

Tristan screamed.

He screamed hard, but not in pain. He screamed to keep himself angry, to give himself the strength to break from the wall. They were back to listening to the comm, although Rivers glanced up at him with a confused expression. Tristan used the other two ignoring him to fuel his anger, to keep the depression at bay.

He pulled at the wall, adding his inability to get away from it to his anger. He pulled and screamed. He did everything to ignore the call of the drug, the call to rest, to catch his breath, because if he listened, it wouldn't stop pulling him when he was catching his breath. It would keep dragging him down until he could do nothing but wallow. And he was done wallowing.

The woman left, not in fear, but determination. She wanted to help with what they were listening to, that thing that worried them, instead of worrying about him.

The young man looked at him, and if he hadn't been busy stocking his anger, Tristan would have smiled at him, would have mouthed promises, but to stop for that would give the drug the opening it needed, and he wouldn't be able to work himself back up.

The tone on the communicator became strident, fearful. The ship shuddered, the lights blinking off and on. He screamed and pulled. Something was interfering with the power distribution. He wouldn't get another chance like this.

His wrist pulled away, barely, but it wasn't stuck anymore. This was a start. He screamed again, and it moved a little more. The lights blinked again and then settled back on, but not as bright. Rivers was watching him.

The wall didn't pull him back. The power had stabilized, but there wasn't as much available; life support and the cryotube system would get the bulk of it. The rest would be split equally. *I am coming. Remember, I will keep you safe.* His hand was past his head now.

The lights blinked. Brian was looking around, his fear climbing into terror, not even noticing Rivers wasn't panicking. The young man had no reason to be afraid. He would be safe; Tristan had promised him that.

Brian said something that Tristan didn't hear over his own scream, and the strength it took to pull his hand a little further forward. Rivers finally looked away from him to the other man. He shook his head. What were they discussing? Abandoning their post? Going to record a message before they died?

Brian made to leave, but Rivers stopped him. The exchange was heated. Threats were made? Tristan so wished he could hear what Rivers said to convince the others to stay, but he had to scream. He couldn't stop until he was free.

The lights flared, then failed.

Tristan flew off the wall, crashed to the floor, and was scrambling to stand, ignoring the taste of blood in his mouth. He felt the vibrations on the floor as he ran for the door, so the ship was still alive for the moment. He ran faster. He needed to be able to push through the end of the tether.

"What happened?" Brian asked, his voice on the edge of panic.

"The explosion must have damaged one of the main relays," Rivers answered, his tone calmer. He knew he was safe. "Don't worry, it'll be fine."

"Why isn't he yelling anymore?"

"He's conserving his strength. It's okay. You'll see."

Tristan hit the door with more strength than he'd expected. There had been no resistance at the end of his tether. Of course not, he realized as the door slammed open with a clang that was nothing like that of the lock. His tether needed power too.

"That's the door!" Brian shrieked. "Let go of me."

"You need to stay calm. You can't go running off in the dark, you'll hurt yourself. It'll be fine. You don't have to worry."

Tristan straightened. Gave the dizziness time to pass.

"Shit." Brian lowered his voice. "He's free, he's out here, with us. We need to get the

fuck out of here. Rivers, are you crazy? We can't stay here."

"We can't abandon our post," the younger man answered calmly, and Tristan used their voice to find them. "The captain ordered us to stay here."

"You think I give a fuck about what he wants? With those mercs running loose? And now *he's* free. Let go of me."

"We can't leave. I don't want him to be angry."

Tristan smiled. He could smell Brian before him, hear the fabric as he tried to pull out of River's grasp.

"Angry? He's always fucking angry. I'd rather have him angry than me be dead."

Tristan grabbed Brian by the neck and threw him at the wall.

"Not—" Rivers had started saying, but then staggered.

The lights came back on as he regained his balance and looked straight into Tristan's eyes. He startled and took a step back, but Tristan caught his arm, careful to be gentle.

The young man looked at it, then back at Tristan. He was afraid, but not of him. "The ship's being taken over."

Tristan nodded and ran a finger along the young man's cheek. He was shaking—the fear, and nothing more. There was no desire in his scent. That was fine, Tristan's body wasn't reacting to him either.

He placed the hand on the side of the young man's face and shushed him gently. He leaned in and breathed in his scent.

"You... You said you'd keep me safe."

Tristan rested the side of his head against the young man's and he whispered, "I'm sorry, Alex."

"I-I'm not Alex."

"I know," Tristan snarled, and broke his neck. "I'm sorry!" he howled. "I'm sorry I lied. Alex, please, I need you." He held on to the wall and held an arm against his chest to contain the pain as he sobbed. "I need you too much. I am so sorry. Why couldn't I have been stronger for you?"

He was on his knees. The drug had him there. He wanted to get angry, but he had nothing left. It would pull him down until he was lying on the floor, unable to do anything but wait for Justin to come back and put him back in the cage.

Someone grunted, and it wasn't Tristan.

Brian was still alive.

How dare he.

Tristan growled.

How dare he be alive when Alex was dead? How dare he not have died when Tristan had thrown him? No one disobeyed him. With a roar, he was on his feet. No one, absolutely no one had a right to live if Alex wasn't with him.

Brian saw him coming, and he tried to back away. The terror in his eyes made Tristan happy, but it wasn't enough. Nothing would ever be enough anymore. He'd had it all, and he'd lost it because he'd been a coward.

He growled as he stood over Brian, but the drug demanded that he fall to his knees and he gave it that, landing on the man's legs, breaking one. His scream made Tristan scream along, and then he was raking the man's chest and stomach open. The smell of blood and entrails reminded him of how hungry he was, so he fed.

