

a little knowledge is a dangerous thing

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Summary

Julian has heard the rumours - a Romulan senator killed and Romulus entering the war effort against the Dominion - he can't wait to discuss it with Elim! He'll be so shocked...

Julian first heard it as rumour, which was how everything important began on Deep Space Nine.

A murmur at the Replimat, too sharp to be idle gossip, too widespread to be contained. He caught fragments as he passed people on the Promenade – Bajorans, Starfleet, civilians – all talking about the same thing: the Romulans, a ship destroyed, Dominion attack. Voices pitched low but carrying anyway, because no one on the station had ever truly learned how to keep a secret.

He slowed, then stopped outright.

“Yeah – a Senator, they’re saying...”

Julian turned on his heel, already smiling at Ensign Sanchez, already alight with it. “What senator?”

The ensign startled, then leant in, grateful for an audience. “Oh, hello, Sir. Senator Vreenak. His shuttle was destroyed on the way back to Romulus. Starfleet thinks the Dominion did it.”

For a moment, the name hung between them, heavy with implication.

Julian’s mind moved quickly, faster than the conversation, faster than caution. “If the Romulans believe that...”

“They do,” his friend said. “Or they will. It’s all over Ops.”

And just like that, the shape of it crystallised. Julian felt it then, that lift in his chest he had not allowed himself in months. Movement. A shift in the long, grinding stalemate of the war. “This could change everything,” he said, half to himself.

No one disagreed.

He was already turning away before the conversation dissolved, the noise of the Replimat swelling back into something indistinct behind him. The Promenade seemed brighter, suddenly, charged. Officers moved with purpose, civilians clustered in tight, whispering groups. News travelled fast here, but anticipation travelled faster.

Romulus entering the war. The thought was almost too large to hold. Reinforcements. Resources. Pressure on the Dominion from another front. He did some mental maths... Woah. The projections alone...

Julian let out a quiet, incredulous laugh. “Garak will love this,” he murmured, and then, softer, as if correcting himself, “Or at least appreciate it.”

He set off at a near jog. It felt, he had to admit it, like bringing good news. Like carrying something precious, fragile with possibility, cupped carefully between his hands. Garak, with his endless appetite for intrigue, his sharp assessments and sharper silences, Garak would

understand the significance of it, would turn it over and examine it from every angle until it gleamed. Julian wanted to see that. Wanted to be there for it.

The corridor outside the tailor's shop was, as always, quiet. Removed from the current that ran through the rest of the station, as though the very air had agreed to behave differently here. Julian did not slow down. He pressed the chime with more force than necessary, barely waiting for the answering tone before pushing the door open.

"Garak, have you heard?"

The bell announced him, bright and discordant.

Inside, everything was exactly as it should be. Fabric draped in careful lines. Tools arranged with deliberate precision. The soft, almost reverent hush of a place devoted to detail. And Garak, of course, exactly where he ought to be.

He sat at his worktable, head bowed, needle flashing briefly in the light before disappearing again into the seam. For a moment he did not look up.

Julian's breath caught, though he could not have said why.

Then Garak glanced up, as if only just noticing him. The faintest flicker of surprise crossed his face, so quick Julian might have imagined it.

"My dear Doctor," he said, setting his work aside, "what an unexpected *pleasure*."

Julian stepped further inside, the door sliding shut behind him with a soft hiss. "Garak, tell me, *have you heard*?"

Garak's brows lifted, just slightly. "Heard what, my dear?"

"The Romulan senator, Vreenak. His shuttle was destroyed. Starfleet thinks the Dominion was responsible." The words came quickly, tripping over each other in their urgency.

"They're saying the Romulans might enter the war."

Garak went very still.

It was subtle, so subtle Julian might have missed it, if he had not been watching. The kind of stillness that was not absence, but containment.

"How... extraordinary," Garak said at last.

Julian let out a breath, something in him easing at the reaction. "Extraordinary? Garak, it's well, it's everything, isn't it? If the Romulans believe it..."

"Yes," Garak said slowly. "If they believe it."

He rose from his chair, smoothing his hands over his sleeves as though considering the matter. His expression had settled into something thoughtful now, faintly troubled in a way that felt reassuringly appropriate.

