

precious and fragile things

Posted originally on the [Ad Astra :: Star Trek Fanfiction Archive](http://www.adastrafanfic.com/works/1713) at <http://www.adastrafanfic.com/works/1713>.

Rating: [Teen And Up Audiences](#)
Archive Warning: [No Archive Warnings Apply](#)
Category: [M/M](#)
Fandom: [Star Trek Online \(STO\)](#)
Relationship: [Tovan Khev/The Player](#)
Character: [Tovan Key](#), [The Player](#)
Additional Tags: [Mind Control Aftermath](#), [Alternating POV](#)
Language: English
Stats: Published: 2024-07-30 Words: 1,238 Chapters: 1/1

precious and fragile things

by [icemachine](#)

Summary

The Tal Shiar ship blaring around you, each wall like a noise - like one pound of a headache. There is no one here to save you. There is no one here to save you. You think about saviors like light but the light is corruption and no one is coming to help you.

Notes

this is the mind game mission!

i.

The lights above you stream into your core. Your eyes are no longer eyes; instead they are pathways, instead they are windows into the open, bare-vulnerable mind that no longer belongs entirely to you; you are strapped down and the platform beneath you burrows into your skin; the Tal Shiar ship blaring around you, each wall like a noise - like one pound of a headache. There is no one here to save you. There is no one here to save you. You think about saviors like light but the light is corruption and no one is coming to help you. This can't—

(A sharp pain pulses in your chest like weaponry like explosives & you cannot move your arms, you try to move your arms, your arms are restrained, your body will not respond to your mind, your mind will not respond to your body. THE INTENSITY OF THE LIGHTS — you can't see past the light, you do not want to see past the light — a pain in your head now, invading each neuron with agony & a silver sadness —

They make the first incision before the anesthesia is applied, a searing fire against your skull, a violation of every stitched-together body part that composes you, sick Romulan, barely Romulan. The incision — the pain — one voice — the — cut — scalpel shining in the unbearable starlight ship whirs —

You can make it through this—

Where is he? Where is he? Where is he? Where is he? Tovan's voice like serenity—

his voice—

the light—

the—

th—)

This can't —

This can't be all that there is.

ii.

“Tovan,” says Satra, her voice always so composed, “you need to calm down.”

“How can I calm down?” he booms, words reaching every inch of the warbird & from her station, Veril jumps, instinct, startled by his volume. “I’m sorry,” he continues, “but... I have to keep looking for him.”

“Of course we’ll continue looking for D’Viren, but we can’t lose another important member of this ship, either.” She smiles, soft and sad. “The stress is taking a toll on you. It’s not healthy. You need to be careful.”

“I don’t care about *my* health,” he responds. “What about *his* ? Who knows what they’ve done to him. He could be...”

“Stop,” she instructs, firm, shattering. “He’s still alive. You have to hold onto your hope.”

“Hope is all I have right now,” he responds. “Trust me.”

iii.

They tell you to pick up the weapon. They tell you that you are a strong, capable man with high potential as a Tal Shiar agent. They tell you that all you have to do to become powerful and wield control over others is kill Veril. Pick up the pistol. Pick it up. Take the pistol, D’Viren, and you will help out the Romulan people, all of them so sad and displaced across the galaxies.

Don’t you want to be useful? You do. You cannot remember morality, as if it has been erased from your biology, but you want to be useful. You want to help your species. You want—

You do not pick up the weapon. The disembodied, frightened voice of Tovan Khev dissipates throughout your mind, coiling in your ears hot and burning. *You’re stronger than this*, he says, and for a moment you think he might be here — to save you, to bring you home — to —

You do not pick up the weapon. This time the voice is calm and star-smooth; unmistakably, Empress Sela. She says *you have to do this, you know that you have to do this*. She says *this is the only way to help us*. She says *you’re such a good, good boy*.

You pick up the weapon.

You shoot Veril.

Why did you do this? asks Tovan, who is not here, who will not save you.

(When Veril's hologram fades — it isn't *really* her, she has escaped, *she* is safe — you feel a frothing disgust within you. How could you do this? Is this really what you are capable of?)

iv.

On the fourth day of D'Viren's absence, Veril picks up a transmission from a Tal Shiar agent, and tugs on Tovan's sleeve.

At first he is furious. His desires have shifted from D'Viren to eviscerating Hakeev, and watching this agent's stutters and whispers elicits a previously unfathomable concept of anger.

And then he says the holiest words. "We have D'Viren on board Hakeev's ship. I must go now, but I will send you our location."

It fizzles out before Tovan can ask if he's safe.

"Setting a course for Hakeev's ship now," Veril says, without being asked. Does she know? Does everyone know?

v.

They make you explode rodents, they make you construct weapons with horrific capabilities. They make you mutilate a live test subject — some unlucky Romulan refugee that had been captured. You assimilate her. You force Borg implants into her body. You steal her remaining innocence, and you do this while Tovan's voice rings throughout the chambers of your mind — *stop, I believe in you, you can fight this, you can* — and you do this while whispering *I'm so sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry* until the fallen sorries slowly dry out & reform into nothingness. Obedience.

It lasts until Khimek steals your consciousness—

You wake up. Your head hurts. You don't hear Tovan's voice. You break into Hakeev's personal lab, your head hurts, you steal his files, your head hurts, you leave Hakeev's ship, you defeat Hakeev's ship, you find your way home, your head does not stop aching.

vi.

Everyone watches as D'Viren exits the bridge. He is frail, strained, sickly, and he moves towards his quarters at an alarmingly slow pace.

Tovan has to follow him.

Tovan will always follow him.

He follows D'Viren, several steps behind, hovering, until they reach the turbolift, and they stand together in silence, unbearable silence, a silence that feels like injection.

Tovan breaks it, tears it out. “I realized something today.”

“What did you realize?” D’Viren asks. He sounds tired.

Is he really going to do this? Is he strong enough? *Yes. He has to. He cannot lose D’Viren again. D’Viren has to know.*

“I realized that we’re in danger. Because we rebel against the Tal Shiar, we’re always in danger, and I could lose you at any moment.”

“That’s a very depressing realization, Khev.”

“Let me finish,” he breathes. “I also realized that I can’t be afraid of myself anymore. If our lives really are so fleeting... I need you to know how important you are to me. I need you to know that I...”

D’Viren turns to him, but his head tilts in confusion. He looks into Tovan’s eyes and witnesses his entire existence, entire soulshards, every quickening organ, when Tovan finishes his sentence with *I love you*.

At first D’Viren’s face is blank, but that turns into a warm, comforting smile once he processes the statement. He moves forward to press a gloved hand against Tovan’s face, *oh—*

oh—

this is in every daydream, but no daydream or fantasy could ever compare to the feeling of D’Viren’s lips, *so real* against his, D’Viren’s body brushing against his with intent, with the purpose of loving & eventually the kiss turns into an embrace; Tovan feels tears begin to flow, feels D’Viren’s face dampen and burn. D’Viren’s grasp on him tightens as he buries his face in Tovan’s neck, trembles, shakes, desires.

“It’s okay,” Tovan whispers. “I’m here. You’re safe now.”

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!