

Alex was on the bridge. He was holding a gun, and people were cheering him on. The captain was there, along with Doc, Will, Jennifer, Perry, and even Anders, as well as a bunch of others, most of whom he didn't know the names of.

There was another person there: a gray-haired man in a white uniform standing in the doorway. He too was holding a gun, and he was pointing it at Alex.

The cheering changed from a generalized support to a chant of, "Shoot, shoot, shoot".

Alex tried to tell them to shut up. He wasn't going to shoot anyone; he wasn't a killer.

"Really?" someone whispered in his ear, nuzzling his neck. "Why not?"

Alex closed his eyes and almost said his name, but realized it wasn't him. Jack wouldn't be here, he wouldn't encourage this. "Go away. I don't want you here."

"Now, now, don't lie. If you didn't want me here, I wouldn't be. It's your dream after all." A hand caressed Alex's sides, moving up. Tristan kissed his neck. "Just kill him, he's in your way."

"I'm not like you."

The alien nibbled on Alex's earlobe. "But you could be." The hand traveled down along his arm, the claws gently raking against his skin, in a way Jack did and Alex enjoyed.

"Stop that. You don't have the right."

"You never complained before." The hand stopped at Alex's wrist, took it tenderly, and began lifting it.

"That wasn't you. It was Jack." Alex tried to push his arm down, but as gentle as the touch was, it couldn't be stopped.

"It was always me," Tristan whispered. "I was the one making love to you; I just let you believe it was someone named Jack."

"No. All you know is death and violence. It's impossible for you to know what love is." His arm was forced straight, gun pointing at the gray-haired man.

"You don't believe that. You know I had parents. My mother loved me, raised me to be a good boy, just like you."

"I am nothing like you."

"You are more like me than you want to admit. Violence is in you; that's why you fell for me. You could feel the violence I was hiding, it turned you on."

Alex snorted. "Nothing about you turns me on."

"Really?" The tone carried a smile. "Look down."

Alex did, and saw he was naked, and sporting an erection. "You're doing that to me."

"Oh, you're right about that. You want me so badly."

"That's not what I meant."

"Isn't it?"

"You're holding my arm so I'll point the gun at that man. You're causing me to react like that."

"I'm not holding anything."

The alien was right. There was no one keeping his arm up. Alex tried to lower it, but it wouldn't.

"Shoot him, Alex. You know you want to."

"I don't want to."

Tristan didn't say anything, but Alex felt his finger tighten on the trigger.

He cursed. He didn't have a choice. He couldn't be arrested...he couldn't go to prison; how would he find Jack from prison?

“That isn’t why you shot him, Alex.” The hand was on his chest, rubbing him. Tristan was pressing against his body, the fur prickling his back. “You shot him because you wanted to. Everything else was a justification.” The hand moved down to his stomach.

“No,” Alex protested. “I didn’t have a choice.”

“You always did,” Tristan kissed his neck while his hand moved lower. “You chose to kill that man. You did it because you wanted to. You wanted to feel the power, the release. You wanted that feeling that you haven’t had since I took Jack away from you. You wanted to be on top.”

The hand closed over Alex’s manhood. He gasped, and there was a flash of light.

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The scream came out as a strangled gasp. Alex panted, shutting his eyes tight, trying to will the erection down. The nightmare had lied; he wasn’t like that. He wasn’t a killer.

He made his way to the shower and turned the water hot before stepping under it. It burned, but he wanted the pain. He wanted the reminder that what he’d done was wrong. A crime. Another crime he’d committed. He scrubbed himself, trying to wash off the sweat of his fear, trying to clean himself of how he felt. How the dream Tristan had made him feel.

He paused when the soap on his arm stung, and he saw he’d scratched himself until he bled. His entire body was red from the hot water and his over-vigorous scrubbing. He put the soap away and let the water fall over him.

The dream was wrong, he told himself. That wasn’t who he was. He would never be like that. He reached for the soap again, but stopped himself. It didn’t matter how much scrubbing he did, it wouldn’t rub the doubt out of his mind.

He dried himself, bandaged the wound, and dressed. Now that he was awake, he felt the hunger. When had he eaten last? At some point before he went to the bridge, before he’d— He stopped that line of thinking.

He headed to the dining hall and piled on food on a tray. Only when he was seated at a table did he notice he’d taken plates of mashed potatoes with gravy, slices of bread thick with butter, cakes and pies, and that no one had stopped him.

He looked back at the two tired-looking cooks, and no Carlina. With a grin, he set about eating the comfort foods.

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“Wake up!”

Alex groaned and tried to stop Will from shaking him.

“Sleep’s done. Party time!”

“I’m awake,” Alex said. “Stop it.” He rubbed as much of the sleep out of his eyes as he could.

“What party?”

“Job’s done!”

“You’re not making any sense.”

Will let out a sigh. “We celebrate the job,” he said slowly. “We won. No one got hurt.” He grinned.

That wasn’t right, but Alex couldn’t remember why.

“Up, up! Sleep’s done.”

“Fine, I’m getting up,” Alex threw his legs off the side of the bed. “But I’m not going to a party.”

Will stared. “Must.”

“No, you go, you have fun. I’m going to Asyr’s lab. I have work to do.” And killers didn’t get to party.

“No work. Party time. Others want you there.”

“What for?” Alex pulled out his work pants, but Will took them away from him, handing him the brown cloth pants that had become part of his usual attire.

“To say thanks. Your fault they’re safe. No work,” Will said gravely, and then planted himself before the door, arms crossed over his chest.

Alex stared at him, then the pants. He knew the younger man well enough not to bother fighting him about this. He wouldn’t give in. With a sigh, he dressed and let Will lead him to the lounge.