Julian found himself watching him, trying to track the shift. “You hadn’t heard?”

“Doctor,” Garak said, with a small, self-deprecating tilt of his head, “even I am not privy to every development the moment it occurs.”

There was just enough humour in it to soften the words.

Julian smiled, relieved. “Well, you’re hearing it now.”

“Indeed.” Garak moved a step closer, his gaze sharpening, not with surprise, exactly, but with interest. “A Romulan senator, you say. Destroyed en route to Romulus.”

“Yes.”

“And the Dominion is the suspected culprit.”

“That’s what everyone’s saying.”

Garak hummed softly, as if turning the idea over. “One wonders what evidence has led Starfleet to such a conclusion.”

Julian hesitated. “I’m not sure there is any, yet. But it fits, doesn’t it? The Dominion are known to be hostile, aren’t they?”

“But would they jeopardise their non-aggression pact with the Romulans?” Garak suggested.

Julian frowned. “Well, I don’t know.”

Garak’s expression shifted again, something almost approving flickering there before it was carefully smoothed away. “If they *did*, it was bold strategy,” he said. “Dangerous, certainly. And it seems to have backfired, because now....”

Julian felt that lift in his chest again, stronger now that he could share it. “Yes! You see it too. If the Romulans join us...”

“They would tip the balance,” Garak agreed.

This time, the certainty in his voice felt earned, reasoned through, rather than assumed. Julian relaxed into it, into the familiar rhythm of their conversations, the way Garak took an idea and refined it, sharpened it into something clearer.

Still, something lingered.

Julian tilted his head slightly. “You don’t seem surprised.”

Garak met his gaze, and smiled, warm, almost indulgent. “On the contrary, Doctor. I am delighted to be surprised. It makes life so much more interesting.”

Julian huffed a quiet laugh. “Only you would say that about an interstellar incident.”

“Ah,” Garak said lightly, “but isn’t that precisely what makes it worth discussing?”

Outside, the distant murmur of the Promenade swelled and shifted, alive with the same story Julian had carried in with him.

Inside, the shop felt smaller now. Closer.

“Well,” Julian said, stepping nearer without quite realising it, “you have to admit, the timing is remarkable.”

Garak held his gaze for a fraction too long.

“Yes,” he said softly. “Remarkable.”

Julian smiled, satisfied, the last of his unease dissolving.

He did not notice the way Garak’s expression stilled again, once his back was turned.

Julian should have been satisfied.

Garak had reacted as expected. Surprise, measured curiosity, the careful unfolding of implications. It all fit. It made sense.

“There’s just no way the Dominion would pass up an opportunity like this,” Julian said, more to fill the space than out of necessity. “A high-ranking Romulan official, alone, en route to Romulus... it’s practically an invitation.”

“Mm,” Garak murmured.

Julian glanced at him. Garak had turned slightly away, fingers resting lightly against the edge of his worktable, as though grounding himself there. His attention seemed fixed somewhere just beyond Julian’s shoulder, unfocused in a way that felt... unusual.

Julian frowned faintly. “You agree, don’t you?”

Garak’s gaze snapped back to him, sharp and immediate. “I agree that the Dominion is entirely capable of such an act,” he said. “The question, as always, is not capability, but intent.”

Julian hesitated. “You think they didn’t intend it?”

“I think,” Garak said, with careful patience, “that intent is often assigned after the fact, to suit a narrative.”

There was something in the way he said it. Not dismissive, not even particularly forceful. Just... precise.

Julian felt that small flicker of unease again. “Well, Starfleet seems convinced.”

“Starfleet,” Garak replied lightly, “is frequently convinced of many things.”

Julian huffed. “You’re impossible.”

“On the contrary,” Garak said, turning back to him fully now, his expression smoothing into something warmer, “I am merely cautious.”

Julian studied him for a moment.

It would have been easy, very easy, to let it go. To fall back into the comfort of familiar roles. Garak, the enigmatic observer. Julian, the eager interpreter of events. They had played this game before, countless times.

But something about this felt different.

“You’re not curious,” Julian said slowly.

Garak blinked. “I beg your pardon?”

