

runner up

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by [meriwethersays](#)

Summary

He couldn't say why, exactly, he wanders into the tailor's shop one morning. He buys strictly off-the-rack and the only suit he's ever had tailored was his wedding suit. Maybe it's that as he walks past, he hears a radio playing the repetitive "beep...beep...beep" of Sputnik passing overhead. It's not a particularly pleasant sound, in the abstract, but for some people—like him—it might as well be the comforting sound of a heartbeat.

Science-fiction writer Julius Eaton meets not-so-simple tailor Elim Garak in the midst of the Space Race.

Notes

Set in the Far Beyond the Stars universe, beginning in 1957. Cameos by Enterprise, TOS, and Voyager characters as well.

Chapter 1

Julius and Kay have an—arrangement, in their marriage, that protects both of them. They're an excellent match in every way except for their mismatched sexual attractions. Kay has a girlfriend, Odette, who's a poet and lives in the Village, and sometimes he goes with her to Odette's reading. Julius ended things with his last boyfriend a few weeks after starting work at *Incredible Tales*, and for now he's not in a hurry to find someone new.

He couldn't say why, exactly, he wanders into the tailor's shop one morning. He buys strictly off-the-rack and the only suit he's ever had tailored was his wedding suit. Maybe it's that as he walks past, he hears a radio playing the repetitive "*beep...beep...beep*" of Sputnik passing overhead. It's not a particularly pleasant sound, in the abstract, but for some people—like him—it might as well be the comforting sound of a heartbeat.

When he walks down a few steps and enters the shop, he hears a man exclaim, "Welcome, welcome!" The shop is overly warm, a little dim, but impeccably clean. Julius steps past a display of clothes to find a man sitting at a worktable, stitching busily. When he comes into sight, the man leaps up. "How may I help you?"

"I was—" Julius starts, and realizes he doesn't have the rest of the words. That's odd. He's almost never at a loss for words. "I heard Sputnik." He points a little stupidly at the short-wave receiver on the man's work table.

"Ah yes! I find it pleasant background noise, don't you?"

Julius stares at the man. "I...suppose I do." He's a little older than Julius, perhaps in his early forties, with lank brown hair that's a little too long for polite society, sunken eyes, and a very pale complexion. "But I'm a science-fiction writer. I'm not sure most people would agree with me."

"Ah, a writer!" The man extends his hand to shake. "My name is Elim Garak. And you are?"

Julius takes his hand. It's callused, a little cool even in the warmth of the room. Mr. Garak's grasp is firm. "Julius, Julius Eaton."

"Of course! I've seen your name—you write for one of the magazines, do you not? *Galaxy*, is it?"

"*Incredible Tales*." It's nothing to be ashamed of, even if it isn't *Galaxy*.

"Yes, yes, of course!" The man sounds delighted at everything Julius tells him, and it sends an unaccountable shiver down his spine. He's been holding the man's hand too long, and he releases it. "I'll make sure to purchase the next issue to find your latest story."

Julius thinks back to the latest story he wrote, which involved Martian princesses. "Perhaps you should wait for the next one."

Mr. Garak laughs at that too. "Whatever you say, my dear Mr. Eaton."

"Call me Julius, Mr. Garak," he says. "Please." The War Office calls him Mr. Eaton.

"Oh, it's only Garak. Plain, simple Garak." There is something about Garak that says that he's neither plain nor simple.

"Garak, then." Julius is somewhat at a loss now, the steady sound of Sputnik in the background.

"I'm always happy to make a new friend," Garak says cheerfully. "Did you come in here looking for a suit?" He looks Julius over, and there's that shiver down his spine again. "Or perhaps more limited tailoring work?" His gaze drops to Julius's hand and the wedding band that sits there. "Many a man's wife has told me that she appreciates the way I've made her husband's suit fit."

"My wife—" How is Julius to say this? It's been a while since he tried to indicate a certain sense of possibility. "My wife appreciates the fit of ladies' clothing." There, that's acceptably ambiguous.

There's a certain spark in Garak's eyes and Julius had forgotten how intoxicating this is—the first flush of excitement, the anticipation. "Still, I would be delighted alter something for you. Perhaps your jacket? May I?" He walks closer to Julius and puts his hands on Julius's shoulders even as Julius begins to agree. "I think you'll find that with a few minor changes, this would sit very nicely." He squeezes so gently that Julius almost thinks he imagined it.

All of this is how he walks into work without a jacket, prompting sharp looks from the police detectives who have been lurking in the neighborhood and an exclamation of "Oh, Julius, what happened?" from Darlene. "Did you get mugged on your way in?"

"Yes, Darlene, I'm sure a man pointed a gun at him and said 'It's your jacket or your life,'" Herbert says from behind his desk.

Douglas pokes his head into the room long enough to regard Julius with some disgust, shake his head, and say, "No sense of decorum at all," before retreating to his office.

Julius pours himself a cup of coffee, lights a cigarette, and sits down at his typewriter. Kay is giving him a look heavy with meaning, the meaning being *don't be indiscreet*. "If you must know, I ducked into a tailor's shop on my way to work this morning and was offered an excellent price for a little work on my jacket. If I'd realized it would upset everyone so much, I would have returned home for another one instead of being on time."

"All right, all right, I'm the only one who gets to spend this much time talking about what my husband is wearing," Kay says. "Unless you all have opinions on the fit of his trousers too?"

There's various grumbling as the others turn back to their typewriters.

Around 6 pm, when Herbert has started nipping at the bottle of sherry he keeps in his desk in case of writer's block and Macklin has lost his fifth pack of matches, Kay heaves a sigh and pushes away from her desk. "Jules, dear, I'm going to go home." She lowers her voice a little. "Will you be home tonight?"

"I think I'll stop by my club," Julius says. "No need to wait up for me."

"Of course, dear. I have plenty of reading to occupy me." Their code for a visit to Odette. She picks up her coat and handbag. "Don't drink too much, you know you're not as young as you used to be."

"And yet you, my dear, never age." He kisses her lightly, careful not to smudge her lipstick.

After the door closes behind her, Herbert says, "You two have such a...modern marriage."

Julius looks at him sharply. "Do you have a problem with my wife, Herbert?"

"With Kay? No, no." Herbert gestures with his sherry glass. "She's too good for you. What kind of man would rather drink with a bunch of other sad old men than be at home with that woman?" Julius knows Herbert well enough to see this for the needling that it is. Herbert has two ex-wives and his only son died in Korea six years ago. He doesn't bother to respond in kind.

Julius stays for another half-hour, poking at his assigned story for the month, about a spy transformed into an alien who can't transform back. It had seemed poignant when he first took the assignment, but it's all coming out a little too depressing. He pulls the most recent page out of his typewriter, adds it to the stack, and stuffs the whole mess into his briefcase before leaving.

What he likes to call his 'club' is the bar at the VFW hall. Technically he's not eligible for membership, what with not having served in the American armed forces, but with his own service and Kay's time in the WAC, it seems they've decided it's close enough. It's an old building, drafty and dimly-lit, with battered wooden floors and threadbare carpets. In summer, it's sweltering; in winter, barely inhabitable. But the membership seems to grow every day, and undoubtedly there will be another surge with the next inevitable war. Sometimes Julius will go every night for a week or two, and sometimes he stays away for a few months.

He hasn't been for quite some time now, but his story is nagging at him. Whether or not he intends it, those men always seem to turn up as characters in his stories and he's stopped fighting it. Tonight, he goes straight to the bar and says, "Scotch, Charlie—make it a double, it's been a long day."

Charlie nods—he isn't much of a talker—and turns away to pour it. Julius contemplates sitting at the bar or finding a table by himself, and has almost decided to sit at the bar when a man next to him says, "Julius, what a surprise!"

Julius turns to the warm presence at his side and finds Garak standing there.

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Garak gestures dismissively and knocks Julius's empty fernet glass off the bar. After eighteen years, Julius has a great deal of practice stifling his reflexes. He watches the descent of the glass and is proud that he doesn't even flinch toward it. When he glances up, Garak has fixed him with a sharp look. "Will you sit and have a drink? Unless you're waiting to meet someone."

"Garak!" His first reaction is alarm at the idea that Garak must have followed him here.

But Garak leans forward and says, "The usual, please, Charlie," and Charlie seems to know what he wants. That means that Julius has somehow failed to notice Garak here in the past. If he doesn't remember Garak, with all of his—particular talents—there must be something *different* about Garak too. "What a pleasure to see you here."

"Do you—come here frequently?"

"Oh, now and then." Garak accepts a glass of something dark and medicinal-smelling from Charlie. "Put it on my account, as usual."

The smell of Garak's drink is overwhelming even Julius's Scotch. "What is that?"

Garak lifts the glass and holds it toward Julius. "Fernet. An amaro. Would you like to taste it?"

Men didn't walk around tasting other men's drinks. "No, thank you. It smells—" Julius cuts himself off before he can say something insulting.

Garak laughs and sets the glass down next to Julius's hand. He doesn't quite touch Julius. "Try it, I insist. Charlie, another for me."

Julius braces himself and takes a sip. It's bitter and astringent, and he coughs. But he can't exactly push the drink back to Garak and it would be rude to waste it, so he braces himself and tosses back the rest of it. "Thank you." He takes a drink of his own Scotch to try to clear the taste. "It was—unusual."

Garak smiles. "An acquired taste that many don't consider worth acquiring." He gestures dismissively and knocks Julius's empty fernet glass off the bar. After eighteen years, Julius has a great deal of practice stifling his reflexes. He watches the descent of the glass and is proud that he doesn't even flinch toward it. When he glances up, Garak has fixed him with a sharp look. "Will you sit and have a drink? Unless you're waiting to meet someone."

"No—I'm not waiting to meet someone, that is. Lead the way." Julius leaves a few bills on the bar for Charlie. He follows Garak to a quiet table, not so far in the corner as to be *private* but out of the main flow of traffic.

Garak settles into his seat and removes his glasses, cleaning them on his shirt. His eyes are very pale blue without the glasses. "Julius Eaton. Writer for *Incredible Tales*. Tell me, what led you there?"

The question throws Julius. He'd been expecting a more leisurely entry into the conversation, the usual meaningless pleasantries, perhaps some discussion of fernet and why Garak would drink something so vile. "What led you to tailoring?"

Garak puts his glasses back on. The metal of them is a little crooked. "I have a knack for seeing people and knowing—what will fit them. A family trait." There's some private joke in there, something Julius doesn't know him well enough to understand. "And you? Did you always want to write about Martian princesses?"

Julius winces internally. So. Garak went out and found the latest issue of *Incredible Tales*. "A taste for adventure, I suppose," he says.

"Oh? Even after the war?" Julius must look startled, because Garak says, "My dear man, every man of our generation around the world was either in the war or—affected by not being in the war."

He's not wrong. "When the war broke out, I lied about my age and enlisted," Julius admits.

Garak raises an eyebrow. "How old were you?"

"Sixteen." Sixteen and stupid and eager to get away from home, away from the suffocating embrace of his parents.

"I hope you won't take this the wrong way, but I find it difficult to believe that anyone thought you were *older* than you are."

Julius laughs at that. "I suppose they didn't, but they let me in all the same." Indeed, how happily they let him in, too young and too foolish to refuse anything that his country asked of him.

"And then?" Garak has a way of looking at Julius that makes him feel—fixed in place, as though Garak believes he's the most interesting person in the world.

"Oh, you know, it's the same story everywhere. Served the rest of the war, met a pretty American girl, persuaded her to marry me and followed her to America."

"Ah, yes, *served the rest of the war*. What a tidy way to describe it."

Julius clears his throat, shifts a little, and sips his drink. “I suppose there are other ways.” He looks away from Garak, out at the other men in the club room. It’s not too crowded this evening. Some nights, there’s such a crush that he doesn’t bother, and other nights he can’t take it, being around other men who are all trying to find tidy descriptions for their own experiences or drink enough to forget them.

“I can only imagine.” Garak’s voice is much gentler.

“And what about you? What were you doing during the war?”

“Oh, the support lines, mending things here and there. Nothing so dramatic as serving on the front.” Garak is quiet for a moment and his eyes are very bright. “You spent quite a lot of time on the front, didn’t you.”

Julius tries to keep those memories preserved away from the rest of his brain, like insects trapped in amber. “I suppose.” He wishes it would blur together for him like other people say it does for them—from the first set of injections to huddling on the beach at Dunkirk to marching across Germany in the spring—but every hour is still sharp in his mind. “It was a long time ago.” And it was, wasn’t it, all over twelve years ago now. “There are boys selling papers in the street who were born after the war ended.”

“After the war ended,” Garak repeats, as though he’s tasting the words. “Yes, it did, I suppose.” When some men say that, they’re quietly admitting that they still relive the war in their minds—but when Garak says it, it sounds entirely different. “So, the war ended, you came here with your pretty wife, and began writing stories of other planets?” He signals with his hand and Charlie appears with another Scotch. Julius hadn’t noticed that his glass was empty, but he accepts it.

“I was a journalist, for a time. But I found that I preferred writing about things that hadn’t happened yet, rather than things that already had.” He smiles wryly. “You can fix things if they haven’t happened yet.”

Garak smiles too and knocks his own glass lightly against Julius’s in an ersatz toast. His knuckles do just brush Julius’s this time. “My dear man, I’m a tailor. I fix many things *after* they’ve happened.”

The conversation turns lighter after that—Garak points out some of the other regular patrons and insists that he frequently sits with them, Julius insists that he recognizes those men and has never seen Garak with them; Julius tells Garak exactly what he thinks of the fernet and Garak says the British lack a sense of taste—and then Julius looks at his pocket watch. It’s been more than two hours, far longer than he intended to stay. “My wife will be wondering where I am,” he says. If she’s returned from Odette’s. She may have spent the night. “I should be going.”

“Of course,” Garak says, standing as Julius does. “Incidentally, I’m afraid I won’t have your jacket ready for at least another week. My aunt is ill and I’ve been called to her bedside.” His eyes glint in the dim light.

If Julius weren’t a writer—if he didn’t make his living observing people and writing about them—if he didn’t have his particular gifts—he might take that at face value. What a good nephew, he might think. So devoted. But there’s the slightest *something* about Garak as he says it, the story a little too ready at hand. “I’m sorry to hear it,” he says. “Does she live far away?”

“Cleveland. Not a pretty place, this time of year.” Garak smiles. “I’ll be happy when I’m back in New York.”

There it is again, the tiniest sense of wrongness about his story. “Of course. We’ll have lunch when you’re back and you can tell me about your exploits in—Cleveland. And you can give me my jacket back, of course.”

“Until then,” Garak says.

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

They're all working on their various stories for this edition—Julius is back to his melancholy spy trapped in an alien body, and he's gutting his way through it, line by line. He finds himself lifting one or two of Garak's mannerisms, his talent for probing questions, and discovers that the story flows a little better—though it still leaves him feeling drained and out of sorts. He would like it better if he could see Garak again tonight. Only to better observe him, of course.

"You're in a good mood." Kay is reading the *Times*, but she lays it down when Julius sets a piece of buttered toast in front of her. "Cooking me breakfast?"

"I met someone at the club last night. A new friend, nothing more," Julius says, just in case Kay gets excited. She's always a little worried about his lack of—romantic—prospects.

"Oh?" Kay takes a bite of the toast. "Very nice, Jules." Their combined cooking abilities are limited, to say the least.

"The tailor I left my jacket with, actually. It turns out he's a regular."

Kay frowns. "And you didn't recognize him before you met him in the tailor shop?"

"No! Isn't that remarkable?" Julius realizes he didn't make a piece of toast for himself and takes a bite of Kay's. "Charlie, at the club, he recognized Garak—that's his name, Garak—and acted like he knew Garak well. But I could swear I'd never laid eyes on him before."

She snatches the toast back. "It doesn't count as making me breakfast if you eat it yourself," she says. "That's—unusual. No wonder you're excited about him. Someone who can escape *your* notice—" Kay ruffles the pages of the *Times* and spreads it out on the table again. "Maybe you should have invite him over for dinner. Him and—"

"He isn't married, not that I can tell." At Kay's expression, he says, "I didn't ask! He doesn't wear a ring."

"Jules." She knows him too well. "We'll have him over for dinner. You're obviously attached already. I'll get food from—" She frowns. "What kind of name is Garak?"

"No idea. It's his last name," Julius says. "First name is Elim."

"Well, I'll buy something from the Carnegie Deli. As long as you don't think he's a vegetarian."

"Kay. Don't get ahead of yourself." Kay raises an eyebrow and innocently turns the page. "He's going to be out of town for the next week or so anyway. I'll—ask him, the next time it comes up naturally."

"All right, all right," Kay says. She pats his shoulder. "Finish your coffee before we're late for work."

* * * * *

Douglas has provided fresh doughnuts today ("Finally!" Herbert says, and takes three. Julius isn't sure that Herbert eats anything at all at home). It's a good thing, too, because a bite of Kay's toast wasn't much of a breakfast. At least Darlene appears to have more talent with the coffee pot than the previous secretary. Julius usually makes a few cups of coffee into his lunch, and Darlene's is more than drinkable.

They're all working on their various stories for this edition—Julius is back to his melancholy spy trapped in an alien body, and he's gutting his way through it, line by line. He finds himself lifting one or two of Garak's mannerisms, his talent for probing questions, and discovers that the story flows a little better—though it still leaves him feeling drained and out of sorts. He would like it better if he could see Garak again tonight. Only to better observe him, of course.

Herbert has pushed his chair back from his typewriter and is looking at his pages in disgust. He turns his annoyance on his favorite safe target, Julius. "Should a good Englishman like you really drink so much coffee? Don't you prefer tea?" His imitation of a British accent on the last few words is painful.

Julius considers his array of possible responses. Sometimes, when he's feeling impatient with Herbert, he points out that he's a British *Arab* and so Herbert's attitude toward the prototypical Englishman isn't particularly applicable. Today, Herbert isn't to blame for his current mood, so he settles for, "Tea is soothing. I wish to be tense—to write about my spy."

Herbert mumbles something about the pretentiousness inherent in applying the Method to writing rather than acting. Julius is proud of himself for the remarkable restraint that he displays in not reminding Herbert that Russians brought Method acting to America. Even oblique references to the Reds are stupidly dangerous in America. "Just don't drink it all," Herbert says.

"Not much chance with you around." Macklin leans back in his chair, drinking a mug of coffee with a healthy slug of whiskey in it. Macklin is always the first of them to finish his assignment. Julius has to hand it to him, the man has found his niche and thoroughly exploited it. He's just published his third novel about robots now, and he's certainly the best-known of the writers at *Incredible Tales*. Of course, he has to write about *robots* to do it.

“Will you all keep it down? My hero is assisting a very grateful Venusian princess,” Kay snaps. She does have a particular talent for writing the—sensually appreciative female aliens.

“I know you all appreciate my wife’s grateful princesses,” Julius says loudly. Kay rolls her eyes, but she gives him a fond look.

Kay goes to Odette’s again tonight and Julius goes to the club—in fact, that’s how they each spend the rest of the week. Julius spends the time looking hard at each face in the club, assessing whether he’s missed anyone else. But he hasn’t—he remembers every face there, every voice, every name. Every drink that’s been ordered when he’s been standing at the bar. Garak is the only nagging hole in his memory.

“Oh, Garak? Good guy,” Davey Cochran says. “Always willing to buy a round.”

“Garak? He’s the one who brought me here,” Alfred Kichener tells him. “I should thank him next time I see him.”

The others say the same thing. Strange, that Garak should be the only one to have slipped past Julius’s notice, when even Davey—who spends most of his time soused—recalls him.

And then, ten days later, Julius walks by Garak’s shop on his usual route to work and sees the light on. He ducks in and says, “Garak, it’s been a bit longer than a—”

Garak stands awkwardly. “Yes, I’m afraid I haven’t been up to venturing much beyond the shop,” he says. His swollen black eye is livid against his skin. Julius can see little cuts where his glasses must have shattered in the blow.

“Garak! Are you all right? Have you seen a doctor?”

Garak waves a hand and sits down again. From the way that he moves gingerly, he must have more injuries too. “I’m afraid there was a bit of an—accident, on my way from the airport back here. I’ll be fine.”

It’s been a long time since Julius saw someone injured like this—since Benny, in fact, who was injured far worse. It’s shocking every time he does. “Are you sure? You don’t look fine.”

“I admit, some of the garments are likely to be delayed further,” Garak says. Julius walks to him and crouches in front of him, turning his head to the side to examine the black eye. “Are you a doctor, Julius?”

“What? Oh, no, not in the slightest. I’ve only—seen a lot of injuries.” Garak’s eye isn’t as bad as it could be. If they were out on the battlefield, Julius would be feeling his ribs to check for damage while waiting for the field medic to get there. “I hope you’ve seen a real doctor.”

“Yes, of course,” Garak says, and Julius is annoyed by the fact that he doesn’t even bother to make it *sound* like the truth.

“Well. If you’re feeling as well as you say, my wife has instructed me to invite you to dinner. Why don’t you come tonight?” Kay will be annoyed when he asks her to be the one to go get food at the last minute, but he’s hoping her interest in meeting Garak will outweigh that.

“Tonight.” Garak considers it. His good eye fixes on Julius. “Really, your wife wants to meet your tailor?”

“She believes my social circle is—lacking.” Wait, that sounds insulting. “I told her I’d met someone new at the club, and she wanted to meet you.” That sounds a little better.

“In that case, how can I refuse? I would be very pleased.”

“Wonderful,” Julius says. “I’ll come by at—6:30? If you’re up to walking?” He remembers and asks, “Incidentally, you don’t happen to be a vegetarian?”

“Goodness, no.” Garak shifts experimentally in his chair. “Yes, 6:30.”

Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

Garak is polite enough not to comment on the fact that they invited him over for dinner and are now serving him pastrami sandwiches and Scotch.

Kay is—peevish. “Why don’t *you* go get food? I didn’t agree to dinner tonight!”

Julius realizes that she may well have had plans with Odette. “Will it be a problem? He looked—he’d been beaten, Kay. I didn’t like the idea of just—”

Kay kisses him lightly. He enjoys kisses from her, the same way that he enjoys an arm around his shoulders. “I’ll get the food. Next time, please give me a little warning.”

Julius tries to imagine picking up the phone at Garak’s shop and telephoning the *Incredible Tales* office to say, “Darlene, please tell my wife that I’ve invited a man for dinner and ask if it’s all right.” He stifles the smile. “Yes, dear.”

He does a terrible job of hiding his anticipation. When Herbert looks over for the fourth time and heaves a loud sigh, Julius realizes that he’s been drumming his fingers against the carriage return. “You know, not all of us have a home-cooked meal to look forward to,” Herbert says.

“Yes,” Julius says absently. It will be Carnegie Deli’s famous pastrami, he suspects. And if there’s one thing that he and Kay have mastered, it’s the art of constructing sandwiches. “Sorry about that, Herbert.” He lights a fresh cigarette and realizes that he has a lit cigarette already between his lips.

“Are you—all right, Julius?” Darlene is always concerned for their welfare, probably because they all survive mostly on coffee, cigarettes, and alcohol in the office. And doughnuts.

“Yes, yes,” he says. “Making progress on my story, that’s all.”

Douglas sticks his head into the office. “You’d better be. Deadline is in two days and I haven’t seen anything from you yet, Eaton.” Douglas is always worried about deadlines, and the deadlines never really mean that much.

He’s almost—jubilant? No, that would be unreasonable—excited when he goes to meet Garak at his shop. Garak is ready, hat at a neat angle and a cane in his hand. There’s a certain practiced way that he grips the cane that makes Julius think he’s used it for more than support in the past. “Are you all right for dinner?” he asks.

“My dear man, I’ve been looking forward to it all day,” Garak says. “Do you know how long it’s been since I had something especially delicious?”

“You’re very optimistic about the quality of dinner we’ll be serving.” Julius sets a slow pace.

“Are you insulting your wife’s cooking, Julius?”

Ah. “We’re both—very busy people. We don’t cook a great deal.”

“Then I’m particularly honored to be invited over.”

They walk in companionable silence until Julius sees two of his least favorite people stepping into his path. “Eaton, is it?” Detective Ryan flicks his cigarette so that the ash lands an inch from Julius’s shoe. Julius suspects that he practices this particular maneuver. “Strange name for someone like you.”

Julius thought the police had long since given up trying to decide whether he counted as colored when choosing who to harass. “And yet it is my name, I’m afraid.” They must be low on their quota this week.

Detective Mulkahey raises an eyebrow. “Oh? Why are you afraid?”

God, but Julius hates them. He’s about to respond when Garak moves slightly forward, tips his hat up, and adjusts his grip slightly on his cane. “Is there a problem, Detectives?”

He sounds wholly sincere, but it has a remarkable effect on Ryan and Mulkahey. Ryan gets a good look at Garak and almost stumbles back, saying, “No, no problem, s—”

Mulkahey elbows him, cutting off what Julius is almost certain would have been ‘sir.’ “No problem at all. Sorry to interrupt. Go ahead.” Both men give them a wide berth.

“What on earth was *that*? They were terrified of you!”

“Oh?” Garak has lowered the brim of his hat again. “You told me how dramatic my—black eye looks. I assume they saw it and didn’t think we were worth the trouble.”

“Worth the trouble,” Julius repeats. “I’ve never seen a police officer react like that, and I’ve been to a lot of crime scenes.”

“Really, I think you’re being a bit dramatic.” Garak gestures with his cane. “Shall we proceed? I would hate for dinner, whatever it is, to go to waste.”

Julius doesn’t press him on it, only because he’s certain that Garak won’t give him any satisfactory answers. “This way,” he says. He can’t help watching Garak from the corner of his eyes as they walk. “Here, why don’t we take the elevator.”

“An elevator?” *This building, on a writer’s salary?* goes unsaid. “Very thoughtful. I must accept.”

They crowd into the elevator, which really only fits one man and Mr. Rivera, the elevator operator, comfortably. Garak is barely a centimeter away and Julius has to breathe carefully not to touch him. “Hello, Mr. Rivera,” Julius says. “Busy evening?”

“I like them busy,” he says. Mr. Rivera must be nearly 80 years old and is discreet. “Mrs. Eaton had quite the selection from Carnegie’s, earlier.”

“Good, we have a guest for dinner. Garak, this is Mr. Rivera.” What kind of pretentious writer lives in a building with an elevator, indeed? They have people over so rarely that Julius has forgotten that their living situation isn’t exactly commensurate with their wages from *Incredible Tales*.

“It’s a pleasure to meet you, Mr. Rivera,” Garak says, and manages to contort in the small space so that they can shake hands, despite his injuries.

“Here we are, gentlemen.”

Garak watches carefully as the elevator stops. “Thank you, Mr. Rivera.” Garak steps out onto the floor and Julius follows him with a glance back at Mr. Rivera. The man raises a greying eyebrow just slightly and then smiles as Julius shakes his head.

Julius unlocks the apartment door and opens it. “Darling? Mr. Garak and I are home.”

Kay is just setting a plate of sandwiches on the table—Julius winces internally as he realizes that she’s had to move the table out of the kitchen into what is supposed to be the dining area. He will owe her for weeks for this. “Welcome home,” she says. “Mr. Garak, it’s very nice to meet you. Can I get you anything?” It makes him uncomfortable to see her playing hostess, like this is a role he’s inflicted on her.

Julius clears his throat. “Kay, I can pour us a pair of Scotches—Garak? I’m afraid we don’t have any Fernet.”

“That horrible—” Kay cuts herself off and smiles. “I take it that’s your drink of choice.”

Garak laughs. “It’s lovely to meet you—please, call me Garak. I’ll follow suit.”

Good God, there are matching clean glasses. He looks at Kay and mouths, *I’m so sorry*, and she mouths back, *Three poetry readings*. It seems like a fair exchange.

“I don’t wish to interrupt,” Garak says, “but would you mind if I sat?”

This is the most disastrous dinner invitation. When Odette comes for dinner, they don’t try to pretend to be formal. “Please, I’m so sorry.” Julius pulls out a chair at the table. “Let me take your cane.”

Garak eases into the chair and hands him the cane. It’s vastly heavier than it should be for its size. “Thank you,” he says, and then repeats “Thank you,” when Kay gives him the Scotch that Julius had poured.

“Oh, do you want ice? We typically drink it neat, but we do have some if you prefer—” Kay is definitely laughing at him, she’s just kind enough to do it silently.

“No, no, this is perfect.” Garak watches expectantly until they each have a glass as well and then lifts his glass to them. “Thank you for being such gracious hosts—I know it was a bit of a last-minute imposition.”

“In fairness, I think it was mostly my imposition on Kay,” Julius says, but he takes a hearty slug of his drink anyway. It’s not the best. “Please, eat.”

Garak is polite enough not to comment on the fact that they invited him over for dinner and are now serving him pastrami sandwiches and Scotch. He eats three sandwiches while making easy conversation—the quality of Kay’s outfit, the merits of Carnegie Deli versus Katz’s, how poorly Julius has treated the jacket that Garak is now supposed to tailor for him. When Julius and Kay are each on their second glass of Scotch, Garak says, “And the two of you met during the war?”

“Oh, yes,” Kay says. “The USO told us they were bringing in some Brits for a change of pace, and then I saw Julius walking in.”

“It was love at first sight,” Julius recites, and squeezes Kay’s hand. “For me, at least. I can’t fathom what possessed her to say yes when I asked her to dance.” Perhaps the sense that he wasn’t interested in more than dancing. But he was haggard and disastrous, and he remembers Kay as—lustrous. “Or why she put up with me after that. Slim pickings, I assume.”

“Oh, I don’t know,” Garak says. He wets his mouth with a sip of alcohol. Julius tries not to watch. “She chose you out of sixty million Allied soldiers in Europe, didn’t she? There must be something special about you.”

Kay coughs a little into her glass. “I’m not sure all sixty million were offering themselves up for marriage. But he’s certainly special. I understand you’re special too, Garak.”

It's fascinating, the minute changes that Julius sees. If he weren't quite so able to—observe, he would never have seen the way that Garak adjusts his posture to be even more nonthreatening, the tiny alteration to his smile. "I am a gifted tailor, but I don't know that I would describe myself as *special*—"

"Julius told me that he had never seen you before at the club." Kay, by contrast, is leaning forward.

Garak clears his throat delicately. "I imagine that some people might find it slightly insulting to be told repeatedly that they are special for having been overlooked."

"Oh, no!" Kay shakes her head emphatically. "No, no—you don't understand." Julius suspects there's no way that Garak would understand short of being told—everything—about Julius. Which is certainly not going to happen.

"What my wife means is that I have an—excellent memory for names and faces," Julius says. "It's not a matter of overlooking."

"You make it sound like I vanished from photographs!" Garak says it like it's ridiculous. It doesn't sound that ridiculous to Julius.

"Well, no, that would be impossible," Kay cuts in. "I'm sorry, Garak, we didn't mean to put you on the spot. Julius may have told you, we don't socialize much outside of the writers' room."

And there, there's the slightest shift back in his posture. "He did. I felt particularly honored to be invited. And rest assured, I find your insistence that I was invisible—charming."

The conversation goes back to easy things. Garak compliments Kay's latest story, and Julius insists that he didn't reveal Kay's pen name. Julius talks too enthusiastically about the history of the building and the fact that Mr. Rivera has been the elevator operator since the turn of the century. At last, Garak says, "I'm afraid I must be going. Kay, it was lovely to meet you. Julius, will you accompany me to the elevator?"

While they wait for the elevator to arrive, Garak says, "It's unlikely I'll have your jacket ready soon. I have a great deal of work to finish, and I only have a few more days in town."

"A few more days? You're in no condition to travel!" Julius's hand twitches. "Really, Garak, I would think whoever it is—"

"My grandmother is dying," Garak says. It's so openly false that Julius gapes at him for a moment. "Pensacola."

"Better weather than Cleveland, I suppose," Julius says. "Is your family from Pensacola?"

"Oh, no, she moved there for the climate years ago." Garak smiles easily at him and then winces a little when it pinches the bruised skin around his eye. "But it's quite a journey. It may be several weeks before I return."

"Garak," Julius says, "how do you ever finish tailoring people's clothes when you're always leaving town?"

"My dear man, this is only my second relative to fall ill recently. I'm certain that when my grandmother has died, that will be the end of it."

"No more relatives?"

"Oh, no, I come from quite a large family," Garak assures him.

"A large family that lives all over the country, I take it."

"And abroad!" Garak's blue eyes are sincere and guileless and every word he's saying is a lie. "But they're all in good health. Or were, the last I've heard from them."

"Of course." Julius meets his eyes and can't help the smile. "Of course." The elevator arrives. "Try to come back in one piece, this time."

Garak smiles back. "I can't make any promises."

Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

Julius watches the room as Garak goes to the bar. There's a group of ten young men who've been frequenting the club for the last month or so. Long since back from Korea but anticipating war in Vietnam, the way they talk—and they're fresh and angry and jostle their way to the bar whenever they want more drinks. They push past Garak and something in Julius wants him to—knock one to the ground, teach them a lesson about appropriate behavior. This isn't a place for violence and yet Julius sees the lines of controlled violence in the shape of Garak's shoulders and wants confirmation. Garak is mild-mannered though, only steps out of their way, and one of them mutters, "Sorry, old man." Julius is insulted on both Garak's behalf—the man can't be over 45—and his own.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Julius has one of his dreams that night. From a distance he sees the pit and doesn't understand what's in it. He's the first to realize that they're stacked bodies and he can't—he wants to lie to himself about what's happened here, about what he's seeing, but his brain won't allow it. He stumbles, steps a little out of formation to vomit, and a bullet zips just above his head. He feels a spray of warmth on his face just before he sees Harrison collapse. There's a frantic scramble to find cover—this area was supposed to be clear of enemy combatants, they're all supposed to have surrendered. Julius sees the movement—he sees the face—and he fires. He's always been a good shot. The War Office saw to that.

"Julius!"

He's paralyzed in bed for a moment before he can sit up. "Sorry," he says.

Kay wraps an arm around his shoulders and squeezes a little. "What was it?"

"The ambush by the mass grave." Kay knows the rough outline of all his dreams by now. He breathes in deeply. "I do wish the dreams weren't all—true." He knows there are people whose dreams at least muddle facts together with fiction, who can wake up from their dreams and heave a sigh and know that it wasn't real. He envies them that.

"I know." Kay passes him the glass of water from her nightstand. He stares at it for a moment before she says, "Drink, Jules."

He finishes the water and gets up to refill the glass. "I'm going to go for a walk to clear my head," he says when he returns it. "Just—fifteen minutes."

Kay looks at the clock. It's four a.m. "All right. Be careful." Their neighborhood isn't bad and his situational awareness is near-perfect by now—though remembering Harrison's death reminds him that it's certainly not perfect—but a man wandering around alone in the early morning can always run into some kind of trouble.

Julius dresses only as much as is necessary to go out in public, tucking his nightshirt into his pants and pulling a coat on over it. He takes the stairs this time, eight flights down, counting each step as he goes. Sometimes it takes him a long time to fix a memory back into its slot and close the door behind it, especially when it's such a violent one. It's still dark out, dawn a few hours away, and the air bites enough that he wishes he'd dressed more, but it helps to clear his head.

He's about four blocks from the apartment and considering turning back when he sees Detective Ryan ease out from an alley and begin following him. Julius walks another six blocks, just to see what Ryan will do, but the man never approaches. If Julius were wiser, he wouldn't confront Ryan. But he can't stop himself; he turns and walks directly back to the detective. "Detective Ryan," he says. "Has something happened?" It's foolish to engage with him at all.

It's hard to tell in the dim light, but Ryan almost looks—alarmed? "It's a dangerous time of night to be out alone," Ryan says. "It would be a shame if anything happened to you."

Julius squints at him. "Is that—a threat?" It should sound like one, but Ryan's voice is almost sincere.

"No, no, not at all. I was in the area and noticed you walking, thought it'd be good to keep an eye out for any trouble."

Julius tries not to gape at him. "I—appreciate your concern." He most certainly does not. He wants Ryan as far from him as possible. "I was planning to head home now anyway."

Ryan walks over to him and straightens his coat a little. Julius's skin crawls. "Go ahead. I'll make sure you get home safe."

Julius doesn't tell Kay about the encounter with Ryan. It's too unsettling—too much, on the heels of Ryan and Mulkahey's reaction to Garak. If his memory ever lied to him, he would think he'd imagined the whole thing. He's decidedly unhappy at the idea of Ryan or Mulkahey following him.

He wants to ask Garak about it—not that he expects to get any meaningful answers—but it's three weeks before Garak returns. Julius accepts a new story assignment, something especially pulpy and meaningless as a palate-cleanser from the last one. Kay waits until he's not having the dreams anymore and then spends an entire week staying with Odette. Julius can feel the inevitable coming, the particular pain that he's always known he'd feel one day. The morning of Garak's return, Julius sits across the kitchen table from Kay and says, "It's time, isn't it?"

Kay looks startled. "Time for what?"

He takes her hand. "You've been with Odette for five years now." He can see it dawning on Kay.

"I never expected—" She sets down her coffee cup. "How is it that you knew before I did?"

Julius laughs, a little sadly. Kay is his best friend and he's about to lose her. "Because you can't see yourself when you're together, and I can."