Alex felt the beat of the music three halls away. Will was bopping to it not long after that. The volume of people coming and going increased the closer they got, until they stood in the entrance and looked at a mob of people.

Alex didn’t move when Will pulled on his arm. Lights were flashing in time with the music, people screaming loud enough to be heard over that. Arms were in the air, bodies moving against one another.

“Look!” Alex yelled to Will. “I don’t think this—”

The younger man yanked on his arm hard enough to get him off balance, and he had to follow. They walked around the dancers until they cleared them, coming to an area where crates had been turned into tables and people mingled with drinks in their hands.

The moment someone noticed him, his name went up in a chant. ‘Crimson! Crimson! Crimson!’

Alex almost bolted, the chant being too close to what had been in his dream, but before he could move, people were surrounding him. Men and women shook his hand, then he felt something in it. He had a glass half-filled with dark liquid.

Someone made a toast to his name, and Alex had to drink. He gasped; the stuff was stronger than he was used to. Someone wrapped her arms around him and kissed him. Cheers went up. And another toast, and Alex had to drink again.

Will dragged him from one table to another, and each time Alex received thanks for keeping them alive, was toasted and kissed. When his glass was empty, another one replaced it.

This way he moved through the crowd, at some point realizing Will had vanished and he was continuing on his own. Someone hugged him, more kisses from women and men, more drinking.

When Alex dropped the glass as he tried to put it on a crate, he decided he’d had enough. He looked around, trying to locate the door, but somehow ended up holding another drink. He hadn’t seen who had given it to him.

He looked for a place to put the glass down, and someone screamed his name. Cheers and drinks went up. Alex had to drink again. Then he moved away from them, looking for a place to

catch his breath.

He ended at a smaller crate, more of a seat than a table, and sat on the edge of it while he waited for the room to stop spinning. He tried to count the numbers of drinks he'd had, but couldn't come out with a number. He knew it was more than he'd drank before, probably in his entire life.

Before this, the only time he'd drank anything was at Alien-Nation, and there he'd nurse his one drink as an excuse to hang around and watch the aliens.

Concern managed to drift up through the alcohol-induced haze. They shouldn't be thanking him. He was a killer, a murderer. Tristan had been right; he had wanted that man dead, and everything else had been justification. He wasn't a hero. And then there was Anders. How was he going to take everyone cheering Alex's name and not his?

A hand ran up his back, his side, and then along his stomach. The person nuzzled the back of his neck. "So, this is where the hero's hiding," a deep voice said.

"I'm not hiding," Alex replied, "just resting." He leaned his head back and the man nibbled on Alex's earlobe. He closed his eyes and a moan escaped his lips.

"Not used to being celebrated like this?" the man whispered.

Alex shook his head.

The hand massaged his chest. "You shouldn't be hiding from it. You're the hero, enjoy it. Take it for everything it's worth." The man kissed the side of his neck, then his cheek as he moved in front of him. "You shouldn't be afraid of taking your due."

The man kissed him, and Alex responded. He wrapped his arms around him, held him tightly. Alex parted his lips and the other man's tongue pushed in. Their soft tongues played together, and Alex frowned.

He opened his eyes and looked into blue ones. With a gasp, Alex pushed him away.

"What's wrong?" the man asked.

Alex stared at him. "Anders? What the hell are you doing?" He quickly looked around for the rest of his posse.

Anders smiled. "I was kissing you."

"Kissing me?" Alex felt anger bubble up. "Wasn't it yesterday you wanted to kill me?"

Anders raised his hands to placate him. "Hey, I'm sorry. I was still riding the adrenaline high, and two of my friends had been hurt. Murray told me what happened."

"He's okay?"

"Yeah, they found him unconscious in a closet. He had one hell of a bump on his head."

"I'm glad he's okay. But yeah, that'd be when the security system came back up. The other coercionist went after that pretty quickly. It was just bad luck your section was one of the early ones to come active."

Anders smiled. "I believe you. I figured I'd make it up to you." He moved closer, but Alex stopped him.

"Kiss and make up? Really?"

"Why not?" Anders grinned. "We can go to my cabin; my bed is much bigger than yours."

Alex didn't trust him, but that wasn't why he wouldn't go. "I already have someone."

"That guy you're going to meet whenever you get off the ship?"

Alex nodded.

"So? It's not like he'll know what you've been up to."

"I don't care. It isn't because he's not here to check on me that I'm going to start cheating on

him.”

“You’re serious? You’re not going to have any sex until you’re with him? You do realize that we’re about one year away, right? And I mean subjective, not objective.”

“I know, and yes. I’m going to abstain until then.”

Anders whistled. “I have to admire your fortitude.” He smiled lewdly and leaned in. “But if you ever find you can’t hold out anymore, come find me.” He turned and vanished among the dancers.

Alex’s head reeled, but he didn’t think it was from the alcohol. He hadn’t expected Anders to offer that. Not that he was tempted, but still, after the animosity...

He stood and waited a moment to see if he was steady. When he was, he followed the wall until he reached the door, then he made his way through the people toward his bed.

“Where to?” Will asked.

Alex stared at him, then around. Where had the young man come from? “To sleep. I’m not a fan of parties, I’ve had too much to drink, and being hit on by Anders was just too weird.”

“Anders?”

“Yeah, why?”

“Anders like girls.”

Alex shrugged. “Maybe he had too much to drink too.”

Will frowned. “He’s trouble.”

“You get back to the party. I’m just heading to the cabin, I promise. I need to sleep this off; I can’t fix the computer in this state.”

“When you’re there.”

Alex thought about protesting, but he was just too tired.