

Scar Tissue

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Scar Tissue

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Summary

Bashir had prepared himself for sex with a Cardassian. He wasn't sure exactly what was in Garak's pants, but he could roll with the punches.

He just wasn't expecting *nothing at all*.

It wasn't what Julian expected.

He didn't know the finer details of Cardassian anatomy. He'd imagined plenty of options, some more plausible than others. And he'd kept an open mind, been prepared for everything from a standard human penis (in grey scales, of course) to something resembling a fleshy lightbulb and an old-fashioned cord (you tugged the cord over and over, until the bulb burst on in a flash of resplendent golden light, so bright it blinded you. That was the climax).

But what he hadn't expected was this. Slowly, Julian sank to his knees on the bedroom floor. He'd been in the middle of removing his tunic, but now he left it alone, hanging open while he placed his hands on Garak's hips and held him still.

"Garak..." he said softly, and at the sound of sadness in his voice, Garak twitched away. He swept his open robe back over himself. "No, don't hide it," Julian said. "I'm sorry. But I didn't know--"

"Don't tell me you are completely ignorant of Cardassian anatomy," said Garak with false cheer. Julian angled his head up, meeting Garak's eyes. The spark there was hard and glinting, a challenge that Julian refused to meet.

"This isn't regular Cardassian anatomy," he said gently.

"You're an expert now?" said Garak with an unconvincing, indignant huff. His acting was worse than usual: a little rattled, Julian thought. And no wonder. He kept his hands on Garak's hips and rubbed his thumbs in soothing circles over the sheer fabric of the robe.

"Garak," he said, "I know scar tissue when I see it. You don't have to tell me what happened if you don't want to--"

Two clawed hands landed on top of Julian's and pushed him away. With a flourish of the robe, Garak huffed across the room to the incense bar, still playing games. Wisps of colored smoke traced through the air as Garak fiddled with them, a Cardassian apothecary of smells. Julian got to his feet slowly. He wasn't as familiar with the cultural implications of each scent as he would like to be, but he knew that one was more important than the rest: bluewater, a distinct Cardassian flower, the symbol of desire. If his research was accurate, and if Garak really wanted to sleep with him, he should have been burning bluewater when Julian walked in. But he wasn't.

So this was all a ruse. A game. Like the time, years before, when he struggled with his implant – when he did everything in his power to make Julian hate him, to manipulate the doctor into refusing medical care, or giving up.

"These mind games won't work on me, Garak," said Julian flatly.

With delicate movements, Garak set a new incense stick on the burner. "I should have known better," he said, "than to attempt deception over a medical matter."

Julian stayed silent, his lips thin.

"You want the truth?" asked Garak. He closed his eyes and feigned resignation. "I was young. This was many years before I made a name for myself in the Obsidian Order. Perhaps, if it had happened later in my life, things might have been different."

It was already such an obvious lie that al Julian could do was hold his breath and wait for it to be over.

"I was assigned guard duty over a squad of Bajoran prisoners," Garak continued, "but one in particular caught my eye. She was ... devious. Ruthless. Fully committed to her cause – to the Bajoran state." He tipped his chin down. "You can see the attraction."

"Except you've never shown a lick of interest in women," Julian said. "Let me finish the story for you. You slept with her."

"Yes."

"You were caught."

"Yes."

"And they mutilated you as punishment," Julian said. "So your coupling with a Bajoran would not sully the bloodline of any future Cardassian citizens you might produce."

Garak turned at the waist, his eye ridges raised. "Why, doctor, what a nice flair. You've been practicing."

"Tell me the truth, Garak."

For a long breath, Garak studied Julian in silence, his expression unreadable. The spark of mischief in his eyes faded. It left behind something drained, sad–

–and utterly artificial.

"You wouldn't believe me if I told you," said Garak, lowering his head.

That was absolutely true, but Julian just resigned himself and waited for the lie.

"You see," said Garak, "it was a freak accident involving a torture device known as the pear–"

"You're right," Julian cut in. "I don't believe you. Try again."

Silence. Beneath his robe, Garak's chest rose and fell, his breaths too slow, too steady. His face was shuttered now.

"What if I told you," he said, not meeting Julian's eyes, "that it was a punishment for an ... unspeakable crime."

Julian folded his arms. The implication settled into his chest and froze there, sharp and cold. Castration, mutilation – it was obvious what kind of crime Garak meant. But Julian kept his voice composed, almost toneless, as he said, "Do you ever commit crimes, Garak, that Federation personnel would not describe as unspeakable?"

Garak's shoulders relaxed incrementally. "I wouldn't say I commit any crimes at all," he said. "I'm simply a tailor."

Julian inclined his head. He seemed to have passed the test. Garak let his breath out in a slow sigh and moved away from the incense bar, his robe wrapped tight around his waist to hide the lump of scar tissue between his legs. He seemed more like himself now, less like a living mask.