"I don't even know if she wants me to—move in with her," Kay says. "She might be perfectly happy with things the way they are." At Julius's expression, she lets a tiny smile slip. "Really?"

Julius runs a hand through his hair. "We'll work out the details. There's no rush. I simply wanted you to know that you don't need to worry about how to tell me, when the time comes."

* * * * *

After everything, the rush of relief he feels when he sees Garak at the club is intoxicating. He refuses to consider what that means. "Garak!" He says it a little too loudly, when he's still a ways away from Garak's table. "You're back!"

Garak smiles and stands, clapping Julius on the shoulder. "Please, join me." He has a cocktail in front of him rather than the usual small glass, but Julius can smell the fernet wafting from it anyway.

"I see you didn't get much sun in Pensacola," Julius says. Garak is nearly as pale as ever.

"I spent a great deal of time in the hospital with my grandmother before she passed. Very tedious." He doesn't sound like he's grieving. "How are you, my friend? If you don't mind me saying, you look a bit unsettled."

Julius sits back and takes a very long drink of his Scotch. A single ice cube, this time, for variety. "I had the strangest encounter with Detective Ryan."

"Oh?" Garak's blue eyes turn a little colder.

"Yes. I—went for an early-morning walk a few weeks ago and discovered that he was following me."

"How peculiar."

"Yes, and the most bizarre part of it was that when I asked him what he was doing, he told me that he was following me to protect me." He pretends to ponder. "You know, I think it was the morning after you came over for dinner."

Garak maintains an expression of polite interest. "It seems a bit over-zealous on his part. I didn't realize there were enough police officers in the city to personally protect ordinary citizens. Not that you're ordinary, of course."

"I am quite ordinary," Julius protests. "Certainly ordinary enough to not warrant being followed by the police. *You* didn't say something to them, did you?"

"My dear man. I don't have that kind of—influence over New York's—" He's clearly unwilling to say *finest*. "Over New York's police force." Garak's eyes are wide and earnest, and he doesn't break eye contact as he sips his drink.

There's something delightful in how blatantly Garak maintains his various pretenses. "Oh, of course not," Julius says. "I wouldn't think so. But I would prefer not to have any police attention, positive or negative. If it's all the same."

"I fervently agree." Garak finally does break eye contact. "I don't suppose you'd try fernet again, Julius? This cocktail is marvelous."

Julius can't tell if he's offering his own drink or suggesting that Julius get one himself. "I'm open to it," he says, just to find out, and Garak pushes the drink toward him. There's a strange and entirely pleasant feeling running down Julius's spine now. He picks the glass up by its stem and touches it to his lips, just enough to wet his tongue. He winces.

"I take it I haven't won you over," Garak says. "To fernet."

Julius sets the glass carefully between them. "It's better that way, but I have to admit, I can't imagine why one would choose to drink it, of all the liquors in the world."

Garak takes the glass back and sips it again, his mouth just where Julius's was, and Julius tries to clamp down on that feeling. "I spent time in Italy during the war." Julius waits for more detail. "While I was there, I was...introduced to amaro. Fernet, in particular. A *nonna* gave it to me as a health tonic at first. She was worried at how pale I was."

Julius can only imagine it, those crystalline blue eyes and pallid skin in the midst of an Italian fall. "I hear Italy is beautiful."

"Hm?" Garak flicks the side of his glass very slightly, just enough to make a quiet clinking noise. "Yes, very. A shame Mussolini ever got his hands on it. I don't know what that man was thinking—" He cuts himself off and smiles again. "But you don't want to hear about that. Tell me, what else has happened in the time that I've been away?"

Julius refuses to let the conversation turn so quickly from Garak. "Pensacola, was it? Is that anywhere near Port Canaveral?"

That prompts a laugh. "My dear man, if only." Garak spins the stem of his glass back and forth between his fingers. Julius has never seen him so fidgety. "Nearly five hundred miles, I believe. Not exactly a day trip."

“No,” Julius says. “A shame, though. I hear they’re testing the Jupiter missiles there.”

“I wouldn’t know. I would certainly like to.”

Julius can’t decide which of those sentences is a lie. “When do you think we’ll have a satellite up there? Something to outdo Sputnik?”

“We? Do you consider yourself American?” Garak doesn’t make him answer that. “Quite soon, I would imagine. Sputnik is too much of a—challenge not to answer swiftly. Though I hope we won’t have to kill a dog to do it.”

“That’s Herbert’s next assignment, did you know? He has to write a story about the plight of a dog sent into space.” Julius lets himself lean back in his chair a little. He doesn’t let his foot bump Garak’s. Not that a single other man in this room would be concerned about something like that.

“Poor Laika and poor Herbert,” Garak says. “Would you like another drink?” He drains their shared cocktail as he stands up.

Julius fully intends to drink until he doesn’t feel bad anymore and then pour himself into a taxicab. Mr. Rivera will give him a very disapproving look. “Yes,” he says. “Pick something for me. I trust you.”

Garak abruptly stares at him. “What a strange choice,” he murmurs. “Very well.” He’s still walking with a cane, Julius notes. But the limp is the slightest bit exaggerated, to Julius’s eyes. What is it like, he wonders, not to notice these things? To take the world at face value?

Julius watches the room as Garak goes to the bar. There’s a group of ten young men who’ve been frequenting the club for the last month or so. Long since back from Korea but anticipating war in Vietnam, the way they talk—and they’re fresh and angry and jostle their way to the bar whenever they want more drinks. They push past Garak and something in Julius wants him to—knock one to the ground, teach them a lesson about appropriate behavior. This isn’t a place for violence and yet Julius sees the lines of controlled violence in the shape of Garak’s shoulders and wants confirmation. Garak is mild-mannered though, only steps out of their way, and one of them mutters, “Sorry, old man.” Julius is insulted on both Garak’s behalf—the man can’t be over 45—and his own.

Garak comes back balancing two drinks in one hand and his cane in the other. “Garak,” Julius says. “You aren’t subtle.”

Garak puts a hand over his heart. “Not subtle? I’m hurt.”

“You were exaggerating the limp when you walked to the bar. And it was barely visible when you walked back.” There’s something about Garak, something dangerous, that makes Julius want to show off what he can do, what he can see.

“I had no idea you were so observant.”

“It’s good to see you don’t need the cane anymore, at least.”

Garak’s mouth twitches a little. “Every man can benefit from a cane. Don’t you think?”

“Canes are for wounded men,” Julius says. He remembers far too many makeshift crutches. “Not for healthy ones.”

“A cane is not the same as a crutch.”

“I didn’t say it was.” It should disturb Julius a little that Garak knew exactly what he was thinking. “A cane is much more—permanent.”

“And can be put to many more uses.” Garak pushes Julius’s drink toward him. “Go on, try it.”

Julius lets the subject go. He inspects the glass. “What’s in it?”

“I thought you trusted me.” Garak sounds a little hurt. “*Doveryai, no proveryai*, I suppose.” Julius stares at him. “Never mind. Taste it and tell me what you think. I suspect it suits your mood.”

That’s ominous. The drink is bright red in the dim light. Julius sips it and regrets it. “That’s one of the worst things I’ve ever tasted,” he says. It’s mouth-curdlingly bitter. “What on earth is in that?”

“Campari, cynar, gin. And fernet.”

Julius tastes it again. “It’s god-awful. Never tell me the Italians introduced you to this.”

“I believe the gin was an English addition,” Garak says, almost accusingly. “Cynar is Italian too, did you know that? They make liqueur out of *artichokes*.”

He tries it one more time and winces. “Good lord. What makes you think I would like this?”

“Oh, I don’t expect you to like it.” Garak sips his own drink, which looks less abhorrent. “I only said it would suit your mood.”

Julius has to give him that. “I suppose you weren’t wrong.” He takes another mouthful. It hasn’t improved upon further tasting.

“And why should you be in such a tearingly bad mood?” Garak makes it sound innocent, but Julius knows that he’s listening carefully to every word.

There’s no reason to obfuscate. “My marriage is about to end.”

He thinks he sees the slightest tension in the way that Garak sets down his own drink. “I’m sorry to hear that,” Garak says.

“Oh, I always knew it would happen eventually,” Julius says. Every sip of his cocktail is just as bad as the first. He wonders idly why he’s still drinking it, when he dislikes it so much. “I suppose I just hadn’t accepted it yet.” His glass is empty. He breathes a sigh of relief.

“Still.” Garak looks at his empty glass. “Considering how negative you were about the cocktail, I’m surprised at how quickly you finished it.”

“Are you? Didn’t you say it suited my mood?” Julius knows exactly how many drinks he would have to have to lose track of them—ironic though it is—and he’s far from it. Garak, dangerous Garak, makes him want to go beyond that. Makes him want to give himself the excuse of having been too drunk, to say things he shouldn’t and ask Garak questions that he knows Garak won’t answer. “I’ll get the next round. I don’t trust you anymore.”

Garak looks offended. “After I got you the perfect drink? Really, I think that’s an overreaction.”

“A man doesn’t always want to be treated like he’s so transparent,” Julius tells him. He doesn’t ask Garak what he wants, buys two glasses of the peatiest Scotch that Charlie will sell him and brings them back to the table.

Garak sniffs it and his face settles into polite horror. “This is—”

“Lagavulin 16,” Julius says. “It deserves your respect.”

“Oh? I suppose the Scotchmen were busy distilling it when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor?” Garak inhales delicately. “It smells like the distillery burned down.”

“Just drink it. Drink it and tell me about the tropical paradise of Pensacola,” Julius tells him. He pulls out a cigarette and taps it against the table, then puts it in his mouth.

“You know, smoking is dangerous.” Garak’s voice is a little irritable. Funny, Julius realizes, he doesn’t usually smoke around Garak.

“Oh?”

“It’s possible to kill a man by poisoning his cigarettes with ricin.” Garak meets his eyes. “I read it in a novel,” he adds deliberately.

Julius spits out his cigarette. “What a dreadful *novel*.” The pack doesn’t seem as appealing.

Garak beams at him suddenly. “Yes, indeed. I’ve never tried it, of course. Now, let me tell you about Pensacola. My grandmother had quite the garden...”

Chapter End Notes

"Doveryai, no proveryai," is the Russian proverb translated as "Trust but verify." It made it into English in the 1980s, but of course Garak knows more than just English.

The cocktail is called [Eeyore's Requiem](#) and is exactly as disgusting as it sounds. I've taken liberties with the date of its creation.

Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

“Quite a spiritual place, Pensacola, isn’t it? I hear there are regular sightings of angels.”

Garak’s eyes light up. “Yes! Blue angels—you can see them through the jungle canopy sometimes. What a sound they make!”

Julius is having difficulty keeping a straight face.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Julius has never been to Florida. “It’s quite the jungle,” Garak tells him. “Positively dripping with humidity. The vines are so thick that it feels like a snake has wrapped itself around you if you get caught up. And the birds! You’ve never seen birds so brightly-colored.”

Julius looked up Pensacola at the library while Garak was gone. “I thought Pensacola was a city. Weren’t you at a hospital?”

“Oh, my grandmother lived quite on the outskirts of the city. It was more of a field hospital than anything else. No running water except what dripped off the leaves of the plants. The canopy was so thick that very little sun penetrated.”

“Quite a spiritual place, Pensacola, isn’t it? I hear there are regular sightings of angels.”

Garak’s eyes light up. “Yes! Blue angels—you can see them through the jungle canopy sometimes. What a sound they make!”

Julius is having difficulty keeping a straight face. “It sounds like a great adventure.”

Unlike Julius, Garak is the picture of sincerity. “It was indeed. Though I do regret my grandmother’s death, of course.”

“Of course.” They both take a drink.

“And what about you, Julius? Do your grandparents live in adventurous places?”

He winces a little at the choice of words. “I wouldn’t know.”

For once, Garak doesn’t press him.

* * * * *

Even as he anticipates the end of his marriage, Julius truly does enjoy his work. Sometimes the story assignments are ridiculous, the inspiration sketches verging on pornographic; sometimes they’re poignant and Julius feels a little like he’s writing a work of literature; and sometimes they’re so truly alien that he wonders if Roy is being periodically abducted. He and Kay still bounce ideas off each other, still work through awkward dialogue, and he’ll miss that when it ends.

He’s working on a novel in addition to his writing for *Incredible Tales*. (Aren’t they all?) He remembers Benny’s passion for his own brilliant story, for the black captain on the space station, and he can’t intrude on that. But he writes about a woman captain, far in the future, on a spaceship miraculously transported into a strange new part of the universe. He names her Kathryn, after Kay, and invents danger after danger for her to face, all with a crew split in its ideology. He thinks it’s rather good.

He’s well into the third chapter when Kay sits down next to him in their apartment and says, “It’s time.”

Julius draws in a long breath. “I’m going to miss you, you know.”

“You can come down to the Village any time, *you* know.” Kay smiles gently at him. “You might even meet some people you like.”

“Maybe.” He’s met Odette’s crowd, all very artistic and very passionate. He finds them exhausting. “Of course I’ll visit, though.”

Kay stands up. She’s a little teary. “It’s been good, hasn’t it.”

Julius pulls her into a hug and doesn’t let go for a long time. “You probably saved my life.”

“I *definitely* saved your life.” When they separate, her face is serious. “Your secret is safe, you know.”

Julius almost asks, *Which one?* He nods at her luggage by the door. “I’ll pack up your books for you and have them delivered to Odette’s.”

“Thank you,” she says. “I love you.” And then she picks up her bag and walks to the door and there, it’s done, twelve years of a platonic marriage gone.

* * * * *

Julius drops heavily into his chair at the office. “Kay left me,” he says.

“Finally!” Herbert crows it a little too loudly and then looks chagrined. “I’m sorry, Julius. It was only a matter of time, but I thought you might wise up before it actually happened.”

“Thank you, Herbert, for your comfort in this difficult time,” Julius says. “It’s—amicable.”

“Not another man?” Herbert stares at him. “A w—”

“She still wants children,” Julius says shortly. “I wasn’t going to deny her that.” This is the story they’ve agreed on—that Kay wants children, that Julius either does not want them or cannot have them—to tell anyone who pries.

At the club, Garak doesn’t pry, but Julius tells him anyway. “Kay finally left me,” he says. “This morning.”

Garak watches him carefully. “I’m sorry,” he says finally. “She’s a lovely woman.”

Julius repeats the story about Kay wanting children.

“Really.” Garak removes his glasses and holds them up to the light, inspects the lenses. “And you are…unwilling?”

“War injury.” Garak is the first person who’s made him say it.

Garak’s eyes cut to him. Without the barrier of his glasses, his eyes are an alarming blue. “Really,” he says again.

“Are you suggesting—”

“I’m not suggesting anything.” He sets his glasses carefully on the table.

In a fit of pique, Julius snatches the glasses off the table and puts them on his own face. Somehow he’s wholly unsurprised to discover that they’re not corrective at all, only clear glass. “Your eyesight must be dreadful to have lenses this powerful,” he snaps. The metal frame is a little warm from Garak’s skin.

“Yes,” Garak says, and for once he looks caught off-guard. “Yes, dreadful.” He reaches across the table and straightens the frames a little on Julius’s face. His fingertips just barely brush Julius’s ear and suddenly Julius can’t breathe very well. It’s the smoke in here, he tells himself. Then Garak slides the glasses slowly off Julius’s face and puts them back on his own. “Are you thinking of getting your own?” His voice is strangely rough, and he clears his throat.

“My own?”

“Spectacles.”

Good lord, he’s still staring into Garak’s eyes. Julius looks away and leans back in his chair. “I’m sure I’ll need them eventually, what with all the squinting at my typewriter.” He won’t. Though it’s not as though any of them has lived long enough to find out if the—improvements—degrade with old age.

“It’s very stuffy in here,” Garak says abruptly. “I think I’ll get some air.”

“I’ll come with you.” Only after he says it does it occur to Julius that maybe Garak is trying to get away from him. “Unless you were hoping to be alone.”

“My dear man, it’s hard to ever be *alone* in this city. But please, join me, as long as you don’t smoke one of those infernal cigarettes.”

Once outside, Garak begins a brisk walk. It’s cold and foggy, and Julius already knows that the apartment will be too chilly when he gets home. “Garak! Slow down!” He hurries to catch up.

Garak has his hands tucked into his armpits and looks decidedly unhappy. “I’m trying to stay warm. I forgot how damned cold it gets in the fall.” He shivers a little.

“Here.” Before Julius realizes what he’s doing, he’s already unwrapped his scarf and is holding it out to Garak.

Garak raises an eyebrow. “I should think you would need it.”

Julius is beginning to feel rather stupid, standing there with his scarf extended in one hand. “As long as you give it back to me by the time you return my jacket—” Garak smiles and accepts the scarf. He wraps it around his neck and there’s something very warm in Julius’s chest at the sight of Garak wearing his rather raggedy wool scarf bundled tight around his neck. He wants to pluck at the scarf to arrange it better, to cover more of Garak’s skin, but he doesn’t let himself.

They walk almost aimlessly, though Julius knows precisely where they are and he wonders if Garak does as well. Sometimes it feels as though they’re playing a very cautious game of poker with each other, just waiting for the other one to call. “Why did you come here, if you don’t like the cold? You know it’s only going to get worse.”

“My dear man, what makes you think that I came here from somewhere else?”

“You said you’d forgotten how cold it gets.”

Garak laughs. The mercury streetlamps are lighting up along the sidewalk with their familiar buzz and flicker. “I force myself to forget every year. No one sane would stay here if he remembered what February was like in New York City.”

Julius remembers it, of course. The brutality of the cold on bare skin, the way it cuts through gloves and thick socks and wool pants—“So you

grew up here, then.”

“I didn’t say that.” Garak looks up at one of the lamps. His eyes are almost electric with reflected light, his skin unearthly pale.

“What sort of name is *Garak*?”

Garak doesn’t look away from the lamp. “A portmanteau of Gardiner and Novak.”

“And Elim?”

“Elliott and Jim. My parents couldn’t agree.”

“That’s preposterous.”

Garak does look at him now and smiles widely. “The truth is often preposterous.”

“That may be true, but your story is not.”

“Really.” Garak begins walking again, and Julius keeps pace. “What about you, Julius Eaton? What sort of name is that?”

Not his true one. Here, in the unreality of the creeping fog and the hints of blue in the street lamps, the world seems secret and safe. “Bashir,” he says very quietly. “It’s Bashir.”

Garak doesn’t falter. “That’s not a very Anglo name.”

“I enlisted as Julius Eaton.” He has the accent to match it. His parents made sure of that.

“Why Eaton?”

Julius shouldn’t be saying any of this. Julius Bashir’s life ended when he enlisted. “After Eton College, of course.”

“Where you were educated?” Julius laughs at that, harder than he should, and Garak stops. He looks a little affronted. “I take it you were not educated at Eton.”

“Indeed I was not.” He doesn’t feel the need to explain it all to Garak.

“I see.” Garak frowns. “You do contain multitudes, don’t you.”

“Coming from you, Garak, I will take that as a compliment.”

Garak’s teeth flash in a smile. “It certainly is.”

They emerge from the fog two blocks away from Julius’s apartment. Before his better judgment can kick in, Julius says, “Would you like to come up for a drink? To—warm you up before you go back out into the cold.”

Garak’s considering look makes Julius shiver for a very different reason than the cold. “One drink?” He says it very carefully, almost unwillingly.

“Yes, just one.” There’s a buzzing very like the sound of the streetlamps in his ears. He can see his breath steam in the air.

Garak closes his eyes for a second, and when he opens them again, they’re very bright. “Very well.”

They take the elevator. Mr. Rivera carefully doesn’t look at either of them, pressed a little too close. Garak’s cheeks are turning red from the warmth indoors, still wrapped securely in his layers and Julius’s scarf. Julius intentionally fumbles his key in the door, drops it and has to crouch to pick it up. “I’m beginning to wonder whether another drink is advisable—for you,” Garak says. “If your motor control is at this level.”

Julius’s motor control is never diminished. In truth, a part of Julius is panicking a little at what he’s doing. He doesn’t even know Garak that well, only that the man is good company and lies cheerfully and has the police terrified somehow. There’s no guarantee that Garak is giving him the signals that Julius wants to see. “I think I can manage to hold a glass,” Julius says, opening the door.

He’s very overheated now, shrugging out of his coat and dropping it on the chair that he and Kay keep—kept? it’s still there—by the door for convenience. Garak has removed his own coat and carefully unwound Julius’s scarf, and now he’s standing there holding them. “Should I put these somewhere?”

“Oh, you can just throw them on the chair,” Julius says.

Garak looks horrified. “I will *not*. You must have a—hanger of some sort.”

He can’t help a laugh at that. “There’s a hook on the other side of the door.”

Garak grimaces. “I suppose you’d like me to tear a hole in the neck of my coat?” He shakes his head, but he does hang his coat there, wincing. Then he offers the scarf back to Julius.

“No, keep it for now,” Julius tells him. “You’ll still have to walk home anyway, you’ll want it then.”

“Of course.” Garak drapes the scarf over his coat on the hook.

As he does, Julius goes to the cabinet and takes out two bottles. He displays them to Garak. “What’s your poison, Garak?”

“Hemlock,” Garak says promptly.

“You certainly seem like a fan of the Socratic method. No hemlock, but I can offer you juniper?”

Garak looks between the Scotch and the gin. “It’ll do in a pinch. Your liquor selection is very—British.”

Julius doesn’t dignify that with a response. He pours gin into a glass for Garak and hands it to him. Garak’s fingers brush his, still cold from the air outside, and it makes Julius feel almost feverish. His own Scotch is a heavy pour, and he’ll probably regret it later.

He brings the bottle with him and sits heavily on the couch. “To the end of my marriage,” he says, and raises his glass. It comes out more bitterly than he’d intended.

“To your future.” Garak takes a chair next to him and touches his glass very gently against Julius’s.

“You could sit on the couch,” Julius says, and cringes internally. “I know our—my chairs aren’t that comfortable.”

“It hadn’t escaped my notice.” There’s a long moment. “Very well.” Garak sits on the couch next to him, leaving a careful inch of space between their thighs. He shifts a little and then says, “Julius, I’m afraid none of your furniture is that comfortable.”

“I know.” Julius downs his drink and refills it. “We had the option to take the flat furnished or unfurnished, and it seemed easiest to take it furnished. We never got around to buying something that we actually liked.” He doesn’t let himself finish his drink in one gulp this time. “The bed is dreadful too. And it was too small when we were both—” He stops himself. He doesn’t make mistakes like that, which means that every time he starts to tell Garak, it’s because he wants to.

Garak sits back against the opposite arm of the couch so that he’s facing Julius, one leg crossed over the other. His posture is carefully casual. He regards Julius with his pale eyes. “When you were both…?”

“When we were both sleeping in it,” Julius says, and lets Garak make of that what he wants. What *he* wants is to put his hand on Garak’s leg and see what happens, see if he’s the only one with this feverish feeling.

“Your marriage did not end because of Kay’s desire for children.” Garak sips at his drink and then rubs his thumb across his lower lip.

Julius laughs a little. “Of course not.”

“Your former wife—appreciates the fit of ladies’ clothing.”

“Precisely.” Julius does finish his Scotch now.

Garak leans forward very deliberately and picks up the bottle from next to Julius. His face is bare inches away and Julius is paralyzed by the desire to touch him, pull him close—and his awareness that he is drunk and twelve hours away from Kay leaving and Garak is still a mystery, much as Julius wants to figure him out. The moment passes; Garak refills his glass and sets the bottle down. “I take it this was—not a recent discovery.”

“What are you asking?” How Julius wishes that he could melt into the feeling of the liquor, that he could blame anything that happens next on it. When Garak doesn’t answer for too long, Julius says, “There must be some amount that I could drink that would—turn off my brain.”

Garak flinches back a little at that. “I understand that’s a time-honored practice among writers.”

“I’m not keen on putting my body through that to test what it takes to stop my brain.” He’s aware this may not make that much sense to Garak. Julius shakes his head.

“Your brain is not easily silenced, it seems.” Garak is smiling warmly, eyes soft, and Julius is seconds away from giving up on good sense and kissing him, when someone bangs on the front door.

Chapter End Notes

Pensacola is home to the [Blue Angels](#). Among other things.

Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

Julius doesn't want to open his eyes, because what he wants is for Garak to stay with him—in many ways, but at this particular moment, so that he isn't alone in this empty flat. “And you're going to leave now.”

“Do you want me to leave?”

Julius opens his eyes. Garak is reclined carefully against the couch, watching him. “Do you want to leave?”

“Julius,” Garak chides. “Given our respective positions, I think you're the one who has to answer the question first.”

Julius closes his eyes again, as though not seeing Garak's face will help. “No.”

“Don't answer it,” Julius says reflexively.

Garak is already standing. “Why not?”

“It may be Ryan and Mulkahey.”

Garak looks almost pityingly at Julius. “I'll handle it.”

“What if it's *not* them?”

The knock sounds again, following by the slow turn of a key in the doorknob. Julius feels a bit like he's having a heart attack. “Jules?” Kay walks in slowly. “Are you all right?”

“I'm fine,” he says. He doesn't get off the couch, though. Brain fine as always, body quite impaired. “What are you doing here?”

Kay looks to Garak and smiles at him. “I'm glad you're all right,” she says. “I was—concerned.”

“About the dreams?” From the corner of his eye, he can see the marvel of Garak shrinking back into near-invisibility.

“Yes.” Her voice is blunt. “I went by the club to check, and they said you'd left quite drunk.”

“That's a bit of an exaggeration,” Julius protests. “You know me.”

Kay flicks a glance at Garak. “I do. I'm glad you're all right,” she repeats. There's real concern on her face—of course there is. She's not wrong, that he'll dream tonight. It's not as though he's never dreamt without her there. The dreams simply—last longer.

“I am, Kay,” he tells her. “I promise.” He frowns. “You left something here, didn't you.”

She looks guilty. “The pages from my latest assignment.”

Julius does laugh at that. “Of course. By all means, dear.”

Kay disappears very briefly into their—his?—bedroom and returns with a sheaf of papers. “That's all I needed.” He strongly suspects that she'd planned to sleep here, if he'd been in too bad of shape. “I'll—see you later. Goodbye, Garak.”

“Goodbye.” Garak says it from the doorway where he's lurking. Almost as soon as Kay has shut the door behind her, he says, “I should be going.”

“You don't have to.” Julius gestures toward his glass. “You're only halfway through.” The heat in Julius's body has dissipated, a little. Only a little.

Garak sits gingerly on the couch again and picks up his glass of gin. “Why did you think it might be Ryan and Mulkahey at the door?”

“It was the worst option that sprang to mind that was also reasonably possible.” Julius has a great deal of experience doing this—assessing the range of worst-case scenarios, ordering them from likeliest to least likely, to identify the worst *likely* possibility and prepare to deal with that. “Ryan, at least, has followed me more than once, purportedly to—protect me? Whatever he's done, it appears to have been linked directly to our joint encounter with them. He might, upon seeing us both enter my building, decide to approach.” He takes a deep breath.

“You certainly seem to believe that the police are interested in you,” Garak says. He makes it sound absurd.

“Garak.” Julius sets his drink on the arm of the couch. “It's apparent that the police—defer to you. Or at least those two officers. There are three reasons they might be following me.”

“Do elaborate,” Garak says, though his eyes are fixed on Julius's drink, balanced on the upholstered arm of the couch. Julius realizes that that's probably not something he should be able to do after consuming this much alcohol.

“First, you might have—instructed them to protect me in some way. Second, in the mistaken belief that it will—ingratiate them in some way,

they may have decided of their own accord to attempt to do so. Or, third, they believe that they may obtain some—information, perhaps some leverage, by following me, that can assist them in their dealings with you in the future.” He reaches back for his glass and sips it.

“Fascinating. I see your drinking does not seem to have impaired your—spatial awareness. Which of these possibilities do you think is likeliest, my dear Julius?” Garak is leaning forward again, just a little. Julius wonders if he’s really doing it unintentionally or if it’s part of the Great Garak Performance.

“Based on my low opinion of the relative intelligence of the detectives, I lean toward the second. I doubt you explicitly requested a protective detail, and I similarly doubt that either man has the—wherewithal to execute some kind of scheme in reverse.”

“You’re not drunk at all,” Garak accuses.

“I’ve had quite a few drinks. I told you,” Julius says. “It doesn’t shut off my—mental faculties. So?”

There’s a hint of a smile in the corners of Garak’s eyes. “I’m afraid you’ve guessed incorrectly. I did happen to mention to Detective Ryan that I would be—displeased if anything happened to you while I was away on business.”

Julius is well and truly surprised. “I must have—lacked some necessary information, in assessing the situation.” Ah, the obvious. “I didn’t realize you cared.”

“Julius, you’re far and away the most intriguing man I’ve met in years,” Garak says. It doesn’t sound entirely like a compliment. “I don’t want anything to happen to you—”

“Until you’ve figured me out? I suppose having police on the payroll would be useful, in that case.”

Garak looks deeply insulted. “On the payroll? I can’t imagine what you mean.”

“Strange, I would think it’s obvious.” He can feel a delightful energy spreading through him. “It’s hardly a secret that people like Ryan and Mulkahey can be bought and sold.”

“Bought and sold!” Garak sounds aghast. “What a mercenary way to put it.”

“How would you put it, then?”

Garak’s expression dissolves into a serene smile. “There are always people in the world who will—defer to someone that they perceive as having greater power. Quite a few people in fact. I would think. No need for money to change hands.”

Julius closes his eyes. He wonders which of the dreams it will be tonight. “Of course, Garak,” he says. He can feel Garak shift on the couch and he smells gin. “I suppose you’ve finished your drink.”

“I have.”

Julius doesn’t want to open his eyes, because what he wants is for Garak to stay with him—in many ways, but at this particular moment, only to stay so that he isn’t alone in this empty flat. “And you’re going to leave now.”

“Do you want me to leave?”

Julius opens his eyes. Garak is reclined carefully against the couch, watching him. “Do you want to leave?”

“Julius,” Garak chides. “Given our respective positions, I think you’re the one who has to answer the question first.”

Julius closes his eyes again, as though not seeing Garak’s face will help. “No.”

“Because of the—dreams that Kay mentioned?”

That’s the easiest route, isn’t it, and Julius has been trained to find the easiest route. “Yes,” he says, and he knows Garak won’t believe it—not entirely—even as he says it.

“That’s the reason?”

Damn him. “Are you going to make me say more?”

There’s a long silence, so long that Julius opens his eyes to meet Garak’s gaze. “No,” Garak says at last. “I’ll sleep on your—extremely comfortable couch.” He grimaces.

That’s—not at all where Julius wants him to sleep. But it’s the only reasonable option. “I would appreciate it.” Julius knows that his voice doesn’t exactly sound unaffected.

* * * * *

It’s the early days. His brain can barely process his new ability to remember—his new inability to forget. No wonder the first test group went insane. He’s struggling to tell the difference between memories—the vital, crisp kind—and what’s happening in front of him. They’ve dumped him into a platoon full of ordinary people and everyone thinks that he’s on the verge of losing his mind.

The thing that brings it all into focus, finally, is the first soldier that dies next to him. Trapped on the beach at Dunkirk, *waiting*. The Luftwaffe is buzzing overhead, occasionally strafing the beach, and it’s not even a bullet that kills the boy, it’s shrapnel from a half-sunk ship being used as target practice. Everything is abruptly very clear; there are the memories, which can be slotted back into place in niches in his brain, and

there is the present, where his task is to use his new gifts from the War Office to save as many people—kill as many people?—do his part to win the war.

“Julius!”

He sits up, automatically reaching for Kay next to him. But Kay isn't there; instead, Garak stands at the end of his bed, eyes almost luminous. “Sorry,” Julius says automatically. “Did I wake you?” At least his perfect memory doesn't extend back to the time during his stay with the War Office.

“You most certainly did,” Garak says, though he doesn't sound as irritated as the situation merits. “One of your dreams, I take it?”

“When Yves died.” He remembers that he isn't talking to Kay. “Just a—nightmare.”

“Will it stop when you go back to sleep?”

“You should—I shouldn't have asked you to stay. You should go home.” Julius has never wanted Garak to see him like this. From the way his eyes feel, he was crying.

“I most certainly am not going to go out into the cold at three in the morning because you are a noisy sleeper.” Julius doesn't blame Garak for being a little peevish. “What would help?”

“Usually I tell Kay what it was, and then we lie in bed together and fall asleep. Or I go for a walk.”

Garak heaves a sigh and Julius sees him walk toward Kay's empty side of the bed. “I'm not going to escort you on some kind of frigid ramble, and I would like to sleep. Is this bed remotely more comfortable than the couch?”

Julius's entire body flushes with heat. “You're—going to sleep in the bed? With me?” He's already told Garak that the bed was too small when he was in it with Kay.

“Yes, yes, it isn't ideal for either of us, but it seems like the best option.”

“The best option.” Julius is in pyjamas; Garak is wearing his undershirt and an ill-fitting set of Julius's pyjama pants. He never should have asked Garak to stay the night, not if it was going to be platonically. Men didn't sleep platonically with other men unless it was in the middle of a war. He watches, a little dazed, as Garak climbs into the bed.

“You'll forgive me if I sleep under the blankets, I'm sure,” Garak says. “It's rather chilly.”

“I can sleep on the couch,” Julius offers.

Garak heaves a loud sigh. Julius thinks he can see Garak's frown even in the dim light. “The entire purpose of this exercise is to stop your nightmare. If that's—”

“Yes, yes, all right.” Julius eases back down beneath the blankets. How long has it been since he spent the night with a man in his bed?

When he closes his eyes, his brain is happy to supply a very different type of memory. 1941, just after the Americans joined the war. It was December and they were all freezing cold, all the time, and Dennys passed out his little supply of pilfered liquor when it was time to try to sleep, and then he and Julius wandered off to the edge of the camp, neither of them quite knowing what to do with the other but certain that they would enjoy it.

Julius wakes up again—without yelling this time, it seems, because Garak is asleep—to discover that he's virtually wrapped himself around Garak, entire body pressed along him. He peels himself away carefully and then adjusts so that he's sleeping under the blanket but atop the sheet. Then he falls asleep again.

When he wakes up in true morning, Garak is already out of bed and wearing trousers and his undershirt—for the best, certainly. He's holding up one of Julius's shirts. “Under the circumstances,” Garak says, “I thought you could loan me a shirt.”

“I,” Julius says. “That one?”

Garak takes the fabric of the sleeve between two fingers to inspect it. “Is there something wrong with it?” He holds it up to his chest for Julius to see.

The problem with it is that Julius doesn't want him to put it on. Garak's undershirt is thin, worn—a surprise, considering Garak—and Julius can see the shape of his shoulders, his chest, the definition of muscle and bone. His body belies any claim that he's an ordinary tailor. “No,” Julius says. “No, I imagine that's the one that would fit you best.”

“The blue does bring out my eyes, doesn't it?” Garak slips the shirt on carefully, one sleeve at a time. His fingers are hypnotizing as he does up the buttons. “I'll return this more promptly than your jacket. Perhaps even altered to fit *you* a little better.”

“And my scarf,” Julius reminds him.

“Your scarf is hanging by the front door.”

“Yes, but I assume you're going to take it when you leave.” Julius slides out of bed, winces, stretches, and winces again. “I—appreciate this, Garak.” He almost thinks he's imagined the way that Garak's eyes follow his body as he stretches. “I know it's a bit of an unusual situation.” Quite the understatement.

“Not at all,” Garak says, waving his hand dismissively. “I know what it is to have nightmares.” He sounds sincere for a moment and then adds quickly, “I’m reliably advised that it’s quite unpleasant.”

“Of course, *you* would never have nightmares.” This is familiar ground.

“My dear man, what could I possibly have nightmares about?” Garak’s eyes gleam.

“A—poorly-hemmed set of trousers?” *Whatever you do when you aren’t here?* “An inaccurate measuring tape?”

Garak looks horrified. “You’re right, it would be dreadful to dream about such things.” He adjusts the collar tabs in his shirt. “Incidentally—”

“Let me guess, your grandfather? In—Arizona?” Julius shakes his head. “Perhaps a cousin in Quebec?”

Garak’s smile feels as though it’s just for him. “Maryland. My oldest cousin.”

“Oh? Where in Maryland?” Julius doesn’t want to let him leave the room. He wants to see what else he can coax out of Garak, whether Garak wants to take that shirt off as much as Julius wishes he would.

That hidden smile grows. “Baltimore. Well, outside of Baltimore.”

“Of course.” Julius can’t help the fond smile. “I look forward to hearing your undoubtedly accurate report when you return.”

“Do try to stay out of trouble until then,” Garak says. “For Ryan’s sake.”

Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

“Forgive me if this is too forward,” Garak begins, “but I find myself in need of new lodgings shortly, and I have been contemplating that it might be pleasant to live with another person.”

Julius is too startled to respond at first. “Another person,” he repeats.

“You’ll find that I’m tidy and quiet,” Garak assures him. “I will always pay the rent on time. Indeed, you may not notice my presence much at all.”

