

Jeremy wanted to sleep, but couldn't. The bench in the cell wasn't particularly comfortable to sit on, so sleeping wouldn't be great, but it was his fear of what might happen if he let his mental guard down and the ultrasonics went to work on him.

Went to unrestrained work on him.

The cube had been the first thing security had taken out of his tool bag when they'd put him under arrest. For his own good, they reassured him. He'd been reminded of one of his friend telling him and the others about someone being escorted by security because they'd come down with the Sickness.

Now, he had to reevaluate what that had been. Had they been someone, like him, who'd come to realize what was being done to them? Would he be shipped back to Earth for 'treatment' too?

Within minutes of stepping into the cell, he'd known it had ultrasonics broadcasting. His stomach started bothering him as he wondered what Growler would make of his disappearance. And he'd used the box to calm it.

He hadn't left on the best terms. Somehow, the idea that Jeremy still considered the station home hadn't sat well with the Kelsirian. That he'd insisted on returning there, even knowing the commander was suspicious.

Keeping his stomach settled had become tougher as the hours passed. And he'd resorted to not thinking about Growler or the Kelsirians to minimize the pain when the box only diminished the discomfort, instead of removing it. He went over designs for one of the many devices he had saved in his drafting table. He even started on an entirely original design for control boards, incorporating what he'd seen in the Kelsirian reactor.

And that had started a fight to keep from doubling over.

Sleep, he'd quickly decided, would be handing himself over to the Commander and

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"Jeremy," Omar said, entering the brig. "You have no idea how happy I am you're here again."

"So happy you waited hours after I was arrested to visit?" He immediately regretted the belligerent tone toward his friend, and reminded himself said friend was working with the commander.

"I have patients. I wanted to come sooner, but I couldn't sacrifice their well being for yours."

He rolled his eyes, then locked them on the other man. "Oh, yeah. My well being." He motioned to the bar separating them. "It's so well served in here."

"You don't understand. We can risk those cats having gotten their claws into your head, Jeremy."

"Their claws aren't in my head." Although Growler's claws through his hair had been

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He doubled over in pain.

"Jeremy, here." The hand through the bar held a pill bottle.

"Fuck off, Omar. I don't want your mind control drugs." He envisioned the circuits, asymmetric, with the chips on the right, in a pleasant wave pattern, instead of carefully lined up. As the pain diminished, he summoned the box and shoved the oozing pain in it.

"Their for your stomach pain, Jeremy. You know that."

“Yeah? And what about those drugs that make me more susceptible to instructions? How are they for my stomach?”

“I don’t know—”

“I had them analyzed on the Kelsirian ship, Omar. And don’t fucking try to tell me they had any reason to lie to me about what they do.”

“I wish you hadn’t done that.”

“Oh, I’m sure you wish I hadn’t done a lot of things at this point.”

“I know what it looks like, Jeremy. But them, and this, it’s for your own good. You’re sick, and—”

“I am not sick!” He stood against the bars. “I’m perfectly normal!” there was nothing wrong with him. He didn’t want anything to do with men.

He pushed away from the bars, away from Omar, putting his back to him and shoving those thoughts into the box. He was normal. Wanting Growler was normal for him. He was his Heart.

Fuck, he should have stayed on the ship.

When he sat on the bench, he made sure not to show any how what made it out of the box affected him.

Omar pulled a chair and sat too. “This is why we don’t tell anyone, Jeremy. It’s why we go to extreme measures to have them believe it’s something else. Encephalo-thrometapil-darminal is fucking insidious. It twists your mind until you can’t know what’s healthy and what isn’t.”

“If liking another guy is so fucking wrong, how is it every species in the federation has them?”

The news surprised Omar, and he took some satisfaction in that. But the man was over it quickly. “I can’t speak to other species, and what they think’s normal. But we have centuries of research, Jeremy. Humans aren’t like that. Anytime someone’s been like that, their lives has been a nightmare, theirs and that of the people around them. Until they die in horrible ways. You can’t want that for your friends. For me.”

“I get how their lives are a nightmare.” He motioned to the cell. “This isn’t exactly pleasant.”

“I know. And I’m sorry. If I had acted sooner, you wouldn’t be so far gone that we had to resort to this. But I told myself I was just imagining it. That the way you were pushing me away was just what you’d told me. Stress of bad days. I hate myself for not being clinical.” He chuckled. “It’s what I get for getting close to a patient, I guess.”

“This isn’t on you.” Jeremy rubbed his temple, wishing the mounting headache went away. “I should have come to you with what was happening, instead of going to—” His stomach twisted as he saw himself on Querik’s bed, the man touching him, telling him—

What was going on?

He glared at Omar, who looked at him as if waiting for him to finish the thought. It was the doctor’s fault. Jeremy had nothing to apologize for. He was the one being manipulated. Was the man even his friend? Or had it all been a way to keep him under control?

“I’m normal.” He forcefully kept his stomach from reacting. “I want Grow—” he doubled over. He forced himself to glare at Omar. “I’m not going to give into this.”

He swallowed and summoned the box. There was so much of that oozing pain he didn't think it could fit, but it diminished so he could straighten.

Omar looked to be in as much pain as Jeremy felt. "I know this feels wrong. And I wish I could tell you it's never going to feel like this again, but now that you know the truth, it's going to be a constant battle. The temptation of how good it feels to give in won't go away. You're going to have to come up with ways to keep yourself in check, instead of only relying on your medication." The smile was pained. "I wish I'd managed to save you from this, Jeremy. You're too good of a person to deserve this kind of suffering."

Jeremy stared at the man. Tried to make sense of what he said. What he understood was that he had a fight ahead of him, but his friends would be there to help him, and he would be able to have a normal—

"What are you doing to me?"

He was normal. What they did to him was wrong. If at least they'd told him, explained things to him. Let him choose this, then maybe—

Fuck!

He glared at Omar, who didn't have the decency of looking smug. He looked confused. As if he didn't know what was going on. As if he wasn't the architect of Jeremy's pain.

The man stood. "I think it's best if I leave you alone for a while." He considered the bottle of pill, then reached between the bars to place it on the shelf. "I know you feel persecuted, but if you'll just take your medication, Jeremy, everything will improve."

As soon as the door closed behind Omar, Jeremy grabbed the bottle and threw it into the disposal. He couldn't afford the temptation. He needed to remain focused, to remain himself until...

Was there any point? Was anyone coming to save him?