"All members of the Obsidian Order are chemically castrated, temporarily," he said. "To prevent any unwanted slips."

Julian nodded. That made sense to him, in a very Cardassian fashion.

"When I was exiled," said Garak. He faltered. "When I was exiled, the ... 'temporary' part was revoked." His pale eyes flickered up to check Julian's expression. Hints of strain developed in his facial scales, turning them a sickly shade of gray. "Violently," he said.

Maybe it was the truth. Maybe it wasn't. But the emotion was real.

"I'm sorry," Julian murmured.

Garak's eyes flashed. "Don't be," he said coolly. "I am proud of my scars, Doctor. There is no purer sign of my loyalty to the State."

"Of course," said Julian. He circled around the room and finally let himself fall back on Garak's bed, exhausted by the back-and-forth. "But if you don't mind me asking a personal question...?" he asked.

Garak hadn't moved. He stood stock-still by the incense bar, his shoulders hunched, his arms crossed tightly over his ribs. It was defensive, defiant posture – and vulnerable at the same time.

"How do you...?" Julian started. And he stopped there.

"Simple," said Garak with all the haughty superiority of a wounded king. "I obtain pleasure by giving pleasure, my dear doctor. After all, what is every member of the Obsidian Order, at base, if not a servant?"

Julian raised an eyebrow. "I might describe them as secret police, first and foremost. Spies, second. Interrogators, torturers, assassins–"

Garak waved this away. "It takes many forms, yes. But what it comes down to–" and now he was approaching Julian, slow and graceful, the silky fabric of his robe gently swaying against his thighs. "--is that we live to serve."

And he sank to his knees before Julian, and for a while, Julian forgot about the scar tissue entirely.

This was how they worked. And for months, there was nothing wrong with it. For Julian, there was no getting past the appeal: he had spent his entire life working anxiously to prove himself in every field, to get past that compounded stigma – augments on top of learning disabilities; shame layered over shame. But with Garak, in bed, there was nothing to prove. No pleasure he could give. Nothing to do but lie back and enjoy.

And Garak stayed fully-clothed the whole time.

Over the months, Julian got only a few brief glimpses of the mutilated organ between Garak's legs. It left him with no clue what Cardassian males were really supposed to look like. The scar was so poorly healed that Julian could still see the pockmarks left behind by crooked sutures, and he knew deep in his bones that Garak must have removed the thread himself. He could picture it, the poorly-lit tailor shop at night, the too-cold air of a space station plucking at Garak's bare skin, his head bowed as he worked the stitches out. Alone.

"Is it numb?" Julian asked one night, not over sex – over drinks and literature, a data-rod twirling between his thin fingers. Garak paused, lips parted over the rim of a flute-shaped glass.

Did he know what Julian meant? He must. He always seemed to know. But he stayed silent, his eyes darting over the table, and finally Julian said,

"Sometimes scar tissue is more sensitive. But usually..."

Understanding dawned in Garak's eyes. Voice clipped, emotionless, he said, "It's numb."

"No sensation at all?" Julian checked. He watched a shutter come down over Garak's eyes, turning them flat and cool. Rushing to explain, he said, "I only want to make sure. There are medical procedures—"

Garak's nostrils flared. A look of pure Cardassian outrage swept across his face.

"You're telling me, doctor, that you wish to remove the finest badge of honor an agent of the State could ever receive?"

Julian wilted. "Of course not," he muttered, stabbing at his salad. "Why should I try to help you? You're only my friend."

"There is a distinct difference between helping a friend and disrespecting a culture you will never understand." Garak sat back with a huff. "Clearly, our discussions on literature are lost on you. I doubt you've ever understood—"

Julian cut him off with a brisk wave of his fork. "Garak. I want to bring you pleasure like *you* pleasure *me*. I want to serve you as a member of the Obsidian Order serves the State. Does that make sense?"

'Obsidian Order,' 'serve the State' – Garak's temper had fizzled out, and suddenly he was giving Julian heart-eyes. He made a visible effort to rein himself in.

"It ... doesn't ... not make sense," he managed primly. "But it isn't possible."

"Isn't it?" Julian met Garak's eyes with a sigh. "Did they sever the nerve endings in every part of your body, Garak? Does it bring you no pleasure to be kissed—"

"Cardassians do not kiss."

"--to be touched?" Julian pressed. He leaned forward, sliding his plate out of the way, and grabbed hold of Garak's wrist. "If I lick a stripe down the inside of your wrist, Garak, you'll still feel my tongue against your pulse."