It’s been two weeks since Kay moved out. The flat is very quiet, and Julius finds himself spending more and more time at the office to write, even when it’s largely deserted. There is something terrible happening in Julius’s novel. Kathryn continues to be a brilliant captain, just enough flaws to make her believable, with a handsome loyal second-in-command who carries a torch for her. But he’s added a new character, a human who’s something more than human—who had things done to her to make her *better*. He’s always tried to be so diligent about keeping himself out of his writing, and certainly, there’s always a little bleed between author and narrative, but this character cuts too close to his heart.

“Seven? What kind of name is that?”

It’s a bad sign that Julius is so deep in thought that he didn’t notice Herbert flipping through his pages. Herbert wants him to scramble and snatch the page back, but Julius only turns and raises an eyebrow. “Are you feeling well, Herbert? I can’t imagine you’re hard up enough for material that you’ve decided to pull from mine.”

Herbert frowns and puts the pages down. “I just think it’s a little strange.”

“That’s all right, Herbert. I’ve always thought you’re a little strange.” Julius sits back from his typewriter and rubs at his eyes. Herbert has broken the flow of creativity. Without a looming deadline, Julius is unwilling to force himself through writing more, not until he’s—reconciled things a little. “I suppose it’s late.”

“I suppose you’re going to go to your club. And sit there alone.”

Dear God. Herbert is trying to—engage with him socially. It’s one thing to engage in a little unfriendly verbal fencing at the office, but if Herbert is *sympathizing*, something is dreadfully wrong with the way Julius has been behaving. “Actually, I’m meeting one of the fellows there for dinner.” Or he’d like to—he hasn’t seen Garak since that morning, when Garak supposedly left for Baltimore.

“Well, that’s a little less pathetic.” Herbert looks almost relieved, as though the prospect of spending time with Julius socially was equally unappealing to him. For a moment, Julius feels a twinge, some sense that he should invite Herbert. But if Garak *is* there, finally, Julius doesn’t want to introduce Herbert to him.

“Yes, well. I’ll be going now. No stealing my material,” Julius says lamely.

“Ha!” Even as Julius closes the door behind him, he can hear Herbert going off on one of his personal rants, the kind that don’t require an audience.

It’s snowing lightly outside. He pulls his coat closed tighter and notes, with some dismay, that there is an unfamiliar policeman across the street who is most certainly following him. He’s both annoyed and a little insulted—he never wanted Garak’s police protection, and this has to be one of the most obvious tails he’s ever seen. Julius walks faster and tracks the man from the corner of his eye. The officer stops abruptly when Julius is four blocks from the club, as though he’s reached the edge of his beat and is unwilling to step a single foot further. This bears considering. Julius has no illusions about his own physical prowess, whatever his mental abilities, and he doesn’t want to have some kind of—negative interaction with this large man.

Inside, the club is quiet, empty enough that Julius is able to claim a table by the fireplace. He eats a very mediocre fish-and-chips (which he suspects was added to the menu solely as a nod to him) and stares into the fire. Then, something drapes around his neck and he startles so badly that he nearly knocks over the table.

“My dear Julius! Forgive me, I didn’t mean to frighten you.” Garak is very suddenly sitting in the chair across from him, firelight dancing in his eyes.

“You’re the only one who can sneak up on me like that,” Julius says. “I wonder why that is?” He touches his neck and discovers that it’s a green wool scarf. “I distinctly remember lending you a gray scarf.”

“I’m afraid your scarf was the victim of an unfortunate accident. This is meant to replace it. I’m pleased to see you’re well, Julius.” Garak sits back in the chair with a sigh and turns his face to the fire. “And that you’ve found the warmest place here.”

“How’s your nephew?”

Garak’s teeth flash in the light as he smiles. “Now, Julius.”

“I’m glad you were on the outskirts of Baltimore, at least. It sounds like there was a terrible warehouse fire in the city.” Julius has missed him.

“How very thoughtful of you to keep up with the news in Baltimore! Yes, I understand that it was an empty building? I’m afraid I went directly from the airport to the boat.”

“The—boat?”

“Oh yes, my cousin lives on a small island in the Chesapeake Bay. Accessible only by boat.” Garak seems to smile more the more outrageous the lie is. “It’s a primitive lifestyle, surviving on what he can catch with his own two hands.” He lifts his hands as though to demonstrate.

“He doesn’t use a fishing rod?”

Garak purses his lips. “You’re very *literal* sometimes, Julius.”

“Of course, of course. There’s quite a bit of amphibious life in the Chesapeake Bay, isn’t there?”

“Nothing you’d like to eat.” Garak wrinkles his nose very slightly. The fire is starting to die down. “Should we—?”

“I can do it.” Julius crouches by the fire and adds two logs, balancing them carefully. “I can’t even count how many fires I made in the Army.”

“Can’t you?” Garak watches him and raises an eyebrow.

Of course Julius can. “You were telling me about the Chesapeake Bay. All the amphibious creatures that you didn’t want to eat. And the fish your cousin catches.” He can’t resist adding, “Any squid?”

“I do enjoy *calamari*, but no, nothing of the kind. Mostly catfish.” He stands. “Would you like a drink, Julius?”

“Should I trust you?”

Garak smiles into the firelight. “Never.”

“Scotch, in that case.” He watches Garak walk to the bar and greet Charlie. He wonders why Garak is dropping these—hints, if that’s what they can be called. There is intention behind each place that Garak names, he’s certain of it. Whether or not Garak is actually going to any of them (and Julius has his doubts), he’s certainly trying to communicate something to Julius. When Garak returns, Julius can’t help asking, “Garak, did you do any code work during the war?”

Garak hands him a glass that most certainly is not Scotch and practically beams. “Oh, a bit. I wasn’t exactly at Bletchley Park. Why do you ask?”

“Oh, only a feeling.” Julius sniffs his drink. “What’s it this time?”

“I suspected that you might have strong feelings about the—origins of the contents of your drink. Was I wrong?”

“You mean—”

“There’s a cocktail said to resemble the flavor of hemlock—how they can prove that, I can’t imagine—but it involves Jägermeister. I didn’t think you would like that.”

Julius stiffens. “*Göring-schnaps*?”

“It didn’t seem—worth the experiment.”

“No.” Julius can hear the tension in his voice. “I wouldn’t have drunk that.”

“And yet you were willing to drink my Italian amaros.” Garak sounds only mildly curious.

“Yes. What’s in the drink, Garak?”

Garak is watching him. “Rum, Julius. Something warm and tropical.”

“Jamaican?” Julius looks down into his glass. “I suppose I shouldn’t maintain strong feelings about every single country that did anything during the war.”

“And yet I suspect you do.” Garak doesn’t ask what happened in Jamaica that bothers him. Garak probably knows exactly what it was. “It’s from Tortola, which I should hope will be acceptable. Really, Julius, a man can’t live on liquor from Britain alone.”

“I have a long memory.” Julius sips the drink, which is colorful and—cheerful?—and seems inappropriate for the weather outside, but somehow Garak seems to have known what would be right. “You know, Garak, I really do—appreciate your efforts to improve my mood.”

“My efforts?” Garak’s expression is very bland, but Julius sees the hint of humor. “I can’t imagine what you mean.”

“Oh, of course you can. Your ridiculous stories, the silly rum drinks. I’ve been in a bit of a funk since—things changed, and you’ve helped a great deal.” He’s not sure if sincerity is the right choice at this moment.

“I assure you, my ‘ridiculous stories’ are entirely true, and I’m only trying to broaden your drinking horizons. If that has the happy incidental effect of improving your mood, I’m glad to hear it.” There, his voice is sincere, even if his words are a little suspect.

“The apartment is just—too quiet without her. She used to sing songs, you know?”

“You could listen to the radio,” Garak offers. His eyes are sharp. “I understand that they play a variety of songs.”

“No, not even real songs. She would take the tune of a real song and changes some of the words to be silly, and she didn’t even notice. Or if she did, she pretended it was accidental.” He takes a drink. “It’s strange, we weren’t even—” He redirects himself just in time. “We were together for almost fifteen years, do you know that? She’s always too warm at night and too cold in the morning, and I’m the opposite.” That’s probably inappropriate to reveal to anyone outside his marriage—his former marriage. He doesn’t know how long it will take to get around to the paperwork, but it’s not as though there a hurry. Neither of them will need to marry someone else. She doesn’t actually want children.

“It’s always difficult to...leave a stage of one’s life behind, even when it’s for the best,” Garak says gently. “If the apartment is too quiet, have you considered taking in a lodger?”

Evan with Kay gone, Julius doesn’t really need another person to afford his apartment. The work at *Incredible Tales* pays—not well, but enough—and then there’s the pension he receives from the War Office, for People Like Him. “Oh, I suppose—”

“Forgive me if this is too forward,” Garak begins, “but I find myself in need of new lodgings shortly, and I have been contemplating that it might be pleasant to live with another person.”

Julius is too startled to respond at first. “Another person,” he repeats.

“You’ll find that I’m tidy and quiet,” Garak assures him. “I will always pay the rent on time. Indeed, you may not notice my presence much at all.”

“I imagine you’ll continue to have sick relatives to visit.” Julius can’t resist teasing him a little. “And perhaps—tailoring conferences? Cloth merchants to patronize?”

Garak looks delighted. “Just so. When I am there, I would be quite the—pleasant lodger. I am, however, unwilling to sing songs.” There’s something very intimate about the way he says it.

“Can you cook?”

“Minimally. Is that a requirement?”

Julius can’t help the smile. “No, I was simply curious.” There’s a part of his brain screaming that this is a terrible idea, but it’s a small part of his brain and easily ignored. “You don’t even know what the rent is.”

“I’m sure you’ll come up with a fair price.” Garak is smiling back at him, that slightly sneaky smile that appears mostly in his eyes.

Julius’s brain says again, this is a bad idea. He hushes it again and holds his hand out to shake. “We have a deal. When can you move in?”

“Friday? It shouldn’t take long. I don’t have a great deal of personal possessions.”

It’s Wednesday evening. “You must not. All right, I’ll have another key made and get the place cleaned up.”

Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

"All your sick relatives seem to have violent streaks." God, Julius is actually *dizzy* with it, how much he wants to touch Garak again. How could he have been stupid enough to agree to this?

"Fortunately, none of them is a very good shot."

It's been quite a while since Julius had something big to *anticipate*. Ever since he started at *Incredible Tales*, his life has been full of the particular kind of repetitiveness that seems to inhere in adulthood. Work, a drink or two at the club, sleep. The encounters with Garak have been bright points, but nothing has really *changed* in his life in years. Kay's departure left a kind of absence, but didn't fundamentally alter the nature of that life. Garak's arrival in the apartment will change things, he's sure.

"Got a date tonight?" Herbert has been lurking behind his typewriter, watching him type. Julius has allowed it because he doubts Herbert can read upside-down and anyway, this story is going into *Incredible Tales*; it's not part of his novel.

"Why do you say that?" Julius doesn't stop typing. If asked, he would say that he puts equal effort into everything he writes, but the fact is, some months he might as well be cutting snippets out of old stories and pasting them together into new ones. This month, it's a short story in which everyone is made equal by all being brought to the level of the lowest man; the inspirational drawing showed a man burdened by heavy weights and wearing a hideous mask.

"You've checked the clock every fifteen minutes for the last two hours. Exactly every fifteen minutes."

Julius is aware of this, because he's having the paradoxical experience of knowing precisely how much time has passed and checking the clock just in case he's wrong. "Herbert, if you're counting down the seconds between each time I look at the clock, you might consider what that says about the quality of *your* attention at your writing." He does lift his hands from the keyboard. "To answer your question, no, I don't have a 'hot date.' I decided to—find a lodger, so that I won't have to move, and he's moving in tonight. I need to be home to let him in."

"A lodger?" Herbert grimaces. "That's no way to get your wife back."

"I told you—" Thank God, it's actually time to leave now. "Why don't you get back to staring miserably at your own story, Herbert?" Julius stuffs his pages into his briefcase, tosses a pack of matches to Alfred as a parting gift, and begins the journey home.

He's offered to help Garak bring move his possessions into Julius's—their—apartment, but Garak insists that he can do it himself, and indeed turns up outside the apartment building in a moving truck with two very heavy trunks, three large wooden crates, and one rather battered-looking suitcase. "I thought you didn't have very many possessions," Julius says.

"I've only brought six items." Garak looks around. "Besides, these men will help."

Julius examines the two sturdy men who have removed Garak's worldly goods from the moving truck. He doesn't recognize the logo on the truck, though he supposes there must be trucks around town whose logos he hasn't seen. Odd. The two men are obviously former—current?—military, with their high-and-tight haircuts and their stiff posture, the way that they relax into *at ease* once everything is out of the truck and then immediately stand at attention when Garak mentions them. They're both taller and broader-shouldered than Garak, who is hardly waifish, and Julius sees the kind of men that he knew who would carry another soldier's pack if he struggled. "...All right," he says, a little dubious. "I'm not sure that the elevator is going to be able to handle all of that."

"Don't worry," one of the men says. "Mr. Garak explained it."

It's a bit like one of the very basic logic puzzles the War Office first used to test Julius and the others. There's one mover at the bottom to load the items in with Garak there to direct him, one at the top to take items out so that Julius can direct him, and Mr. Rivera in the elevator, vigilantly protective of its capacity. Once the man on the upper floor has carried everything into the living room, he nods and says, "Can I help you with anything else, Mr. Eaton?"

"No, thank you." Then something possesses Julius to ask, "What's your name?"

The man looks startled, as though he hasn't been given the correct answer to this question. "Reed," he says eventually.

"And your friend down there?"

Reed looks acutely uncomfortable and hesitates again. "Tucker."

Fascinating. From his reaction, Julius very much doubts that they work for a moving company. "Well, Mr. Reed, please thank Mr. Tucker for me as well." He begins to dig for his wallet in his pocket to find a few bills, but Reed shakes his head.

"Mr. Garak has taken care of it all—but it's much appreciated, Mr. Eaton." The elevator opens to reveal Garak, and Reed disappears into the stairwell.

"You see," Garak says. "Much more efficient for professionals to do it. Not that I doubt your ability to move heavy objects." It feels as though Garak's eyes linger on him a little, on his rolled-up shirtsleeves, on the extra bit of bare neck revealed by his lack of a tie. "Shall we?" Or he

likes to think so.

They fall into step until Garak moves the slightest bit faster to enter the apartment first. It feels almost as though he's—shielding Julius with his body? Which would be preposterous, Julius and Reed have just been in there, there's no danger—but Julius recognizes it. "I doubt there's an assassin waiting inside."

Garak smiles innocently. "I can't imagine what you mean. I'm eager to settle in."

"Of course you are." Not an unreasonable explanation. Maybe Julius is so eager for excitement that he's seeing suspicious behavior where none exists. Julius stands in the doorway to Garak's room awkwardly as Garak opens the first trunk. The room is smaller and darker than his own, the bed undoubtedly equally or even more uncomfortable than his. There's a dresser, a mirror, and a single lamp next to the bed. "I see you never got around to doing much with this room," Garak says.

Kay slept in this room, sometimes, when she was out late with Odette and didn't want to wake Julius climbing into bed with him. "By all means, decorate it," Julius says. "For that matter, do anything you'd like with the rest of the flat." He realizes that it might sound a little snide, but Garak's face is as blandly friendly as he's seen it in the past, not a hint of insult. "I'll—I'll make dinner."

"Oh dear." Garak has begun to remove neatly-folded clothing from the first trunk. "You're going to cook? I thought it—wasn't a particular skill of yours."

"I'm perfectly capable of feeding myself and another person," Julius snaps. This is—barely true. He knows how to cook—or at least all of the technical aspects—but he doesn't care much about what he eats and doesn't bother with making himself food most of the time. He hadn't been planning to make dinner for the two of them anyway. It feels a little intimate, but so would standing in the doorway and watching Garak unpack. Or, worse still, *helping* him.

Instead, Julius walks the few steps to the kitchen and braces himself. A long time ago, Kay's well-meaning aunt gave them a cookbook and Julius hunts through the kitchen cupboards for it now. *Betty Crocker's Picture Cook Book*, it announces in red script. *We hope this book will bring you more fun in cooking and deeper joy in your homemaking*, it encourages. He could read the recipes, if he wanted, and fix them into his memory, but something in him resists the idea.

He thinks of the one meal he remembers from his childhood, confirms that there are indeed two potatoes—not squishy—near the back of the cupboard, and turns on the oven. He pierces them all over with a fork and then tosses them into the oven. "Garak," he calls. "It'll be forty-five minutes or so until dinner. I have to run to the shop—do you need anything?"

Garak pokes his head out of his room. "You might buy a bottle of wine. I enjoy Scotch as much as the next man, but it does get old."

Julius imagines serving jacket potatoes and a bottle of wine. Oh dear. "If you see smoke coming out of the kitchen, please turn off the oven."

He goes to the bodega down the street and finds a stick of butter and—after far too long contemplating a very small selection—a one-dollar bottle of white wine. On the elevator ride back up, Mr. Rivera raises an eyebrow and says, "Cooking tonight?"

"I already had all the other ingredients." Technically true.

"Enjoy," Mr. Rivera tells him, and Julius cringes a little.

At least nothing is on fire in the apartment. Garak is in the kitchen lurking next to the oven. "Ah, Julius!" he says. "I see you've found some wine. Are you cooking something particular?" He's not exactly staring pointedly at the empty stove and countertop, but Julius can imagine the question in his voice.

"Potatoes," Julius says, and takes them out of the oven. He has to admit, there are meals things less inspiring than a whole potato set onto a chipped gray plate. Julius watches Garak slice his open with an alarming kind of confidence, as though he knows exactly how much pressure to use. Julius takes a chunk of butter for his own potato and offers the stick, saying, "Sorry, I should have bought something already cooked."

Garak raises an eyebrow. "My dear Julius," he says, with a careful kind of concern, "I didn't expect you to cook for me at all. Potatoes are—very nutritious." He opens the potato into two halves and cross-hatches the surface of each.

"My mum used to make jacket potatoes." Julius tells him this as though it will make the dinner offering less pathetic. He pours half of the bottle of wine into a pint glass for himself. Why they have pint glasses, he couldn't say.

* * * * *

Living together requires—an adjustment. That first night, while Julius is showering, he hears the bathroom door open and yells, "Garak!" He sticks his head around the shower curtain.

Garak raises an eyebrow mildly. He's in a full set of pyjamas—of course they fit him perfectly—and holding a toothbrush. "Would you prefer that I wait? Or—" he grimaces—"brush my teeth at the kitchen sink?"

"I—just—" It's not like Julius hasn't showered with other men plenty of times in entirely innocuous circumstances. This just— "No, it's fine. Just give me a little warning. Knock or something."

"Very well."

In the morning, while Garak is in the shower, Julius takes a deep breath and tries it himself. He opens the door and says "Gar—"

It's only his unnaturally quick reflexes that save him from Garak's hand around his throat. Instead, Garak pins him to the wall with his wet body pressed tight against Julius's, one hand planted against the wall on either side of his head. Garak's eyes, only a few inches away, are a

very bright blue, and his dark hair is slicked back and there's water dripping everywhere, soaking into Julius's shirt and puddling on the cold tile floor. Heat surges through Julius's body at the feeling of it, at Garak's rapid breath against his chest, at Garak's mouth so close to his own, and he shivers involuntarily.

Garak releases him, stepping back a foot. "You surprised me," he says. His hair has fallen out of place, and he rakes it back out of his eyes with one hand.

Julius is too busy trying to cope with what's just happened—the feeling of Garak's body against his own, and then the sudden loss of it—to process spoken language at the moment. He takes a deep breath and his eyes fall to Garak's bare chest before he abruptly looks up again and meets Garak's eyes. "Apparently."

"What happened to knocking?" Garak looks curious rather than angry.

"I thought—saying your name would suffice—but I see it didn't."

Very deliberately, Garak goes to the shower and shuts off the water. Julius does stare while Garak's back is turned, at first out of a failure to look away and then because he's a little entranced by the shape of his body, the expanse of pale skin over lean muscle. Garak is of a height with Julius, but he takes up more *space* with his presence. His back, though, is marred with scars whose origins Julius can't identify, save for obvious bullet wounds.

Garak turns and catches him looking. He smiles, unselfconscious, and slowly moves his forefinger from one scar to the next across his chest and abdomen—one bullet entry wound after another, as far as Julius can tell. "I've had a lot of bad luck," he tells Julius. It's only when he taps the scar just above his hip that Julius feels himself blush and glances away.

"Yes, all your sick relatives seem to have violent streaks." God, Julius is actually *dizzy* with it, how much he wants to touch Garak again. How could he have been stupid enough to agree to this?

"Fortunately, none of them is a very good shot." Garak finally picks up a towel and wraps it around his waist, though it does nothing to hide his chest. "My dear man, much as I would love to continue this tête-à-tête, it's a bit chilly without any clothes on and I believe you may be late for work."

"Work," Julius mumbles. "Yes." There's a long, puckered scar on Garak's chest, as though a knife slashed across his ribcage but couldn't quite get to his heart. Garak must not have sewn the wound closed himself. His stitches would have been much neater. "Yes." He turns and flees the bathroom.

Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

“Julius Eaton, what on earth are you writing?” It’s Kay’s voice that cut through his reverie, and he realize Herbert and Alfred are staring at him too.

He clears his throat. “I don’t know what you mean.” His cheeks are hot, he realizes. He must be blushing. Strange, that he shouldn’t have noticed everyone staring. Maybe his situational awareness is failing.

“You’re bright red,” Herbert says. “Getting a little too involved in your story, hm? A particularly—exciting part?” His eyes fix on Julius’s typewriter. “You know this isn’t some skin rag. Douglas will cut anything too daring.”

Julius spends the morning with his mind helpfully supplying the memory of that encounter over and over again. There is, of course, the fact that Garak leaped out of the shower fully prepared to attack when Julius entered the room. (He ponders this as he buys the *Times* from the newsboy outside of the Trill building and gets suckered into buying a chocolate bar too.) Julius knows what it is to respond poorly to a surprise, but Garak’s reaction went far beyond that.

He sits at his typewriter, eating a cruller. It’s sweet and crisp, freshly fried. Odd. “Douglas, are these better doughnuts than usual?”

Douglas glares from inside his own office and doesn’t answer. Herbert, who has stacked three on a paper napkin on his desk, says, “I won a bet with him. He didn’t think Kay would come back to the office. I told him she would. Now we get fresh doughnuts.”

“Is that so?” He talked to Kay on the telephone the night before Garak moved in, and she’d warned him to be cautious, which he’d immediately brushed off. She’d also mentioned that she was still writing for *Incredible Tales*, but somehow that didn’t translate in his brain. “Good for her.”

Herbert squints at him. “This must be some kind of stiff-upper-lip British thing, because I don’t understand you at all.”

Kay walks in just then and Julius can’t help his immediate smile. She practically beams back, in an electric-blue pantsuit that he’s never seen before, and sits down a desk-length away from him. “Julius, hello.”

“Kay, welcome back.” He almost reflexively stands up to kiss her, almost calls her ‘darling,’ and then shakes his head at himself. He hears Herbert mutter something in disbelief across the room and ignores it. Darlene pours him a sympathetic cup of coffee—she doesn’t usually do desk service—and then, after he nods at Kay, pours her a cup as well.

It should be distracting, having Kay back. He should be having complicated feelings about seeing her, maybe suggest that they have lunch. Instead, he stares at his typewriter with a silly little smile on his face and remembers the intensity of Garak’s eyes on his own. *Sarvay looked down from the cliffs. “How can we escape the aliens? Look at the cavalry down there, on their chimera beasts!”* Garak’s hot breath on his face, the strength of him as he held Julius against the wall. *“Heck, don’t worry about them,” Tommy shouted over the howling savage creatures behind them.* Garak’s naked body, slippery and—hard?—where it rubbed against his own. *“The fall alone will kill you!” Tommy took Sarvay’s hand and they jumped, her dress turning into a sail.* Garak when he turned away and then back, sliding his hand down his chest to touch each of his scars, and then lower, and Garak was visibly affected—

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“You’re bright red,” Herbert says. “Getting a little too involved in your story, hm? A particularly—exciting part?” His eyes fix on Julius’s typewriter. “You know this isn’t some skin rag. Douglas will cut anything too daring.”

“Robots,” Alfred says. “Always safe with robots. Their parts aren’t the same as human parts.”

Julius clears his throat again. “Tommy and Sarvay are escaping the Genovians, if you must know.”

Herbert shakes his head. “Whatever gets you off.” Then he blanches and looks from Kay to Darlene. “Excuse me.”

“Believe me, I’ve heard worse.” Darlene snaps her bubblegum. “You wouldn’t believe how the men talked at my old job—”

Douglas emerges from his office, which is always a bad sign. “This is an awful lot of chatter and not much typing. This is a *workplace*, people.”

“For two cents a word, I’ll chatter all I want,” Kay teases. Douglas won’t take offense. Kay is his favorite. Indeed, he just huffs and goes back into his office, closing the door very firmly behind him. Kay rolls her chair over to Julius and lowers her voice. “You’re looking very rosy today.”

“I can’t imagine why you would think so,” Julius says, with as much dignity as he can muster. Herbert mutters something insulting again from across the room. “I moved some boxes and had jacket potatoes and wine for dinner last night, it wasn’t exactly thrilling.”

Kay lowers her voice further. “So that’s why you look like you’re about to walk into a wall. He moved in last night.” She smiles a tiny secret smile at that. “You can’t fool me, Julius. I remember what you look like when you feel like—this.”

“We only happened to run into each other this morning!” Julius regrets his phrasing, because it tells Kay exactly why he’s so—rosy.

She smirks a little. “Whatever you say.”

* * * * *

All right, so he’s a bit distracted. He walks home only half-aware—as much as he can ever be unaware—and walks into his flat to find that it smells like—food?

“Julius, you’re earlier than I expected,” Garak says. He’s in the kitchen. He appears to be cooking.

“I thought you said you couldn’t cook?” At least two burners on the stove are occupied. There’s a mixing bowl on the counter. He didn’t know that he owned a mixing bowl. And Betty Crocker on the kitchen table.

“My dear man, when I said I could only cook *minimally*, I didn’t realize exactly how dire the situation was here.” Garak takes off his glasses, which have steamed up, and cleans them on his shirt.

“You know, you don’t have to wear the glasses in here,” Julius says. “I know you don’t need them and I’m the only one here. You don’t have to pretend.”

Garak raises a heavy eyebrow. “I can’t imagine what you mean.” But he sets the glasses on the kitchen table, which Julius considers a small victory. “There are seven boiled eggs in your refrigerator,” he says. “I’ll teach you how to boil an egg when I get back, if Mrs. Crocker hasn’t done it by then.”

“You’re leaving again, already?”

Garak ignores that. “There’s a loaf of bread in the cupboard and some sausage links in the refrigerator. All you have to do is put one in a hot pan and cook it until it’s cooked through. If you’re not sure, cut it open to see, and then cook it some more.”

“Garak. You’re leaving?”

Garak faces him, and Julius remembers—forcefully—what Garak’s body felt like pressed against his own. “I find that work calls me away again.” He looks almost regretful.

“Work?” It can’t be a slip of the tongue. No revelation is ever accidental, not with Garak.

“Yes, a—tailoring job. For a client in the north.” Garak’s gaze is always so steady when he’s lying about things like this.

“You know, I don’t even know how long ago it was that you persuaded me to give you my jacket to tailor, and I *still* don’t have it back. Really, you shouldn’t be taking new commissions if you haven’t finished your old.” Julius moves a little closer, as though he wants to peer into the pots on the stove.

Garak is quite close to him now. He’s flushed a little red from the heat of the stove, his eyes very bright. “You’re right,” he says softly. “I’d quite forgotten about your coat.”

“But you have to go—north. For work.”

Garak breaks his gaze, which is strange, and looks back at the stove. “There’s a sauce, in the one pot. You can put it on anything. Stew in the other. I’ll be very disappointed if I come back and you haven’t eaten them.”

Julius is almost breathless. What would happen, he wonders, if he touched Garak now? If he put a hand on Garak’s shoulder, or turned his face back to Julius’s? “How long will you be gone?”

“No more than a week, I hope.” Garak turns the burners off and steps back, away from the stove and from Julius. Julius feels abruptly colder despite the warmth of the stove. “After all, there are only seven boiled eggs.”

“I shall endeavor to have eaten them all by the time you return.”

“You should read the book while I’m gone.” Garak sits in one of the chairs wedged next to the kitchen table. “Learn how to cook something.” Julius hears *for me* and doesn’t know if Garak means to say it. There’s a glass of Scotch in front of Garak, and another at the place where Julius will sit.

“Perhaps I will. Are my bad habits rubbing off on you?”

Garak’s eyebrow might raise, just fractionally, before he lifts his glass. “I don’t enjoy packing,” he admits. “I thought it might make the process more pleasant.”

Julius sits. “I could help.” He inhales—this is a new bottle of Scotch. He’s not going to think about what that means.

“I’m sure you’d be happy to help.” Garak laughs a little. “I can only imagine the nefarious uses you might invent for my various tailoring tools.”

He grins, unrepentant. “You can hardly blame me, can you? When you’re off to a mysterious tailoring job in the north that you only mentioned

today?"

Garak knocks his glass lightly against Julius's. "It really can't be helped." He looks sorry again. "I will try to give you a little more warning, next time."

"You don't owe me anything," Julius says, because it seems like he should say it. He can hear the regret in his own voice and resents it. "Did you already eat dinner?"

Garak looks insulted. He reaches over to the oven—the kitchen isn't big—and opens it to reveal—some kind of casserole? "I was waiting for you." He does have to get up to remove the casserole from the oven, and Julius startles when he realizes that Garak isn't wearing potholders.

"Is that cold, or are your hands made of asbestos?"

"Asbestos," Garak says decisively. The casserole steams as he dishes it out onto two plates and sets one in front of Julius.

"...Tuna noodle casserole?" Alfred and his wife once had Julius and Kay over for dinner, and Alfred's wife had presented them with tuna noodle casserole and explained that it was the latest in culinary development.

"It was in the cookbook," Garak says. "Very—American." As though he isn't? Julius takes a sinus-searing gulp of Scotch and then digs a fork into the casserole. "Well?" Garak watches him intently.

"Tastes just like the last time I had it," Julius says. It's food. That's the important thing.

"The cookbook said that the frozen peas were optional." Garak tastes it. "I think they're an improvement."

Julius makes a concerted effort to enjoy the casserole. It's warm, and quite mild, and as American casseroles go, not unpleasant. And—Garak *made* this for him. "I agree," he says, and takes another bite as Garak watches. "Thank you, Garak."

"I'm glad you like it. There's plenty for the rest of the week," Garak tells him.

* * * * *

The dream that night is one of the worst he's had in a long time. He wakes up with his throat hoarse from screaming and has to slam his open hand against the wall a few times before he believes that he's really awake. Garak bursts into the room, eyes a little wild, and shouts, "Julius!"

The adrenaline is still pounding through his body. "I'm so—I'm sorry," he rasps. "I forgot you were next door." No, it simply hadn't mattered.

"I didn't realize your dreams were—like that sometimes," Garak says. He's holding his floor lamp like a spear, its cord trailing, and when he notices Julius looking at it, he sets it down.

"I'm sorry," Julius says again. "It's rare, I promise."

Garak sits very cautiously at the end of the bed. "What were you dreaming about?"

"The war."

"A lot of men dream about the war." Garak waits.

"Oh? Listen to a lot of men dreaming, do you?"

"I've heard a lot of men screaming." The matter-of-fact way that Garak says it sends a shiver through Julius's body. "Usually they're in quite a bit of pain when they sound like that."

"I have an excellent memory. For everything that happened," Julius says. "My dreams tend to be—particularly vivid. Real." Garak seems to be waiting for something. "I saw a lot of terrible things." Garak is still watching him silently. "My unit—liberated—one of the camps," he says at last. The memories are still right there, lurking. "You can go back to bed, Garak. I'll—take something to sleep more soundly."

"Don't be silly." Garak pulls the blanket down, out of Julius's grip, and gets into bed with him. Julius freezes. "This seemed to work the last time. Didn't it?"

There's too much happening in Julius's head right now, even for him. "Yes," he says, because Garak will know if he lies. "But you—"

"Need to sleep the rest of the night, because I'm leaving early for the airport," Garak supplies. "Unless you'd prefer that I didn't—?" Julius feels him go very still.

"No." Julius's throat hurts, and it's not just from screaming. "No, stay. Please."

Garak settles next to him very carefully, not touching him except for one hand anchored on his shoulder. "Go to sleep, Julius," he says.

Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

There's a voice deep in Julius's brain saying that all of his rationalizations are ridiculous. It's the same voice that told him not to let Garak move in. It's telling him that he's in too deep, that he's let his nascent feelings for Garak get far out of control, that he can't possibly ignore what he's found. That he shouldn't sleep better with Garak in his bed than out of it.

Julius is getting very good at ignoring that voice.

Garak is gone when Julius wakes up. Yet another mark of his—strangeness. Even Kay, who knew him very well and knew how to be quiet, could never avoid waking him when she moved around the flat.

Julius uses this—and the fact that Garak talked about hearing the screams of men in a great deal of pain—as justification for something that he knows he shouldn't do: searching Garak's room. It's inexcusable, really, especially after Garak has just done him the humiliating kindness of sleeping in his bed again. But Julius wants to *know* and there are odd things about Garak, things that don't add up, and so after he stands in front of Garak's closed bedroom door for a good ten minutes, Julius turns the knob very gently and lets the door swing open naturally.

He edges in, careful not to disturb anything, and looks around to memorize the room's appearance. The bed is neatly made, with Army-tight corners. The second drawer of the dresser is pulled out just slightly more than its fellows. The floor lamp is leaned up against the far wall, next to the window; its cord has snapped, the plug still in the wall. There's enough morning light that Julius feels confident he would spot any immediate booby-trap, and he gingerly turns on the overhead light.

Garak has added a rug to the room, and the third tassel of its right side is at odds with the other tassels. One of his trunks, at the foot of his bed, is open; the other, against the wall, is padlocked. Julius exhales slowly. He doesn't know what he expects to find—what he hopes to find—but he starts by crouching to look under the bed. It's dusty and he has to hold his breath to avoid sneezing. The space appears to be vacant, and he moves on. The shade on the floor lamp is torn, no sign of anything otherwise out of the norm.

The rug is an obvious red herring, an almost insulting invitation to slip up. Julius lifts it to confirm that there's nothing beneath it and then gently places each of the tassels back into their previous positions.

He moves to the dresser. Whether or not Garak intends to foil a searcher, he's made the top drawer almost impossible to search. It's relatively easy to search an orderly space; all that's required is to recall the sequence of items, the order of folded shirts and the distance between the stacks. Chaos, though, is much harder to search subtly. If Garak were a lesser man, Julius would rummage through the drawer and trust in its original mess to camouflage any changes. But Julius suspects that Garak knows exactly how this drawer, full of a tangled mess of socks, briefs, and undershirts, looked when he left it. Julius is left only able to slide his fingers gently down the edges of the mess. He finds cold metal near the bottom—the grip of a pistol, he thinks, though he can't be certain without disrupting things.

The second drawer is full of trousers, all folded neatly but stacked in an intricate interlocking pattern. Julius dismantles it one pair of trousers at a time, nearly holding his breath as he lifts each pair and waits to feel a piece of paper drop or a coin fall out of place. His fingertip just barely grazes the end of a pin, gently enough that it doesn't draw blood, and he makes a note of it to himself. Halfway down, there's a sealed manila envelope. It's labeled JULIUS EATON with his address, no postage. From its weight, there are only a few pieces of paper inside. Julius doesn't really know how to unseal and re-seal an envelope, so he sets it aside and continues through the rest of the drawer. There's nothing else. He begins to reassemble the puzzle-piece arrangement of Garak's trousers until he reaches the place where the envelope would go, and hesitates. He knows where the envelope goes, now. Garak won't be back for days. He could keep the envelope, for now, and see if he might be able to open it subtly. Before he can think better of it, he keeps the envelope out and re-composes the rest of the second drawer, sliding it almost all the way closed. How he admires the way Garak has done this—but to do so also reveals that Garak must be very concerned about someone searching his possessions, or at least must want very much to know if someone has done so.

The third and fourth drawers have nothing out of the ordinary. The open trunk contains bolts of cloth and spindles of ribbon that Julius is unwilling to fully unwind; they all feel normal enough. There's a ledger with—well, Garak would undoubtedly claim they're client names, due dates, cost estimates. Julius reads them closely, in case he'll understand them better later. He could keep this out too, could pore over it, but he doesn't want to tempt fate. One item out of place is already too many.

Julius does dismantle the bed, meticulously. The pillows are immaculate—strange, if Garak was sleeping in here before he came to Julius's rescue—and the thin blankets smell of laundry soap and nothing else. Julius pauses before removing the sheets from the bed, until he's confident that he'll be able to fit them back on correctly, but he does it in the end. There, at the very end of the bed, between the mattress and the box spring, is a very thin flat case. Julius opens it and is, somehow, unsurprised when he sees five different passports, with an empty slot for a sixth. Has he ever doubted that Garak is some kind of—spy? Something more than he seems to be? Garak has never really tried to hide that.