He fed himself, fed his anger. He tried to fill the hole in his chest with the man's heart, but it did nothing. His hunger was abated, but nothing else. The pain didn't go away, the hole wasn't filled.

He howled, not in despair—he wouldn't give the drug that—but in fury, in a promise to the universe that he was done giving it any chances. It had taken away the only thing that mattered to him, so he was going to destroy it.

He stood. The drug protested, and he staggered. He'd fed, it said, he should rest. He

would be better afterward, after a good rest. But he knew that lie. He didn't listen to it, growling the entire way to the door. There were people on the other side—more people still alive while Alex was dead. More of the universe that tried to defy him.

The light on the lock flashed between green and red. It meant something, but he couldn't remember what. He didn't care what. He pounded a fist on the door, saw motion through the bad welds.

He hit it again, slow and measured, stoking his anger each time it wasn't responded to. He hit it harder, and some of the blood he left on the door was now his. The physical pain didn't match the one inside him—nothing ever could—but it helped him fight the drug.

The door slid open and an angry woman opened her mouth, eyes going wide as his fist hit her. Bones in her face broke under the impact and she went down. He snarled at the three guards before the door, the sound shaking them out of their stupor, but he was already on them.

He sank his teeth into the neck of the man as they fell to the floor. Ripped the section out as they landed, arterial blood spreading over Tristan as he stood. He chewed as the two guards watched him, horrified, found it was mostly cartilage, and spat it out.

A man turned and ran, screaming.

Tristan grinned. Finally, he was the cause of their fear.

The woman shot at him, but she was shaking so badly he only felt the heat of a few blasts as they singed his fur. He walked to her, taking his time. Her shaking intensified and her aim got worse until he was too close, and she realized she should have run.

“Pl—”

His hand closed on her throat and tightened.

“No. I am done playing its game. I am done showing it mercy.”

She fought, struck his arm, his sides. They always did that, once it was too late. She was taking too long, he decided, and slammed her against the wall. She stopped fighting, but her head didn't leave a bloody mark, so he slammed her again. On the third hit, a large red spot appeared on the wall and she went limp.

He picked up the gun she'd dropped, a Dolfic Personal Power 231. He turned it over in his hand, trying to focus on it, but to do that meant letting go of his anger. He screamed and smashed it on the wall.

There were more people who had to die.

He turned and headed in the direction the other had fled.

Go slow, the drug said. Take your time. He picked up speed. He growled at the universe, at himself. The drug wanted him to suffer, to be punished for what he'd let happen, and he wanted that too, but first, others had to pay.

He ran into the five guards as he turned a corner and sent them crashing, except for one, who shrieked and ran off. He recognized the sound.

He grabbed the first guard to stand and took the knife out of the sheath, shoving him away. With a quick turn, he threw it at the fleeing man who went down, the knife in his thigh. Tristan would get to him once he was done here.

The four guards had stepped away from him and were aiming their 231s at him, but not firing. They were afraid of hitting one another, he realized.

“Idiots,” he growled, in anger at not having someone to fight who could hurt him back. “You're wearing armor.”

He launched himself at one, causing the others to finally fire.

“Too late,” he growled as he landed on top of her. He grabbed her neck and turned as they went down. He landed on his back and she took the brunt of the blasts. They didn't hurt her, but the knife he planted in her lower back made her scream.

Still holding her by the neck he stood, and she yelled about her legs, about how they weren't there anymore. She was so busy being hysterical to notice Tristan taking the

Dolfic out of her hand. The others had their guns aimed at them, trying to find a way to shoot him around her.

Around her.

Justin would skin them alive for this. He'd have told them to kill him, no matter what.

Tristan didn't have that worry. He shot at them, but the armor took the blasts, much to their surprise. That had been the reason he never used this gun: not enough power to get through even the lightest armor. Couldn't anyone make a decent gun anymore?

He shot the guard who'd decided to get closer, in the face. It didn't explode, but it burned off as he fell back. Not as satisfying, but the look of terror on the others' faces made up for it.

One ran off. What was it with humans and fleeing? Didn't any of them have the courage to stand by their partners? He shot that one in the back, six quick shots from neck to tailbone. He dropped.

The other one stood frozen. *Well*, Tristan thought, *at least he hadn't run off*. The man yelled and tried to protect his face, unfortunately the armor didn't cover his arms. It took three shots, but he went down. He placed the gun against the woman's head and fired before walking after the last one. Following the trail of blood.

He found the man by a door, trying to get the lock to respond.

"You ran," he snarled, and the man turned, going for his gun and fumbling as he pulled it out. It clattered on the floor. "You abandoned your partners to me!"

The man tried to run, but screamed as he put weight on his injured leg and fell against the door.

"How could you do that to her?" He stalked to him slowly. "Didn't she mean anything to you?"

The man looked confused. "Please. I'm not a guard, I'm a maintenance tech. I shouldn't have been there."

"What kind of man leaves the person he loves to die horribly!"

"What?" The confusion in the man's eyes wasn't what he wanted to see. "I'm—her? No, I'm not— I was forced to guard with her, work with her. I don't know her."

"Do you think you can lie to me?" Tristan snarled. "I know the kind of coward who never admits it, who hides how he feels behind distance, forced control. Who keeps the one he cares for addicted to him without ever sharing in—"

"I didn't—"

"I'm talking!" He punched the man. He flew and crashed, head bent further than it should.

"I'm that man." Tristan leaned against the door. "It's me. I'm the coward. I'm the horrible monster."

It's time to rest, the drug whispered.

He couldn't. If he did, he wouldn't be able to continue.

Later, it said, you have time. They will still be there once you're rested.

That was a lie; he wouldn't rest. Misery would take him, but he was so tired. He slid down the door as the drug dug its claws deeper into him. He was already sobbing before he was on the floor.