shuttle has been made to look as if it were pursued and fired on.

JORET
When the patrol stops me, I will claim to have stolen it.

SITO
(skeptical)
Do you really think they'll believe you?

JORET
No. Not if I'm alone. But if I had a prisoner with me... a Bajoran terrorist... they would.

Sito reacts as she realizes he means her.

JORET
Border crossings by bounty hunters are not uncommon... for a portion of the profit, the patrol can be convinced to look the other way.

Picard turns to Sito.

PICARD
Once the shuttle is safely past the patrol, you would be placed in an escape pod and sent back across the border -- we would be here waiting to pick you up.

SITO
I understand, sir.

PICARD
Ensign... this is obviously a very dangerous mission. No one would blame you if you declined to participate.

(CONTINUED)
She looks up at him.

SITOL
I'll do it.

WORF
Be certain you understand the risk you are taking. If you are captured --

SITO
I'm Bajoran. No one knows better than I do what the Cardassians do to their prisoners.

She turns to Picard.

SITO
I've made my decision.

Picard studies her for a beat.

PICARD
Very well, Ensign. Report to Sickbay.
(off her reaction)
Doctor Crusher will explain.

She stands.

PICARD
I'd also ask you not to discuss this mission with anyone...

SITO
Yes, sir.

She moves to the door.

JORET
Ensign...

She turns.

JORET
Thank you...

She acknowledges, then EXITS. There is a silent moment as everyone contemplates the dangers of what she's being asked to do. Joret turns to Picard, gives voice to what they're all thinking.

(CONTINUED)
JORET
(quiet)
I didn't realize she would be so... young...

Off this moment...

EXT. SPACE - THE ENTERPRISE (OPTICAL)
as it hangs in space.

INT. SHUTTLEBAY

where Geordi is doing a last minute check on the shuttle. Joret is at the controls; Worf stands near the aft section.

GEORDI
(to Joret)
I've TECHED the engines so that it looks like they were overtaxed in the escape attempt. Let me show you.

Geordi climbs in and heads toward the cockpit. Sito ENTERS from the corridor, dressed in BAJORAN CIVILIAN CLOTHES. When she approaches Worf we see that her face is badly BRUISED.

WORF
What happened?

SITO
The Captain wanted Doctor Crusher to make it look like Joret had mistreated me.

She sees Worfs look of concern, reassures him.

SITO
Don't worry. It didn't hurt.

Worf accepts this, but he can't help but be disturbed by her appearance. Geordi steps out of the back of the shuttle.

GEORDI
We're all set...

Worf acknowledges and Geordi moves off.

(CONTINUED)
SITO

Sir... I wouldn't be going on this mission if it weren't for you. I want you to know that I really appreciate the fact that you've always had confidence in me.

Worf acknowledges -- he's proud of her, but at the same time concerned for her well-being. She steps up into the shuttle. The door begins to CLOSE.

WORF

Have a safe journey.

SITO

I'll see you soon.

And the door closes all the way. The ALARM SOUNDS that indicates the HANGAR DOOR is OPENING. Worf moves away from the shuttle.

EXT. SPACE - THE ENTERPRISE (OPTICAL)

as the shuttle pulls out of the shuttlebay.

INT. SHUTTLEBAY (OPTICAL)

Worf stands looking out the shuttlebay door at the stars... Off this moment we...

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT FOUR
ACT FIVE

FADE IN:

EXT. SPACE - THE ENTERPRISE (OPTICAL)
as it hangs in space.

INT. BRIDGE (OPTICAL)

Riker is at an aft station, Lauelle is at the Conn,
Worf at Tactical, Data at Ops. Riker crosses down into
the command area.

RIKER

Lauelle...

Lauelle tenses; he's come to expect the worst from
Riker.

RIKER

Where did you say your grandfather
was from?

Lauelle is surprised but pleased by the question.

LAUELLE

Montreal, sir.

RIKER

Beautiful city...

Riker leans closer, quiet.

RIKER

There's a bar there where the
women --

Suddenly:

WORF

(off console)

Sir, the Qolada colony is under
attack.

RIKER

Red alert! Helm, set course for
Qolada, maximum warp.

LAUELLE

(works)

Aye, sir.

Picard ENTERS from his Ready Room.

(CONTINUED)
RIKER
When did the Cardassians cross the border -- why didn't we detect it?

DATA
(off console)
The warship has not changed position, sir.

(off console)
The colony is being attacked by what appears to be a freighter...

Everyone reacts to this surprising news.

PICARD
On screen.

On the VIEWSCREEN we see a FREIGHTER firing PHASERS down at a planet.

WORF
Sir, the colony's shields are failing -- the freighter is armed with Class A disruptors.

RIKER
Since when is a freighter equipped with that kind of technology?

No one has answers.

DATA
We are entering the Qolada system.

PICARD
Full power to shields. Bring all weapons systems on line.

WORF
Sir, the freighter is breaking orbit --

RIKER
They must have detected our approach.

DATA
They are heading for the border.