He's certainly not an expert on forged passports—only knows what an American passport and a British passport should look like—but these seem like very good forgeries, perhaps even somehow real. Each one has a few stamps in it, different photographs and slightly different signatures. They all list his name as Elim Garak, strangely. There's no American passport in the case, which means that either Garak has taken it with him this time or that he doesn't hide that one. Tucked behind the third—Japanese—passport is a small, folded slip of paper. When Julius opens it, he discovers that it's a single typed word: *extraordinary*. His heartbeat spikes when he reads it, as though he's just been caught, but his hand stays steady. He carefully replaces the slip of paper as well as the Japanese passport. Behind the fifth—Soviet, of course—passport, is a key.

Julius goes to the living room and telephones the office. “Darlene,” he says, and thank God his voice still sounds terrible from screaming last night. “I’m afraid I’m feeling ill today. Please let Douglas know that I won’t be in, and tell Kay not to worry.” If he doesn’t say something to her, she might come to the flat, and he can only manage so many moving parts at the moment.

He lifts the key between two ends of a handkerchief and looks to the locked trunk. No surprise, when he tries it in the lock, the key slots in perfectly. Julius opens the trunk very slowly, in case there’s a secondary catch, and finds it—a taut length of thread. With cautious fingers, he explores its length until he finds a clasp at one end and unclasps it. The trunk opens the rest of the way.

For all the security, Julius expects to find something—dramatic in the trunk. Something that will let him shout “Aha!” and realize exactly what it is that Garak *wants*—something beyond multiple passports that all have Garak’s own name (his real name?) on them. There’s nothing inside it but another sealed manila envelope, labeled exactly like the other one. They weigh the same amount, as far as Julius can tell.

Obviously, Garak expected Julius to search his room. Obviously, he’s found only what Garak wanted him to find: a gun in the underwear drawer, five passports and one missing, a piece of paper with the word *extraordinary*, and two manila envelopes. Julius isn’t sure whether to be insulted or strangely flattered. The question is whether he wants to let Garak know that he took the bait—and if so, how to do it. He could switch the two manila envelopes. For all he knows, their contents are just as identical as their outward appearance (and really, it’s remarkable that the typed address label is affixed at precisely the same uneven angle on both envelopes). He could try to open one, or both, and then decide what to do about their contents.

Julius takes a deep breath and considers. It’s almost all-consuming, how much he wants to open one of the envelopes. But to do so would be to give Garak some kind of—victory. To tell Garak that, yes, Julius *was* intrigued enough to search his room once he left, and that then Julius couldn’t contain his curiosity and fumbled his search just to open an envelope. Julius has accepted that he won’t be able to open the envelopes without revealing it.

His relationship with Garak already feels completely out of his control. Something in Julius rebels at the idea of playing along with Garak’s game. Before he can stop himself, he puts the second manila envelope back into the trunk at the correct angle and lowers the lid of the trunk enough that he can re-clasp the thread, then withdraws his hand and closes it fully. He pulls the key from the lock with his handkerchief and lays it exactly back behind the Soviet passport, then closes the case itself and replaces it at the foot of Garak’s bed. The sheets go back next, tight corners; the blankets, the pillows, until the only things out of order in this room are the first manila envelope and the trousers that will stack back atop it if Julius replaces it.

He does.

He eases himself slowly back out of the room, empty-handed, and pulls the door closed again very gently. He wonders what Garak will do, when he returns. Will he be disappointed? Or will he know, somehow, despite all Julius’s efforts, that Julius did search his room?

Julius can feel himself trying to rationalize what he found. What Garak wanted him to find. A gun, well—people own guns. Plenty of men kept their service revolvers, after the wars. Too many. Unremarkable. The manila envelope—well, the entire thing was a game, wasn’t it? For all he knows, the envelope contained a piece of paper saying “Ha! Caught you snooping!” Or “Tell me you found this and I’ll know you’re worth”—no. (How he already wishes he’d opened one of them.) The envelope doesn’t mean anything. And the passports—well, who isn’t paranoid anymore? Who wouldn’t want to have whichever passport he needed to get anywhere? Who can’t read the signs of impending violent conflict? It’s—odd—to have gone to the trouble of obtaining multiple passports—the obvious illegality, of course—but maybe Garak wants Julius to know that he has that kind of—power? Access? The way that he has control over the police? Or is simply—showing off. Offering something tantalizing to keep Julius interested.

There’s a voice deep in Julius’s brain saying that all of his rationalizations are ridiculous. It’s the same voice that told him not to let Garak move in. It’s telling him that he’s in too deep, that he’s let his nascent feelings for Garak get far out of control, that he can’t possibly ignore what he’s found. That he shouldn’t sleep better with Garak in his bed than out of it.

Julius is getting very good at ignoring that voice.

Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

“Do you know, Garak, that when you look at me like that, I want to tell you all my secrets?” He doesn’t even mean to say that much.

Garak appears unsurprised. “It’s not an uncommon reaction,” he says.

Garak is gone for a week and a half. Julius hasn’t been back in his room since that first day. He can’t allow himself the slightest temptation, not when he knows that the envelope with his name on it is lurking in Garak’s second drawer.

When he gets home on the tenth evening, he opens the door to the flat and can almost *feel* the difference. “Garak?” he calls. There are two voices talking.

“Julius!” Garak stands up from the couch, and Julius sees the hitch as he does it. “It seems you ate all the food that I left for you. I’m glad to see it.”

“You were gone—are you watching television?” He didn’t even realize the thing worked. It came with the flat and neither he nor Kay ever turned it on.

“Yes, the job took a little longer than expected. Matching wedding dresses—you can’t begin to imagine the trouble!”

Julius approaches him slowly. “It looks like it was a lot of trouble, the way you’re standing.” Garak hasn’t even carried his luggage into his room yet. It’s as though he came home and only managed to turn the television on before collapsing.

“Ah. Yes. I’m afraid I got in between two brides, and one of them landed quite a blow.” He grimaces. “I could use your assistance.”

“Whatever you need.”

Garak raises an eyebrow. “Are you sure?”

Julius can’t tell if that’s supposed to be innuendo or a warning. “I said I would help. What do you need?”

“In the bathroom, there’s a medical kit. As you may be aware. Please bring it out here, and a chair for me to sit in.”

Julius never searched the bathroom, he realizes. He’s overlooked the medical kit every night since Garak moved in, dismissing it as something ordinary. It’s surprisingly heavy. When he returns to the living room with the kit and a chair, Garak has divested himself of his sweater and is painstakingly unbuttoning his shirt. His mouth is pulled tight. “I can help with that,” Julius says.

“All right.” Garak sits in the chair, lets his arms ease to his sides, and allows Julius to unbutton the shirt. It brings them very close together, close enough that Julius can feel Garak’s harsh breath.

Julius focuses on the buttons so that he won’t look up into Garak’s face. “A fight between two brides, you said?” He finishes the buttons and helps slide the shirt off Garak, one arm at a time.

“Vicious. In the kit, there are scissors. Cut the undershirt up the side—carefully, pull it away from my skin.”

Julius obeys, increasingly alarmed. When he’s cut the undershirt off, he sees a bandage, blood seeping through, with livid bruising radiating out from it. “You’re bleeding through the bandage,” he says, and he keeps his voice very steady. “And you can’t tell me your ribs aren’t broken.”

The irritated hiss of breath tells him he’s right. “There should be a clean bandage in the kit,” Garak says. “Change—”

“Yes, I know how to change a bandage.” He peels it off slowly. “Garak—did you stitch this closed yourself?”

“Most certainly not!” Garak looks offended. “I would have done a much better job.”

“You should see a real doctor,” Julius tells him.

“I’ve *seen* a real doctor. I simply need a little assistance changing the bandage. If that’s too much to ask—”

“No.” Julius takes a long, slow breath. “What started the fight?” He kneels next to Garak.

“The first bride demanded much more white tulle for her dress than we had agreed.” Garak doesn’t flinch when Julius applies pressure, even though it must be excruciating. “It wouldn’t have left enough for the second bride’s dress.”

“And how did this happen? One of them stabbed you and the other hit you across the ribs?” The stitched wound is nauseating.

Garak smiles at him, eyes wide, even as he tenses beneath Julius’s hands. “Indeed! The second tried to get at the tulle herself, with an open pair of scissors, and the first threw an iron at her.”

“And they both hit you instead.” Julius smooths the bandage on as gently as possible. Garak’s skin is hot beneath his hands and he ghosts his fingers out to the edges of the bruises, until he’s touching undamaged skin. “What an unfortunate coincidence.”

“Indeed.” Garak’s gaze fixes on Julius, and he looks very tired all of a sudden. “Eventually their mothers pulled them apart, but it was a close thing.”

“You should be more careful,” Julius says. He still has one hand on Garak’s bare skin, almost at his lower back.

Garak closes his eyes. “So I’ve been told.” Julius watches the rise and fall of his chest. “Would you mind helping me to my room? I suspect that rest will be the best remedy.”

Julius lifts one hand to rest on Garak’s back, takes Garak’s hand in the other. Garak leans on him as he stands, until he’s mostly straightened up, and they walk together the few steps to Garak’s room. Julius waits for Garak to turn the knob, then helps him in, until they’re standing next to the bed. When Julius turns to leave, Garak says, “Wait.”

“What is it?” If not for Garak’s injury, this would feel dangerous—the two of them here in this room, in the darkness.

“I’d rather not sleep in my trousers.”

When Julius looks at his face, it’s shadowed, but for his eyes—luminous from the moonlight outside, and fixed on Julius. Very slowly, Julius unbuckles his belt, and then unbuttons his trousers with a touch even more delicate than that he used to search Garak’s room. He looks up and sees Garak still staring at him. “I hope you asked both brides for additional compensation,” he says, because he can’t take the silent tension any longer, and finds that his voice is a little hoarse.

“Oh, yes, quite a bit more.”

He can feel the vibration from Garak’s voice. When he goes to slide the trousers off Garak’s hips, he’s—clumsy?—and his fingertips slip just barely beneath the waistband of Garak’s briefs, just enough that Julius realizes and snatches his hands back. His cheeks are burning. “Will you be all right from there?”

“I think I can manage,” Garak says.

* * * * *

Garak is conspicuously absent for the next few days. Julius expects something—some further commentary on the fact that he ate every bit of the food that Garak left him, or some indication that he slipped up and Garak knows that he searched the room, or even just some of Garak’s usual good-natured lies. But Garak is gone except when he’s asleep in his bedroom, the door shut. He doesn’t ask for Julius’s help changing the bandage again, either.

Julius grows gradually more melancholy, which is ridiculous under the circumstances. He decides to blame it on work. He’s reached a scene in this month’s story in which the veteran soldier is forced to confront a young alien who wants to fight him, and it’s hitting him harder than he means it to. He drags his typewriter into the kitchen and sets it on the table—a true sign of desperation, he and Kay did it only when one of them needed privacy from the other—and digs out the bottle of Scotch that Garak gave him. He works through it steadily while staring at the half-empty piece of paper in his typewriter.

“Julius.”

It’s a testament to how much liquor he must have consumed that he’s startled by Garak’s arrival. “Garak! I didn’t hear you come home.”

“I assumed,” Garak says. “You’re usually quite—aware. And you don’t usually write at the kitchen table, do you.”

“No, only when things are dire—Come, sit, have a drink. I’ve consumed far too much of this by myself.” There’s an empty glass next to him and he realizes he’s been drinking directly from the bottle. “If you don’t mind—”

Garak sits in the other kitchen chair and pours himself a good measure, then passes the bottle back to Julius. “What’s brought on this—rather uncharacteristic choice of drinking location?”

Julius frowns. “I’m—struggling with a scene.”

“It’s making you a bit maudlin, if you’ve decided to bring your typewriter in here and drink this much.” Garak watches him steadily. “Do you do this whenever I’m gone?”

Whenever he’s gone—Garak has had *days* now to examine his bedroom and drawn whatever meaning he wants to from its undisturbed state. God, Julius wants to know what meaning he drew from it. He wants to know what Garak thinks of him, if he should have opened one of the envelopes. If Garak was disappointed that Julius hadn’t engaged with his game, or thought that Julius hadn’t been good enough to so much as get to one of the envelopes. Garak’s eyes are still fixed on him, patient. “Do you know, Garak, that when you look at me like that, I want to tell you all my secrets?” He doesn’t even mean to say that much.

Garak appears unsurprised. “It’s not an uncommon reaction,” he says. He inspects the glass. “This is really quite good, you know. You shouldn’t be drinking it when you’re already drunk.” He stoppers the bottle and moves it from Julius’s reach. “I suppose you’d like something else.”

“You know, Garak,” Julius begins. Garak hands him a bottle of Jack Daniels with a grimace and Julius takes a swig. “You’re right, that was a waste.” He’s not sure why he even has a bottle of Jack Daniels in this flat. “*Do you want to know a secret?*” He says it softly, as though the War Office has a listening device hidden in this flat. If they do, they know far more about him than he’d like to think.

"I want to know all your secrets." Garak fixes his crystalline eyes on Julius's. "But I'll settle for one."

"The army knew I was too young, when I enlisted." He thinks he sees the slightest flicker of disappointment in Garak's expression, quickly stifled.

"That's no secret," Garak protests. "You told me when you first met that you lied about your age. With your face, I can't imagine that anyone would have been fooled."

Julius shakes his head. "They chose the youngest of us—I suppose they thought we would adjust better. One hundred of us, as the first subjects." Garak's eyes turn icy. "They gave us—experimental drugs. The hope was that they could eventually develop drugs that would allow soldiers to become brilliant tacticians, able to memorize enemy troop movements, see broader strategies where no one else could. They were hoping for other benefits too. Enhanced strength, speed. Perhaps even *special powers* like in the stories I write."

"I see." Garak is perfectly motionless. Julius knows how to do that too. Has done it before. It's a useful skill.

"They did—ask us. For consent." Julius laughs a little at the idea of that. "The first thirty lost their minds. The doctors said they'd all developed schizophrenia, said it must have been an underlying defect triggered by the drugs."

Garak inclines his head in the tiniest nod.

"They adjusted the drugs, tried another round. The next twenty-five were—insensate. Unable to speak. Shells that kept breathing. All of those had to be institutionalized." He likes to think that's what happened. "And then they adjusted it again, and tried it on the rest of us." He rubs his hand across his eyes. They're burning a little. "Most of us ended up like me."

"Like you?" Garak's voice is very soft. "Brilliant?"

Julius laughs a little. "I don't know if I would call it that. I read very quickly, and I remember all of it. I notice details—every detail—and remember them—I was so surprised to see you at the club for the first time and learn that you'd been coming here for a long time. I can't think of a single other person who's been able to hide from me that way."

"You wouldn't, if they've never approached you," Garak pointed out. Julius raises an eyebrow. "I'm sure you were aware of my presence in the past and simply dismissed it."

"No," Julius says, and finds that he's jabbing his pointer finger against the second button of Garak's shirt. It has the slightest sheen to it, but he doesn't let himself investigate further. "No, I don't forget people. I should have recognized you in the tailor shop, if I had seen you at the club before."

Garak fixes his eyes on Julius and knocks his own glass off the table. This time, Julius catches it before it can hit the ground. "Improved reflexes as well, I would think. Unless you were naturally gifted."

"You did that on purpose. To distract me."

"Yes, of course." Garak looks unrepentant. "What else?"

"Hand-eye coordination."

"Yes, even under the influence of substantial quantities of alcohol. Fascinating." Garak is staring at his hands now. "But not strength or speed or other unusual abilities?" Julius shakes his head. "I wonder that they didn't make you a sniper."

Cold washes through Julius's entire body. "No." His hand is steady on his glass when he takes a drink—his hands are always steady. "No, they did that with—one of us. One of the—successes. He lost his mind very quickly. They didn't try it again." Bad enough that Julius remembers the trajectory of every bullet he fired at faceless German soldiers. Bad enough that he remembers vomiting long after his stomach was empty, after they liberated the camp. "They distributed us into different units after the treatment ended, to see if things changed in...real-life scenarios."

"And then they just—let you go at the end of the war? They didn't try to keep you?"

"A few of us stayed behind. Voluntarily."

Garak snorts. "I suppose that's a comforting lie."

"The doctors suggested that perhaps their memories could be—fixed. Made gentler. Some of us were willing to risk it again. I was not." He shrugs. "Were I them, I would have set someone to watch me, but I suppose I would have spotted anyone." The thought occurs to him. "Unless it's you." Even as he says it, he doesn't really believe it.

Garak leans forward and covers Julius's free hand with his own, then looks him directly in the eyes. This close, his eyes look almost like clear blue glass. "I assure you, Julius, I am not employed by any government to watch you." *Any government.* What a strange way to say it.

"Do you want to know another secret?" Julius begins to turn his hand palm-up.

Garak is suddenly—closed, his hand withdrawn from above Julius's, new distance between them. "I think that's as many secrets as you want to tell me tonight," Garak says. He stands. "I suggest that you drink some water and go to bed. You don't appear to be accomplishing much writing."

Julius is struggling to keep up with the speed with which things have changed. "I didn't mean—" He stops and forces his mouth into a smile. "I hope you don't regret that you've agreed to live with—someone unnatural. I suppose I don't know if anyone else has manifested strange

symptoms since the war—”

Garak’s hand rests lightly on his shoulder, so lightly that he has to turn his head to confirm it’s there. “Not at all.” He starts to leave the kitchen.

“Garak,” Julius says. He inhales very slowly, feels his lungs inflate. He can’t resist asking. “Why do you have so many passports?”

“I’m a citizen of the world,” and that’s *glee* in Garak’s voice—no doubt at the fact that Julius broke first and admitted to searching.

“Incidentally, I notice you haven’t had any loud dreams recently. If you think you might have one tonight, what with your confession, it might be best if I slept in your bed from the start instead of joining you after you’ve already woken both of us.”

Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

They're in the kitchen. Garak is putting a container into the refrigerator while Julius leans against the counter next to it. "I expect you to eat all of this by the time I come home," Garak says. "Not just hot dogs and pastrami sandwiches and canned soup." He closes the refrigerator door.

"Oh?" Julius grins at him, a little recklessly. "What will you do if I don't?"

Garak's mouth twitches in the barest hint of a smile and he steps into Julius's space, plants a hand on the counter on either side of Julius and crowds in. "I expect you to eat it," he repeats, almost against Julius's lips, and then waits for Julius to close the distance.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

It's cold in the flat, but Garak is very warm in bed, pressed against his back, one arm wrapped around Julius with a hand laid over his chest. Julius is very confident that heterosexual men don't sleep with their friends like this. He can feel his own heart rabbiting and he tries to take long, slow breaths to calm it. He's almost succeeded when Garak says, "Did you open the envelope?" Garak's breath is hot on the back of his neck.

"Which one?"

He can hear delight in Garak's voice. "Any of them." Apparently, Garak isn't willing to admit how many there were.

"Can't you tell?"

Garak heaves a sigh against his skin and Julius can't suppress a shiver. "They appear unopened. But I can't rule out that you've learned to open and re-seal an envelope, with your brilliant memory."

"Which do you think I found?"

He feels Garak chuckle a little. "You hid your search very well. If you hadn't asked about the passports, I might not have known at all."

That rings false, and Julius shakes his head a little against the pillow. He wishes he could roll over and see Garak's face, but Garak has him held fast. "Don't flatter me."

"The envelope in the trunk, of course. Though you did a very nice job re-affixing the thread. And the envelope in the dresser drawer—you re-folded everything very well, but I *am* a tailor, my dear man. I can spot an errant wrinkle that no one else can see."

"Of course," Julius murmurs. He waits.

"The window frame and the floor lamp—those were smaller. I would be very surprised if you found either. I don't suppose you'd like to confirm?"

Julius suspected that there were others—though, of course, even this might be a test. There might not be other envelopes. "If you can't tell what I found and what I didn't, Garak, perhaps you're not the man I thought."

He hears Garak's breath catch, feels his hand tighten a little. He can't suppress another shiver when Garak breathes out against his neck, mouth so close that Julius can almost feel the brush of his lips as Garak says, "You could open the envelopes next time." He doesn't say anything more, and Julius doesn't let himself answer.

* * * * *

He shifts in the night and finds that Garak is hard against him, very slowly sliding his hand down from its place on Julius's chest, down his abdomen, down inside Julius's pyjama pants to grip him lightly. Julius tries to thrust forward into Garak's hand, but Garak opens his hand and pushes Julius firmly back against him. He slides a knee between Julius's legs to spread them a little.

Julius's breath is coming fast now, his entire body hot, and he doesn't say anything for fear of Garak stopping. Instead, he tries to roll his hips a little and hears the smallest noise escape Garak's throat. Garak props himself up on one elbow so he can lean over and Julius turns his face up for the hungry kiss. It feels like Garak is everywhere, on him and around him and he only wants more. Garak tightens his hand on Julius and works him slowly, until Julius is almost frantic, almost writhing. He reaches behind him and gropes around until he can tug two-fingered at the waist of Garak's pants, pull them down off his hips. Somehow both of their pants end up kicked to the bottom of the bed, and Garak is almost searingly hot where he slides against Julius's bare skin.

Then Garak pulls Julius up onto his hands and knees. He kneels behind Julius, between his spread legs, and Julius is gulping in air, every nerve on fire, all of his awareness fixed on Garak behind him, on the touch of his fingers—

Julius wakes up breathing hard, Garak asleep against his back. He eases a few inches away, enough that his rapid breaths won't wake Garak

and reveal—what a state Julius is in. The light outside says that it's early morning.

Well. This is unfortunate. Julius rolls over, but that brings him almost nose-to-nose with Garak. He closes his eyes anyway and tells himself to sleep and ignore the quiet feeling of Garak's breath a few inches away—

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Garak's mouth twitches in the barest hint of a smile and he steps into Julius's space, plants a hand on the counter on either side of Julius and crowds in. "I expect you to eat it," he repeats, almost against Julius's lips, and then waits for Julius to close the distance. Julius leans forward the final inch, and this kiss is lazy, like they've done it a hundred times before—

Julius wakes up again and immediately rolls away from Garak and out of bed. This is *very* unfortunate. He could try to go back to sleep again, but there's something restless and jumpy in him. Instead, he dresses quietly and leaves the flat. He takes the stairs down to the first floor and steps out into the biting air. Snow is falling lightly, softening the harsh tone of the street lamps. He shoves his hands into his pockets and regrets the lack of gloves, but he's unwilling to go back for them. The streets are almost empty, but for a few taxicabs and a man sleeping in the doorway of a church a few blocks away. It's just before four a.m., before the morning deliveries begin and the sidewalks grow noisy. The tips of Julius's ears are cold beneath his hat, but his scarf—Garak's scarf—is warm around his neck.

He's aware, again, of the tall policeman tailing him a block away. When it's this quiet out, it's hard to follow someone subtly. This isn't Ryan or Mulkahey, though—Julius doesn't recognize him, and can't trust that he's one of Garak's loyalists. There's something about the cold, and the edge of danger, that throws him back to 1941, to the grimmest days, and he irrationally hates the man following him for doing that.

He realizes quickly that he should have turned back when the second tail walks out of a darkened corner store. They're not even tailing him so much as herding him, almost, so that the only way to continue avoiding them—and now a third man—is to walk toward a certain destination. Julius doesn't know what's waiting there, but he doubts it's good. Instead, he turns and tries to slip past them—lies to himself that he's succeeded, just before someone hits him in the head, hard.

* * * * *

When he opens his eyes to a throbbing headache, there are three men standing in front of him. He's handcuffed to a pipe in what seems to be some kind of industrial building. Two men are speaking in quiet, urgent Russian.

Julius tests the handcuffs. He's never been captured before. "What do you want?"

"Where has Garak hidden it?" His stomach drops horribly as the third man steps forward and he sees Detective Ryan. "Is he keeping it at your apartment?"

"I see you've found a new master," Julius says. "Your third, now?" So much for hoping that Ryan or Mulkahey were also tailing him and might have gone to warn Garak.

Ryan sneers. "A better one than yours, I think."

"I haven't the faintest idea what you're looking for, and if it's something that Garak has, I wouldn't have the faintest idea where it was. He's not exactly forthcoming." Unfortunately, Julius hears one of the men say *ledger* to the other and has a nasty feeling that he does know what they're looking for, and that he knows exactly where it is, or at least where it was before Garak came home. What he's about to say next is dangerous, but he can't think of anything better. "Detective Ryan," he says, "I write stories for a magazine. Do you think Garak likes me for my *mind*?"

Ryan's lip curls. "I know about *that*," he spits. "Garak has never been subtle about it with anyone. Thinks he's untouchable." And oh, but that feels like a punch in the stomach. He lowers his voice. "I told them you were useless. They said to snatch you anyway."

"Let me go, then. I won't tell anyone. It wouldn't matter if I did—Garak probably knows these men want whatever it is he has." The handcuffs are cutting into his wrists, and he tries to crouch to relieve the pressure on them a little, realizes it's the wrong choice when one of the Russians shouts. He has just enough time to go limp before the man punches him, just enough awareness to roll with the force of it instead of trying to hold firm against it. Even so, the pain is dizzying. He feels his nose break, blood dripping down over his mouth. Dimly, he sees the man moving away again.

Ryan seems startled but otherwise unconcerned, and Julius remembers hearing about what he did to Benny. "They'll let you go when you tell them what you know."

So much for that faint hope. "What do they want to know? I can tell them anything about—about what he eats for breakfast, or what—he watches on television, or his cologne!" There's a strange kind of disconnection happening, as though he's outside of himself now. Saying words with what sounds like a great deal of emotion, but the emotion is only surface level. Part of him is very aware of the pain in his nose, the blood pooling at the back of his throat, but this strange separation is starting to prevent it from affecting him. If he were in any other situation, it would be terrifying. In this particular one, though, it feels like protection. "Please, Detective, I'll tell them anything—"

"You would, wouldn't you." Ryan looks disgusted. "I bet you were never much of a soldier either. Probably skulking at the back of the lines, hoping to stay out of sight—"

The part of him that's feeling emotion is enraged. He spits blood onto the floor and snaps, "*I fought*," and there must be something in his voice, because the two Russians turn. Interesting. Perhaps Ryan isn't the way out of this. "I fought for my *country*," he tells Ryan. "I fought when the Germans were attacking us every night, I marched across Europe, and you were—what? Comfortable here, where they were never

going to get you?” He jerks his head at the Russians. “*They* know, Ryan. They know what it’s like.” At this point, he’s pretty sure that no one in the room cares if he lives or dies, so he might as well try to sow a little discord. The two men are talking to each other quietly, but he can hear well enough—understand well enough—to know that they’ve never liked Ryan, that they think he’s a weasel who would turn on them if someone better came along.

“You said he would know something,” one of the Russians says to Ryan—the one who hit him.

“Maybe he wanted to seem useful,” Julius offers. “Too afraid of Garak, so he thought he’d pretend that Garak had an associate he could bring you instead of a—roommate.” From the way Ryan flinches, he knows that he’s right. Ryan would never risk going after Garak directly, getting the tiger by the tail. What a coward.

“Very perceptive,” the Russian says. He’s watching Julius closely, and Julius lets that disconnected part of himself go a little vapid, reminds himself not to seem calm or calculated about any of this. “You want us to let you go, of course.”

Julius stifles multiple sarcastic responses to this and instead says plaintively, “I really don’t know anything that you want.”

The Russian man peers at him. “Yevgeny!” his compatriot hisses. “Don’t be foolish!” He says it in Russian, and Julius reminds himself not to react to the content of his words, not to reveal that he understands.

The man—Yevgeny—steps away abruptly. “I’m going up to look around,” he says. “Watch him.”

When he leaves the room, Ryan expresses his feelings about the whole situation by kicking Julius in the side. Pain lances through him and he notices it in an abstract kind of way. He suspects that Ryan would happily continue, but the other Russian grabs Ryan by the wrist and shakes his head. Julius suspects that the man doesn’t speak English. What a shame, that to speak Russian to him now would only be a harmful revelation.

He hears the slightest noise, realizes what’s about to happen, and covers his eyes with his arm as a stun grenade detonates. His ears ring deafeningly, but he can still see when he looks up. The two men are flailing, blinded, and he watches Garak walk into the room and shoot them in quick succession.

Chapter End Notes

I’m taking a few liberties. Stun grenades were invented by the British SAS in the 1960s.

Probably.

Chapter 14

Chapter Summary

“Julius,” Garak says softly, and he doesn’t want to hear it, but for once Garak is merciless in telling the truth. “You have many leverage points.”

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“There’s a third one,” Julius says, or tries to say. Garak looks at him—surprised?—and then says something that Julius can’t hear. When Julius shakes his head, Garak frowns and crouches to dig through Ryan’s pocket. He retrieves the handcuff keys and releases Julius, then helps him stand. “There’s a third one,” Julius repeats, and this time he can hear himself a little bit.

“He’s gone,” Garak says into his ear. “Are you all right?”

Julius’s brain is aware that there are parts of his body—a lot of parts—that hurt. He can’t breathe through his nose and one of his eyes is swelling shut. His wrists are bruised and scraped raw where the handcuffs were. There’s a sharp pain in his side where Ryan kicked him, and he thinks his rib might be broken. His ears are pounding. “Fine,” he says. “I’m fine.” In this strange distant part of his brain, it feels true.

“You wouldn’t know it to look at you,” Garak says. The ringing in Julius’s ears is starting to subside. Garak looks down at Ryan’s body. “Pity, I rather liked him.” At what must be a truly horrified expression on Julius’s face, he hastens to add, “As an asset. Not as a *person*.”

“Not a very good asset either, if he decided to betray you to the Russians by kidnapping me.”

Garak frowns a little as he looks at Julius’s wrists. “He was always swayed a little too easily, but he was useful. You should get home, you’re only going to feel worse over the next few hours.”

“Yes,” Julius agrees. “But I want *you* to take me home and I want you to explain to me *exactly* why it is that I was kidnapped off the street and interrogated about where you keep your ledgers.” When he sees Garak hesitate, he adds, “Unless you’re planning to kill me yourself, now that I know there’s some value to anything in the flat.”

For the briefest second—so brief that he may have imagined it—Garak looks horrified. Then he says, rather dryly, “No, I think you’re rather more useful than Ryan.” He touches his fingers very lightly to Julius’s chin and then, even more lightly, ghosts his fingertips along the line of Julius’s nose. “It’s broken,” he says. “Do you want me to fix it?”

“What, re-shape it?” Julius brushes Garak’s hand away and feels the line of his nose himself. The pain is still distant, separate in his brain, and he touches it less gingerly than Garak did. “It’s still the same shape. Just—swollen.” Every part of his face feels swollen, in fact.

“Whatever you want,” Garak says. He’s moved his hands to Julius’s shoulders, running along the length of each arm, then down along Julius’s ribs on either side. When he touches the place where Ryan kicked Julius, it takes Julius a minute to process that it hurts.

“Ouch,” he says belatedly. The dried blood on his face is starting to itch.

Garak lightens his touch, but he runs his hands carefully over the rest of Julius’s torso, his abdomen, his hipbones. “Does anything feel out of place?”

My head, Julius wants to say, but he doesn’t. “What about the—bodies? Are you just going to leave them there?”

“What, a police officer and a Russian spy? I doubt anyone will have much trouble coming up with an explanation for that.” Garak takes his chin more firmly and peers closely into his eyes. “Any dizziness? Blurry vision?”

“I can see every one of your eyelashes,” Julius says. “Clearly.” The room around them smells murky, like wet concrete and iron, but Garak’s hand is full of the sharp scent of gunshot residue. The forefinger touching Julius’s chin is the trigger finger that saved him—and *put him in danger in the first place*, Julius reminds himself. “I suppose you have a way to get back without everyone seeing me in this state?”

“Of course.” Garak releases his chin. “Follow me.”

They’re two flights of stairs down in an industrial basement, Julius discovers, and the broken rib is seeming more and more likely as he climbs the stairs. The light outside is fully afternoon, and there’s a truck waiting in the parking lot, a truck that looks suspiciously familiar. “Mr. Reed and Mr. Tucker took a day off from moving furniture to pick us up?” Garak doesn’t bother to answer.

Even as he asks it, Reed climbs out of the driver’s seat and hurries to support Julius. “All right there, sir?” Reed guides Julius around to the back of the truck, where Tucker is waiting. They’re both in very anonymous navy-blue uniforms and the inside of the truck is set up like a troop carrier, with a bench along either side. Tucker helps him up into the truck and onto one of the benches. Garak follows and nods at Tucker, who closes the doors behind them.

The truck rumbles to life, jostling Julius on the bench. “Hold still,” Garak tells him. He crouches in front of Julius with a bottle of rubbing alcohol and a cloth.

"I hope they're better assets than Ryan was." Julius allows Garak to clean the blood off his face and dab the skin with rubbing alcohol. "Are they the ones who did that dreadful job sewing up your wound from—what was it?"

"The dueling brides," Garak says, and his voice sounds warm in the dim light of the truck. "Yes, I'm afraid Mr. Tucker isn't quite as good at repairing the human machine as he is the more traditional kind." His touch is very gentle. "Let me clean your wrists."

"They're mostly just bruised." Julius offers the wrist that took the brunt of the force when Yevgeny punched him. "Maybe sprained." The alcohol stings.

"Can you put this on?" Garak reaches under the bench and then holds up another of the navy uniform jumpsuits.

Julius considers. "I might need a little help." The clothes he's still wearing are wretchedly filthy and ice-cold by now. "I'm afraid I lost your scarf."

"Yevgeny took it," Garak says. He begins to unbutton Julius's shirt.

That distant part of his brain, the one holding all the pain at bay, keeps him from startling at Garak's use of Yevgeny's name. It shouldn't be a surprise that Garak knows him. "You'll have to get me another one," he says. "In another color, so that you won't mistake me for him."

Garak's hand stills for a moment, and Julius remembers only a few days ago, when he was doing this for Garak. "Don't go out alone next time."

"Are you going to tell me this is my fault, Garak? Twelve years in this city and I've never so much as been mugged, and now I go for an early walk and get kidnapped by Russians?" Julius yanks off the shirt and drags off his trousers without assistance, and he might have hoped that the first time Garak undressed him would be very different. He steps unsteadily into the uniform and zips it closed. He sits down hard as the truck jolts, and only then does he shiver with cold. Silently, Garak passes him a pair of socks and black boots. "You have all these in my size, do you?"

"The truck has quite a few sizes," Garak says. "Including yours."

Quite a few. Specifically set aside by the bench on which Julius was meant to sit, when Garak rescued him. Of course. He's warmer now, and the pieces of his brain are beginning to return to their proper shape, the pain growing more insistent. "I don't suppose the truck also has some paracetamol—some Tylenol?"

Garak offers him two pills. They ride the rest of the way back to the flat in silence, until Garak sends Julius—with Tucker as a guard—up the elevator. Reed and Garak meet them at the door; only after Tucker and Reed have cleared the flat does Garak allow Julius to enter behind him. "Thank you," Julius tells them, because Garak doesn't seem like he's going to.

"Of course, sir." Both men look to Garak, who nods shortly. After they leave, Garak bolts the door.

"Now," he begins. "Where is your suitcase?"

"My suitcase?" Julius has just allowed himself to take a few steps toward the kitchen, where he's confident that there must be something edible in the refrigerator. "Why would I—"

Garak marches into Julius's room and digs into his closet until he emerges with luggage. "It's time to go," he says.

Julius follows him. "You're not making sense."

"I have another—trip planned. A long one. It's clear that you won't be safe here while I'm gone, so you'll have to come with me." There's a strange kind of emotion in Garak's eyes.

"A work trip, or a trip to visit a sick relative?"

"Really, Julius. You know the answer to that."

"But who do you work for? What are you running around the world trying to do, that you come back looking like *this* sometimes?" Julius gestures to himself. "Who wanted me?"

"My dear man—"

"FBI? CIA? MI-5? MI-6? KGB? Stasi?" Julius is running out of intelligence agencies. "The United States military?"

The humor has been growing in Garak's clear blue eyes. "Have you run out of guesses?"

"NACA?" Garak's lip twitches. Julius knows him well enough to know that he would never give himself away unintentionally. "Garak, you know my most dangerous secret. Isn't it only fair to tell me yours?"

"That's hardly how it works," Garak says. "But I do feel some obligation to ensure you don't think I work for—government." He holds out the suitcase, and Julius refuses to take it.

"What, you're a freelance spy?"

Garak looks heavenward with annoyance. "That is a tediously dramatic way to describe it. There are—men and women around the world who believe that the Cold War should not be fought across the poor nations across the world, with world powers pulling the strings. Men and women in many governments who would prefer to see the war limited to a war of—ingenuity."

“The Cold War is certainly prompting a lot of innovation.”

Garak opens one of Julius’s dresser drawers and inspects its contents. “Not that kind of innovation. The kind of ingenuity that you write about.”

“You’re a spy—on behalf of the space program? *Every* space program?” It sounds absurd even as Julius says it. “Come on, Garak. I’ve put up with most of your lies. I pretend to believe that some member of your extended family falls ill every few weeks. I ignore that you have some kind of hold over every person in this city. But I asked for the truth for once—not your version of the truth, but a version of truth that *I* can understand. You don’t have to insult me.”

“Julius.” Garak turns away from the dresser, takes Julius’s better hand, and squeezes it almost uncertainly. “Look at me.”

Julius lets himself. Garak’s blue eyes are darker than usual, pigment blooming in his irises. “I swear to you on whatever you think that I believe in that I am telling you truth that is *true*.”