“You should be asking questions. Speculating. You always do.” Julian tilted his head, watching him more closely now. “Instead, you’re... holding back.”

For a fraction of a second, something flickered in Garak’s expression. Not surprise this time. Something closer to calculation.

Then it was gone.

“My dear Doctor,” he said, almost gently, “I assure you, I am *deeply* curious. But curiosity, like any appetite, is best indulged with restraint.”

Julian did not smile.

“Right,” he said. Silence settled between them, thinner now. More fragile.

Outside, the station pulsed with it, the news spreading, solidifying into something real. A shift in alliances. A turning point. The beginning of the end, perhaps. Inside, Julian found himself watching Garak as though seeing him slightly out of focus.

“You said ‘if they believe it’,” Julian said after a moment.

Garak’s expression did not change. “Did I?”

“Yes.” Julian took a step closer, not quite consciously. “You didn’t say they would. Just that they might.”

“A distinction worth making,” Garak replied smoothly.

“Why?”

Garak tilted his head, considering him. “Because belief, Doctor, is far more fragile than fact. And far more useful.”

The words settled heavily.

Julian felt it then, not quite a realisation, but the outline of one. Something just beyond reach. “Useful to whom?”

Garak smiled. It was a familiar smile. Warm. Polite. Entirely uninformative.

“Why, to everyone involved, of course.”

Julian held his gaze. For a moment, neither of them moved. Then Julian exhaled, the tension slipping just slightly from his shoulders. “You’re doing it again.”

“Doing what?”

“Answering questions without actually answering them.”

Garak’s smile widened, just a fraction. “A skill you once claimed to admire.”

“I still do,” Julian said. “Usually.”

Something in his tone must have shifted, because Garak’s expression softened, almost imperceptibly.

“Doctor,” he said quietly, “you mustn’t let my conversational habits detract from what is, by all accounts, a very positive development.”

Julian hesitated.

Positive.

“Yes,” he said, after a moment. “It is.”

It had to be.

He forced a small smile. “The Romulans joining us... it could shorten the war. Save lives.”

“Indeed,” Garak said.

There was no hesitation in it.

That, more than anything else, eased something in Julian’s chest.

He nodded, more to himself than to Garak. “Then I suppose we should be grateful.”

Garak inclined his head. “Gratitude is always appropriate when fortune favours us.”

Julian let out a quiet breath, some of the earlier brightness returning. “Well. I thought you’d want to hear it straight away.”

“I am touched by your consideration,” Garak said.

Julian smiled properly this time. “Someone has to keep you informed.”

“Quite.”

The moment settled, gentler now. Familiar again.

Julian turned towards the door. “I should get back. I imagine Sickbay is about to become very busy with people celebrating prematurely.”

“A most predictable side effect,” Garak said.

Julian paused at the threshold, glancing back. “You’ll keep an eye on things here?”

Garak’s smile returned, perfectly composed. “Doctor, I always do.”

Julian nodded, satisfied, and stepped out into the corridor.

The door slid shut behind him.

Julian did not mean to bring it up again. That was what he told himself, at least. The lights were low, the station quieter in that artificial way it only ever managed in its off-hours. Beyond the viewport, the stars held steady, indifferent. Julian lay half-turned on his side, watching the slow rise and fall of Garak’s shoulder beside him, tracing the familiar lines of him in shadow.

It should have been enough. The day had been long, full, significant in ways that would ripple outward for months, years. There was no reason to disturb this, to pull at threads that might unravel something far more immediate.

But something nagged at him.

“You knew,” Julian said softly.

The words settled between them without preamble. Garak did not move. For a moment, Julian thought he might pretend not to have heard; might pretend to already have succumbed to sleep. But then there was the faintest shift, a subtle stilling that Julian had come to recognise far too well.

“My dear Doctor,” Garak began, voice smooth with the beginnings of something familiar.

“Don’t,” Julian said. Not sharply. Not angrily.

Garak fell silent. A pause stretched between them, thinner than it had been a moment before.

Then, quietly, Garak said, “Are you certain you wish to pursue this line of inquiry?”

Julian frowned slightly. “I’m asking you a question.”

“And I am asking you one in return.”

Garak turned his head then, just enough to meet his gaze. Even in the dim light, his expression was composed, but there was something else beneath it now. Not deflection. Not quite. Consideration.