PICARD
Change course and pursue.
(to Worf)
Open a channel.

(CONTINUED)
Continued: (2)

Worf
Channel open.

Picard
Stand down immediately. You will not be permitted to leave Federation space.

After a moment.

Worf
No response, sir.

Picard
(to Worf)
Notify the Cardassian warship that we intend to stop that vessel, even if it means crossing into their space.

Worf works the console.

Worf
They are not responding...

Data
The Cardassians are powering up their forward disruptors.

Riker
I don't think they like the idea of us crossing their border.

Picard
Apparently not.

On the viewscreen, the freighter is moving away from us and toward the Cardassian warship, which hangs in space in the distance.

Data
Sir, the freighter will enter Cardassian space in eleven seconds.

Picard
Will we be able to overtake them before that?

Data
No, sir.

(Continued)
WORF
Sensors indicate there are twenty-one life-forms aboard the freighter... all are Cardassian.

PICARD
That explains why the warship is moving to protect them.

DATA
The freighter is entering Cardassian space... now.

PICARD
(grim)
Maintain course --

EXT. SPACE - THE ENTERPRISE (OPTICAL)
as it hurtles by.

INT. BRIDGE

WORF
The freighter is moving past the warship...

Picard watches the viewscreen with determination.

DATA
We are now crossing into Cardassian space.

RIKER
Full power to forward shields --

WORF
The Cardassians are firing!

PICARD
Hard to port!

EXT. SPACE

A disruptor BLAST lances out from the Cardassian ship... and hits the freighter, destroying it.

INT. BRIDGE (OPTICAL)

Reactions to this surprising turn of events.

(CONTINUED)
RIKER
They destroyed it...

WORF
We are being hailed...

PICARD
All stop.
(to Worf)
Put it on the Viewer.

A CARDASSIAN GUL APPEARS on the VIEWSCREEN.

GUL MAKOR
I am Gul Makor... chief of security for this sector.

PICARD
What is going on here? Why did you destroy that ship?

GUL MAKOR
What a question, Captain... How could we allow them to escape after they attacked our neighbors on Qolada?

There is a distinct undercurrent of insincerity to everything Gul Makor says.

GUL MAKOR
I only wish that we had realized their intentions and had been able to prevent the attack in the first place.

PICARD
Our sensors showed that freighter was manned by Cardassians.

GUL MAKOR
Yes, Captain. We believe they belong to a dissident group that has been harassing shipping lanes in this area for months now.

(beat)
From what little we know of them, they are committed to forcing the Federation to withdraw from territories along the border that formerly belonged to Cardassia.

(CONTINUED)
PICARD
I see... then they are operating outside governmental control?

GUL MAKOR
Of course... the Cardassian government would never sanction an attack on a Federation colony. The dissidents have been informed in no uncertain terms that their actions will not be tolerated.

Picard isn't buying this.

PICARD
How careless of them, then, to carry out an attack when a Cardassian warship was so nearby.

GUL MAKOR
How careless indeed. But then... we are dealing with a somewhat fanatical element.

PICARD
That would be one explanation...

Makor doesn't miss Picard's tone.

GUL MAKOR
Captain... it appears that you have strayed into Cardassian space.

Picard matches Makor's insincere smile with one of his own.

PICARD
You understand that was purely unintentional.

GUL MAKOR
Of course. We would be happy to escort you to the border.

PICARD
That won't be necessary, Gul Makor. We know the way out.

Picard signals Worf to cut the transmission.

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED: (3)

RIKER
(to Lauelle)
Get us out of here. Take us back
to the Argaya system.

LAUELLE
Aye, sir.

Picard and Riker share a look... neither of them
believes a word Makor said...

INT. SICKBAY

Beverly and Ogawa are looking over a PADD.

BEVERLY
It's a small mistake... but
unfortunately it invalidates all
your results.

OGAWA
Next time, I'm going to go over my
protocol with a fine-tooth comb
and make sure its perfect.

Beverly detects a lack of enthusiasm in Ogawa's tone.

BEVERLY
Let me ask you something,
Alyssa... did you enjoy doing
this project?

OGAWA
It was very painstaking work. I
can't imagine anyone would
actually enjoy it.

BEVERLY
People do. And they make the best
researchers. When you're trying
to do something so intricate, the
only way to avoid mistakes is by
getting caught up in every little
detail.

Ogawa takes this in...

OGAWA
I have to admit that the prospect
of starting a new project doesn't
exactly excite me.

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

BEVERLY
Well then don't start one until it does.

Ogawa considers Beverly's advice.

OGAWA
Maybe I'm just not cut out to do research.

BEVERLY
Alyssa... if you were excited about what you were doing, I have no doubt that you'd do an excellent job with it.

OGAWA
Doctor... I appreciate you taking the time to go over this... and I also appreciate your being honest with me.

Beverly smiles warmly, relieved that Ogawa took her advice in the spirit in which it was given... Off this moment...

EXT. SPACE - THE ENTERPRISE (OPTICAL)
as it hangs in space.