“What a strange way to say that you’re telling the truth,” Julius murmurs. He can’t look away. “How does control over the police have anything to do with the space program?”

“Every person and every organization has a—leverage point. One has only to find it to be able to exploit it. A person’s future usefulness isn’t always immediately obvious.” He looks a little impatient. “Come now, don’t be naïve. Politicians advance from city council member to senators. Police become private security officers who are employed by wealthy companies. Infrastructure can always be improved or damaged or altered as necessary.” Garak frowns at him. “You can see it. You’re brilliant. You just don’t want to believe it.”

“But you have...principles? Things you wouldn’t do on behalf of your employers?” Julius has known there was *something* strange about him since the day that Garak surprised him at the club. He’s known that the passports, the gun, the ledger, weren’t the kind of thing that an ordinary man would have, and hasn’t wanted to accept it.

Garak glances away. “I have—beliefs, if you want to call those *principles*. I don’t have—moral limitations. Certainly none that I’ve encountered,” and that’s terrifying. Julius believes it entirely.

“I suppose my leverage point is my—augmentations.” The words are as bitter as fernet in his mouth.

“Julius,” Garak says softly, and he doesn’t want to hear it, but for once Garak is merciless in telling the truth. “You have many leverage points.”

Of course he does. How stupid of him, to have told Garak anything. To have told him about the experiments, the war itself, the dreams. And how incautious he’s been around Garak, to have showed his interest so obviously. “It would be very silly for me to—have an emotional reaction to your revelation, wouldn’t it,” Julius says. “As though I didn’t know what’s under your mattress. As though I had every truly believed a word that you said about your time in the war and your sick relatives and—and your other travels.” Or the way that Garak seemed to look at him sometimes when he thought Julius wasn’t looking—no, the way that Garak seemed to look at him when he knew Julius was looking and wanted Julius to see that look. God. “And I suppose you don’t have a single leverage point, do you.”

Garak’s gaze fixes on Julius. “No. I don’t.”

He says it very firmly.

“I believe that too,” Julius says. He feels weary and hurt all over. Garak hasn’t apologized, he notices.

Chapter End Notes

NACA was the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics, which was absorbed into NASA into 1958.

Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

"I've always heard the story as the scorpion and the frog," Julius says. The heat of the sunlight has passed. He opens his eyes to see Garak watching him. "The scorpion stings the frog and they both drown."

"Well, that's absurd," Garak says. "Why would a frog agree to carry the scorpion across the river?"

"I suppose it believed the scorpion when it promised not to sting."

Garak shakes his head. "That's ridiculous. And why would the scorpion ask the frog for help, knowing that it would have to sting and they would both drown? Was it deceived in its own nature that badly?"

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

It takes Julius a minute to re-compose himself, during which time Garak packs his suitcase with efficient movements. "Why are you packing my clothes?" His voice sounds distant to his own ears.

Garak huffs out an impatient breath. "I've explained this. I have to go away. It's not safe for you here, clearly."

"Why do you care?"

Garak pauses infinitesimally in his packing, then resumes. "It would be quite the waste. And I can't rule out the possibility that you *have* learned something—dangerous. Besides, you might be useful."

"A new asset." He doesn't like how that tastes in his mouth. He wonders if this is what it was about all along. "Where are you going?"

"We're going to California," Garak says. He zips the suitcase shut.

"It's a big state."

"You're determined to be difficult." Garak drops the suitcase next to Julius's bedroom door. "What else do you need? I expect that we'll be gone for at least three weeks, if not a month. Incidentally, can you speak without that accent?"

"What, like an American?" Julius re-focuses on the more important part of this. "I'm not going anywhere without telling Kay first."

"You'll only put her in danger," Garak warns.

"I don't—" He can't say *I don't care*. "Kay would kill me if I left without telling her."

"I can't guarantee that the telephone is secure."

Julius looks at Garak like he's never seen him before. Everything he says should make perfect sense, given what Garak has already said, and yet each new revelation is a bit of a shock. "I don't need to *telephone* her. I'm going to eat something, sleep for ten hours, and go to work tomorrow. If I'm going to leave with you, I'll leave after that."

"I really wouldn't advise—"

Julius shakes his head. "If you and Mr. Reed and Mr. Tucker can't manage to keep me safe here in the city between now and five o'clock tomorrow, I can't imagine how I would be any safer with you anywhere else."

Garak opens both hands and then closes them slowly. "I can—arrange that," he says, and smiles blandly, as though Julius can't see through that anymore. "Sit on the sofa," he tells Julius. "I'll make you something to eat."

Julius's entire body is throbbing badly now. "Make me a drink too," he says, and he follows Garak out of the bedroom.

* * * * *

Garak sleeps in his bed again, careful not to touch him. Julius doesn't dream. In the morning, he avoids looking at himself in the mirror and walks to work, keenly aware of his lurking bodyguards. Reed and Tucker aren't even subtle, one ten feet ahead of him and the other ten feet behind; Garak disappears into the crowd on the street, and Julius has never felt so watched in his entire life.

"Julius!" Kay gasps when he walks in the door, and Darlene says, "Oh no, what happened?"

"I was mugged. Last night," Julius says. "Wasn't quite quick enough with my wallet."

Kay can tell he isn't telling the truth, but Darlene produces a bottle of aspirin and Albert makes concerned noises and even Herbert says, "You look terrible. Are you sure you should be here?" Douglas sticks his head out from his office and frowns.

"Actually, I'm going to take a few weeks to—travel and recover," he says. "Don't worry, Douglas, I'll still have my story to you by the

deadline.” He’ll find a way to mail it. “But I need a change of scenery.”

“A change of scenery.” Kay’s voice is flat.

“Yes,” Julius says. “But for now, I would really prefer to focus on writing.”

Douglas doesn’t look very happy at all, and Julius knows he’s probably pushing it with repeatedly taking all of this time off. But he’s never missed a deadline and Douglas pays him by the word, so Julius refuses to be cowed by him. Kay is another story. As soon as he sits down, she sits next to him and hisses, “What is *happening*?”

Julius has had all morning to imagine what he can tell her that will make the slightest bit of sense. “I was—attacked. By some men who were trying to get to Garak.” She looks murderous. “He rescued me. He thought it would be a good idea for both of us to—leave town for a few weeks.”

“You’re really that blind when it comes to him?” Kay is clearly biting her tongue. “He moves in with you and all of a sudden you’ve been kidnapped and you have to go away with him?”

“I—told him,” Julius says. “About—the war. The War Office.”

Kay turns very pale, almost bloodless against her red lipstick. “Jules.”

Julius closes his eyes. What can he possibly say to her to make it make sense, when it barely does to him? “If it helps, I think he genuinely wants to protect me.”

“You *think*.”

“I think he wants my help.”

Kay moves even closer and jostles his bad side. “Sorry!”

He shakes his head. “I’m all right.”

“He wants your *help*? With what?”

Julius lowers his voice to the barest whisper. “He’s—involved in intelligence work.” Kay looks even unhappier. “You know I would be good at it too, with my—gifts.”

“I thought you wanted a life that didn’t depend on what they did to you.” Kay puts a very gentle hand on his arm. “Do you?”

“I want—” He shakes his head. “I don’t even know what I want anymore.”

“Jules,” she says. “I’m not sure you ever did.”

It feels like the rest of the office has disappeared, as though he’s about to sever his last tie to reality right now. “I’ll send you a postcard.” She laughs, and there’s real sorrow in her eyes. This feels more like the end of something than it did when she moved out. “Look on the bright side. If I get myself killed, you won’t have to worry about divorce paperwork.”

“*Someone* had better send me a postcard,” Kay says. She leans in close and presses her lips to his cheek, then rests her forehead against his own. He can smell the greasepaint scent of her lipstick, and behind it, Odette’s perfume.

“Tell Odette that she had better be good to you,” he says. “She had better make you happy.”

Kay hugs him around the shoulders a little awkwardly, but she holds on tight. “Tell Garak that I’ll hunt him down and kill him.”

“If something happens to me?”

Kay releases him and leans back a little. “Or even if it doesn’t.” She smiles. “I suppose you’re going to tell me that I need to be extra-careful now too.”

“Yes. Garak wanted me to leave last night. He said it would put you in danger to tell you that I was leaving.”

Kay snorts and shakes her head. “I’ll be careful.” Louder, she says, “Julius, I can’t believe you’re at the office when you feel this way! You should go home, right now!” Kay’s voice, at that precise pitch, is impossible to disobey. Even Douglas sticks his head out from his office again and makes a shoving motion, as though gesturing Julius to leave.

“All right, all right.” Julius picks up his briefcase and goes slowly, painfully, to the door. He pauses in the doorway and looks back at the office—at Kay, at the covers of *Imaginary Tales* hung on the walls, at the stale doughnuts and discarded coffee cups perched on the desks, at Albert fumbling for pipe matches and Herbert arguing with Darlene about when the next pot of coffee will be ready—and then walks outside.

* * * * *

The familiar moving truck is parked two blocks away. Tucker is doing something involving a large wrench and a lot of grumpy words, not quite swearing, while Reed stands with his hands on his hips and frowns. The back of the truck is open and it appears to be loaded with crates of apples. The motor is running. Julius walks casually over to Tucker and asks, “Do you happen to have the time?”

“Just about right,” Tucker says, and in one smooth motion, he shields Julius from sight as Reed helps him up into the back of the truck. Reed climbs in too, and Tucker shuts the door.

Julius has barely found a seat before the truck starts moving. Reed flicks on a camp light and sets it atop one of the crates. It illuminates Garak's face. "Have you said goodbye to your satisfaction, Julius?"

"Kay told me to tell you that she'll hunt you down and kill you."

"If I harm you in some way?"

"She didn't qualify it." Julius sees the spark of humor in Garak's eyes. "I'll need to send her a postcard at some point." Garak ignores that. "Now, where are we going?" The smell of apples and diesel is almost suffocating.

"An airfield," Garak says. "A—friend is going to fly us." He hands Julius a pill. "Something a little stronger than Tylenol, if you'd like. You can't be feeling very good."

He's not wrong. Julius accepts it and swallows it dry. Garak begins to blur in front of him and the smell becomes overwhelming, almost all-consuming. He feels Garak's hands as Julius collapses against him, and then the world goes dark.

When he wakes up again, he's in a rather comfortable leather airplane seat, in a little ten-seater that's soaring away from New York City. "God damn it, Garak," he says.

Garak is standing close to the cockpit door, but he turns at the sound of Julius's voice. "Ah, you're awake. I apologize, but it seemed easier. I hope you feel better now?"

Annoyingly, he does. Both less painful and more awake. "That's the last time I accept something from you, Garak."

Garak sits down in the seat next to him. "Don't be silly. I gave you something for the pain. It just had a bit extra in it."

It's been a very long time since Julius was in a plane, and the view out of the window is almost hypnotic. His mouth feels gritty. "Will you tell me now where we're going? No more—jokes, or obfuscations."

"My dear Julius, I can't imagine to what you're referring. I plan to be entirely forthcoming from this point on."

"Garak, do you recall the story of the boy who cried wolf?" The inside of the plane is bright with noon sun, and he and Garak seem to be the only ones there. There's a smile, somewhere deep in the mélange of curiosity and frustration roiling inside of Julius, and he tries to suppress it.

Garak raises an eyebrow. "The boy cried wolf, the villagers came running, the boy did it several more times, and eventually the villagers stopped coming?"

"And when a wolf did come, the boy and his flock were gobbled up." Julius's father always did a scary voice when he told that part.

"A bit graphic, I've always thought, but then most fairytales are. The point?"

Julius looks out the window at the dark forests far below. "If you lie all the time, no one will believe you, even when you tell the truth."

"Are you sure that's the point?"

When he looks back at Garak, the man is wearing a ridiculously puzzled expression, as though he really doesn't understand. "What else could it be?"

"Never tell the same lie twice, of course."

Julius shakes his head. "It wouldn't have mattered if he'd lied about other things. Eventually, the villagers would have realized he couldn't be trusted."

Garak shakes his head too, and he's abruptly limned in light as the clouds clear on the other side of the plane. "We'll have to agree to disagree, my dear." He shifts a little to the side and the sun is blinding in Julius's eyes. "Would you like to hear my favorite story?"

"I shudder to imagine." He blinks his eyes shut and the sunlight turns the insides of his eyelids red.

"There was a scorpion that wished to cross a river, but it couldn't swim. It asked the turtle to carry it across the river. The turtle agreed. Halfway across the river, the scorpion tried to sting the turtle, but its stinger couldn't penetrate the turtle's shell. On the other side, the turtle asked why the scorpion had tried to sting him, when they were old friends and it knew that its stinger wouldn't strike true. The scorpion apologized and told him, 'It's in my nature.'" Garak sounds very satisfied with this story. "In some versions, the turtle drowns the scorpion to teach it a lesson, but I prefer this one."

"I've always heard the story as the scorpion and the frog," Julius says. The heat of the sunlight has passed. He opens his eyes to see Garak watching him. "The scorpion stings the frog and they both drown."

"Well, that's absurd," Garak says. "Why would the frog agree to carry the scorpion across the river?"

"I suppose it believed the scorpion when it promised not to sting."

Garak shakes his head. "That's ridiculous. And why would the scorpion ask the frog for help, knowing that it would have to sting and they would both drown? Was it deceived in its own nature that badly?"

"It's a *fable*, Garak."

"Yes, but the lesson doesn't follow unless the story makes sense. My version makes much more sense."

“I suppose the moral of your story is that a scorpion should find friends with thick shells.”

“Precisely,” Garak says.

“That doesn’t surprise me,” Julius mutters.

Garak brightens. “A scorpion could kill a wolf.”

“A scorpion could kill a boy too.” Julius is losing track of the metaphor’s direction. “How long until we land?”

“Hours,” Garak says. He leans in and bumps his shoulder against Julius’s. “We’re going to California. The Mojave Desert. Eventually.”

Julius can’t help leaning against Garak too. When he turns his head to speak, Garak’s face is too close, bright blue eyes fringed with dark eyelashes that Julius can almost imagine he feels brush against his skin. “What’s in the Mojave Desert?”

“The future,” Garak says. He puts a finger to Julius’s lips before he can protest and clarifies, “Specifically, the Air Force Test Pilot School.”

“What do you mean, eventually?” Julius speaks the words against the warm shape of Garak’s finger, and he blames the after-effects of whatever drug Garak gave him for the fact that he wants to suck the tip of that finger into his mouth, just to see what Garak will do.

“This plane isn’t exactly up to transcontinental flight,” Garak says. He hasn’t taken his finger away. “We’ll have to—make a few stops.”

“Carefully chosen, I’m sure.” Garak shows no inclination toward moving his finger, so Julius snakes his hand out to grasp Garak’s wrist. He can feel a steady pulse there, but it quickens under his thumb. “Garak,” he says, and he’s suddenly breathless.

Garak’s gaze has dropped to his mouth. He drags his finger slowly down Julius’s lips, until it rests on Julius’s lower lip, and then Julius can’t resist darting his tongue out. Garak jerks his finger back as though he’s burned it, pulling out of Julius’s grasp. He stands, and then falls back into his seat as the plane pitches sharply. He grabs the radio and says, “Hikaru? What was that?”

“There’s some bad weather coming,” the pilot says. “You should hold on.”

Chapter End Notes

Garak's version is a Persian fable. Julius's version is the Russian fable.

Chapter 16

Chapter Summary

“I think I’ve proven myself,” he says, even as he thinks that perhaps he should have pretended to shoot poorly, just to keep Garak close to him for another few minutes. But Garak wouldn’t have believed that.

“Yes.” Garak eases back, enough that Julius can turn to face him. They’re a little too close—aren’t they always?—and he can see Garak’s breath. “I suppose I should have known you would be—”

“Perfect?” Julius smiles, a little cocky, as he says it. “Just as they made me.”

Like all of Garak’s honest expressions, the frown is fleeting. He straightens Julius’s collar unnecessarily and smiles back. “My dear Julius, if there’s one thing I’ve learned, there’s always room for improvement.”

The plane shudders terribly. “Strap in,” the pilot—Hikaru—says over the radio, and Julius obediently finds the straps to the safety harness. He finds Garak watching him, and only when he’s safely strapped does Garak attend to his own. There’s a very long dropping sensation, in which his stomach tries to escape his body through his throat, and then they slam back into some solid trajectory. Julius doesn’t know exactly how long it goes on like that, until Hikaru says, “We’re coming in for a landing” and all of a sudden the wheels hit something and they’re on blessedly solid ground.

The snow is falling thickly, the wind howling. Hikaru must have known about this place, this tiny airstrip with a few houses next to it, because Julius can’t fathom finding it in such weather. “Come on,” Garak calls in his ear. “You should get inside. I need to help Hikaru.”

In normal times, Julius would be inclined to argue, but Garak pushes him firmly in the direction of the closest house and the snow is almost blinding, stinging his nose. Garak has already turned back to the plane, his shape a little blurry as he bends to put a block in front of the wheel, and it seems like the better part of valor just to get inside. The nearest house is unlocked, frigid and dark inside. It’s little more than a single room with a few cots and a door that leads to—Julius fervently hopes—an indoor bathroom. There’s a wood stove on the far wall, a stack of dry wood next to it, and Julius sets to work building a fire. He’s shivering badly, his New York City office wear no match for whatever hellish place they’ve landed. After he gets the stove going, he finds a kettle, fills it from the creaking tap, and sets it atop the stove. Then he indulges himself and huddles as close to the warmth as he can get. His broken nose is almost throbbing now, the relief of Garak’s miracle drug ebbing.

Garak and Hikaru burst in through the door, snow clinging to their clothes, and Julius shivers again at the gust of cold. They begin to divest themselves of hats, scarves, gloves, coats, and what seems like several inches of snow. Both men are flushed with the incipient warmth of the house. “Julius!” Garak’s eyes are bright from the cold. He nods at the kettle. “The consummate Englishman, of course.”

“It’s nice to meet my kidnappee,” Hikaru says. He steps forward and offers a hand to Julius to shake. Julius takes it. Hikaru can’t be more than twenty-two, which makes Julius feel very old. “Sorry about the unexpected landing. The weather came up out of nowhere and the plane was starting to—give a little too much.”

“Hikaru is usually a very good pilot,” Garak assures Julius. From the exasperated look that Hikaru throws him, Julius gets the sense that they’re used to friendly jibes. “Despite our unscheduled visit to Ohio.”

“It’s very cold,” Julius says stupidly. He’s never been anywhere in the United States but New York City.

The kettle is beginning to boil. Garak must know this house well, because he’s pulling mugs out of a cupboard. “Yes, it’s a terrible place,” he agrees. “Barely inhabitable. Tundra and blizzards half the year, and the rest of the year there are lightning bugs the size of your fist, flying every which way out of tornadoes.” He sets the mugs on the very narrow wooden counter. “Hikaru, is there anything to put in the hot water?”

“Instant coffee or Swiss Miss,” Hikaru says. Garak grimaces. “You’re welcome to resupply anytime you’d like.”

Garak digs around in one of the drawers and emerges with a jar of Swiss Miss and a single teabag. Julius grips the kettle by its very hot wooden handle and brings it over, and Garak presents him with the teabag in a mug, almost proudly. Julius shudders internally to imagine how flavorless it must be by now, but he fills the mug with hot water and thinks he can smell at least a hint of Earl Grey. He pours water into the other two cups for Garak and Hikaru to prepare as they see fit.

There are no chairs and no table in the house—Julius supposes he should count himself lucky that there’s running water. They end up sitting cross-legged at the base of the wood stove, sipping their drinks and staring at the fire. “Hikaru, I don’t suppose you’ll tell me how you know Garak?”

Hikaru laughs. “He’s very secretive, isn’t he. My father was an interpreter during the war. He brought us to Minnesota with him for his training at the Language School to keep us—safe.” Julius sees the shadow cross his face. “When he came home from the war, sometimes he would tell outrageous stories about the things he and his friend Garak had done. We thought he was making them up until a few years later, when we moved back to California and Garak showed up.” It doesn’t escape Julius’s notice that Hikaru has answered his question without revealing anything meaningful about Garak or himself. “What about you?”

“Garak stole my jacket,” Julius says.

Garak turns to him with a look of outrage. “I most certainly did not!”

“He—*lured* me into his shop and he insisted that he would tailor my jacket if I gave it to him. I don’t have that jacket back, Garak.”

“My dear Julius!” Garak’s continued outrage is spoiled by his slight hot cocoa mustache. “Really, I *lured* you? By leaving my radio on?”

The heat surging through Julius has very little to do with the tea or the wood stove. “Yes!” He can hear Hikaru’s slight choked laugh. “It was very clearly a lure. And then you appropriated my jacket for alleged alteration and never returned it.” He frowns. “I’m beginning to think you lost it.”

“Julius,” Garak says, and his gaze is entirely earnest. “I most certainly did not. When we return to New York, I will make your jacket my very first priority. Rather than unpacking, or cooking us a nourishing meal, I will go directly to my tailor shop—”

God, his eyes. “I’ll hold you to that,” Julius says. He yawns widely and winces. “Blast.”

“Here.” Garak digs around in his trouser pocket with some difficulty and withdraws a small metal tin. He passes it to Julius. “Take one.”

“Is this what you gave me before?” Julius lets his fingertips linger against Garak’s as he accepts the tin. “Tell me the truth.”

Garak doesn’t quite release the tin. “Yes,” he says.

“I don’t want to pass out again,” Julius protests.

“Hikaru is going to go see if he can find some food in one of the other houses. Take it after we eat. When the weather dies down, we’re leaving.” Garak lets go of the tin and Julius regrets the loss of contact. They’re certainly not going to be sleeping in the same bed tonight.

Dinner is long thin noodles cooked in a defrosted block of beef stock. They drag three of the cots closer to the wood stove, draping themselves in wool blankets that smell very strongly of horse. Garak pushes his cot right up next to Julius’s and lays the blanket over Julius before lying down himself. Julius rolls to face him and discovers that Garak’s face is so close that he goes cross-eyed trying to look at him. In some ways, it’s better than sleeping in the same bed—it feels almost safe to be this close. “Is this everything you envisioned?” Garak asks.

“Oh yes, everything.” Julius keeps his voice very soft. “I certainly didn’t imagine we would be staying at a fancy hotel under assumed names, or anything of that sort. I certainly envisioned sleeping on a cot in a blizzard under a horse blanket.” He can’t keep the smile from sneaking out. Garak probably can’t see it.

“Happy to oblige,” Garak says.

* * * * *

They don’t leave when the storm clears. In the morning, it’s sunny and brutally cold and Hikaru says, “The plane was damaged by the weather,” as he hands out mugs of instant coffee. Julius regrets his harsh judgment of the Earl Grey last night. “It’ll take me a day to repair it. If the weather holds, we’ll fly out tomorrow morning.”

Garak, for some reason, takes it into his head that this is the perfect time to teach Julius how to shoot. He drags Julius out to a snow-covered pasture and leans a piece of wood marked with a bullseye against a stack of hay bales. They walk across the pasture to just outside the fence, and Garak offers Julius a pistol. “This is an important skill,” he insists.

Julius stifles a slight laugh. “I know how to shoot a gun, Garak.” He accepts the pistol from Garak and tests the weight a little in his right hand. Funny, how quickly it feels familiar again.

“Shooting to Army standard more than a decade ago is a little different from shooting accurately when it matters most,” Garak says. “Now, stand properly.” He doesn’t even give Julius time to move before he’s adjusting the position of his shoulders, nudging his feet a little further apart. Garak keeps one hand on Julius’s left hip and steadies his right arm, and his chest is warm against Julius’s back, his breath warm in Julius’s ear. “There.”

Garak’s physical presence is more distracting than any loud noise or flashing light could be. Still, Julius has been a perfect shot since the War Office finished with him. He fires three times, through the center of the bullseye. “Is that satisfactory?”

“I only see one bullet hole.” Garak’s lips almost brush his ear as he speaks, and damn him, Julius shivers at that. It’s cold out, he tells himself. It’s started snowing lightly again. There are snowflakes melting in his eyelashes. Shivering is reasonable.

“You know that’s because I hit the same place thrice over.” Julius’s hand is getting very cold on the grip. He hasn’t worn gloves because he didn’t think they would be out here for so long. Garak puts his own hand around Julius’s and the warmth is a shock. “Are you satisfied?”

“Finish the clip,” Garak says. He releases Julius’s hand and it feels like he presses a little closer, even through their overcoats.

Julius uses the remaining five bullets to form a very tight star shape, just encircling the first bullet hole. He’s comfortable with the recoil, but Garak’s hand tightens a little on his shoulder with every shot. When the clip is empty, Julius lowers the gun. “I think I’ve proven myself,” he says, even as he thinks that perhaps he should have pretended to do poorly, just to keep Garak close to him for another few minutes. But Garak wouldn’t have believed that.

“Yes.” Garak eases back, enough that Julius can turn to face him. They’re a little too close—aren’t they always?—and he can see Garak’s breath. “I suppose I should have known you would be—”

“Perfect?” Julius smiles, a little cocky, as he says it. “Just as they made me.”

Like all of Garak’s honest expressions, the frown is fleeting. He straightens Julius’s collar unnecessarily and smiles back. “My dear Julius, if there’s one thing I’ve learned, there’s always room for improvement.”

* * * * *

The dream that night is—vivid. Garak is testing his shooting again, but it isn't snowing and they aren't wearing coats. Instead of a hand on his hip, Garak has one firm hand on his abdomen, just about the waist of his trousers. "Breathe steadily as you aim," Garak says, and his lips brush the shell of Julius's ear.

"You know I can shoot straight whether or not you try to distract me," Julius tells him.

"Oh?" Garak's hand slides down his abdomen, to the button of his trousers, and flicks it open easily. "Prove it." He drops his other hand from Julius's shoulder to the small of his back.

Julius inhales deeply and fires the first shot. It doesn't matter how distracted he is, he knows where the target is and he knows how to reach it. "See?"

"Hmm." Garak keeps one hand just inside the front of his trousers, cupped slightly. His other hand, though, slips down from the small of Julius's back and beneath his waistband. Garak strokes two fingers further down, between his cheeks, and Julius chokes back the needy little noise that tries to escape his throat. "You're not distracted?"

He fires another shot, through the hole that the first bullet left. Garak laughs a little, a low noise that rumbles against Julius's back. Garak's fingers slide lower, until they're teasing back and forth over Julius's rim, and they're slick and slow and Julius drags in a long breath. His head lolls back for a moment before he catches himself. "Not at all," he says, and he can hear how wrecked his voice sounds.

"Not at all?" Garak pushes just the tip of one finger inside, holding Julius in place with his other hand.

Julius shoots twice more. "You'll need to do m—" Garak slides his finger in fully, drags it out slowly as the moan escapes Julius's throat. He does it again, unhurried, even as Julius shudders at the overwhelming feeling of it. It's been so long— "Are you—" There are four bullets left—will Garak stop when he's fired all of them?

He doesn't know how long they've stood like that, all his attention focused on the slick slide, before Garak says, "Is this all it takes to render you—vulnerable?"

Julius drags in a long shuddery breath and fires again. He's off by perhaps half a centimeter this time, and that's when Garak pushes a second finger into him. He can't stop another moan, a little louder this time, and he arches back against Garak a little. "I can still," he says, and he may not be able to string words together, but his hand-eye coordination is still strong. He empties the clip as Garak pumps his fingers in and out, faster now, and his whole body is singing but his accuracy hasn't decreased. He drops the gun and pushes back onto Garak's fingers and he *wants* this, wants Garak to open him up and fuck him—

He wakes up hard in the gray predawn light. Garak, in the cot next to him, starts awake. "What's wrong?" he asks. For a moment, Julius is horrified at the idea that Garak *noticed*, but then realizes that he's talking to Hikaru standing in the doorway.

"The weather is clear and the plane is ready," Hikaru says. "Let's get out of here before it starts snowing again."

Chapter 17

Chapter Summary

Julius eyes the top bunk. It looks even more cramped than the bottom one. “Do you really think something is going to happen? That we’re in danger on this train?”

“I’m sure there’s some kind of appropriate parable about the lion that falls asleep and is strangled by a snake, or something like that,” Garak says. “Go on, climb up.”

Julius clammers awkwardly up into the top bunk. He can’t sit up fully, and there is a very short guardrail to keep him from rolling down and breaking his neck. When he wriggles awkwardly to the edge, he finds that Garak’s face is level with his own. “If anyone breaks in, don’t hit them with the typewriter,” he tells Garak.

Garak’s lips curve into a smile. “I promise to shoot them instead.”

Julius manages to make and drink two full cups of instant coffee—and make another two for Garak and Hikaru—before he’s shepherded toward the plane. “Leave it,” Hikaru tells him, when he goes to fold the horse blankets. “Just make sure the stove is out.”

Julius dumps the remains of the hot water over the coals and sets the kettle atop the stove. “Where are we going now?”

Garak drapes his own scarf around Julius’s neck in what feels like an almost proprietary gesture and herds him out the door. It’s very cold and clear out, the sun still below the horizon. “New Mexico. But we’re flying to Chicago.”

Garak’s scarf is very soft, once Julius plucks a small bit of straw out of it. Garak must be very distracted to have overlooked it. He sits in the plane seat and adjusts a little gingerly. His body isn’t used to sleeping in a narrow cot, though at least he hasn’t had more dreams. “I don’t suppose you would tell me why.”

Hikaru laughs and goes to the cockpit. Garak turns an innocent smile on Julius as he sits in the next seat. “You seem to be laboring under the misimpression that I keep you in the dark for my own amusement.”

God, how tempted Julius is to kiss him and damn the consequences. “All right then, Garak. Why are we flying to Chicago?”

“The military keeps somewhat—tight security in certain airspace.”

“Such as New Mexico?”

“Certain parts.”

Julius feels his stomach swoop as the plane’s engine starts. “Parts that we’re visiting?”

“Uncertain,” Garak says, and Julius frowns at him. “I don’t know yet, Julius. I’m not—entirely in control of our destiny.” He sounds a little peevish.

“How are we getting from Chicago to New Mexico, then? Never tell me we’re driving.” Julius imagines that Garak must be a menace when he drives.

“No.” Garak stretches languidly and then drapes one arm around Julius’s shoulders. Julius would call it one of the least subtle things he’s ever seen if he thought that Garak meant anything by it. “Much as I would enjoy traveling Route 66 with you—” and he does look a little regretful “—we will be going by train. I’m told it’s quite comfortable, actually.”

Julius raises a doubtful eyebrow. “In my experience, traveling by railcar is hardly comfortable.”

“My dear Julius. A troop transport is hardly the same as a sleeping car on the *Super Chief* line. I’m told.” Garak brings his arm back to his side. “You are welcome to exact your revenge if I’m wrong.”

“Far be it from me to question your sources,” Julius says. Garak has occupied the armrest between them, and Julius wedges his own arm halfway onto it as well. Garak’s forearm is warm and vital against his own. Julius bumps their knuckles together. “I don’t suppose there’s a typewriter on the train.”

Garak doesn’t move his hand. “I’m sure that can be accomplished. Feeling inspired?”

“You never know,” Julius says.

* * * * *

The *Super Chief* line is materially better than the railcars he rode during the war, Julius has to admit. The roomette, as the porter calls it, contains two padded bench seats facing each other, and the porter demonstrates the way that they slide together to form the lower bunk and the way that the top bunk releases down from the wall. It will be—cozy, perhaps excessively so, but it’s clean and warm and there’s a shower compartment just down the hallway. “Garak, I’m desperate for a shower,” he says, once they’ve settled into their respective seats. Garak has stretched his legs out and his ankles bump against Julius’s. “I’ll be back shortly.”

Garak puts a hand on his wrist as Julius rummages through his suitcase for fresh underclothes. “Be careful,” he warns.

“I’ll endeavor not to slip and break my neck,” Julius says. “If I am kidnapped out of the shower, I will most certainly blame you.” Garak looks so peeved that Julius almost laughs. “As you may recall, Garak, I have exceptional situational awareness—”

“You managed to get yourself snatched off the street,” Garak grumbles. “Not so exceptional, I think.”

“I was exceptionally *aware* of what was happening, thank you very much.” He pulls his wrist gently out of Garak’s grasp and settles his bundle of clothing securely in his towel to carry. Garak’s concern becomes even more laughable when he passes a roomette a few down from theirs that contains Messrs. Reed and Tucker. Reed meets his eyes and immediately looks down at the magazine propped in his lap. Tucker appears to be happily disassembling (reassembling?) a typewriter. A small hysterical laugh tries to struggle its way out of his throat, but he stifles it and continues to the shower compartment.

The experience of taking a shower while traveling sideways at fifty miles per hour is a strange and somewhat unsettling one, but it’s glorious to wash off the grime of the past few days. It takes several passes with a good deal of soap, but the water is running clear down the drain when he finishes. Clean clothes are another revelation, the soft fabric settling against his skin, and even a cotton undershirt feels almost—sensuous. A ridiculous thought.

On his way back, he sees that Tucker is now replacing the typewriter ribbon and Reed has moved on from the magazine to staring so fixedly at the pages of a novel that Julius is confident that he isn’t reading it. When Julius returns to their roomette, Garak slides the compartment door shut decisively. He inhales deeply. “You look,” he starts, and then stops. It’s strange—Lord knows Garak has seen him fresh out of the shower before. Still, Julius runs his fingers through his wet hair a little self-consciously. The train-provided shampoo has a faint kind of citrus scent, not altogether unpleasant.

He sits back into the chair and stretches his own legs out, knocking his ankles against Garak’s. “I recommend the shower,” he says. “Quite the scenery along the way, too.”

“You do look less disreputable,” Garak says. “I should you think you’d be tired of seeing snow by now, though.”

“Oh, I mean the—people-watching. You can’t imagine who I saw while walking down the corridor.”

Garak’s eyes widen. The afternoon sunlight on the snow outside is really quite extraordinary. “I’ve heard rumors that there are often celebrities on this train line,” he says. “Who was it? Never tell me it was—” he lowers his voice “—*Elvis*?”

“Garak. You know very well that the Army has him now.” Julius refuses to let Garak distract him. “Even stranger than Elvis. I could swear that I saw Mr. Reed and Mr. Tucker a few compartments down from us, and they seemed to be fixing a typewriter.”

“Mr. Tucker is very mechanically inclined,” Garak says. “I would imagine he’d be up to the task of fixing a typewriter.”

“Yes, I don’t doubt his skill at typewriter repair. The question is why he’s doing it *here*.”

“You said you wanted a typewriter.” Garak looks entirely innocent as the trees flash past, casting very brief shadows on his face.

“I said—Garak!” He can’t tell if he’s feeling fond exasperation or exasperated fondness. “That was a joke! Never tell me that you brought them both here just to bring me a *typewriter* from New York.”

“Nonsense,” Garak says. “I believe they located this one in a junk shop in Chicago, thus its condition. I do hope you’re not disappointed.”

“Disappointed.” Maybe he should accept this quasi-hysteria as the normal state of affairs at this point.

“With a secondhand typewriter, of course. I know I’ve caused you a terrible inconvenience—”

“What, getting me kidnapped and beaten, then drugging me and putting me on a tiny plane that nearly crashed in Ohio, then nearly freezing to death?” His voice is getting a little high-pitched. “That inconvenience—”

“Now, Julius.” Garak sits up straighter. “Don’t pretend that you were happy before, or at least anything more than complacently dull. Kay decided it was time to look for—more, and you finally did too. I do apologize for the—unfortunate mistreatment by the late unlamented Detective Ryan, but do us both the favor of dispensing with any—pretense that you’d like to be back sitting alone in your apartment in New York, writing the story you’ve been told to write every month and wondering if this is all you’ll have for the rest of your life.”

“I like to write,” Julius says, because Garak isn’t wrong about any of it and he’s not quite ready to admit that.

“And I got you a typewriter,” Garak tells him, as a porter knocks at the door. “Yes?”

“I was asked to bring this to you,” the man says. He hefts a typewriter case.

Julius accepts the case as Garak folds down the center table so that Julius can put it down. The case is square and black, with brass latches and a lock that has—rather charmingly—a small key sticking out of it. Julius carefully unlocks it and palms the key. He opens the case to find something really quite beautiful inside. It’s an old Corona typewriter, glossy black, with each separate key polished bright. It would be very expensive, in this condition. He runs one finger gently over the Floating Shift key. “I suppose you did get me a typewriter,” he says finally.

“I hope it meets your—needs.” Garak is watching his fingers on the keys. “I believe there is paper as well.”

“Thank you. For the typewriter,” Julius clarifies. It feels like a small point in his column. “I don’t think I’ll write—right now.” That would feel very intimate, to sit in this small compartment with Garak just there. Very different than the *Incredible Tales* office, even, where Herbert was always looking over his shoulder.

“All right,” Garak says, though he looks almost disappointed. “I should think they’ll be calling us for dinner shortly anyway.”

* * * * *

After dinner, the porter comes around to set up the bunks for them. “You should take the top bunk,” Garak says. “If I’m on the bottom, I’ll be more able to—respond. To anything that might happen.”

Julius eyes the top bunk. It looks even more cramped than the bottom one. “Do you really think something is *going* to happen? That we’re in danger on this train?”

