

Chapter 36

What had he done?

The indicator showed the injector was empty.

What had he done?

The human was talking, but Tristan wasn't listening. He was trying to understand what he'd just done.

He'd needed to use the cure; of course he'd had to. His life was in danger, and that was unacceptable.

He'd inserted the vial, switched the injector on, and then?

The human was silent.

Tristan looked up. Alex was looking at him, expectantly. "What?" he snapped.

"That was for you." Alex's tone was measured, calm and neutral.

"You think I don't know that!"

"Then why?" His tone was demanding. Alex snapped his mouth shut, took a breath, and tried again in a calmer tone. "What do you gain by giving me the cure?"

He didn't know. He had no idea why he'd done it. It had happened so fast. He'd made the decision to inject himself, then he'd used the injector on Alex. Why? It wasn't how things went. *He* should be cured, not Alex.

Alex was still looking, expecting an answer, a reason why Tristan had put him first.

"I'm not here to answer your questions." He put menace in his voice, threat, anger. He pointed to the computer. "Find me the computer core. I'm fed up with these games. Shut the whole thing down."

"Everything? Even life support?"

Tristan felt something dig in his palm. He hadn't lost control of his claws when making a fist since being a child. He leaned in. "Wasn't I clear? Everything." His arms shook from keeping himself from hitting Alex.

Wait, why *wasn't* he hitting Alex?

Just when Tristan had convinced himself he was going to strike him, Alex turned and sat down to type. Tristan opened his hands. The injector was crushed in one, jagged pieces digging in his palm. One had cut him and some blood had poured through before the wound healed.

Tristan flung the pieces aside.

"I can't do it from here," Alex said.

He snapped back from wherever his mind had retreated to. "What?" he snarled. "I thought you could do anything to computers."

"I can," Alex spoke calmly, "if I can reach them. You want me to take over the core, but Baran's made that difficult. He—"

“I don’t care if it’s difficult. The only reason I keep you around is to deal with computers, so deal with it.”

Alex watched him. Tristan saw him make the effort to stay calm, and it infuriated him. He wanted Alex angry, he wanted a reason to hit him, over and over, for what he’d done to him.

“Baran has arranged it so the core can only be accessed from a few locations. He knows what a coercionist can do, so he’s taken steps to make it more difficult to just come in and take over the ship. We can go back to the medical bay; that has access to the core.”

“No. Find somewhere else.” He wasn’t setting foot in there again. He wasn’t getting close to that machine. He wasn’t risking it spouting something else that could put his life in danger.

“Then we need to go up three levels. There’s a conference room with access there.”

“Fine.” He exited the room and stopped. He sniffed the air, listened. A large number of people had walked by recently. He could still hear them further down, getting further. He turned to go after them. He wanted to sink his claws into their flesh, hear bones crack in his teeth. He wanted to hear screams. He wanted to hear one person scream.

Alex walked around him and headed in the opposite direction. “There’s an access to the maintenance conduits. It opens up just by the conference room.”

Tristan watched him. But they were in the other direction. He wanted to wrench arms out of bodies. He wanted to hear them scream. He took a step in their direction and stopped.

What was wrong with him? Want? He didn’t want anything. Want was for people who had no control over themselves. He was here to do a job. That was what he needed to focus on. When it was over, he would find himself some peace and quiet.

He caught up to Alex.

All this was his fault. Tristan knew it. The universe had put Alex in his life to chip at his self-control bit by bit. Well, it wouldn’t happen. It wasn’t the first time the universe tried something like this, and like before, it would fail.

They started the climb up, Alex in the lead.

He could kill Alex right now. Grab his leg, pull him down. Smash his head against the conduit’s wall until it was nothing but a bloody mess. If only he didn’t need him, want him.

He growled. No. He wanted nothing. He was in control. He looked up and hated Alex. Hated that he needed him to finish this job. Once it was over, he was dead. Alex was a tool, nothing else, and tools could be disposed of whenever he wanted. He wished he hadn’t spent those years honing Alex into such a perfect weapon. Weapons were things Tristan appreciated.

That would make killing him difficult, not this unwanted sense of desire toward him. No, he would miss the—

Alex was out of the conduit, fighting.

