

Tristan hadn't moved since Alex had left. He'd remained seated there, legs crossed, hands on his lap, looking at the floor for what, fifteen, twenty minutes now? Victor watched him, crouched well out of reach.

The stillness felt wrong. The Samalian he'd known, who had lived with him, hadn't stood still. Simon had been full of energy, always wanting to do something, be that a rump in bed, running around the city, seeing the sites, or a rump in the city among the darkened alleys...or not so dark ones at times. He couldn't help smiling at how stupid he'd been while young and in love.

The smile didn't last. The memories of the sex brought that of his disgrace with them. Of the research, trying to understand how Simon could have done this to him, of finding out Simon had actually been Tristan, and realizing all the crimes he'd committed.

Even when he'd found the Samalian again, Tristan had this life about him, this sense he was watching you. He could stand still, but it was the stillness of a wild animal waiting for you to turn your back so he could pounce.

Not this.

Tristan raised his head and looked him in the eyes. Even expecting it, from the listlessness he could see in his body, the lack of emotions in those eyes unsettled him. They weren't cold, like the last time, they were...almost lifeless.

"I'm going to kill you." Tristan's voice was hollow, like he was repeating something he'd said hundreds of times and no longer cared about. "Maybe you'll finally stay dead."

"Why do you want to kill me?" Victor found himself curious. The last time, Tristan told him he hadn't bothered because Victor was insignificant, but how could he trust someone who always lied? Maybe this version would answer honestly?

Tristan didn't answer immediately, and Victor wondered if he'd gotten lost in his dementia. "Because I should have done it that first time," he finally said. "It's how I do it. It's how I make sure you can't come back to make my life difficult." He looked around slowly. "Them too. Once you're not useful anymore, so I'm going to kill you all."

He looked at Mary, still tending to Zephyr. He was a better patient than Alex had been, and Mary seemed to enjoy tending to him.

"What about Alex?" he asked.

Tristan looked at his hands, trying to say something. Victor couldn't see the blood in the fur, the dark brown masking it, but the white speckling had almost vanished, and flecks of it fell as he turned them over. "I— He needs... I want too..." The words should have come with some emotion, but the voice remained flat.

"I can kill him for you." The words came out before he could stop them. The fantasy he'd never act on. But what if Tristan asked him—

His eyes grew hot with rage. "I'll rip you apart if you touch him." Now there was emotion there, not controlled, as Tristan normally shown; this was wild, the kind that could destroy an entire ship if it wasn't kept in check.

Tristan didn't just want someone to kill for him, he wanted Alex.

The understanding didn't hurt as much as Victor expected.

He headed for Mary and Zephyr, stopping to pick up the metal headband he saw, not far from what was left of Anders. Tristan had done a number on the man, breaking open the ribcage. He looked away. Even if Anders had deserved it, it wasn't something anyone should have to suffer.

He turned the headband in his hand. A quarter of it wasn't there, just like the holder. This was the controller for the holograms in the room. There was a small yellow light blinking at the one end. He put it on and tried to make a cube appear in his hand.

It didn't.

Maybe it was broken? Maybe he needed the operating files to figure out how it worked? He started walking again, trying to will the cube into existence, carefully envisioning it in his mind, seeing it as clearly as he could. He still hadn't produced it when he reached them.

“How are you doing?” he asked. Zephyr looked to have more sealant than skin.

“I’m alive. It’s all I can ask for.”

“Mary, what exactly is wrong with Tristan?”

She looked at the Samalian, her expression not shifting away from the clinical one. “They pumped so many drugs in him that he’s gone insane which, considering he’s still alive, can be considered a good thing. Just don’t ask me how he’s still alive. Even Samalian physiology can’t be that hardened.”

“What kind of drugs?”

She shrugged and focused on applying sealant. “Custom stuff. Mood-disruptors—up, down, sideways, forward, and back. Adrenaline-boosters, blockers, endorphin simulants.”

“Don’t some of those counteract each other?” Victor asked.

“Oh yeah, and with the injection band broken, whatever controls were in place are gone, so it’s no wonder he’s such a mess.”

“Shouldn’t you sound more sympathetic toward him?”

She looked at him. “You do know who that is, right? The kind of things he’s done, what he’s done to Alex?” She searched his face. “Oh great, you’re in love with him, too.”

“I’m not,” Victor protested. He wasn’t, was he? Not after all this time, after knowing the truth, after the way Tristan had used him the last time he’d seen him. He sighed. “I don’t know. I used to be, but now…” He shrugged.

“Anyway, no, I’m not broken up about him. As far as I’m concerned we would all be better off if he died right now, but Alex is paying me to keep him alive, so I’m going to do what I can.” She looked at him again. “Not that there’s anything I can— Shit.”