Garak's eyes were wide and challenging. His throat flexed as he swallowed. His hand twitched in Julian's grasp, but he didn't pull away – not even when Julian forced Garak's hands up, manipulated them, one thumb stroking over the meat of Garak's palm until he pressed down on just the right muscle, and those angry fists turned into open palms. Julian drew Garak's hands closer, his eyes burning into Garak's, and parted his lips. He slipped one clawed, scaly finger into his mouth, let his hot tongue warm Garak's skin. The air cooled it when Julian pulled away. He licked the vulnerable flesh of Garak's wrist, nipped at it with his teeth, pulled away.

Garak's chest rose and fell in short bursts. His face remained expressionless ... but he tracked every movement like a predator watches its prey.

"Was I kissing numb skin?" Julian asked. Garak looked away. "I felt your heartbeat quicken, Garak. Your pulse doesn't lie."

"Maybe not for a human," said Garak faintly. "And maybe not for a Federation doctor. But what kind of ... tailor would I be, if I couldn't control my pulse?"

"Tell it to hold steady, then," Julian said, and he grabbed Garak's wrist roughly and sank his teeth into that tender flesh. Garak jerked in Julian's grasp, a cry of pain spilling over his lips before he caught himself, realized there was no blood. Julian's blunt human teeth couldn't do much except bruise him, and slowly Garak relaxed. His heartbeat pounded, fast and thready, against Julian's lips.

"Alright," Garak said breathlessly. "I feel it."

Julian met his eyes. He licked over the dents his teeth had made in Garak's skin, kissed the bruises gently, slow and open-mouthed. "So you can feel pleasure," he murmured, his breath hot against Garak's wrist.

"I am exiled," said Garak, taking a deep breath. "Not dead."

“Well, I don’t want you to just feel ‘not dead,’” Julian said. He leaned forward, his fingers hooking in Garak’s collar, knuckles brushing gently against the soft, sensitive skin of Garak’s neck. “I want you to feel alive,” he said.

Garak might have snorted at that, and almost certainly rolled his lies, but all sarcasm was lost to a very human, not-at-all-Cardassian kiss: soft lips on his, Julian’s too-warm tongue brushing against the ridges on the roof of Garak’s mouth, a place where no one ever touched him, a spot so sensitive that it almost made him melt.

Almost. But Obsidian Order members – that is, plain and simple tailors – did not melt. Nor did they moan. They held perfectly still – they parted their lips – they allowed entry – they leaned into the touch – they curled their fingers into claws.

They broke.

“Bed?” Julian suggested, and Garak, panting, managed a desperate nod. He let Julian guide him to the bed, his legs not shaking – not exactly. Nothing so ostentatious as a muscle tremor. But inside him, something threaded between his nerves and skittered down his veins, a shaking that never quite reached the skin. Julian coaxed him down, pushed him onto his back with all that pitiful human gentleness that made the Federation so obnoxious, worked the buttons open on Garak’s shirt, exposed his stomach, his chest, all that wide expanse of skin.

Here, too, there were scars. Julian ran his fingers over them, traced their patterns over Garak’s ribs. His fingertips left a hot trail behind on Garak’s skin, a spark that nestled right against his lungs and made it difficult to breathe.

“Where did you get these?” Julian murmured. “Tailoring accident?”

Garak’s jaw locked up. “You know how tricky those needles can be,” he managed, and with a tolerant smile, Julian lowered his head and kissed the scar on Garak’s ribs.

It really was pointless, Garak thought. All over his body, once-sensitive skin was marked by swaths of tissue that was years past healing. Tissue that couldn’t feel a thing, where neither scales nor hair would grow. The wet heat of Julian’s tongue might as well have been pressing against rubber.

But his lungs stuttered anyway. And his legs shifted apart. And his hands tangled in Julian’s hair. And on the edges of each scar, where the skin was whole, he felt Julian’s touch like a ghost. An aftertaste of skin and warmth and pressure. An echo of a life he might have had if he hadn’t been exiled – if he hadn’t joined the Order so young – if he hadn’t tucked his childhood away, shot Elim dead, worked to become the Son of Tain.

He closed his eyes. He killed the emotion rising in him. This was pointless, and he needed to catch his breath and calm his thoughts, articulate exactly why Julian should stop. First of all because it wouldn’t result in anything. No climax, no explosive end, just a slow fade. And second of all because he didn’t deserve–

Because of a thousand assassinations. Because of fathers, tortured and killed in front of their sons. Because of Bajoran refugee camps and ore mines filled with slaves and children dying on packed ships. Because an Obsidian Order agent should never grow a conscience. Because an Obsidian Order agent should never give into sentiment.

Because a Cardassian should never betray his state.

But–

But Julian slipped his fingers beneath Garak’s waistband, and he kissed his way down Garak’s stomach, and he mouthed over the unfeeling scar tissue that Garak swore was a badge of pride.

And Garak leaned into the touch.

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