“I’m sure there’s some kind of appropriate parable about the lion that falls asleep and is strangled by a snake, or something like that,” Garak says. “Go on, climb up.”

Julius clammers awkwardly up into the top bunk. He can’t sit up fully, and there is a very short guardrail to keep him from rolling down and breaking his neck. When he wriggles awkwardly to the edge, he finds that Garak’s face is level with his own. “If anyone breaks in, don’t hit them with the typewriter,” he tells Garak.

Garak’s lips curve into a smile. “I promise to shoot them instead.” Julius can feel his breath. Garak hesitates for a moment, as though he wants to lean a little further forward, but instead he just says, “Sleep well, my dear Julius,” and that *dear* feels like it means a little something more than an affectation this time. Garak steps back and settles down out of view.

“Good night,” Julius says. Garak exhales a long breath and switches off the light.

Julius falls asleep surprisingly easily, even with the motion of the train and the risk of death by falling from the bunk. He wakes suddenly in darkness and realizes that there’s someone looming in front of him—but even as his adrenaline kicks in, his eyes recognize the shape of Garak. Julius leans over the edge a little and whispers, “Garak?”

“Just someone trying to come into the wrong room,” Garak says softly.

“And you didn’t even shoot them.”

He sees Garak turn in the darkness and walk the few inches over to him. “I didn’t,” Garak says, and the humor that Julius would expect is missing from his voice.

Julius reaches his arm out in some kind of attempt at—comfort? His hand lands on the side of Garak’s neck. The skin is warm and a little scratchy with stubble, and he can feel Garak’s pulse pounding. “Garak—”

Garak cups his cheek almost cautiously. He leans in carefully, slowly, and then between one breathless second and another, he presses his lips to Julius’s.

Chapter 18

Chapter Summary

When he wakes up in the morning, there's a dreadful moment when he thinks that maybe it was all a dream. But when he climbs down from his bunk, Garak looks up from his seat and smiles and Julius sees the faintest mark on his neck, just where Julius—so it was real, then. "Good morning," Garak says with his usual innocent cheer. "Did you sleep well?"

He can't help the little gasp that escapes his lips when Garak kisses him, and Garak starts to pull back. Julius tugs him back with that hand on Garak's neck and fits their lips together again. Heat shoots through him as Garak *opens* to him, finds Julius's tongue with his own. Julius pulls Garak closer, ignores the twinge from broken nose and the way the safety rail pokes into his chest, loses himself in the sensation of Garak's mouth. Garak tastes faintly of the after-dinner mints and Julius chases that taste until Garak breaks away to draw breath. Julius strokes his fingers against the skin of Garak's neck and leans forward just a little, just enough to catch Garak's lower lip between his teeth. Garak's hand tightens on his shoulder almost convulsively, the slightest noise escaping the back of his throat. He pulls Julius a little closer and kisses him again, a little rougher this time. He keeps hold of Julius's shoulder and threads the fingers of his other hand through Julius's hair, grips just enough to tilt his head as Garak wants it. Garak kisses like he's searching for something, like Julius is a puzzle he hasn't already figured out.

Julius is half over the side of the safety rail now and he wants to be down there in Garak's bunk, wants Garak pressed next to him even in the tight confines of the train compartment. Garak is holding half his weight as they kiss, keeping Julius from falling out of the bunk, and he barely separates long enough to breathe, tugging Julius's hair in a way that makes Julius bite his lip again, and this time Garak does groan louder.

Julius feels the vibration in his own throat and says, "Shhh." It's the first thing either of them has said. Garak pulls back a little, just enough that Julius can see his eyes, and his pupils are huge in the darkness. "Of all the places you could choose," Julius says. He doesn't want to let Garak go.

"The curtain is closed." Garak's voice is like velvet. "As is the door."

"Let me come down there, then." He can imagine it vividly, the way Garak will hold him—

"That, my dear Julius, would lead to something *very* inappropriate for the train," and the shiver runs down his spine at what Garak means.

Julius leans back in a little, until he can feel Garak's quick breaths on his face. "We could be quiet," Julius offers. He lowers his head to Garak's neck and presses a hot sucking kiss to his neck until he can hear Garak struggling not to groan again, then covers his mouth a little awkwardly.

Garak laughs quietly, a little breathlessly, and sucks one of Julius's fingers into his mouth for a moment. When he releases it, he says, "No. I want to *hear* you," and that goes straight to Julius's cock, leaves him shifting uncomfortably in his bunk. "And it would leave us—too vulnerable.

Julius traces the shape of Garak's lips with his fingers and leaves a series of bites down his neck, careful not to leave a mark. He loves the way that he can feel Garak's pulse jumping. "Your choice of location leaves something to be desired." He's nearly falling out of the bunk now, and he pulls back enough that he can brush his lips across the shell of Garak's ear.

"Yes," Garak says, and he sounds—perturbed. "I regret it. The choice of location." He eases Julius back into the bunk, but follows partway, until he must be standing on his own bunk to be able to reach this far, to lay Julius's head on the pillow and kiss him again.

"And we're—just supposed to go back to sleep now?" The thought is agonizing. He shifts again.

"Yes," Garak says again, and kisses him in a way that feels like it should be final, but Garak keeps coming back, says "Good night" and then puts one hand over Julius's pounding heart and licks into his mouth, and then says "Good night" again. His voice is raspy.

"Good night," Julius says, when Garak has stepped back down and disappeared into the darkness of his own bunk. He puts his hand on his cock, as though the pressure will help somehow. Below him, he hears cloth rustling and imagines that Garak is doing the same, that he's stroking himself slowly. "I would very much like to see your face," Julius admits, barely more than a whisper.

"I know," and it sounds like *so would I*, especially the little hitch in Garak's voice and the way his breathing is growing heavy.

Julius spent six years in the Army in crowded barracks, he knows what this sounds like, and he'd wager Garak does too. His hand speeds up, thinking of the way Garak kissed him, the way Garak said *I want to hear you*, and he finds himself saying "I want to hear you," and Garak makes a choked-off kind of noise that only makes him harder. It doesn't take long after that, not when he can hear Garak getting closer too, and then he says "*Garak*" and hears a longer, louder groan that tips him over the edge too. He falls asleep quickly after that.

* * * * *

When he wakes up in the morning, there's a dreadful moment when he thinks that maybe it was all a dream. But when he climbs down from his bunk, Garak looks up from his seat and smiles and Julius sees the faintest mark on his neck, just where Julius—so it was real, then. "Good morning," Garak says with his usual innocent cheer. "Did you sleep well?"

How Julius wants to kiss him, now that he knows it's allowed. "I believe I could have slept better," he says, and throws caution to the winds

and leans down to kiss Garak. There's an abrupt knock at the compartment door and Julius leaps back, narrowly avoiding whacking his head on the upper bunk. He pulls the curtain open and cracks the compartment door. "Yes?"

The train attendant looks singularly unimpressed by his pyjamas. "The dining car is now open for breakfast, sir."

"Of course, thank you." Julius closes the compartment door and lets the curtain fall back into place.

Garak meets his eyes a little ruefully. "You should dress for breakfast." Garak, of course, is already dressed. Julius half-thinks that he never changed at all.

"Of course," he says again. He unbuttons his pyjama shirt slowly and folds it, then strips off his pants as well, facing Garak the entire time. Garak is watching him with frank interest, gaze keen on everything movement, and the hair on Julian's arms prickles. "Pass me a pair of trousers, will you?"

Garak pulls the trousers out of Julius's suitcase, but instead of handing them across to Julius, he closes the space between them and noses at the corner of Julius's jaw before pinning Julius against the wall with his body. "Would the shack in Ohio have been better?" He says it against Julius's neck.

Julius tips his head back a little to encourage him, even though he knows he shouldn't. "Garak, we *shared an apartment*." He's very aware of Garak's body through the thin fabric of his briefs.

"That was—different." Garak is mouthing down the line of Julius's throat when someone else knocks at the door. Julius scrambles to pull on the trousers before Garak opens the door. He's fairly sure that Garak is wearing a gun.

Chapter 19

Chapter Summary

Garak is watching him and Julius says, “It sounds as though you’re telling me that we have at least eighteen hours in this motel room with nothing in particular to do.”

Garak’s blue eyes focus sharply and this time when he smiles, Julius sees teeth. “You make an excellent point, my dear Julius.”

It’s only Tucker and Reed, a boyish grin painted wide across Tucker’s face at the sight of them. “Good morning!” Tucker says.

Reed, behind him, looks exasperated. “They’re serving breakfast,” he says in his clipped voice.

“Yes, the attendant told us,” Julius says. His body is still tingling, but at least he has trousers on now. He picks up last night’s shirt and buttons it. “I didn’t realize we had to be so punctual.”

“We don’t.” Garak isn’t quite glaring, but he doesn’t look thrilled to see them. “I can only assume you gentlemen have stopped by because you lack the ability to entertain yourselves?”

“How’s the typewriter? Have you tried her yet?”

Tucker looks so eager that Julius is almost tempted to lie. “I haven’t written anything, but it’s a lovely machine,” he says. He feels a change in the train’s movement and looks out the window. “Why are we slowing down? I didn’t think we’d reached the next stop yet.”

Reed shakes his head. “There have been—engine troubles. They’re going to bring in a new locomotive, but we’ll be running slower until they do.”

“I see,” Garak says, and Julius does too. They’re here because any deviation is suspect; anything out of the ordinary could mean danger. “In that case, we’ll proceed to breakfast.”

Last night, he and Garak were seated at a table with an elderly couple from Wisconsin who’d had a great deal to say about themselves and not much interest in anything else. This morning, they walk in with Tucker and Reed and are seated together. The waiter brings them cups of coffee and glasses of orange juice and hearty omelettes with buttery white toast. Reed isn’t much of a conversationalist, but Julius sees the way that he and Tucker hold themselves, with the careful awareness that bespeaks a concealed weapon. Garak is beyond distracting next to him, his thigh pressed against Julius’s under the table. He doesn’t do anything more than that, and Julius has the sense not to do anything either, not here in this very public space.

They’re passing between the dining car and the sleeper car when Julius feels the explosion coming—a split-second before anyone else—and he shouts, “Down!” He pushes Garak bodily through the door into the next car, away from the roaring noise and the shattering glass. The entire train shudders, and for an instant Julius thinks it’s going to jump the tracks—but instead the train stops with the dreadful shriek of metal.

Garak looks up at him with the slightest bit of wonder. Then he catches his balance, stands, and says, “Get to our compartment, and be ready to leave as soon as I say it’s safe. Tucker, Reed, with me.” Then the three of them are pushing their way back into the dining car before Julius can protest.

He’s on tenterhooks in the compartment, waiting. A train attendant hurries down the corridor and Julius asks, “Excuse me, what happened? I heard a terrible explosion!” He leans into the persona of the fussy Englishman to ensure that he gets *some* kind of response.

“Nothing to worry about,” the attendant says, and Julius doesn’t envy him the job of trying to lie to everyone on this train. “An accident in the kitchen. It caused an explosion, but no one was injured. Please stay in your compartment, sir.”

There is, of course, no point in telling the attendant that Julius has been present for more than his share of explosions, that he knows in his bones what they feel like, and that *that* one was no kitchen accident unless it was assisted with a little extra dynamite. “I’m so glad to hear that,” he says. Their suitcases and his typewriter case are packed and arranged just out of sight, ready for what Julius suspects will be a rapid departure from the train when Garak returns.

He returns alone, mouth tight. “We’re getting off the train,” he says. “There’s a small town about a mile away. I don’t want to wait around here.”

“Tucker and Reed?”

“Doing what I need them to do,” Garak says shortly. “Come on.”

There’s enough general hubbub around the train—a lot of men inspecting the tracks and quite a few more looking at the large hole in the side of the dining car—that it’s easy for them to slip away. Even with two suitcases and a typewriter case. The landscape is wide and barren, scrubby little bushes and looming cacti, and it’s so cold that Julius’s hands go numb quickly. Garak takes the typewriter case from him as they walk swiftly. Every bit of Julius’s awareness is focused on the space around them, on whether someone might be sneaking up on them, even whether someone might be aiming a sniper rifle at them right now. Hyperarousal, he remembers the doctors saying. A likely side effect of the treatment, and were they ever right.

The expected attack never comes. They find a motel on the outskirts of the nameless town. It's small and dingy, the curtains on their single window stiff with disuse. Garak pulls them firmly shut. The room is very cold, here in the high desert, and Julius fiddles with the wall heater while Garak tests the strength of the locks. "What exactly are we expecting?" Julius finally asks. "You seem to be preparing for a siege."

Garak laughs a little sourly. "Most likely nothing," he admits. "But after the business with the locomotive, and the dining car explosion—it seemed prudent to alter the plan. We'll stay a night here and determine the best way forward after that."

"If you say so." Julius hasn't yet brought himself to ask what the purpose of their New Mexico stop will be—Los Alamos seems likeliest, though that's frankly also the most frightening. Maybe he doesn't want to know.

"You know the quickest route out?" At Julius's raised eyebrow, Garak smiles. "Of course. I suppose you could tell me what the motel clerk's name was and whether he was right- or left-handed."

"Peter. Left-handed, with a slight tremor." He finally gets the radiator working and stands up. Garak is watching him and Julius says, "It sounds as though you're telling me that we have at least eighteen hours in this motel room with nothing in particular to do."

Garak's blue eyes focus sharply and this time when he smiles, Julius sees teeth. "You make an excellent point, my dear Julius." It takes him only the space of a minute before he's crowding Julius against the wall, tilting his head for a kiss that won't knock against Julius's broken nose. It's as good now as it was last night, the way that Garak kisses him. The heat blowing from the wall radiator against Julius's legs is nothing compared to the heat that swamps him when Garak slides his hand into Julius's hair again, when Garak's tongue finds his own, when he feels Garak start to unbutton his shirt one-handed.

Julius breaks the kiss long enough to gasp, "Only a tailor," before Garak catches his mouth again. He's all-consuming, pushing Julius's shirt off his shoulders even as Julius is sliding his hands up under Garak's sweater to touch the bare skin he wanted to feel last night. Garak pulls away only long enough to strip his own sweater and undershirt off in a single smooth motion, exposing the expanse of his skin. Julius steps forward and pushes Garak toward the bed, and Garak grabs his wrist and pulls Julius with him as he walks the few steps backward to sit on the bed. He holds Julius there, standing between his spread legs, and kisses the skin just above the waist of his trousers. When Julius tries to unbutton his trousers, though, Garak covers his hand and holds it still. "Garak—"

Garak looks up at him and the force of his gaze is dizzying. "We have at least eighteen hours," he says, in a pitch-perfect imitation of Julius's accent.

The noise that escapes Julius's throat is undignified at best. "If you think—" The heel of Garak's hand presses against his cock, rubs back and forth a little. "I hadn't envisioned waiting eighteen hours to come."

"No, I didn't think so." Garak removes Julius's hands and unbuttons the trousers himself, then pushes them down off Julius's hips. Julius barely has time to react before Garak skims his briefs down as well—and then he stops, just barely not touching Julius's cock. "You're beautiful," he says frankly. "I'd like to fuck you." He can see the way Julius's cock jumps a little as he says it. "I'll take that as a yes?" Garak trails his fingers along Julius's cock, and that first touch is searing.

"Yes," Julius manages. He's clutching Garak's shoulder for support now, digging his fingers in with how badly he wants—anything—and Garak drops his shoulder and rolls, pulling Julius down onto the bed and somehow ending up above him. His weight presses Julius into the mattress a little and Julius kisses him again, all teeth and tongue. Garak is removing his own trousers nearly one-handed, and then they're both gloriously naked, hot skin sliding against skin, and Julius gets his hand on Garak's cock for the first time. Garak hisses and jerks a little in his grasp, leans down to catch Julius's nipple in his teeth for just a second, just before putting his mouth to Julius's collarbone and sucking a mark there. The not-quite-pain of Garak's mouth, coupled with the way their cocks slide together, has Julius gasping for breath.

Garak breaks away from his collarbone and says, "Roll over." When Julius does, he feels Garak lean away for a moment before returning. Garak strokes one hand very slowly down his spine, almost as though he's checking each vertebra, and then spreads his cheeks very deliberately. Julius tries not to buck at the feeling of it, the weight of the anticipation, as Garak rubs one slick finger back and forth across his hole. Garak lifts his finger away for one unbearable minute and then comes back with more lubricant. "I want to see you do it," Garak says, and oh, that's maddening, with how much Julius wants him inside already. Garak puts a thumb on either side of his hole, only the slightest bit of pressure. "I want to see you open yourself up for me."

"Garak." Julius is so hard he feels like he might have a heart attack. He reaches back and begins to work one finger inside himself. "You just —"

"You're beautiful," Garak says it again as Julius does it, and he sounds—entranced. "I knew you were something different the first time I saw you at the club. You try so hard not to show it, but I saw."

"How long?" Julius blames the War Office for the fact that his brain is still functioning even as he's sliding a finger in and out of his ass. "How long did you—?"

"Watch, before you came into my shop?" Garak's voice is thick as he slowly slides in a finger alongside Julius's, and Julius's knees almost buckle at the feeling of it. "I couldn't say. A few months, at least." Julius can feel the tip of another finger brushing back and forth across his rim, where he's stretched around both their fingers, and he shudders in pleasure at the sensation of it. "You're the one who approached me."

Julius clenches around both their fingers and is rewarded by a gasp. "You stole my jacket," Julius says.

"I had to be sure you would come back." Garak's voice is hoarse now, and there, he's sliding his second finger in, pumping them slowly in and out against Julius's finger. Julius feels stretched, exposed, his entire body throbbing with heat as he tries to fuck back onto their combined fingers. "And you did." He sounds very satisfied as he withdraws his fingers and Julius does the same. A second later, he feels the blunt head of Garak's cock at his rim and almost reflexively spreads his legs a little wider as Garak pushes inside. It's slow, inexorable, overwhelming, the way that Garak fills him, and he can hear Garak's harsh breaths. Garak's fingers dig into Julius's hips as he slides in fully, when his hips

meet Julius's. He pauses to let Julius adjust to the feeling of it.

Julius can't work himself back onto Garak's cock any further, so he moves forward a little and then thrusts back, and the noise Garak makes is incredible. He does it again, snaps his hips back a little this time. Garak pulls out almost the entire way and then thrusts back in, and Julius can't stop the moan, doesn't want to. He matches Garak's rhythm, hears the way that Garak's breath catches on every inhale.

"Julius—" His voice is almost pleading. Julius braces himself up on one elbow and reaches down to his own cock, and stroking his cock in time with Garak's thrusts is pushing him closer and closer—when he comes, he clenches down tight around Garak's cock. Garak makes a truly desperate noise, lets go off Julius's hip with one hand and reaches up to grip his hair as Garak fucks into him. Julius keeps clenching tight and it's only a few more strokes before he feels Garak coming inside him.

Chapter 20

Chapter Summary

“Do you mean to tell me that we’ve come all this way so that you can chat with a scientist and remind him not to hurt people?”

Garak sips at a spoonful of soup. “A—chat. What an excellent way to describe it.” He takes another delicate mouthful. “Did you know, the word *chat* comes from the Middle English *chatteren*, itself an onomatopoeia?”

“Somehow, Garak, I doubt your *chat* is going to sound much like that.” The bread roll that accompanies his soup is a little cold, but tolerable. “And what will I be doing, during this onomatopoeic encounter?”

Garak smiles slowly, in a way that sends a jolt of adrenaline through Julius’s body. “You know, my dear, I thought you might accompany me.”

Afterward, as they lie next to each other in bed, Julius says, “I can’t believe you were watching me for *months* and I never spotted you.”

“My dear Julius, I was quite determined not to be spotted until I had determined whether you were...in the same line of work.” Garak’s voice is almost syrupy.

“You thought I was—also a spy?” It’s too hot in here now, the radiator pumping out heat, but neither of them is willing to stand.

“You may be shocked to learn this, Julius, but I am very good at reading people. It would not be boasting to say that I can look at a person and, within a few minutes of acquaintance, know what they’re trying to hide.” His clear blue eyes are fixed on Julius. “Or, at minimum, the rough shape of their secrets. Addictions, lovers, illegitimate children, debts owed, personal rivalries, political ideologies. Every person is hiding *something*, no matter how banal.”

“And you knew I was hiding something.”

“I thought you were hiding something—a little less ordinary.” Garak touches his face lightly. “Something extraordinary, even. And I couldn’t see the shape of your secret.”

Julius can’t help smiling against his fingers. “And you couldn’t tell me any of this when we were living in a very comfortable apartment with a much more comfortable bed—”

“Of course not,” Garak says, as though it’s the most obvious thing in the world. “First, the cots we slept on in Ohio were more comfortable than *that* bed.” His expression sober. “And second—no. Not until I made the rather selfish mistake of—demonstrating that you could, in fact, be a—leverage point.”

“I distinctly remember you telling me that you didn’t have any leverage points.”

“You remember everything distinctly,” Garak says, and doesn’t answer the underlying question for a minute. “At the time, it seemed like something that could be—managed. Avoided.” It seems like post-coital is the best opportunity for answers from Garak. “There didn’t appear to be—risk to you, during my absences. I thought it was safe.”

“Safe to sleep in my bed, but nothing else?”

Garak huffs out an irritated breath. “At the time, I believed I was maintaining adequate emotional distance.”

Julius is trying to find the safe path. “But not anymore.”

He doesn’t answer that directly. “When you were taken, it became clear to me that my attempt to maintain distance was—unpersuasive.” He shrugs as well as a person can, lying in bed. “It didn’t seem necessary anymore.”

“You might have let *me* know.” Julius is a little peeved at Garak’s unilateral decision.

“My dear Julius, you are brilliant and you’ve cultivated the ability to hide your gifts, but you are not—reserved, emotionally.” Garak says it gently, but it still feels like an insult. “If I had told you anything of the kind, it would have been obvious.”

Julius suspects it had more to do with Garak’s need to control every variable in a situation, but he lets it go. “You win, Garak. I’m going to take a shower.” He hesitates. “I don’t suppose you feel the need to protect me in there too.”

“That shower is barely large enough to fit you,” Garak says, but he stands up too and follows Julius into the bathroom. The shower is, admittedly, a relatively small one, but Julius turns the water on and raises an eyebrow at Garak in challenge. When Garak only smiles, Julius pulls Garak into the shower with him.

There’s enough room that they can each squeeze past each other, that Garak can pass Julius the bar of soap to lather in his hands. When Julius ducks his head under the shower spout, Garak kisses the back of his neck and slides his hands over the shape of Julius’s shoulders, down his sides. “You have no idea,” he says, “how difficult it was to watch you and stay hidden.”

“No?” The water pressure is dreadful. The hot silky feeling spreading through his body is—due to something else entirely. Garak’s hands slide

past his hips, down to cup his ass, and Julius leans back into it a little. “How difficult was it?”

“I’ve told you, I knew you were something—out of the ordinary.” Garak pushes two fingers back into him all at once, where he’s still slick, and Julius gasps a little involuntarily. “Surveillance is best when you’re—only so interested in the subject.” He slides his fingers in and out slowly, as though he has no purpose but this. “It’s easy to live in the background when that’s the case. You were too interesting.” He bites Julius’s shoulder lightly, only enough to leave the impression of his teeth, as his fingers keep moving.

“Sorry for the trouble,” Julius manages to say. He’s braced himself on the wall with both hands to keep upright, because his knees want to give out with every stroke of Garak’s hand. Garak’s fingers are hitting just right and Julius is hard again.

“I like a challenge,” Garak says, and grasps Julius’s cock in his free hand. He’s pressed close against Julius’s back now, the shower running forgotten, as he strokes Julius’s cock in the same rhythm as his fingers. Julius wants Garak to fuck him again—but he’s already flying apart from this, the world tilting around him. When he comes again, pulsing, Garak bites his shoulder harder this time and works him through it until it’s too much and Julius sags back against him.

The second attempt at a shower is more successful.

* * * * *

They leave the motel—Julius is surprised that Garak allows it, but happy to escape the stuffy room—and wander into the small town. There’s a restaurant, or at least a lunch counter, and they sit down at a table and each order the day’s special. The waitress brings them coffee, though it’s nearly dark outside, and after Julius has taken a long, hot drink of it, he sets the mug down and meets Garak’s eyes. “Garak,” he says.

“Julius?” It’s remarkable how ordinary Garak looks sitting here, elbows perched on the white Formica table.

“Why are we here?” He keeps his voice low as he says it, but the restaurant is almost deserted and they’re tucked back in a corner. “In New Mexico, I mean. I’ve given up trying to get a straight answer out of you regarding the ultimate purpose of our travels.”

Funny, the way that Garak’s eyes go from good-natured to steely without any change to his expression. “We are in New Mexico,” he says, “because there is a scientist who needs to be reminded of his obligations.”

“And what—obligations—are those?”

Garak puts his coffee cup to his lips, but doesn’t take a drink. “Are you familiar with the phrase *First, do no harm*?”

“It’s a rule that doctors are supposed to follow.”

They both fall silent as the waitress delivers their meals. When she’s gone, Garak says, “It’s a good rule for nuclear physicists as well.” He leans close to his steaming bowl of soup and inhales deeply. “Lovely, just what I wanted.”

“Do you mean to tell me that we’ve come all this way so that you can chat with a scientist and remind him not to hurt people?”

Garak sips at a spoonful of soup. “A—chat. What an excellent way to describe it.” He takes another delicate mouthful. “Did you know, the word *chat* comes from the Middle English *chatteren*, itself an onomatopoeia?”

“Somehow, Garak, I doubt your *chat* is going to sound much like that.” The bread roll that accompanies his soup is a little cold, but tolerable. “And what will I be doing, during this onomatopoeic encounter?”

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Chapter 21

Chapter Summary

"I don't control everything that comes out of these laboratories," O'Brien says. He keeps his voice low. His wife and daughter are away, Julius knows—the reason they've chosen tonight—but it must be force of habit.

It's a few hours' drive to Los Alamos in a stolen car, fifteen minutes to check into a motel on the outskirts of town, and then hours more to observe their target—Miles O'Brien, a researcher at Los Alamos National Laboratory. They're sitting on the man's couch, in the dark, when he walks in. Once Garak pointed out what to do—what to watch for, what to listen for—Julius discovers that it comes naturally to him, this entering without notice, this lurking. The man's schedule was easy to observe. The locks on the doors opened easily. Garak watches Julius with a kind of frank admiration that almost makes him uncomfortable—almost—as he does it, as they situate themselves. When Mr. O'Brien turns on the lights and sees them there, he flinches—but he doesn't scream. Instead, he only looks tired.

"Mr. Garak," he says to Garak. "I wondered when I'd see you again."

"Oh, there's no need for formalities," Garak says. "Miles."

"I suppose not." O'Brien tosses his coat over the back of a chair. "I'm still holding up my end of the deal."

"Are you." There's something mesmerizing about the way that Garak draws their focus in, without ever moving from his casual position on the couch. "I've heard concerning things."

"I don't control everything that comes out of these laboratories," O'Brien says. He keeps his voice low. His wife and daughter are away, Julius knows—the reason they've chosen tonight—but it must be force of habit.

"Perhaps not officially." Garak's eyes are fixed on O'Brien.

O'Brien is silent for a long time before he says, "I can—slow it down." At Garak's raised eyebrow, he amends, "Six months. I can delay it by six months."

"The agreement was no new weapons."

"What do you want me to do, sabotage whatever they come up with? You know propulsion is propulsion, whether it's an A-bomb or a damn spaceship, don't you?"

Garak looks unimpressed by O'Brien's frustration. "I have—trusted you, Miles. To steer things the way that they should go." He looks away from O'Brien, straight at Julius, and his eyes are a very icy blue. "If I can't trust you anymore—" He doesn't finish the sentence.

"You can damn well trust me," O'Brien says tightly. "And there's no need for you and your—*associate* to come around again. I'll do everything I can."

"A lot of people are depending on you to do everything that's needed." Julius sees the slight tensing of Garak's muscles that means he's about to stand, and stands in unison.

"You know that I want us out there more than anything." O'Brien's eyes flick upward. "If you would send me to the Langley laboratory instead, to make progress instead of just slow it down—"

"For now, we need you here," Garak says. There's some sort of kindness in his eyes, though. "When we can, though—I'll see about it."

"Right." O'Brien looks very tired. "Yes, sir." He watches silently as they leave, until Garak shuts the door firmly behind them.

They make their way away from O'Brien's house quietly, unobtrusively. There are shadows everywhere, and it's easy to stay out of sight until they've gotten back to the car. Garak drives quite correctly, just a bit over the speed limit because it attracts notice to drive beneath it, and they don't speak. It's only when they're back at the motel, door securely locked, that Julius says, "That's all you needed to do? Tell him to work more slowly?"

"You may be shocked to hear this, Julius, but brilliant people sometimes struggle to keep themselves from excelling." There's a fond twist to Garak's lips. "Miles could accomplish vastly more, if he pursued his current area of research more—bluntly. But he has to be careful to work at cross-purposes."

Julius understands O'Brien's frustration. "I'm not shocked."

"No," Garak says, "I imagine it's been very difficult for you, keeping yourself—limited." His eyes are fixed on Julius's face, and it makes Julius shiver a little. "You did such a good job of it, though."

"I hope O'Brien does a better job of it. *You* saw through me."

Something a little possessive comes into Garak's eyes, and he hooks his finger into the knot of Julius's tie. "I did."

Adrenaline floods Julius's body. "What next?"

Garak crowds closer to him, until Julius can feel his warmth. “Tomorrow we go on to California,” he murmurs into Julius’s ear. “Tonight—”

Julius turns his head to catch Garak’s mouth in a kiss before he can finish. This is still novel—the softness of Garak’s lips, his slick tongue, the way he takes Julius’s lower lip between his teeth just long enough for Julius to feel the shock of it. The scrape of his stubble against Julius’s neck, the way he breathes hot over the sensitive skin as he pushes Julius’s coat off his shoulders, followed by his suspenders. Julius is rapidly hardening by the time that Garak rests a firm palm against the shape of his cock in his slacks. He hears the faintest dark chuckle from Garak’s throat. Garak slides one hand beneath the cloth, his other hand still gripping the knot of Julius’s tie.

Julius groans and pushes up against Garak’s hand. He tries to lean in for another kiss, but Garak holds him in place. Garak’s blue eyes are bright, almost greedy, drinking in the sight of Julius’s face as he strokes Julius’s cock. His grip is tight, his movements steady, and Julius gasps and grasps at his shoulder. “Garak—”

Garak’s hand never wavers. “Julius,” he says, and Julius knows that Garak can see the flush in his cheeks, the way that his breathing is speeding up. Julius’s eyelids flutter closed for a second and Garak says, “Keep your eyes open. I want to see you.” He tugs at the knot of Julius’s tie again, just enough to remind Julius that his hand is there, and Julius can’t stop the noise that escapes his throat. Garak holds him there, gaze fixed on his face, as Garak works him to the edge, until Julius is gripping his shoulders and trying to thrust harder into his hand. He doesn’t even realize that Garak has been pushing him backwards until his legs hit the side of the bed.

Garak lets go of him entirely then and it’s almost painful, how close Julius is to coming. His hips thrust up, against nothing, and he nearly whines at the loss of contact—and then Garak is pulling his slacks down, his briefs with them. The shock of the cold air of the motel room on his cock is blanked out entirely when Garak sinks to his knees and takes Julius’s cock in his mouth.

Julius shouts at that, at the wet heat of it, the way that Garak sucks him in, the slick slide of Garak’s mouth as he moves his head. It’s barely any time before Julius is coming helplessly, one hand in Garak’s hair. Garak sucks him through it, until he’s almost too sensitive, and then releases his cock. Then Garak sits back on his heels and looks up at Julius. He must look a mess, still gasping. Very gently, Garak cups Julius’s balls in his hand—Julius shivers—and says, breath hot across the head of Julius’s cock, “Can you come again?”

He’s thirty-four years old and the answer should be an emphatic no, but Garak touches the tip of his tongue to the head of Julius’s cock and must take the strangled noise that Julius makes as affirmation. Garak goes slower this time, coaxing Julius back to hardness in his mouth and rubbing one finger back and forth across Julius’s rim. It’s not long before Julius is fully hard again, panting, as Garak sucks him with one fingertip working slowly just inside his hole, and Julius presses back against it even as he wants to thrust forward into Garak’s mouth. All the sensation churns together in his head, into a drugged kind of feeling that spreads through his entire body, and he comes blindingly, body jerking. Garak makes a kind of rumbling satisfied noise around his cock and he shudders and jerks again and then collapses back onto the bed, gasping in lungfuls of air.

He dreams again that night, for the first time in a long time.

* * *

It’s the very early days, just after the treatments finish. The doctor—Smith, though he’s very confident that’s not the man’s real name—says, “Did you complete the task?” and Julius recites for him the Giles translation of *The Art of War*, which he was given to read a day earlier. “Did you find it difficult?” Smith asks, with a kind of eerie urgency.

“Not particularly,” Julius says. It’s not as though it was in the original Chinese. His mind is racing now, all the time, the sensory input almost overwhelming—but he can’t let it take him over, not if he wants to avoid ending up like the first round of experiments.

“I’m going to give you a set of equations, Mr. Eaton. I’d like you to solve them, as quickly as possible.”

Of course, they want to know if he’s anything more than a mimeograph. “Of course.” Julius accepts the proffered booklet and pen.

Smith’s eyes grow more and more eager with each equation that he completes, until he writes out the final answer and Smith says, “Very good, very good” and nearly snatches the booklet out of his hands. “Very good,” he repeats. “I’ll have additional reading for you shortly.”

* * *

Julius goes from the dream into wakefulness in an instant. There’s no moment of transition, no grogginess—he opens his eyes onto the darkened room with Smith’s words still in his ears, abruptly awake. Garak, next to him, is still asleep. Julius’s eyes adjust as he watches the slow rise and fall of Garak’s chest, as he listens to the soft sound of Garak’s breaths. He wants to lay a hand there, to feel the movement, but he knows it would wake Garak.

Instead, he slips out of the bed. He needs to move, needs to leave the room, and so he dresses silently. The air outside the motel door is sharp and clear, the smells of dust and old stone and gasoline all around. He takes slow, careful steps along the sidewalk and then onto the dirt on the shoulder of the road. The moon is almost painfully bright above him, casting strange shadows across the desert. Cacti turn into hulking misshapen creatures, their limbs twisted and reaching. It’s silent but for his footsteps, the land open in every direction except for the shape of the motel behind him and the town in the distance.

When the War Office first came to him, he’d felt—special. Chosen. When he’d understood the extent of what they’d done to him, how they’d changed him, he’d felt—suddenly burdened with purpose. During the war, he’d served a purpose, in a way. But for the last twelve years, Julius has been—without purpose. Without a challenge. His modifications have gone unused, wasted. Now, though, Garak has come to him with a purpose. Julius has been writing about space for years now, dreaming of the different versions of their world that might be out there. The space race has been an animating force, something to focus his creative energy—and now there’s *something*, something for him to do that isn’t just write around the edges of it.

He turns back toward the motel. He might even be able to sleep again, he thinks.

But when Julius returns to the motel room, Garak is gone.

Chapter 22

Chapter Summary

When Julius looks at his own possessions, his suitcase is still there, at precisely the same angle it was before. The typewriter case, though, is a little out of place. An inch, perhaps.

Julius doesn't need to turn on a light to confirm Garak's absence, but he does it anyway. The overhead light leaves harsh shadows in the empty room. There are two options: either Garak left of his own volition, or he was taken. Each option has sub-variants.

Garak left willingly:

He's been playing a long game with Julius and he's finished with it.
The—relationship, whatever it is, was too much.
Julius isn't the partner in his plans that he wanted.
He wants to keep Julius safe.

Garak left unwillingly:

He needs Julius's help.
He doesn't want Julius to come after him.
He's dead.

The first thing to do is to determine which option Julius is dealing with, before he can begin to formulate a plan. Garak's luggage is gone, which weighs in favor of willing departure. When Julius checks, the car is missing from the motel parking lot. The bed is made. There's nothing to suggest a struggle, not the slightest damage to the window frames or walls or carpet, not a fragment of glass or a drop of blood.

But. When Julius looks at his own possessions, his suitcase is still there, at precisely the same angle it was before. The typewriter case, though, is a little out of place. An inch, perhaps. Not enough for anyone to notice in the dark—but Garak wouldn't have made the mistake of knocking it away, not if he were simply leaving Julius behind.

Julius picks up the case very gingerly. The key is in the lock, where he left it. He opens the latches slowly, one after the other, feeling for anything out of the ordinary. When there's nothing, he runs his fingers over the typewriter itself—each key, the carriage return, even the ribbon—before he finally finds it. It's only a scrap of paper, tucked in next to the red ribbon, where he would only find it if he switched from black to red. Julius extricates it with two fingernails and then lays it flat on the bedside table beneath the lamp. It's nothing more than a phone number, which Julius commits to memory instantly.

The real question is whether to call it. He can only assume—and it seems like the most logical assumption—that Garak placed that phone number carefully, when they boarded the train, or had Tucker place it. Then, when Garak was taken—and it seems Julius has decided to believe that he was taken—he was able to nudge the case slightly, enough to catch Julius's eye and no one else's. Julius can call the number. He can go deeper into whatever this is, perhaps even try to find Garak. Or he can make his way to the nearest bus depot and then to an airport and fly back to New York, attempt to resume his life there, write about the stars sometimes and wonder what he's missed, what's happening that he doesn't even know about.