The growl made Victor turn. Tristan was looking at them, staring. The listlessness was gone. His lips curled up in a snarl.

Zephyr said something in a language Victor didn’t understand, but the tone made it a curse. He scrambled to his feet. “I thought you’d cured him.”

“You don’t cure crazy, not with the little I have to work with,” Mary answered, standing. “I had him stabilized, but that went away when the monitoring band he made was broken.”

“Didn’t you say the other one was broken too?” Zephyr asked.

“That just means he isn’t getting anything new into his system, which included a bunch of blockers. Whoever made this is sadistic, and wanted to be sure Tristan got a clean experience from each effect. Now it’s all mixing in there without any controls.”

“What’s going on?” Victor asked. They were a lot more worried than he thought they should be. Alex had told Tristan to stay there, and the Samalian had obeyed, even if he was now looking at them like they were going to be his next meal.

“Don’t let him get to you,” Zephyr said, taking out two knives. “You’re not going to like what he does.”

“Alex said he’d only attack if we threatened him, so you should put those away.”

“I wouldn’t put too much credence in Alex’s words when it comes to Tristan,” Mary said. “In some ways, Alex is crazier than him.”

“You two are serious?” Victor took his gun out. “Didn’t you travel with him? He had to be under control.”

Mary glared at him. “Broken armband, what part of that don’t you understand? Think a gun without its power regulator. Anytime you use it, it could explode. We just have to hope that when he explodes, it isn’t us he sees.”

“I’m not even going to ask,” Victor replied. “But he did say he wants to kill us.”

“Again,” Mary said with a sigh. “He’s been saying that a lot.”

Zephyr took her arm as he moved away along the wall. Victor followed. Tristan’s gaze stayed on them.

“I don’t like th—” Zephyr began.

Tristan was up with a roar and running at them.

Victor took off sideways, only to realize Zephyr and Mary went in the other direction, and that Tristan was after them, instead of him. Mary shrieked and threw herself down as Tristan pounced over her. He landed and closed his hand over nothing while Mary scrambled away. Except for there not being anyone under him, Victor swore Tristan was strangling someone.

Victor helped her up when he reached her. "That was close."

"Oh, this is just the beginning," she said. "We need to get out of here until it stops." She started going around the Samalian, then cursed. "Zeph!"

The man was leaning against the wall by the door, his golden skin pale.

"I told him not to exert himself."

Tristan looked up, then around. He looked in Zephyr's direction and stood. Victor stopped and raised his gun. He opened his mouth.

"Don't yell," Mary warned.

Tristan ran for the man.

Victor moved his aim and fired at Tristan's feet. He stopped, jumped to the side, rolled, and went to a crouch, eyes fixed on Victor.

"You do get the point of not yelling was to avoid getting his attention, right?" Mary moved away from him.

"Did you expect me to let Tristan kill him? He's in no state to fight." Victor aimed at Tristan's chest as he stood. "Don't move! Tristan, stay where you are! Don't force me to shoot you!"

"He's too far gone to listen to warning," Mary said. She was moving wide and slowly.

As if to defy him, Tristan took a step.

"I said not to move!" He didn't want to shoot the Samalian. Both because he couldn't remember what setting the gun was at, and because Alex would make him pay, in kind, and with a lot more pain. Mary wasn't wrong when she'd said Alex was crazy when it came to Tristan.

Maybe he could just shoot out a leg? Limbs could be replaced, so Alex wouldn't be too pissed, right? But would that even slow Tristan down?

"Calm down." Maybe he could reason with him. "You can't kill me, you still need me. You need us to help you get to the ship, to go home."

Tristan roared and ran at him.

He fired at his feet again, but Tristan jumped and kept coming.

Victor threw himself to the side, landed on his sore arm, and cursed, but forced himself to get to his feet. Tristan hadn't followed him, but he was watching. This wasn't going to work.

"How long is he going to be like this?" he yelled, not taking his eyes off the Samalian.

"How should I know? I don't even know if there was a fixed schedule when the injector was working!"

"Mary, I can't stay out of his reach forever. An idea of how long I have to keep this up would be nice!"

Tristan moved sideways, eyes on Victor—stalking him, he realized. Victor turned with him, glancing at Mary when she didn't answer. He caught Tristan running out the corner of his eyes and Victor tried to throw himself out of the way, but Tristan turned and was on top of him before he could get back up.

He looked up and saw death in those brown eyes, in the extended hand, the sharp claws. A knife flew close to Tristan's face, and he threw himself back. Victor was up at the same time Tristan was, and they were both looking at Zephyr, who was taking out another knife.

They couldn't survive this. "Mary, take Zephyr and get out! Lock the door behind you so he can't come after you."

"I am not abandoning you to him," Zephyr yelled back as Mary tried to pull him to the

door.