PICARD (V.O.)
Captain's Log, supplemental. We have been waiting at the rendezvous point to retrieve Ensign Sito for over thirty-six hours. There is still no sign of her.

51 BRIDGE (OPTICAL)

Picard and Riker are in the Command Area, Worf at Tactical, Data at Ops, Lauelle at the Conn. The mood is grim.

DATA
I have completed a long-distance sensor sweep. The escape pod is not in detectable range.

Picard takes this in.

(CONTINUED)
RIKER
It looks pretty hopeless...

Worf looks up from his console.

WORF
Sir, I recommend we launch a probe to increase the range of our sensor sweeps.

Picard considers for a beat. Riker doesn't like to have to be the one to say it:

RIKER
(quiet)
Sending a probe into Cardassian space would be in violation of treaty.

Picard acknowledges, but he's still considering it.

PICARD
Prepare a probe and launch when ready.

WORF
Aye, sir.

Worf sets to work, grasping this last thread of hope. After a beat we hear the SOUND of a probe being launched.

ON VIEWSCREEN (OPTICAL)

Stock shot of a probe being fired away.

RESUME SCENE

WORF
We are receiving the probe's telemetry.

A tense beat as everyone waits for the results.

DATA
Sir... I am detecting signs of debris three thousand kilometers inside Cardassian space...

Lauelle turns to Data, his face full of dread.

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

DATA
(off console)
Its mass and composition indicates that it is what remains of a Federation escape pod...

Reactions... Lwaxana looks down at his console... Worf focuses on the viewscreen... After a long beat...

PICARD
Put me through to all decks...

Worf works his console.

PICARD
This is the Captain... it is my sad duty to inform you --

INT. ENGINEERING
where Taurik is working as Picard's voice comes over the com.

PICARD (V.O.)
-- that a member of the crew...
Ensign Sito Jaxa...

He reacts to hearing his friend's name...

INT. SICKBAY
where Ogawa and Beverly are listening.

PICARD (V.O.)
Has been lost in the line of duty...

Ogawa covers her face with her hand; Beverly puts a comforting hand to her shoulder.

INT. TEN FORWARD
where Ben is listening.

PICARD (V.O.)
I will be contacting her family to express condolences on behalf of the entire crew...

Ben's face shows the loss he's feeling.
STAR TREK: "Lower Decks" 11/05/93 - ACT FIVE

57 INT. BRIDGE

PICARD
A memorial service will be held aboard ship at a later date.

Picard's face shows the toll of having to make this announcement. Without another word, he turns and EXITS to his Ready Room. Off this moment...

58 EXT. SPACE - THE ENTERPRISE (OPTICAL)

as it moves at warp.

59 INT. TEN FORWARD

Worf sits alone at a table near the windows. Ben approaches him with a drink. Sensing that he's lost in thought, he sets it down as unobtrusively as possible and moves off...

We FOLLOW him as he approaches Ogawa and Taurik, who are sitting in silence at their usual table (there are two empty chairs). Their mood is somber.

BEN
What's Sam talking to Riker about?

OGAWA
Where...?

He indicates, and they turn to see that Lauelle is over by the bar talking to Riker. They see Riker say something to him, then reach to shake his hand. They two men part -- Riker EXITS and Lauelle approaches the table.

BEN
What's going on?

Lauelle sits; he seems troubled...

LAUELLE
I just got promoted...

Lauelle shows them the COLLAR PIP he's been given to designate his new rank. It is clear that he has conflicting feelings about this. Ogawa tries to put the best face on it:

OGAWA
Congratulations...

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

LAUELLE
(without enthusiasm)
Thanks...

They all know what he must be going through.

LAUELLE
There's going to be a promotion ceremony next week... I don't even want to go.

BEN
You shouldn't feel that way, Sam.

LAUELLE
It doesn't seem right... for all I know, she might've gotten the promotion instead of me.

OGAWA
It doesn't matter. You know Jaxa... she would have been happy for you.

TAURIK
You would honor her memory... by doing your best at the position.

Ogawa takes the pip from Lauelle's hand; as she pins it to his collar.

OGAWA
We're proud of you, Sam.

Lauelle looks at his friend's faces, grateful for their support.

Ben moves off, and we FOLLOW him as he crosses to Worf's table.

BEN
Excuse me, Worf... but I need to wipe this table down.

WORF
What?

BEN
There's an empty seat over there.

Ben indicates the table where Sito's friends are sitting. Worf realizes what he's up to.

(Continued)
WORF
I appreciate what you are trying
to do, but it is not...
appropriate. I was Ensign Sito's
commanding officer... you were
her friends.

BEN
Sir... I happen to know that she
considered you a friend, too.

Worf looks up at him. He considers, then stands. He
and Ben cross over to the table. The others look up at
him, their faces welcoming... and then Worf takes his
seat among Sito's friends... Off this moment...

EXT. SPACE - THE ENTERPRISE (OPTICAL)
as it moves away...

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT FIVE

THE END