Julius picks up the telephone and dials the number.

* * * * *

A woman comes to pick him up. "You may call me Polly," she tells him, and he's never seen a woman who looks less like a Polly. Her hair is short, her face pointed and severe; both her face and voice are devoid of emotion. Sometimes when she speaks, he thinks she's a little like him—there's a part of her brain that's always running, cataloging, assessing too. "I am here to take you to California."

Julius spares a minute to wonder how she got here so quickly. Another minute to feel the unease of the situation, of trusting himself to the voice on the other end of the phone, which had only said "We'll send someone to help you" before disconnecting. Then he says, "Do you know where in California?" Garak said they were going to the Mojave Desert, once.

Polly looks at him. It's not a glare, but it might as well be. "Yes," she says.

"Well, that's good." He finds himself almost snapping it at her. "To find Garak, or to complete his mission?"

"I expect that Garak will be at the site of the—planned mission," Polly says. "We should leave immediately."

Polly is not much of a conversationalist. She has an unobtrusive grey sedan and she allows Julius to place his suitcase and typewriter case in the rear seat rather than the trunk. She says, "You may sleep if you need to," and those are very nearly the last words she says for the twelve hours it takes to drive through vast open lands, until they reach Barstow after nightfall.

It should be discomfiting, the long quiet drive with someone he doesn't know, but in some ways it's better. Polly's demeanor doesn't invite conversation. She drives precisely at the speed limit. They stop twice for gas and the toilet. She switches the radio on and allows Julius to tune it, but there are long stretches of road where there's nothing but static. Julius turns the volume low and leaves it on, just barely. His own mind is too full, the way that it's always been, and he's examining each encounter, each conversation, with Garak—every ridiculous story that Garak

has ever told him—for any hint of what it is that Garak was supposed to be doing in the desert. His traitor mind keeps bringing him back to the other conversations with Garak, the other encounters, the ones that seemed to have nothing at all to do with being a spy. The expression in Garak's eyes when he stared at Julius, when he called Julius extraordinary.

“Do you know Garak?” he finally asks, as they drive into Barstow.

Polly's face doesn't change. “We have met,” she says. “You should endeavor to mimic the accent here, rather than speaking as you do now. It will draw less attention.”

“Sure,” Julius says. He's never tried it before, but he finds that it's not difficult to change his inflections, to correct the diphthong sounds that don't exist in American English. “Sure, I can do that.”

She nods decisively. “It has been a long time since a meal.” Julius hasn't eaten since dinner the night before, eaten early so that they could be in O'Brien's house at the correct time. “We will eat.”

“I'm hungry enough to eat a horse,” Julius says, and Polly meets that with a raised eyebrow. Perhaps it was a bit much.

“I believe you will have to settle for a cow.” She drives into the parking lot of a hamburger restaurant and parks the car. “If this is acceptable to you.”

“Sure,” Julius says again. “Looks great.” He wonders if Garak has eaten anything since last night's dinner.

Chapter 23

Chapter Summary

“Is car theft your area of expertise, Mr. Eaton?”

“I’m a fast learner.”

It takes only a few minutes—enough time for the waitress to ask what they’d like to eat, and write down two orders of the special—for Julius to notice that there’s a man watching them. He glances at Polly. “Apparently we’re very interesting,” he says. “Do you suppose we shouldn’t have picked the special?”

Polly raises an eyebrow. “I understand your point, Mr. Eaton.” She sips at her Coca-Cola and doesn’t quite grimace at the carbonation. “What do you propose to do about it?”

“I suppose asking him where our friend might be is out of the question.”

Polly’s eyebrow rises a little higher, as if to say, *amateur*. “I suspect it would not yield results. Certainly not useful results.”

There’s a tightness through his whole body, and he has to remind himself to relax each muscle, one by one. He wants nothing more than to put his hands on the man and take him apart, piece by piece, until the man confesses Garak’s location—until he takes them there. “You know, I might have left the car unlocked,” he says. “Would you give me the key? I’d like to check.”

Polly hands over the key wordlessly. The man watching them flinches slightly, but he remains at his table watching Polly as Julius walks out to the parking lot. The man is in an excellent position to see her, but Julius sees that his view of the parking lot is limited. Perfect.

There are only a few cars in the parking lot other than theirs, which makes his task easier. One is a battered Ford truck, more than a few years pre-war. Pre-Julius’s war, that is. He has trouble believing that whatever organization with the resources to kidnap Garak has its operatives performing surveillance in twenty-five-year-old vehicles. One of its mirrors is missing, an easy reason for a police officer to perform a stop. He rules out the truck.

There’s a long, mean-looking Impala with a sharp tail, shiny and light blue, parked a little unevenly between the lines in the lot. Something about it catches Julius’s eye—something beyond the admittedly dramatic styling. The uneven parking suggests the slightest amount of haste. The wheels and undercarriage are dusty, and Julius pulls out a handkerchief to wipe off a good amount of the dust to examine under better light. He tucks the kerchief back into his pocket and continues his examination. There are minute scratches all along the undercarriage too—gravel, perhaps? Hardly a surprise that a dusty road would include gravel.

When he tries the handle very gently, the door is unlocked. Sloppy, but consistent with haste. He moves quickly—Polly can’t hold the man’s attention forever—and ruffles through the glove compartment until he finds what look like two different identification badges—one for a janitor at Edwards Air Force Base, and another for a security guard at Dominion Enterprises. He memorizes the appearance of both. Then Julius replaces everything where it was and closes the door quietly.

When he returns to the restaurant, he announces, “The door wasn’t locked. We need to be more careful—there might be car thieves!”

Polly looks up at him from her hamburger and gestures at his own rapidly-cooling plate. “Did you find something?”

“Dust and gravel scratches on the undercarriage—I took a sample.” Julius pats his breast pocket. “Security identification for Dominion Enterprises.”

Something that’s almost an expression crosses Polly’s face. “I am familiar with Dominion Enterprises,” she says. “I believe they have a secondary storage location in the desert. The road is—poorly improved.”

Everything clicks into place as she says it. “Let’s go, then,” he urges. “Now that we know—”

She dabs at her mouth. “Our friend will notice.”

“Can’t you—incapacitate him? I’d rather take his car.”

Again, the tiniest hint of expression—this time, maybe a smile at the corner of her mouth. “Is car theft your area of expertise, Mr. Eaton?”

“I’m a fast learner.”

They leave a ten-dollar bill on the table and walk out of the restaurant together. Julius goes directly to the Impala, while Polly waits for the man to exit the restaurant and approach the car so that she can incapacitate him with a grip to his neck. Julius has never seen anything like it, but Polly plucks the keys from his pocket and dumps the man into the backseat. “We can dispose of him once we’re out of the city,” she says.

“Are you going to kill him?” He thinks Garak might have. Polly starts the car and it growls almost eagerly.

“Not unless it becomes necessary.” She’s exactly at the speed limit as they drive south out of town, back into the maw of the dark night. “I was going to leave him by the side of the road on our way, if that’s acceptable to you.”

“Yes, quite acceptable,” Julius says. Polly hands him a gun and he starts a little, but accepts it. “What’s this?”

“It’s a Makarov. Can you shoot a gun?” She doesn’t look away from the road.

How vividly he remembers Garak’s wholly unnecessary lesson. “I can,” he says, instead of explaining.

“Good.” Polly pulls off the road. “Roll him down the side of the ditch,” she says. “He shouldn’t wake for another few hours, but there’s no sense taking him all the way with us.”

Julius awkwardly drags the man out of the backseat and pushes him down the hill, then gets back into the car. “How far are we?”

“Another ten minutes, if I remember correctly.”

It’s a strange experience, especially when Polly cuts the headlights, turns off the road, and uses the moon as her only source of illumination. A few times, Julius has to say, “A little more to the left,” and he realizes that his vision is better than Polly’s. Perhaps unsurprising. They drive very slowly up the gravel path, and Julius can’t help wincing at the soft noise of the tires over the gravel. Even with his enhanced eyesight, Julius spots the building only when they’re pulling up off to the side. It’s dilapidated, unlit, with a fading DOMINION ENTERPRISES logo painted on one wall and a large NO TRESPASSING sign. There are two trucks parked in front. It looks like the perfect place to hold someone prisoner.

“How many guards, do you think?” He pitches his voice so low that he isn’t sure Polly will hear him.

“At least four.” Polly meets his eyes. “I can deal with the guards if you can find Garak.”

Julius breathes in deeply. “I can.” If Polly can handle the guards with her death grip, it means that he’s less likely to have to shoot anyone—Julius has shot plenty of people, but he feels no need to add to the total.

The side door that they try is locked, but Julius manages to pick it open. He takes in as much of the building as he can at a glance—a large warehouse, turned into a maze with incomplete construction everywhere and piled wooden pallets. He spots a few tiny beams of light, which must be security guards patrolling. Julius avoids them, picking his way through the skeletal frames of future hallways, looking for a closed door where someone like Garak could be kept.

He pauses. There’s heat coming from somewhere, which means a boiler room. An ideal place to imprison someone, in a pinch. Julius follows the heat, ducking into corners or behind a stack of pallets if one of those flashlights approaches.

Rather prosaically, the door to the boiler room doesn’t even require a key. It’s just a deadbolt. With very light fingers, he slides the deadbolt open and walks through the door. He finds Garak there, in the tiny boiler room, shaking and gasping for breath. One eye is swollen shut, the other open wide in—fear? Garak, afraid? “It’s me,” he says. “It’s only me.”

“Julius?” Garak squints in the darkness. “I’m afraid you’re not real.” His voice is regretful. “But I appreciate your company nonetheless. This room is—quite small.” He gasps as he inhales.

“It is,” Julius agrees. He fights to keep his voice steady. He pulls out a lighter and flicks it open for a little light, so that Garak can see him, and then offers his hand to Garak. Garak grips his hand almost convulsively. He flexes his fingers, stretches his wrists, and then reaches out very slowly to lay the lightest touch on Julius’s face. “You’re alive?” He still doesn’t sound like he believes it.

“Very much so,” Julius says. If not for Garak’s bloody lip, he would kiss Garak to make the point. “I’m glad to see that you are too. We should hurry—Polly is dealing with the guards, but another is coming.” He can hear the dull rhythm of the guard’s footsteps. “I’d like to be gone when he gets here.”

“If you say so.” Garak is suspiciously malleable. He lets Julius lead them back through the series of half-constructed hallways and piled pallets until they’re out of the warehouse in the cold night air. The moon is a brilliant waning gibbous, and it casts bright silver light over everything. Their shadows are sharp as Julius steers Garak to the meeting point. Garak didn’t react badly to Polly’s name, which seems like a good sign.

The car looks abandoned, but Polly stands up from behind it. “I see you have recovered him. Please get into the car. His absence will be noticed soon, if it has not already.” They slide into the front seat, all three of them, and she takes the wheel.

Julius remembers everything, but this car ride will stand out most clearly in his memory: the light of the moon overhead, illuminating their way; the way that Garak touches Julius’s cheek again almost disbelievingly with his chilly fingers; the feeling of Garak’s bloody lips beneath his own, when Julius ghosts a kiss across his mouth, and the faintest taste of blood transferred between them. Garak’s hand comes up to clutch the back of his neck and pull Julius in closer, until their foreheads meet gently. “You’re alive,” Garak repeats.

“I didn’t realize that was in question.” Julius tries to put a little humor into it. “I’m not the one who was kidnapped. You left me a message in my typewriter.”

“I hoped,” Garak murmurs. In his peripheral vision, Julius sees Polly look over sharply, but she doesn’t say anything. Garak sounds woozy to Julius’s ears, but at least his breathing has started to return to normal.

“Did they give you something?” He puts his hand on Garak’s cheek to ground him. “Garak. Did they give you something?”

“Oh yes,” Garak says. “All sorts of things. Marvelous things.” He touches a finger to Julius’s lower lip.

“Did you *tell* them anything?” Polly’s voice is sharp.

“How could I do that?” Garak asks. “I’m only a tailor.”

Chapter 24

Chapter Summary

"I was—captured. Rapidly and very thoroughly sedated. When I woke up, I was in the dark, in a very small—" He breaks off. "I am not fond of small spaces."

"You're out now," Julius says. "You're safe."

Garak laughs a little and pats his cheek. "My dear Julius. I am never *safe*. But I'm temporarily out of danger, which I suppose is as close as I can come."

Polly checks them into a motel and waits until Garak and Julius are both safely inside before saying, "I will confirm that this location is secure," and leaving the room.

Julius suspects she's trying to give them a moment of privacy, which is strangely sensitive for Polly. But he can't bring himself to care, not when he's helping Garak carefully to the bed. Garak squints at the bright light of the bedside lamp, but when Julius goes to turn it off, he grabs Julius's wrist. "Don't," he croaks. "Leave it on." His eyes dart to the door, to the window, and he takes in a long, shaky breath. "I was in the dark for—a long time."

"Do you want some water?" When he makes as if to stand, Garak's hand tightens on his wrist.

"Just—stay here." Garak runs his thumb over Julius's pulse point. His pupils are too large for the light. "It really did seem likeliest that you were—"

"I'm a little insulted," Julius says softly. He settles onto the bed next to Garak so that they're sitting side by side. "I woke up from one of my dreams and went for a walk. At first, I thought you had left on purpose." He feels Garak stiffen. "Your luggage was gone, the car was gone."

"My dear Julius, I wouldn't have—"

"Yes," Julius says. "It did seem like it would be—rather an odd choice. And then I saw that the typewriter wasn't in the proper place."

He feels Garak laugh a little. "I did hope you would notice that. It was the only thing I had the opportunity to do that they wouldn't fix."

"I suppose you tucked that number in when Mr. Tucker was repairing the typewriter?"

"I ensured that Mr. Tucker and Mr. Reed purchased a typewriter that would require repair." Garak exhales. "I knew that you were exceptional, but I couldn't—allow myself to hope that you were exceptional enough to notice such tiny imperfections."

Julius presses his shoulder firmly against Garak's. "What happened to you?"

"I was—captured. Rapidly and very thoroughly sedated. When I woke up, I was in the dark, in a very small—" He breaks off. "I am not fond of small spaces."

"You're out now," Julius says. "You're safe."

Garak laughs a little and pats his cheek. "My dear Julius. I am never *safe*. But I'm temporarily out of danger, which I suppose is as close as I can come." He runs his thumb over Julius's cheekbone, then pulls Julius in for another kiss. But he lets out a tiny involuntary noise of pain even as he holds Julius close, and Julius pulls back enough to look him in the eyes. Eye, really. The other eye is swollen almost closed.

"You should rest," Julius tells him. Garak's pupils are still so dilated that there's only a thin rim of crystal blue visible. The light must be excruciating. "Here, lie down." He stands and tries to encourage Garak to stretch out. Garak grabs his wrist again. "I'll lie down with you, I promise," Julius says. When he's finally wrestled Garak into place, Julius slides onto the bed next to him. "Do you still want the light on?"

"Yes." Garak pulls Julius against him, aligns his body with Julius's and wraps one arm around Julius's chest, hips fitted flush together. Julius lets Garak hold him like that, tries to relax into the embrace, even as he can feel Garak's heartbeat rabbiting against his back. Garak's breath is warm against the back of his neck, and Garak's hand is far hotter than normal where it's pressed to Julius's chest.

They lie together like that until Garak's heartbeat has started to slow back to normal. Julius is sweating from the heat, but he's unwilling to pull away. It's only when he hears Polly's steps outside the door that he says, "Garak. Polly is back."

Garak releases him, swiftly enough that Julius manages to be standing on the other side of the bed, rummaging through the nightstand drawer, by the time that Polly walks into the room. He retrieves a Gideon's Bible from the drawer.

Polly raises an eyebrow, but says nothing about what they might have been doing before she walked in. "I have secured the location and contacted your—associates," she says, and Julius wonders a little at the hesitation. It must be the first time that he's heard a hint of emotion in her voice. "They will be here within an hour. Sir."

That answers one question. "Thank you, Polly," Garak says, sitting up. His stomach growls audibly.

"I also purchased food." Polly sets two pizza boxes on the table. "You should eat carefully if you haven't eaten recently," she tells Garak.

Garak has already opened one of the boxes and is halfway through the first piece of pizza. He swallows and says, "I'll do my best."

Julius is very aware of the dinner special that he ordered hours ago and never got to eat. The pizza is pepperoni, orange grease dripping everywhere, and even eating carefully, he manages to finish a slice in under a minute. "Did you eat?" he asks Polly.

"Yes," she says. "I'm vegetarian."

Julius and Garak have made it through a pizza and a half by the time that Reed and Tucker walk into the room. Julius sees the lingering look between Polly and Tucker, hears the strangled way that she says, "Mr. Tucker," and Tucker's face is a little lost at the sight of her, as he murmurs "Pol." It all happens in a matter of seconds, and then he would never know there was anything different between the two of them than anyone else in the room. Julius's throat tightens at the idea that he and Garak might ever be like that.

Garak swallows the remains of his last piece of pizza and wipes his mouth on a towel from the bathroom that he's using as a napkin. "Well, now that we're all here—I suppose I should give you some idea of our mission."

Chapter 25

Chapter Summary

Reed shakes his head a little. “I can’t believe I’m saying this, but between you and Mr. Eaton, and Polly and Tucker, someone has to remind everyone that the mission must be paramount. Personal attachments can’t interfere, even if it means losing someone.”

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“Does the name Mercury mean anything to you?” Garak is addressing all of them, but his eyes are fixed on Julius.

“The planet, the Roman god, the element...”

There’s a spark of humor in Garak’s blue eyes. “Project Mercury.” Julius, Tucker, and Reed all shake their heads. Polly doesn’t move. “It’s the American answer to the Russian space program.”

“I thought that was Kaputnik,” Tucker says, and Polly gives him a withering look.

“Mercury is the *real* answer. Not shooting rockets at the moon to see if we can hit it, not sending animals up into the sky to die when their oxygen runs out. Mercury is—the future.” Garak’s pale face is flushed with excitement. Julius noticed when Tucker passed him a pill, earlier, and he suspects that might have been more than aspirin. “Mercury will take man into space—to the moon, and beyond.” Julius thinks of his half-written novel, of Kathryn and her starship, and it’s impossible not to get caught up in Garak’s excitement. He wants to get caught in it, wants to feel that rush.

“This is all very abstract,” Reed cuts in. “What is our mission *today*, sir?” His voice is tight, tense.

“The space programs need certain kinds of people to go into space,” Garak says. He slants an apologetic glance at Polly. “The government wants people who are already proven.”

It clicks into place. “Graduates of the test pilot schools,” Julius says. “That’s why we’re here. Edwards Air Force Base—that’s where the air force’s test pilot school is.”

Garak looks entirely unsurprised that Julius noticed the sign for Edwards AFB and inferred the rest. “The trip would have been much shorter if we’d been assigned to prevent the attack on the naval test pilot school instead,” he says dryly. “But yes. They will want men who have already shown a certain reckless disregard for their lives in pursuit of scientific advancement. The test pilot schools are the—feeders for the space program. Without them, the American space program will be set back years. And the Soviet space program needs the American competition, just as the Americans need the Soviet pressure.”

“There’s an attack planned on the base? That seems—suicidally stupid,” Tucker says.

“Dominion Enterprises?” Julius remembers that man’s dual identifications. “They’ve infiltrated somehow?”

Garak nods. “From what I’ve gathered—what I had gathered before they took me, at least, and nothing suggests otherwise—they are bringing in substantial quantities of explosives. The fuel stored around the base is highly volatile. A fire could be devastating. The pilots are not always where they’re supposed to be.” He meets their eyes in turn. “This is about the pilots, not the technology. Dominion Enterprises is the front for the people who want to see the space program end before the first man takes a step on the moon, and a loss like this would be devastating.”

“They’ll attack both bases?” Reed’s words seem to grow more clipped every time he speaks. “They would have to. Synchronized attacks, to avoid any warning. That would be—hundreds of men murdered.”

“I suppose it’s lucky that they decided to bring you here when they snatched you,” Julius says, mostly to provoke Garak. He knows it’s not a coincidence.

“Yes, what use could they have for a man from out of town with no connections to the area, who could be left near the scene—shot dead as he fled, perhaps, after being discovered?” Garak’s mouth curves into a smile. “My dear Julius, you know very well why they brought me here.”

“How long do we have?” Tucker is gripping both arms of the flimsy motel chair he sits in, as though holding himself there. Julius has doubts about the chair’s structural integrity. “Tonight?”

“Yes,” Garak says. “Two in the morning, if nothing has changed.” He looks a little apologetic. “I had intended to have better information, of course, but—”

“We should begin surveillance immediately,” Polly says. “I will go with—”

Tucker springs out of his chair. “I’ll go with you.”

“Very well, Mr. Tucker,” Polly says, and her face betrays nothing. “Communication devices, sir?”

Garak nods. “You brought them?”

She hefts Julius's suitcase. "In here." Julius watches with some discomfort as his suitcase is unceremoniously emptied onto the floor to reveal five earpieces and the smallest handie-talkies he's ever seen. The ones in the war had antennae that were longer than a man's arm, and they had weighed nearly two and a half kilograms. These are the size of his fist. It's hard to believe that they can carry any kind of signal.

Polly hands one to Tucker. She allows him to carefully hook the earpiece of the other around one delicate ear. Tucker brushes her hair gently back into place to cover it and says, "Let's go."

When they're gone, Reed turns to Garak. "Sir," he says, "Permission to speak freely."

Garak looks mildly amused. "We're not in the Army anymore, Reed."

"I would ask that you reconsider bringing Mr. Eaton on this mission." Reed looks at Julius and sets his jaw. "I understand that he is—gifted, and you are—fond of him. But he lacks the particular training—"

"The training?" Garak's voice is light. "What training would that be, Malcolm? Would you like to remind me what *you* did in your training?"

Reed hesitates for a long moment. He looks intensely uncomfortable. "Sir," he says at last, resigned. "You know what I mean."

Julius can't tell if Reed did something terrible in his training or if he just didn't have any in particular. "I have excellent aim and situational awareness. And perfect recall," he offers. "In case that helps." He's not trying to be an ass to Reed, but neither does he want the man questioning his competence.

Reed shakes his head a little. "And—I can't believe I'm saying this, but between you and Mr. Eaton and Polly and Tucker, *someone* has to remind everyone that the mission must be paramount. Personal—attachments—can't interfere, even if it means losing someone."

"Thank you, Malcolm, for that excellent refresher on the fundamental rule of our work," Garak says, and his voice is still light, as though he's actually appreciative. "I'll endeavor to sacrifice Julius if at all possible." That sounds a little less light.

Reed visibly struggles with the desire to say something more and swallows it down. "Sir."

"Excellent," Garak says. "Do you know, I think I'll take a shower before the fun begins. I still smell like that boiler room." Julius immediately feels guilty, but then, he wouldn't have let Garak go into a small room by himself an hour ago. "My dear, you don't mind if I borrow a few things, do you?" He plucks a shirt, slacks, and briefs—Julius attempts to control the blush at the thought of it—from the pile that Polly dumped out of Julius's suitcase. "Play nicely." Then he walks into the bathroom.

Julius is left in the main room with Reed, who still looks distinctly unhappy. "Do you know how to fight, hand to hand?"

"I was in the military," Julius says, which really only means that he knows how to go for whatever vulnerable parts are most accessible if someone comes at him and he doesn't have a weapon. "If it would make you feel better, you could try to punch me."

Reed winces. "I'm not trying—" He stops. "Tucker and I have been with Garak for a long time. He's behaving—" Reed stops again. "We all know that the mission has to come first. Always. I've never questioned his commitment to that."

"Until now," Julius says. The last piece of pizza isn't sitting so well in his stomach anymore. "You don't think he would—let me die, if he needed to?" What a surreal question to ask someone. *I'm sorry the man I love would try to save me*, of all the things to have to say.

"Tucker couldn't do it," Reed says, and that confirms what Julius has suspected. "I never thought I would worry about it with Garak."

"I'm sorry." Sorry he's worried, anyway. "You don't think I would let him die either."

Reed looks surprised. "I—no, it never crossed my mind—to expect that you would. You're a—civilian. For lack of a better word."

The shower turns off. "Well, I can't promise that I will," Julius says. "I suppose we'll all have to endeavor not to be put in such a situation."

Reed grimaces. "I suppose so."

Garak emerges from the bathroom, cheeks flushed. His dark hair is slicked back from his face and Julius's shirt is just a little too tight across his chest. If not for the impending attack—and Reed's presence—Julius would already be unbuttoning it. "Shall we? Reed, did you bring supplies?"

Reed points to the immaculate leather suitcase sitting just inside the door. "As requested."

"Julius? A 9 millimeter? Or something else?" Reed unzips the suitcase as Garak asks.

"That's fine." Julius accepts the shoulder holster from Reed and slips it on. Garak tugs it gently into place on his back, his fingers warm and comforting. When Reed passes him the pistol, Julius checks that the safety is on and then slides it into the holster. It's not quite the shape of the familiar Webley he first carried when the War Office was done with him—and what a strange reminder that is, that he's been this way, what the War Office made him, for more than half his life now. "A knife as well, please." He has no intention of being caught in a situation that requires the use of a knife, but then, he's hoping not to shoot anyone either. Reed hands him an American combat knife silently.

Garak and Reed arm themselves with an easy familiarity that speaks of years of doing this. Once Julius has tucked extra ammunition away, he takes a deep breath. "We should be able to drive most of the way," Garak says. "If I'm correct, there won't be much in the way of security to worry about."

"Handie-walkies" was apparently the official name, but people just called them walkie-talkies.

Chapter 26

Chapter Summary

“Garak,” Julius hisses, and gets no response. Garak’s body is very heavy and his head is lolling to one side. He’s less stable with each stumbling step.

They load Reed’s bag of weapons, Julius’s suitcase—and the typewriter, he notices with absurd fondness—and another suitcase into the trunk of that sharp-edged blue Impala he and Polly stole. Julius slides into the backseat, where he finds a long rifle.

“When we get there, stay behind me and stay quiet,” Garak says. “Look for someone *alone* who’s a little bigger than you are. I’d hoped to have uniforms already, but it seems we’ll have to obtain them as we go.”

“Yes, sir.” Reed’s syllables are clipped. Julius’s adrenaline is surging—every detail of the smell of the air, the slide of the seat beneath his thighs, the shape of the gun he’s carrying feels hyper-real, every color hyperpigmented, every sense so sharp that the information is pouring into his mind, and he’s never struggled to keep up but he’s also never been so focused on being *aware* before.

Garak turns off the headlights, then puts the car in neutral and they coast to what Julius assumes will be their hiding spot. “Follow me.” His voice must be barely audible to Reed. As they creep closer, he points to the fence. “Gap in the fence, blind spot in the patrols.” Somehow Julius had expected something more like the camps, but this is so much more open, the few guards that he can see looking bored or smoking or chatting—it helps to dissipate the nauseating coil of dread that had been forming in his stomach.

“Tucker and Polly should be in already,” Reed says.

Julius spots a faint red light flashing out G-A-R-A-K in Morse code further down the fence line. “I’m guessing that’s them.”

Garak snorts very quietly. “Through the fence, then.”

“Once more unto the breach,” Julius murmurs, and follows Garak through the gap in the fence. Reed brings up the rear.

“The majority of the explosives will be set at the fuel tank there,” Garak says, pointing toward one end of the base. “There will be others at the barracks.”

“Tucker and I will handle the fuel tanks.” Reed has spotted Tucker and Polly, baggy green uniforms buttoned over their clothing. “Fuel tanks?” he says to Tucker when they meet.

Tucker nods. He passes a stack of clothing to them. “Get ready.” At least they won’t need to knock anyone out to blend in.

It feels like stepping back in time twenty years, buttoning that coarse green jacket over his shirt and belting the pants around his waist. He adjusts the placement of his gun and his knife and the world is narrowing around him until Garak says “Julius!” and puts a hand on his arm.

Julius stiffens. “I’m ready.” He keeps his voice to the barest whisper.

“We’ll take the barracks,” Garak tells him. “Polly—”

“Understood.” She disappears into the darkness toward the hangar. Reed and Tucker walk—casually, but briskly—toward the fuel tanks.

Garak looks at Julius. “Can you do this?”

Julius forms his words into an imitation of Garak’s bland American accent. “I’m ready.” He watches the affect of the soldiers patrolling, of the ones smoking, and lets his shoulders mimic their posture. “Any chance you’ve got a cigarette?”

There’s something very affectionate and a little wondering in Garak’s face. “I don’t think it’s a good idea to bring something burning where we’re going.”

Ah. No. Probably not. Julius wouldn’t have minded it to calm his nerves a little. They walk even more casually toward the barracks. Out in the distance, past the hangar, he can see the broad expanse of runway, illuminated. He can’t hear anyone up there now.

It’s at the far end of the barracks that things change. Julius sees the shapes lurking, crouching at the base of the wall, and touches Garak’s elbow slightly. Garak nods. A third man appears—somehow Julius missed him—and throws Julius to the ground in pursuit of Garak. Julius’s reflexes save him from hitting his head, but the concrete is unforgiving and it stuns him for a minute, long enough for the man to hit Garak brutally. There’s the flash of a knife in his hand and Julius sees it cut into Garak’s forehead, can’t tell how deep it went, but as the man goes to strike again, Julius takes his own combat knife, feels the balance, and throws it.

The knife strikes the man’s neck with a wet crunch that Julius hasn’t heard for a long time, had hoped never to hear again, and the man collapses. The other two come at them—in the reflected light, Julius recognizes one of them as Yevgeny, the man from New York. Yevgeny has a gun but Julius can tell he doesn’t want to use it, doesn’t want to attract the attention that a gunshot would bring now. Half of Garak’s face is bloody as he fights Yevgeny—the other man is scrambling at the base of the building now, and Julius can just barely see the flashing red light of a countdown clock. He hits the man across the back of the head with his gun, as hard as the can, and the man goes down hard. When Julius kneels, the timer is at 30 seconds.

“Julius!” That isn’t Garak’s voice. Julius turns his head and sees Yevgeny bringing a gun to Garak’s head. “If—”

Time slows. Julius can almost see what will happen next. Yevgeny will try to use Garak as leverage—will tell Julius that they have just enough time to get away before the building explodes, that he’ll release Garak if they both run now—will say, “Are you fast enough?” and “you can’t save them all—”

There’s no time for that. No time to let Yevgeny rest the gun comfortably against Garak’s skull, no time—

Julius shoots Yevgeny before he can make the threat. The sharp crack of the gunshot echoes out in the emptiness and he knows he hit his target but he doesn’t have time to look, only registers the sound of a body falling and the clatter as Yevgeny’s gun falls to the concrete. Distantly, he knows that the lack of a second gunshot means that Garak is still alive, but the whole of his attention is devoted to the timer clicking down. Twenty seconds now. “Garak, run,” he says reflexively, and touches the casing very delicately.

Garak doesn’t answer. Julius allows himself two seconds to look back and see that Garak has collapsed too—Julius could probably drag Garak to safety, if he abandoned the timer now. The bomb would go off, but he and Garak would be safe and he loves Garak, more than any of these anonymous men on this base—

He remembers Reed’s concern and it doesn’t matter, there’s no time to be selfish. He snatches the knife from the man that he’s knocked out and flicks the casing open. Four wires to the detonator—thank God for his improved vision, because they’re red orange yellow white, barely distinct, and he can still trace which one goes from the timer to the detonator. He takes the yellow wire between his thumbnails, tugs just enough to give himself the slack to cut it with the knife—

The timer stops. Julius drops it and scrambles across the concrete to Garak, whose eyelids are fluttering a little. His face is gory, blood pooled and drying and still flowing, and his heart is pounding when Julius takes his pulse. Julius wants to drag him away now, find a doctor who will fix whatever is wrong—but the explosives are still there, an unconscious saboteur lying next to them. He can’t risk the man setting them off and he doesn’t want to kill someone unnecessarily—

He cuts two strips of cloth off Garak’s jacket, folding one into a thick pad the length of the wound and tying it into place with the other. His own shirt shows through beneath the jacket, very pale in the dim light, and Julius squeezes Garak’s wrist briefly before turning back to the problem. He doesn’t think he can drag both Garak and the other man at the same time, and he doesn’t want to try to carry explosives one-handed.

“Garak!” Julius has never been so glad to hear Tucker’s drawl. He looks up to see Reed and Tucker hurrying toward him. Reed and Tucker both look worse for wear, one side of Tucker’s face swelling as though he’s slammed it into something. Been slammed, more likely. There’s blood trickling out of his mouth and he isn’t walking very straight.

“I cut the timer, but the bomb is still—live,” Julius says. “Yevgeny is dead, the other man is unconscious—for now.”

Reed’s face is very cold. “I will handle him.” Julius doesn’t want to ask. “Can you—disarm the bomb further?”

Julius considers. This is well beyond the realm of his experience with bombs, which mostly amounts to pulling the pin out of a grenade and keeping count in his head, but someone has to do it. He doesn’t think Reed would ask if anyone else could. There’s a kind of cold separation in his body now, the feelings thrust deep down where they can’t hinder him. “Yes,” he says, because “I can try” doesn’t inspire confidence. “Can you get Garak to safety too?”

“I can take him,” Tucker says, but from the way he slurs, Julius suspects it’s fortunate that Tucker is still walking around at all.

“Polly?” His mind is already back on the bomb, on the pathways of wires. He only needs to make it safe enough to carry it somewhere that it can’t do damage if it explodes. He has steady hands.

“She’s ready.” Reed taps his earpiece. “When we give the signal.”

Julius doesn’t even know what she’s going to do. “Have Tucker deal with the man, whatever you were going to do. You take Garak. I’ll handle the bomb.” If Reed objects, he doesn’t register it. The whole of his mind is focused on the bomb now. It feels like a dream, examining it further to find where each part connects. It’s crude enough that he can access every part of it with a little work—crude enough to be unstable, but he lets his fingers explore it very gently, beyond where his eyes can follow. He doesn’t know how long it takes before he separates the detonator from the explosives, and it’s a sign of how hard he’s focused that everything else has passed him by. Usually his sense of time is impeccable. He lets out a slow breath. “It’s—safe. We need to get it away from the barracks.”

Reed has dragged Garak a little ways away, back toward the fence line—not nearly as far as Julius wanted—and now is trying to help Tucker stumble away from the very still body of the other man. “Set it down there.” He gestures one-handed toward a wide-open space—Julius doesn’t know what it’s for but he assumes Reed does. “Then I’ll give Polly the signal.”

Once Julius has disposed of the explosives, Reed radios Polly. Her job seems to involve setting off a blaring siren and spotlights. “Couldn’t’ve waited another ten minutes?” he seethes. There are men emerging around them, and he says, “Garak, help me here,” and heaves Garak up as best he can and prays. Garak manages to get his feet beneath him, at least enough to help Julius walk toward safety. A soldier runs toward them and Julius yells, “There’s some kind of explosive over there, be careful!” The man slows a little, but keeps heading away from them. Reed is half-carrying Tucker in the same kind of hold, and at least it’s a little less conspicuous than dragging two limp bodies—no, Julius can’t let his mind go there.

“Garak,” Julius hisses, and gets no response. Garak’s body is very heavy and his head is lolling to one side. He’s less stable with each stumbling step.

They’re almost to the fence when two MPs in helmets confront them. “Who are you?” one of them demands. “What’s going on?” He starts to draw his gun.

Reed half-drops Tucker to the ground, grabs the gun in the MP's hand, and disarms him with a move that—Julius winces—sounds like it breaks the man's wrist. The other one is coming at Julius with a baton and Julius ducks down beneath his swing, lets Garak slide to the ground, comes up with a knee to the man's groin. He gasps in pain but keeps hold of the baton and Julius has to dodge the next swing, punches him in the stomach like a schoolboy. As he stumbles, Julius grabs his gun and points it. "I don't want to hurt you," he says, and he remembers to keep his American accent. "We're leaving." He struggles to lift Garak again while keeping the gun on the man, and then—in a moment of immense relief—sees Polly approaching. She comes up behind the man and does—something that leaves him crumpling to the ground. She does it to the other one too, the one whose wrist Reed broke, and only then do her eyes settle on Tucker's still form on the ground.

"We should leave immediately," she says. "The danger to the pilots has passed, but we are at increased risk with every minute."

Chapter 27

Chapter Summary

“Drive as fast as the car will go and avoid all police interaction,” Polly tells him. She unfolds a map and shows it to him. “This is where we’re going.”

He takes a second, memorizes it, nods. With a bag of weapons in the trunk and two bloody men in the backseat—definitely no police.

Between the three of them, he, Reed, and Polly manage to drag Garak and Tucker to the car without worsening their injuries too badly. “We have to get to a hospital,” Julius says.

“No. There’s a—safe place, a few hours away.” Polly’s mouth is tight. Julius doesn’t know what happened to Tucker, but he looks—bad. “Drive. I’ll tell you where to go.”

They hoist Garak and Tucker into the back and Reed climbs into the back seat as well. “I’ll watch them,” he promises.