Tristan rushed the rest of the way and stepped out. Alex was fighting four mercs in gray while keeping them in the way of a fifth who was trying to shoot him.

With a roar he was on them. He broke a neck, ripped an arm out of the next man. He felt the burns of being shot and turned. The man kept firing. Tristan welcomed the pain, this pain from an outside source, instead of the one assaulting him from inside. When the pain came from outside, he could do something about it.

Three steps and he had the man by the neck. Tristan lifted him, slammed him against the wall so hard the back of his head left a bloody spot there. The fifth man ran off and Tristan had to fight the urge to chase after him. Later, he’d get him later. First was the mis—

Alex stood there, covered in fresh blood, a smile on his face. Three bodies lay at his feet, one giving a final twitch before dying. Alex smiled, was happy.

Their eyes met and Tristan’s body reacted to the desire he saw in Alex’s. He wanted, needed to take him right here, now. To show him he was his and his alone. Alex wanted it, too.

“Job,” Tristan growled, unable to stop shaking. He was in control. He wanted nothing. “Now!”

Alex snapped back to himself and gave him a nod before turning and walking away.

Tristan couldn’t move. Emotions assaulted him and he had to fight them, force them back in their box, under control. He needed to be calm and controlled if he was going to find a way out of this trap the universe had laid for him. When he stopped shaking, when he had himself under enough control he could think, he stalked after Alex.

And found Alex in another fight.

The merc who'd run off had found friends and thought they would be enough to take them on. Tristan didn't roar. He didn't make one sound as he ran at them, he just smiled.

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Tristan was panting hard. His fur was matted with blood and that would normally be enough to make him want to shower, but right now all he cared about was Alex, pinned against the wall, and they were almost touching.

He was growling, low and deep, looking into Alex's eyes. There was no fear in them. Usually, he wanted him afraid. He wanted Alex to remember that his life depended on Tristan's whims—that the moment he ceased to be useful, he'd be discarded.

Now, he only wanted.

He breathed in Alex's scent, mixed with the blood, and he wanted. He wanted to rip his clothes off him. Bury himself in Alex, bite the back of his neck.

With a growl that lacked lust he pulled himself away, forced the emotions in their boxes. Alex's eyes were unfocused, his smell too fucking desirable.

"The job, Alex." He hid how little control he seemed to have behind a cold tone. He didn't want Alex to realize the effect he had on him right now.

Alex didn't respond. He was waiting for Tristan to take him, and that want battered at Tristan's self-control even harder, because he wanted to give him exactly that.

"Alex," he growled. "Focus."

He tried to apply that to himself. The job was to destroy the virus and get his quarry back to his employer. He brought his quarry's image to mind and felt the anger rise. It was his fault Tristan was in this predicament. He'd released the virus, he'd tried to kill him.

"Right," Alex slurred. "The job." The smile on his face was one Tristan saw on drunks. Alex looked him over, stopped at his crotch, and looked up hopefully, before shaking his head, rubbing his face. He spread more blood over it, and Tristan cursed himself for wanting to lick it off.

Alex tapped the door. "Behind that. They were guarding it."

Tristan ripped the lock's cover off, found the correct wires, and opened the door. He didn't bother putting the cover back on; he was done being subtle.

Alex headed for the terminal and immediately began typing and talking. The human was lost to this world. In a few minutes, he would be so engrossed in his work he wouldn't be aware of a fight happening in this very room.

He was utterly vulnerable in this state. Tristan thought he'd learned to accept it, this one quirk of his weapon. Every good weapon had some quirk to it. Only now it was one more aggravation he had to deal with, and with Alex being cured, he could die, which meant Tristan had to protect him.

For the good of the mission, only for that. There were no other reasons he needed Alex to live. Absolutely none.

How had he let things get to this point?

Alex.

He was the reason for all this. Tristan had thought he could handle the human, and he could. It was simple, actually. All he had to do was remove Alex from his life.

Did he really need Alex? No, of course not. He didn't need anyone. The mission would be more difficult, but difficult was something Tristan could enjoy.

He took one of the Kentrics out of its holster.

His life would be so much simpler without the human in it. He only brought complications, and Tristan hated complications.

He aimed at the back of the human's head.

He was done dealing with this complication.

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