“Don’t be an idiot!” Mary yelled. “If you stay here, you’re just going to die along with Victor!”

Zephyr wrenched his arm out of her grip.

Victor chuckled. It was nice to see that at least one of them had their survival instincts intact. Because she was right: there was no surviving this. Unless he was willing to fire at Tristan and risk Alex’s wrath, they were all dead.

He backed away. Maybe there was a solution? Alex was coming back, and he would be able to calm Tristan, so all they had to do was keep him distracted. He set his gun to the lowest setting. Of course, doing that with just one gun would only end with them dead.

“Mary! I need you to stun him!”

“Are you insane? It isn’t going to do any good amped up as he is!”

“That’s the point! We keep him distracted between us, that way he doesn’t get to anyone!”

“I’m not suicidal!” She moved away from Zephyr as he reached for her bag. “Don’t even think about it. You’re already hurt.”

Victor saw Anders’s corpse.

He fired at Tristan’s back, and after the Samalian took a few steps in Victor’s direction, he slid the gun to the Zephyr. “Zeph! Wait until he’s closer to me and shoot him. I’m going for Anders’s gun, so we can keep him bouncing between us!”

He ran for the body and didn’t make out what Zephyr yelled in reply over the roar Tristan let out. He didn’t think about the Samalian gaining on him, catching him, and tearing him apart. He just thought about the body, and he hoped Anders didn’t have any kind of locks on his gun.

He slid to a crouch the last few feet, and glanced over his shoulder. Tristan was heading for Zephyr, and Mary hadn’t run off. So much for any of them having surviving instincts.

The heart was missing from Anders’s chest, and Victor almost threw up when he noticed one of the veins poking out of the man’s mouth. Not now. He had more important things to do. Anders kept his gun on the left side.

He reached over the body and felt there. The holster was empty.

“Victor!” Mary sounded terrified. He looked, he couldn’t help it. He kept searching by feel. The gun had to be here, somewhere. She was away from Zephyr, gun in hand, while Tristan stalked the man. She fired, and with a roar, Tristan spun. Zephyr stopped moving. He didn’t look good.

Come on! Where was Anders’s gun? The man couldn’t have been stupid enough to come down here without a weapon. He looked around. He might have dropped it during the fight, but he wasn’t seeing it. He pushed the body up to look under. Not there either.

“Victor!” Mary’s scream was pure terror. Tristan was after her. Zephyr was firing at his back, but the Samalian was ignoring the shots.

Victor looked around for something, anything he could use to keep Tristan from reaching her. But short of a wall separating them, nothing could—

There was a wall of light between the two of them, green and clear, ten feet high and five wide. With a roar, Tristan slammed a shoulder against it. He clawed the wall, eyes fixed on Mary through it.

Victor looked at the height; ten feet would never stop him. He could almost reach to the top by raising his hand up. It would have to be twice that for it to have any chance—

The wall was double the previous height.

Victor stared. He’d done that? He reached up and touched the band on his head. That thing actually worked? That changed things. He imagined a box around Tristan.

Nothing happened.

Well, if walls were all he could do, he’d work with that. He envisioned the wall

stretching from one side of the room to the other.

Nothing happened.

He ground his teeth. What was he doing wrong? He hadn't even thought about it before, but simply wanted the wall to double in height—

The wall was taller.

He stared at it, just as Tristan looked away from Mary and to the side. He took a step for the end of the wall.

No, no, no, wider, much wider!

The wall of light stretched until it connected to both sides of the room. Victor let out a sigh and fought the urge to sit down. "Mary! Come toward me." He motioned to her, in case she couldn't hear.

Tristan looked at him. He needed another wall to keep Tristan from reaching him, a big one. A wall of light appeared, perpendicular to the already existing one, and orange. It went from one side of the room to the other and appeared right in front of Mary, so she hit it at a full run.

Victor winced.

Tristan roared silently. He pounded a fist against the orange wall, tried to claw it. It was impervious to him.

This time Victor felt weak with relief, until he noticed Zephyr still leaning against the room's wall, with nothing protecting him from Tristan. He needed a wall too.

A wall—purple this time appeared—crossed the room, and kept Tristan from reaching the man. Everyone was isolated from everyone else, but at least they were safe.

Right?

How long did the walls last? Did air flow through them? If he couldn't hear Tristan, that had to mean nothing made it through the walls. Could he make openings?

He looked around fearfully. He'd made walls by wanting them, was the same true of an opening? Where would it appear? He didn't see any.

Zephyr touched the purple wall, then used it to help him move along.

Victor let himself relax as he watched the man. Mary was standing again, glaring at him. She motioned to the wall before her, and Victor shrugged.

He had to be careful, but now he had the time to figure out how the system worked.

So long as he didn't accidentally let Tristan loose.