“Drive as fast as the car will go and avoid all police interaction,” Polly tells him. She unfolds a map and shows it to him. “This is where we’re going.”

He takes a second, memorizes it, nods. With a bag of weapons in the trunk and two bloody men in the backseat—definitely no police. Polly only has to tell him to speed up once before he realizes that he’s the one driving because of his enhanced awareness. As long as there are no police nearby, he can truly floor it—well. He also has to make sure that the car doesn’t break down. But he keeps it just at 80, eyes on the road and hands steady on the wheel. “Nothing’s changed,” Reed says periodically. “They’re still unconscious.”

“You don’t need to *tell* us that,” Polly snaps, and Julius is a little terrified to hear her sounding upset. “Another hour at this speed. I will guide you.”

Without his—gifts, he would never have dared to drive this fast on these roads. They’re narrow, twisty and dark, and the paving gets worse and worse the further they drive. He knew they weren’t exactly going to be on the highway the whole time when Polly showed him the map, but this feels like a barely-controlled dive, as though the minute he slows or breathes they’ll go careening off the road.

“Here,” Polly says suddenly, “At the light.” It’s not even really a streetlamp, but he brakes enough to make the turn and then he really does have to slow down. It’s a dirt lane, well-maintained but dirt nevertheless, lined on both sides with neat split-rail fencing. The more he pays attention to his surroundings, the less he thinks about Garak in the backseat.

He’s about to ask Polly where they are—they’re off the map she showed him, now, there were no streets—when he realizes they’re approaching a house. There’s someone standing in the doorway, backlit in yellow warmth, but Julius can see the shape of a shotgun in his hand. He glances sidelong at Polly, but she says nothing as he slows further and then stops. “We have two wounded men,” Polly calls, her voice low and urgent, and the man sets his shotgun down—he must know Polly—and approaches the car.

“Garak again?” The man’s voice is gentle, a little wry. “Tucker too—it must have been a bad one. Katie!”

A woman joins them, and in a blur of staggering and hissed “watch out!” and “careful, I’ve got his head!” they all manage to get into the house. “Into the bedroom,” the woman says, and there’s such an air of command in her voice that Julius is moving before he realizes it.

Reed helps him lay Garak gently on one of the beds as the man and Polly drape Tucker over the other. Julius lingers, brushes a few strands of Garak’s hair out from beneath the bloody bandage on his head, squeezes his hand tight and doesn’t let go until Polly says, “Julius.” He follows her out of the room.

It’s jarring to see Polly and Reed in full light again. He can’t imagine that he looks much better, dirty and bruised. “Katie, Chakotay—this is Julius.”

“The newest acquisition?” Katie hangs up the telephone. “The doctor should be here soon.” She’s an imposing woman with ash-blond hair in a thick braid down her back, in what must be a nightgown.

“Somehow I’m not surprised.” Chakotay smiles, first at Katie and then at the rest of them. He has some kind of tattoo over one eyebrow—tribal, maybe?—and there’s a dimple in his cheek when he smiles at Katie. “I hope whatever you were doing went well. They didn’t look too bad.” Julius shudders to think what his definition of “too bad” would be.

“Could be a brain injury, but it’d be hard to tell with Tucker.” Reed’s joke lands awkwardly. Julius winces at Polly’s expression. Her face is usually so emotionless that it’s terrifying when she loses the mask.

“How far away is the doctor?” Julius asks. Both Katie and Chakotay are loose, relaxed—surely if Garak was dying, they would be tense, even if they tried to hide it?

“Another five minutes,” Katie assures him.

Chakotay gestures to the kitchen table. “Please, sit down, have something to eat. There’s potato stew, and Katie had nothing to do with making

it.”

Katie rolls her eyes. “Bowls in the cupboard, pot on the stove, help yourselves.” It’s not until Reed moves toward the bowls that Julius realizes that he is, improbably, very hungry.

Still, he leaps to his feet when the doctor arrives, his bowl of stew forgotten. The doctor is a very grumpy-looking man, bald but for some tufts of dark hair on either side of his head. It must be nearly five in the morning, Julius realizes. “What have you brought me this time?”

“Two men who need medical attention,” Polly says stiffly. “They are in the bedroom. I will show you.” She leads the doctor in and Julius follows them.

The doctor examines Garak first, lifting each eyelid to check his pupils with a small light and grimacing at the bandage on his head. He listens to Garak’s chest and runs his hands over it gently. “Is there anything else wrong with him?” He glances at Julius and Polly and purses his lips. “Anything more than what’s wrong with you?”

“Just the head wound,” Julius says, and he has to fight to keep his voice even. “How is he?”

“I would say at least one or two cracked ribs, from that bruise on his side, but nothing broken. You won’t know if there’s any significant brain damage until he wakes up, but his pupils respond to light and he has visible pain responses.” At Julius’s face, he adds, “It doesn’t look bad. But change that disgusting bandage in a few hours.”

So, the doctor is familiar with Garak. “All right,” Julius says. He sits on the edge of Garak’s bed and lets his hand find its way to squeeze Garak’s. He’d like to think he isn’t imagining it when Garak squeezes back.

The doctor tut-tuts as he examines Tucker. “*Definitely* two broken ribs, maybe more. You’ll have to try to make him take it easy when he wakes up. But I don’t hear anything wrong with his lungs.” He checks Tucker’s mouth and grimaces. “Might as well while he’s out,” he says—a horrifying thing to hear—and pulls out what looks like a broken bloody tooth. Polly watches stiffly; Julius finds that he wants to vomit, but he swallows it back. “No obvious neurological damage, though,” he tells Polly. “Tell him that I ordered bed rest, when he wakes up. Tell him that his one of his broken ribs is on the verge of puncturing his lung. It’s not!” he hastens to add. “But it might keep him still a little longer.” He leaves the room, whistling, and calls, “Katie—”

Julius meets Polly’s eyes. “It would probably be a good idea to—keep a close eye on them,” he tries. “I might sleep in here.” He has the feeling that she wants to sleep next to Tucker but is unwilling to admit it. Just a hunch.

“Yes,” Polly says. “I believe the beds are—wide enough.”

Julius closes his eyes briefly. “Do you think Reed would get the bags from the trunk?”

“One of these days,” Reed announces from the door, “I’m going to find someone highly competent to bring on a mission and then she, too, will sit beside my bedside with a loving, concerned expression on her face while I lie unconscious.” He drops Julius’s suitcase and Polly’s bag with a clunk.

“If you’re looking for someone more competent than you are, I should think you’d be spoiled for choice,” Polly tells Reed. Julius and Reed stare at her. She just told a joke. She must be very upset indeed.

“I’m,” Julius says, and waves vaguely at the door. The exhaustion is hitting him. “Going to sleep here.”

“Yes, I gathered,” Reed says. “You too, Polly? I didn’t realize—”

“*Thank you for your assistance with the baggage,*” Polly hisses, in a tone that tells him in no uncertain terms to get out.

Julius is too tired to do more than toe off his shoes and pull his belt off before he climbs very carefully onto the bed next to Garak. He can’t find the wherewithal to remove the uniform. He allows one hand to rest, very gently on Garak’s unscathed arm, and is unconscious before Polly has gotten her own shoes off.

Chapter 28

Chapter Summary

The wound is long and jagged, but Garak doesn't wince as he cleans it. "Wait," he says when Julius goes to apply the new bandage. "Katie, is the sewing kit still in the bathroom?"

Katie sighs and nods. "You know, one of us could do it."

"I prefer my own stitches, thank you very much," Garak says.

"Julius?"

Julius is instantly awake. Garak is lying on his side, watching. "You're awake! How do you feel?"

"Dreadful," Garak says. "As though someone ran me over with a tank." His voice is a beautiful thing to hear.

"You say that, but Tucker is the one with broken ribs," Julius mumbles. He hadn't realized how afraid he was until Garak opened those clear blue eyes and recognized him. "Is your vision all right? Your hearing?"

"*What happened to my mouth?*" Tucker wails from the next bed. "What—" Julius hears Polly start whispering.

"I can see your lovely face and I heard Mr. Tucker complaining, so I would say that everything seems to be intact." Garak tilts his head forward just enough to touch his forehead to Julius's and then says, "Ah, no. I appear to have a head wound."

"The doctor said we should change your bandage," Julius agrees. "After a few hours—I don't know how long we've been asleep."

"Let's find out." Garak sits up slowly and then closes his eyes in pain briefly.

"Are you all right?"

Garak opens his eyes again. "Just a headache. I take it we're staying with Katie and Chakotay?" He swings his bare feet to rest on the carpet. "I could use a little help walking to the kitchen."

Julius is at his side in a moment, ducking under Garak's arm so that Garak can rest his weight on Julius. "Slowly," he says. "There's no rush." It's such a relief to feel Garak conscious, aware, as they walk.

Tucker wails, "*Bed rest?*" as they shuffle past him. Polly whispers something sharply, and he lowers his voice to an aggressive grumble.

In the kitchen, Katie is leaning against the counter and filling a pitcher for coffee. "It sounds like the patients are awake," she says.

Julius glances at the wall clock. It's 4 in the afternoon. "Sorry about—disappearing like that," he says.

"Oh, no, we got to hear all about it from Malcolm." Her smile is a little wicked. "Garak, I see you're not quite indestructible."

"Just a flesh wound," Garak says.

Katie sets a cloth, a bottle of rubbing alcohol, and a fresh bandage on the table. "Yes, the doctor told me."

Garak turns beseeching eyes on Julius, who sighs and removes the old bandage. The wound is long and jagged, but Garak doesn't wince as he cleans it. "Wait," he says when Julius goes to apply the new bandage. "Katie, is the sewing kit still in the bathroom?"

Katie sighs and nods. "You know, one of us could do it."

"I prefer my own stitches, thank you very much," Garak says.

Julius realizes what he means and swallows down the horror as Garak limps toward the bathroom. "Do you want—" he tries to offer.

"No, no," Garak says. "You are highly competent at many things, my dear, but I am confident that I can set stitches better than you can. In deference to your delicate sensibilities, I will sew it out of sight."

Julius winces and Katie shakes her head. "How long have you known Garak?" she asks, and there's another question beneath that, a question Julius doesn't want to answer just yet. Katie and Chakotay may be living out here, away from town, so that no one looks sidelong at them and whispers—or does more than whisper—but that doesn't mean they'll be fine with whatever he and Garak happen to be doing.

"About a year," Julius says, which is not true but makes living together sound a little more reasonable. "We knew each other from the VFW club, and when my marriage—" He stumbles over it. His life with Kay feels like, well, another life. "He and I happened to need a flatmate at the same time."

"I see." Katie pours a cup of coffee and passes it to him. It looks almost automatic. "And he dragged you into all this."

He needs to tread carefully. "I was—in the British Army, during the War." There have been plenty of other wars, but there is only one War. "I

told Garak about some of my experiences. Then I was kidnapped and Garak felt it was best to—enlighten me.”

Katie smiles ruefully. “Funny how often being kidnapped is a prelude to joining this fight.”

Before Julius can ask, Chakotay returns to the kitchen. He puts a casual hand on Katie’s waist and brushes a light kiss across her mouth, then pours himself a cup of coffee. “Is Garak stitching himself up?”

“I offered,” Julius says. “He didn’t think my sewing abilities were up to the task.”

There’s a groan from behind Julius, and he turns to see Tucker dragging himself pitifully toward the kitchen table, one cheek very swollen. A very harassed-looking Polly follows. “Can I have—” Tucker starts, eyeing the coffee. Chakotay opens the freezer and tosses a frozen pack to Polly, who plucks it out of the air and presses it none-too-gently to Tucker’s cheek. “Ow,” Tucker complains, and Polly frowns at him.

“What a lovely gathering!” Garak has returned. “How do I look?” The black stitches are livid across his forehead.

“Reminiscent of Frankenstein’s monster,” Julius says. “But with nicer eyes.” Garak beams at him. “You’re supposed to put another bandage on that.”

Garak waves him off. “I’m letting it air out.” He walks to stand behind Julius, ignoring the empty chair next to him, and rests his hands on Julius’s shoulders. It’s comforting to feel his grip, a stark contrast to the limp body Julius had seen last night. He knows Garak must be badly bruised, after the beating he took, but he’s standing almost straight and his hands are firm, his eyes bright. “Incidentally, I thought I might shower, now that I can stand. I’m sure Julius can assist me.”

Neither Katie nor Chakotay looks the slightest bit surprised. “There are towels and some of my clean clothes in the first bathroom,” Chakotay says. “And a jar of arnica gel, for when you need it.”

Julius abandons his coffee and then gives Polly an apologetic look as Tucker reaches for it. He follows Garak to the bathroom. “I would welcome your assistance, my dear,” Garak says. His fingers fumble the buttons, and Julius gently moves his hands out of the way. Julius slips each button out of its buttonhole smoothly and then eases the jacket off Garak’s shoulders, dropping it on the floor. Julius does the same with the army pants, and Garak steps out of them stiffly. He must be in a great deal of pain, because he closes his eyes and sways a little as Julius undoes the buttons on his borrowed shirt.

“I was worried about you,” Julius admits. He keeps his hands very gentle and tries not to gasp when he sees the patterns of bruises across Garak’s body. “Garak—”

“Yes,” Garak says. “I was worried about you too. Don’t worry, these aren’t all from today.”

Of course. “It’s a miracle you didn’t break anything.”

Garak’s smile is wry. “They didn’t intend to *break* anything. Except Yevgeny, who I am sure would happily have broken me in half.” He gazes solemnly into Julius’s eyes. “You killed him?” When Julius nods, he says, “I’m sorry. I didn’t want you to have to kill anyone again.”

Julius turns the shower on. “I wasn’t about to let him hurt you. Here,” he beckons, and unbuttons Garak’s slacks as well. There’s the tiniest spark of mischief in Garak’s eyes as Julius pulls his slacks and briefs to the ground. “I’m glad to see you’re feeling well enough to think about *that*,” Julius says.

“You realize you’ll need to stand in the shower with me, to keep me steady.” Garak looks him up and down. “Were you planning to do it in those clothes?”

Right. As soon as he mentions it, Julius’s skin begins to itch like he’s been marching in these clothes for a muddy week. “No, I suppose not.” Julius undoes his own clothes roughly, quickly, as Garak steps into the shower, and then joins him there.

Garak tilts his face up to the hot water and leans back against Julius. “I’m glad you came out of this more or less unscathed,” Garak says into the water. “I would have felt—been—” He stops.

“I’m fine,” Julius says. He wraps his arms gently around Garak, letting his hand settle over Garak’s heart, and then kisses an unbruised spot on Garak’s shoulder. It’s faintly salty as the water washes away the sweat, and Julius inhales a long breath. Garak turns in the circle of his arms and kisses him sweetly, lips tender. They stand together like that for a long time, mouths touching, as Garak runs his hands over Julius’s head, over his neck and shoulders and back and chest like he’s checking for injuries, and Julius repeats, “I’m fine.” One side of his body—the side that crashed onto the concrete—has started to throb, and Garak frowns at his wince. “Is there soap?” Julius asks to distract him.

Garak lathers his own hands with a bar of something very faintly orange-scented and passes it to Julius. For a long moment, they do nothing but wash each other’s bodies, the blood and grime disappearing down the drain in faint streaks of red and brown. Julius keeps his hands very light, trying not to press on the bruises. Garak sways a little and closes his eyes. “My dear Julius, I may have—overestimated how long I should stand.”

Julius braces him. “Lean on me,” he says, and guides Garak out of the shower. “Sit down.” Garak sits on one of the folded towels atop the toilet lid without protesting. Julius turns the shower off and then uses another towel to blot Garak’s skin dry without too much pressure. It’s only when Garak is dry that Julius realizes he’s still dripping and starting to shiver. He wraps himself in Garak’s towel.

“There will be spare clothes in the cupboard by the sink,” Garak murmurs. His breathing is even, but his shoulders droop. Julius recognizes the bone-deep exhaustion from days without sleep, can only imagine what the combination of the Dominion’s drugs and whatever Garak took after and the head wound and blood loss have done.

Julius finds them, loose shirts and drawstring pants, and helps Garak dress before he pulls on his own. “Let’s get you back to bed.”

Garak frowns but doesn't argue, which is a sign in and of itself. Julius thinks of those stories that Garak used to tell, his preposterous adventures and the injuries that came with them, and wonders how many times Garak had to do this alone. He doesn't like to think about it.

They walk slowly back to the bedroom, Garak leaning heavily on Julius by the time they reach his bed. Julius helps him sit and then plumps the pillow before Garak lowers his head. "Thank you—my dear," Garak says softly. He's already starting to drift off.

Julius brushes his mouth across Garak's. "Sleep well." He wants to say more, but Garak is asleep now.

Julius wanders back into the kitchen. It's only Chakotay now, washing dishes in the sink. "Polly protected your coffee," he says, nodding toward the nearly-full mug.

"Where did they go?"

"Reed is watching Tucker so that Polly doesn't strangle him." Chakotay leans back against the kitchen and dries his hands on the dishtowel. "Katie took Polly."

"They seem—complicated." The coffee is lukewarm now, but Julius drinks it anyway. "Tucker and Polly."

One corner of Chakotay's mouth pulls into a smile. "When you love a very competent woman with a strong sense of purpose, it can take—time to figure it out." He hangs the dishtowel through the refrigerator handle.

"It seems like you and Katie figured it out." Julius feels like he's walking around with less than half the story, these days. He wonders how much Chakotay will be willing to tell him.

"I made a vow to her a long time ago," Chakotay says. "During the War." Julius hears the capital W.

"Is that how you all met?" Julius doesn't specify who 'all' is. He'd settle for an explanation of any one of them.

"Not all at once." Chakotay crosses his arms across his chest. "Katie was with the French resistance, for the OSS." He smiles wide, a dimple showing. "My Army unit showed up to liberate her town and she'd already done it." Somehow that doesn't surprise Julius. "Reed and Polly were OSS too. When the war ended—when it turned into Central Intelligence—they all left."

"And Tucker?" Julius is trying to talk around it, test to see how much Chakotay will say, before he asks about Garak outright.

Chakotay shakes his head. "He came with Garak." He must know what Julius is about to ask. "No one really knows where Garak came from."

Chapter 29

Chapter Summary

"Are you ever going to tell me?"

"Would it bother you if I didn't?" Garak looks sincerely curious. There's a loud snap and pop from one of the logs in the fireplace, and a few tiny embers land on the floor. "Would you spend the rest of our—would you resent that?"

Julius considers. "I would resent that you never trusted me enough to tell me," he admits. "Whatever it is, I'd rather know."

Time passes strangely, there at the safehouse. Waking up at four in the afternoon and then drinking coffee—urging Garak to sleep as much as he can, to recover from his wounds—watching Tucker and Polly work each other into increasing spirals of irritation—and then before he knows it, it's morning and he's pressing a kiss to Garak's forehead and climbing out of bed.

"Coffee in the pot," Katie says automatically. "Unless you'd like tea. I'm a fiend for coffee, but I think Chakotay keeps something around—"

"Somehow I doubt it's a double bergamot Earl grey." Julius smiles at her. "Coffee would be lovely." He finds a mug in the cupboard and pours himself some. There are eggs and a bottle of milk and a little sack of flour on the wooden counter. "Are you making breakfast?"

"Katie is even worse at cooking than you are, my dear." Garak walks into the kitchen, his feet tucked into sheepskin slippers, and there's something bizarrely funny about it all, contrasted with those horrid black stitches across his forehead. He takes the mug of coffee from Julius as though that was Julius's intent in the first place and sips it, then passes it back. "Unless she's improved since the last time I was here?"

Katie smiles wryly. "I can think of better uses of my time. Malcolm offered to make pancakes." It takes Julius a minute to remember that Reed's first name is Malcolm. "But there are oats in that crock, if you want oatmeal instead."

Julius is never one to turn down a meal cooked by someone else, and Reed's American pancakes are thick and fluffy, spread with butter and fruit preserves. The kitchen is cozy and very full with all seven of them crowded in there, crammed tight around a table meant for four. It makes Julius's throat catch, this feeling of—he doesn't know how to describe it, but it's somewhere between comfort and safety and not quite family—if Kay were here, he thinks, it would feel *complete* that way.

After breakfast, after Julius has washed dishes with Katie ("because we're the only two who'll never have to cook," she explains), he asks Garak, "Can I talk to you?"

Garak fixes him with an odd look. "I assume you mean privately?"

"Not the way you're thinking," Julius warns. "You're still recovering."

The odd look doesn't fade. "Yes, my dear, I suspected it was something else. Follow me." Garak leads him back through the house, to a chilly room with big windows that looks out onto a pasture. Julius busies himself building a fire in the fireplace, until Garak says, "I think we're past the point of—tiptoeing, Julius. What do you want to ask me?"

Julius sits on the sofa next to Garak. "No one here seems to know where you came from," Julius says eventually. Garak's blue eyes are serious, none of the overexaggerated innocence that he used to perform around Julius. "Chakotay says you weren't OSS with the others, but you brought Tucker with you. Hikaru says you were with his father in the war. Are you ever going to tell me?"

"Would it bother you if I didn't?" Garak looks sincerely curious. There's a loud snap and pop from one of the logs in the fireplace, and a few tiny embers land on the floor. "Would you spend the rest of our—would you resent that?"

Julius considers. "I would resent that you never trusted me enough to tell me," he admits. "Whatever it is, I'd rather know." There's such affection in him, when he looks at Garak, when he thinks about spending—a great deal more of their lives together—but he needs to know if Garak will keep this from him forever.

Garak smiles, a little wry, and sits back against the cushion. "The funny thing is, you've built it up to be such a *story* in your head. Everyone has."

"You didn't spring into being fully-formed."

"What, motherless, from my father's head? No, but he would have liked that." There's a slight curl to Garak's lip. "He was a diplomat," and it's the way he says it—reluctantly, resentfully—more than anything else that makes Julius believe it.

"A diplomat," Julius repeats. "Where?"

"Oh, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Russian Empire—he was flexible." Garak is staring into the fire now.

"*That* kind of diplomat."

"The kind of diplomat who accumulated enough favors to get himself out just in time," Garak says. "Enabran Tain could always see which way the wind was about to blow. Not that it took much of a visionary to know what was coming after Princip seized his opportunity. My

mother was pregnant, and he thought he would have an easier time getting out if he claimed to have a pregnant wife, so he took her along.”

“Where did you go?”

“I’m told I was born on the last American ship to weigh anchor out of Trieste, on the eve of the war to end all wars,” Garak says. “Though he always had a tendency to exaggerate.” He looks back at Julius. “New York, for a while. We learned to speak English, and he invented a new identity—became Evan Gardiner instead of Enabran Tain—and found a war widow with some money to marry.” At Julius’s curious noise, Garak adds, “My mother was his—housekeeper.”

There’s something hot and outraged in Julius’s throat, but he knows it isn’t the time for that. “So you grew up in New York?”

“Here and there,” Garak says, but he doesn’t glance away. “We traveled, too. Looking after his interests. After my mother died—well, by then I was old enough to know enough of his secrets that he and his wife couldn’t send me away.”

“How old were you?”

Garak gives him a very sharp look. “That’s a rude question, my dear.” His hand twitches a little, and Julius moves to take it, but Garak says, “I might become—emotional, if you touch me now.” Julius wouldn’t mind, but he can see that it would bother Garak. “I found my way around the world, with them, and then without them. There are a lot of beautiful places out there, you know.” He sounds almost wistful. “Beautiful places in terrible times.”

“I’m sure.” Julius hadn’t seen anything of America but New York, before Garak dragged him along. Garak is silent for a long time.

“You know, I told you the truth, more or less, about the origin of my name.”

“Elliott Jim?”

“Eliya, originally. But my father wanted me called Jim, to avoid the—particular taint of a name like that.”

“And the rest of it?”

“Just as I said. My father adopted the name Gardiner. My mother’s surname was Novak.” Garak stares into the fire, the light flickering in his eyes. “You can imagine why I didn’t want that printed on my dog tags.”

“So you *were* in the military, then.”

“You thought I had talked my way into the VFW club like you did?” For the first time, there’s a hint of a smile on Garak’s face. “I maintained the connections I’d developed. Intercepted messages for the SIS in India and Eritrea, facilitated introductions between partisans and profiteers and the various militaries on every continent but the southernmost, and helped to—guide choices.”

“Guide choices?”

Garak tilts his head a little. “I helped to narrow the range of choices available to targets until they made the right choices. Including killing people, Julius.” He over-emphasizes the words.

“I killed plenty of people during the war,” Julius says. He remembers every one of them.

“Yes,” Garak agrees, though he sounds unsatisfied by Julius’s response. “I—served in the Army, in various capacities, for the rest of the war. I would say that I grew disillusioned by the end, but that would suggest that I ever had illusions.”

“And Tucker? They say he came with you.”

Garak’s smile is almost beatific. “They had him hidden away in Arlington Hall, working on coding machines, of course. I—suggested to him that there was a wider world for his skills. I suppose I painted the picture well.”

Julius swallows hard. “And the work to protect the space program continues, doesn’t it. It’s not as though the bombing at the test pilot school was the last attack.”

“It wasn’t,” Garak confirms. “It’s not just the American space program that has to be safeguarded, either. They all have to be guided, pointed toward exploration rather than attack.” He looks earnest, a strange expression on his face. “The American space program—there are terrible men within it, at the heart of it.” Julius knows the name. “But the space programs, the race—persuading the Americans and the Russians to send their rockets, their *people*, into space instead of at each other—it’s worth safeguarding.”

“Are you asking me to join you?”

Garak looks torn, and Julius is surprised. He’d assumed the answer would be an immediate yes. “I suppose it would be selfish of me to say that I would like you to join the fight only when I’m there to protect you,” Garak says slowly. Julius makes a slightly outraged noise and Garak amends it to, “only when I’m there to work with you. I know you can be very useful, with your abilities, but I admit that I like to think of coming home to you and your typewriter and your latest story.”

“And telling me the truth about where you’ve been? No more dying cousins in Chesapeake or angels in Pensacola?” Garak nods. Julius likes the thought of Garak coming home to him too, likes the thought of writing his novels, of not giving the War Office the satisfaction of having turned him into a weapon. “I’m not saying I won’t go with you when you need me to,” he says. “In a heartbeat. If you need me, I’ll be there.”

“My dear, I believe you.” Garak shifts so that he’s leaning into Julius, lets his mouth find Julius’s lips. They kiss like that, soft and slow, until the fire pops again and Garak pulls back. “I suppose I can’t marry you so you can live off my pension if I die.” He looks pointedly at Julius’s

finger, where his wedding band used to sit.

“Somehow I doubt that they pay out a pension to the widows of spies.” It’s easier to say it that way, as a joke.

Quickly, almost awkwardly, Garak lifts Julius’s hand to his lips and kisses the knuckle of his ring finger. “I would, though,” he says. “If I could.”

Julius brings Garak’s hand to his own lips, slower. Garak’s finger is cold when Julius kisses it, and he lets his mouth linger there to try to warm it a little. When he finally lowers their joined hands, he says, “I would too.”

Chapter Summary

“The eyes of the world now look into space, to the moon and to the planets beyond,” President Kennedy declares. “We have vowed that we shall not see it governed by a hostile flag of conquest, but by a banner of freedom and peace. We have vowed that we shall not see space filled with weapons of mass destruction, but with instruments of knowledge and understanding.”

Garak has been gone for a week—not unusual, but long enough for Julius to start to get a little twitchy, to wonder if he should have gone along this time. He’s just finished his draft of *The Wandering Ship*, the sequel to *Galactic Voyage*, and he’s full of the restlessness that always overtakes him at the end of a new novel.

It’s only by chance that he turns on the television. He has to clear a stack of discarded manuscript pages from atop it, blow dust off the screen, and fiddle with the dial a bit. They don’t use it much. He switches from CBS to NBC, then hears the president’s distinctive voice and pauses.

“The eyes of the world now look into space, to the moon and to the planets beyond,” President Kennedy declares. “We have vowed that we shall not see it governed by a hostile flag of conquest, but by a banner of freedom and peace. We have vowed that we shall not see space filled with weapons of mass destruction, but with instruments of knowledge and understanding.”

“Space science, like nuclear science and all technology, has no conscience of its own. Whether it will become a force for good or ill depends on man.” How well Julius knows it—how well every person in this world has come to know it. He thinks of Garak, currently foiling some threat at Cape Canaveral; of all the men at the club, hollow-eyed when they let themselves remember too much of the War. Of his own dreams, which are better these days, but not always. “Space can be explored and mastered without feeding the fires of war, without repeating the mistakes that man has made in extending his writ around this globe of ours. There is no strife, no prejudice, no national conflict in outer space as yet. Its hazards are hostile to us all. Its conquest deserves the best of all mankind, and its opportunity for peaceful cooperation may never come again.”

His breath catches in his throat. There are nationalist words in between those beautiful sentences, phrases that say that the Americans must be first, and Julius knows better than to trust that any government lacks self-interest when it comes to space exploration. But he’s always been susceptible to soaring rhetoric, especially when it’s about something so central to his life these days.

“Space is there,” Kennedy declares. “We’re going to climb it, and the moon and the planets are there, and new hopes for knowledge and peace are there.” And there, he says it then, “We choose to go to the moon in this decade.”

Julius and Garak have known that this was coming. After Shepherd, Grissom, Glenn—every step has been toward the moon. And after that—there are new worlds, new civilizations, out in the galaxy. Julius is confident of it.

“I’m hurt,” Garak says softly, into Julius’s ear. “I’ve been gone a week, and you’d rather listen to the president than welcome me home.”

“Garak!” Julius leaps up and pulls Garak into a tight embrace. Garak smells of diesel fuel and pomade, and he holds Julius close and leans in for a kiss.

“You’re losing your edge, if you didn’t hear me come in,” Garak says, when they’ve finally separated.

Julius considers, examines his memory. “No, I heard you—you didn’t register as a threat, so I suppose it didn’t trigger a reaction.” His hand finds the back of Garak’s neck and he pulls him into another kiss.

“Not a threat!” Garak sounds outraged. “I’ll have you know that there are several men currently wandering through the Everglades who would say I’m very much a threat.”

Julius smiles sweetly. “You know very well what I mean,” he says, and he sees Garak’s answering smile. “Are you all in one piece?”

“Would you like to check?” Garak’s grin turns into a leer. “My transportation home was less than luxurious. I could certainly use a shower.”

Julius’s fingers were already playing at the knot of Garak’s tie, but now he grips the tie and tugs Garak toward the bathroom. “I would like to check *thoroughly*,” he agrees.

In the bathroom, Garak laughs against Julius’s mouth as they scramble to undress. Julius loves to do this when Garak comes home, loves to pull every scrap of clothing off of him and then touch every inch of him to be certain that he’s all right. Garak leans down to turn on the shower and Julius is already hardening, stroking the lean lines of his body. It’s a revelation every time that Garak comes home.

The shower is always a close fit for the two of them—it always reminds Julius of the motel room, years ago—but it’s all the better for that, because it means that Julius can press his chest close against Garak’s back as he lathers Garak’s skin, can take his time rubbing his soapy fingers back and forth across Garak’s nipples until they’re tight and hard. He loves the sound as Garak’s breathing grows faster, harsher, as Julius slides his hand down to wrap around Garak’s cock and Garak pushes back against him, a moan at the back of his throat. Garak turns around, so that they slide together, and then almost growls, “There isn’t enough room in here for what I want—”

It’s less than a minute before they’re tumbling into bed. They’re both always a little desperate for it when Garak first comes home and this is no exception, Garak kissing him a little frantically as Julius scrabbles in the bedside drawer and then Garak is slicking his fingers, working Julius open as quickly as he can take it. Julius pushes down on his fingers, trying to get Garak deep inside him, but it’s still one, two, three

fingers before Garak thrusts his cock in. Julius groans, and Garak does too, as Garak finally fills him. For a moment they're both still, adjusting to the feeling of it, breathing against each other, and then Julius lifts his hips, wraps his legs around Garak and urges him on. They move together, hard and fast—later they will go slowly, after they've showered again and eaten and Garak has regaled him with his latest adventures—but now the bed is shaking beneath them as Garak thrusts in and Julius rises to meet him. Garak gets one slick hand on Julius's cock, holding it so that it rubs against Garak's stomach with every movement, and it isn't long before Julius is coming, spurting across Garak's skin. He clenches tight around Garak's cock as he does, and it's only a few more jerky thrusts until he feels Garak stiffen and come inside him. Julius keeps his legs wrapped tight to hold Garak inside clenches over and over as Garak comes, until Garak is shaking and almost whining. Only then does Julius release him and Garak rolls onto his back next to Julius, gasping.

Julius gives him a very sloppy kiss. "Welcome home," he says. "I missed you."

Chapter Summary

“Roger, Tranquility. You got a bunch of guys about to turn blue. We're breathing again. Thanks a lot.”

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The drive to Katie and Chakotay's is beautiful in the sunlight of a summer afternoon. The trees cast long shadows across the road as Julius drives, and he remembers that first frantic trip here in the pitch-dark, more than a decade ago. Garak must see it, because he puts one hand on Julius's shoulder and they drive like that, the radio faded to quiet static.

Katie and Chakotay are out in front of the house, waiting for them. Chakotay's black hair is greying now, but his smile is the same. “You must have had terrible traffic,” he teases. “The others beat you by a few hours.”

Julius is extremely aware of what he and Garak were doing a few hours ago, the reason that they're late, but he has enough practice to fight back the blush creeping up the back of his neck. “Julius was feeling inspired,” Garak says. “Couldn't tear him away from the typewriter.”

Katie looks unimpressed. “I warn you, your ex-wife brought a copy of your last novel for us. There may be dramatic readings, especially after a few drinks.”

He blames Odette for Kay's desire to read written work aloud. “I'll remind her she only gets to read Janeway *or* Torres, not both.”

Garak lifts one of their suitcases out of the car, but Julius snatches the other before Garak can grab it and hands Garak the cane. “You never minded using it when you *didn't* need it,” he says. Garak brandishes the cane like a rapier, lifting the suitcase like a shield. If Julius didn't know him so well, he would miss the tiniest wince as Garak puts his full weight on his bad knee. “You've proved your point, dear.” Garak gives in and leans on the cane.

They follow Katie and Chakotay into the house, which is riotous with noise. The twins are wrestling, alternately shouting “Laurie!” and “Lizzie!” Tucker has crawled under the table, one hand on Elizabeth's chubby ankle as he tries to separate her from her brother.

“Whenever I'm tempted to reproduce,” Reed says, “I have dinner at Tucker and Polly's house. Amazing, how effective that is.”

“I believe the first step would be finding someone to reproduce with you.” Polly's tone makes clear exactly how distasteful she finds the idea, but Julius thinks he sees the slightest hint of fondness in her eyes as she watches Tucker drag their toddlers out into the open.

Reed rolls his eyes. “Garak, Julius, the back bedroom is free. It's next to the—shrieking creatures, but you were the last to arrive, so—”

“I think we'll manage.” They don't bother pretending, here, that Garak and Julius are anything other than—what they are to each other.

The twins have worn themselves—and their parents—out by the time they've all finished dinner. They make their way into the living room gradually, one after another, crowding onto couches and chairs and eventually a rug, all set in front of the television. Julius finds himself tucked tightly between Garak and Kay, watching Tucker fiddle with the television set while Elizabeth drools on his shoulder. He suspects that Tucker was up on the roof earlier today, doing something very illegal to make sure they could watch the television broadcast.

The television fuzzes for a moment and then Walter Cronkite's face comes into focus. Julius knows what is going to happen, knows already from their contacts in NASA that the landing was successful, but it doesn't stop the great swelling of emotion in him as the landing begins. There's a moment—a long moment—when none of them breathes. Then Neil says, “Houston, Tranquility Base here. The eagle has landed,” and there's a collective gasp of relief.

The men in Houston must feel the same, because Mission Control responds, “Roger, Tranquility. You got a bunch of guys about to turn blue. We're breathing again. Thanks a lot.” Julius doesn't look, but he's fairly certain that someone in the room is crying. Garak gasps in a quick little breath as Neil begins to describe the surroundings, the chalky gray, the abundance of small craters. Then there's the line, the magic line, “That's one small step for a man—one giant leap for mankind,” and even having known ahead of time that it would be something like that, Julius finds that it *hits* him somewhere deep.

His eyes are burning as Neil keeps going, talking about the fine layers of moon-dust on his boots, the ease of walking around, as he says, “It has a stark beauty all its own,” and Julius isn't quite crying but there's adrenaline rushing through him and tears in his eyes. He feels Garak hitch a little next to him and grips Garak's hand. “Magnificent sight out here,” Neil says, and Buzz agrees, “Magnificent desolation.” Garak's hand clenches tightly on his own. The words wash over him, and he knows he'll remember every one of them later, turn each one over in his mind.

But right now, his entire focus is on that single man as Neil reads the words aloud from the plaque, and everyone in the room is crying now, even if only silently. “Here, man from the planet Earth first set foot upon the Moon, July 1969 A.D. We came in peace for all mankind.”

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Try watching this video on www.youtube.com, or enable JavaScript if it is disabled in your browser.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you all for coming on this journey with me!

You can read the entire transcript of the Apollo 11 mission on NASA's website [here](#).

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