

Anhedonia

Posted originally on the [Ad Astra :: Star Trek Fanfiction Archive](http://www.adastrafanfic.com/works/1304) at <http://www.adastrafanfic.com/works/1304>.

Rating:	General Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	Gen
Fandom:	Star Trek: Deep Space Nine
Relationship:	Corat Damar/Weyoun
Character:	Julian Bashir , Weyoun 9
Additional Tags:	Hurt/Comfort
Language:	English
Series:	Part 10 of Weyoun Ficlets
Stats:	Published: 2024-02-02 Words: 756 Chapters: 1/1

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Summary

Of course the Vorta are capable of feeling joy.

What emotion is it, when you tremble before a righteous god, if not joy?

“You know,” said Dr. Bashir, “if you were a non-augment, I’d diagnose you with depression.”

“Oh, Doctor,” said Weyoun cheerfully. “You’re not qualified to make mental health diagnoses. And I assure you, I’m perfectly happy.”

“I know,” said Bashir. “That’s why I said, ‘if you were a non-augment.’” He studied his medscanner, his face dark. “Have you ever heard the term ‘anhedonia?’”

“Once or twice,” said Weyoun.

“It comes in many forms,” said Bashir. “A lack of interest in social interaction—“

“The Vorta are not programmed to be social with each other,” said Weyoun with a sunny smile. “Although of course we are perfectly capable of play-acting, if our duties require it. I like to think I performed sociability rather well in my role as diplomat.”

“Right,” said Bashir drily. He checked his PADD and continued the list as if Weyoun hadn’t spoken. “There’s musical anhedonia, where the listener has no trouble distinguishing between tones and notes, but derives no pleasure from the music—“

“Guilty,” said Weyoun with a peppy shrug. “I must admit I never developed a taste for opera—“

“Palatial anhedonia, the lack of interest in food and drink, often accompanied by weight loss,” Bashir said.

“The Founders, in their infinite wisdom, did not deem it prudent to program me with tastebuds,” said Weyoun. He smiled brightly. “However, I think I make do quite nicely with my appreciation for textures!”

Bashir cleared his throat. “And sexual anhedonia—“

“I’ve never complained about that,” said Weyoun swiftly, his smile dying.

“Damar has,” said Bashir flatly.

Weyoun looked briefly aghast. “That’s not possible. I’m an excellent actor.” Then he recovered. “Well, perhaps it’s for the best. If the Founders wished me to engage in intercourse, they would have...” He trailed off, his index finger rubbing anxiously against his thumb. Bashir watched him for a while, his eyes hooded.

Bashir folded his arms. He considered letting it go; his instincts told him to say nothing, and for a while he traced his lips with one finger, keeping the words locked up. But finally, he said, “Let me ask you something, Weyoun, and I hope you won’t find it impertinent.”

Weyoun gave him an artificial smile.

“Do you ever feel joy?” Bashir asked, studying him closely.

“My dear doctor,” Weyoun simpered. “Of course I do.” His smile practically sparkled; his eyes were dull. “I feel joy when my work is finished

quickly and competently; when my observations about a species prove useful; when—”

“When you please the Founders,” Bashir said, his voice soft.

“Precisely,” said Weyoun, clasping his hands. Bashir let the silence between them rest for a bit, his mind tracking over his last conversation with Odo.

“Odo speaks to you sometimes,” he said. “One-on-one. He told me you’ve had conversations so far about your collection, Vorta culture and cloning practices, the lives of your predecessors ... do those conversations bring you joy?”

Tight lines wreathed Weyoun’s eyes. His smile had become strained. “I appreciate any attention the Founder gives me,” he said, staring down at his clasped hands.

“But perhaps it makes you anxious as well?” Bashir suggested.

There was no response. Weyoun’s eyes remained downcast, his face unreadable. There was a tense line to his shoulders that told Bashir not to push it further. He left it at, “Odo would never hurt you, you know. Even if you displeased him.” But still, Weyoun stayed quiet, and he didn’t look up.

“In any case,” said Bashir, returning his eye to the medscanner, “since your anhedonic traits are the deliberate byproduct of genetic engineering — not a symptom of depression — then I suppose you’re perfectly healthy.” He attempted a smile, his teeth bared. “As your god intended.”

Weyoun’s lips lifted automatically, without humor, his eyes still far away. But when he slid off the examination table, he boxed it all up behind a cold, superior expression Bashir had seen before, at the height of the Dominion War.

“Exactly as my god intended,” said Weyoun with a perfunctory nod, “and content about it, too. Thank you, Dr. Bashir.”

Bashir watched him go, catalogued the spring in his step, the cheerful ‘hello’ he gave to the medics he passed by on his way out. On Weyoun’s medical file, in the empty space for a diagnosis, Bashir simply wrote ‘healthy.’ No other diagnosis would be honest; still, he thought of the taste of wine or the warmth of an embrace, the pleasure of a night out on the holodeck or in Quark’s bar with his friends, and somehow, ‘healthy’ felt like a lie.

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