“Do you *really* wish to know the answer?” Garak asked.

Julian stilled. The question landed differently than he expected. Not evasive, not dismissive. Serious.

“Yes,” Julian said, after only the briefest hesitation.

Garak watched him for a moment longer. “I wonder,” he said softly, “if that is entirely true.”

Julian pushed himself up onto one elbow. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

“It means,” Garak said, “that there are certain questions which, once answered, cannot be set aside again. You may find the knowledge... inconvenient.”

Julian let out a quiet breath. “Inconvenient.”

“A polite term,” Garak allowed.

Julian studied him, something tightening in his chest. “You’re doing it again.”

“Am I?”

“Yes. Turning this into something abstract so you don’t have to actually answer.”

Garak’s gaze did not waver. “On the contrary, Doctor. I am attempting to ensure that, when I do answer, you are fully prepared to hear it.”

The seriousness in his tone cut through the last of Julian’s patience.

“Yes, Elim, I am prepared,” Julian said.

“Are you?”

Julian held his gaze. “Yes.”

Garak inclined his head, just slightly. “Very well.”

Julian drew in a slow breath.

“You were involved,” he said. Not a question.

Garak did not look away.

Julian’s throat felt tight. “How many people know?”

“A select few,” Garak replied.

The immediacy of it sent a small shock through Julian. No deflection. No evasion.

“Starfleet?” Julian pressed.

“A limited number of individuals, operating with a commendable degree of discretion.”

Julian exhaled slowly. That was answer enough.

“And you?” he asked. “Did you act alone?”

“No.”

Julian closed his eyes briefly.

It settled into place, then. All of it. The certainty. The timing. The careful phrasing.

He opened his eyes again. “The shuttle. That wasn’t the Dominion.”

Garak was quiet for a moment. “You already know the answer to that.”

Julian swallowed. “Say it.”

Garak studied him.

“You wish to know?” he said quietly.

“Yes.”

Another pause. “No. It was not the Dominion.”

The words did not feel like a revelation. They felt like confirmation.

Julian let out a slow, unsteady breath, staring somewhere just past him. “For the war,” he said.

“For the war,” Garak agreed.

Julian’s voice was quieter now. “You killed them.”

“No,” Garak said.

Julian looked at him sharply.

“I arranged circumstances,” Garak continued, “in which certain outcomes became highly probable.”

Julian let out a hollow sound. “That’s not a meaningful distinction.”

“It is the only one that matters,” Garak replied.

“To you.”

Garak held his gaze. “To history.”

Julian shook his head, dragging a hand through his hair. “There were people on that shuttle.”

“Yes.”

“A Romulan senator.”

“Yes.”

“And you decided that-”

“I ensured that the Romulan Empire would enter the war,” Garak said, calm and precise. “An outcome you yourself described as capable of changing everything.”

Julian went still. Because he had said that. Because he had *meant* it.

“That doesn’t make it right,” he said, but there was less force in it now.

Garak’s expression softened, just slightly. “No,” he said. “It does not.”

Julian blinked at that.

“You’re not even going to argue?”

Garak’s gaze lingered on him. “Would you find that comforting?”

Julian let out a quiet, incredulous laugh. “I don’t know what I’d find comforting right now.”

“Then perhaps honesty is the most appropriate alternative,” Garak said.

Julian stared at him.

“You lied to me,” he said.

“Yes.”

Again, no hesitation.

Julian shook his head, something almost helpless in the motion. “You didn’t even try to avoid that one.”

“You asked me not to.”

Silence settled between them again, heavier now. After a long moment, Julian lay back down, staring up at the ceiling. He did not move closer. He did not move away.

“I don’t know what to do with this,” he said quietly.

Garak did not answer immediately.

When he did, his voice was softer than Julian had ever heard it.

“You will, in time.”

Julian turned his head slightly. “And you? How do you deal with this?”

Garak’s expression did not change. “By thinking about the people that my action might save.”

Julian let that sit. After a while, almost without thinking, he reached out and let his hand rest lightly against Garak’s wrist. Garak did not pull away.

Neither of them spoke. Outside, the stars held steady.

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