

Emerill had told the truth. Alex didn't come across anyone through the damp corridor connecting the two buildings, and there was no one waiting for him once he stepped outside. The main exit was on the opposite side of his building, and as much as he knew he shouldn't, Alex walked around to see what was happening.

He mixed into the crowd massing on the other side of the road, watching the group of soldiers with their weapons trained on the door. The black armor matched that of the guards while he was imprisoned, and he vaguely remembered them from when they broke into his apartment while he was sick.

He left. He knew they wouldn't find who they were looking for, and he didn't want to be around when they expanded their search.

Two blocks away he called a private car. He didn't like them; they were expensive, and added to the road congestion. He'd prefer taking the transit system to the port, but time was an issue. He would have taken one when he ran from Luminex, but the cars took a while to arrive.

He gave the destination as soon as he got in and swiped his ID to authorize the payment. He realized someone might track him that way as the car merged into the traffic.

Was it worth getting out and finding another way to get to the port? He decided to keep the car. They had to know where he was heading, so getting there fast was more important than covering his tracks right now, but he promised himself that as soon as he had time and access to a decent system, he'd work on a way to hide his financial transactions.

It took an hour for the car to reach the port, and Alex spent the entire trip searching for any pursuing vehicles. He didn't see anything that screamed 'corporate security' around, and the airspace was clear.

Cars weren't allowed to fly over the city, even if most had the capability. The airspace above the roads was reserved for emergency vehicles only—not that the adventurous car owner couldn't fly into them and try to bypass the bad traffic, despite the hefty fine for being caught. Another reason Alex didn't want a car: he wasn't sure he'd have the patience to deal with the traffic. Using transit, he could read or watch something while he waited to get to his destination. Not for the first time he wondered why the transit system didn't use the emergency lanes. It would move faster since it could bypass all the slow spots, and that would be an incentive for more people to use them, reducing the numbers of cars on the road.

The car dropped him off at the main entrance. He'd tried to get it to go to another one, but the car had a dumb system, in that it didn't make the decisions. It was controlled by a central computer that Alex couldn't talk to.

He walked around the port, to a side dock that technically was for deliveries only, but in investigating alternative ways to get in, he'd come across a complaint thread about how the docks were always open and security couldn't spend their time there forcing people to use the entrance and pay the fee.

As the thread indicated, there was no security there. A truck was at the dock, but no one was around. Alex slipped in and walked down the corridor. There weren't any signs indicating where the concourses were, and after going through three doors and a few turns, he wondered if this might not be an entirely separate part with no access to the rest of the port.

He relaxed when he heard the hubbub of people in the distance for a moment, someone opening a door to the concourse. He increased his pace until he heard someone coming in his direction, then slowed to a more normal one, ready to play the part of the lost kid.

The person turned a corner, too far for him to make out details. A gray suit was all he could

tell for a while as they got closer. Then brown hair pulled back. A woman.

He stopped and cursed. What was she doing here?

“Nice outfit,” his interrogator said, “but you’re a bit old to pull it off.” She continued walking toward him.

Alex looked around. It was just the two of them here.

“Did you really think we weren’t going to monitor every entrance point?”

Alex groaned. They’d known where he was going, he knew that. That’s why he’d gone for a side entrance, but he’d completely forgotten to check if there were cameras.

She stopped a few paces away. “Now, for the moment it’s just the two of us. I didn’t let them know you’re here because I want to have a talk with you. I want you to understand the seriousness of the situation you’re in.” She pulled her jacket aside to show the gun in the shoulder holster. “You don’t have any protection anymore. I don’t know why Karson was protecting you, but that’s done.”

“Damn it, I had nothing to do with your husband’s death!”

The woman’s face became harder. “Right, that’s why you’re heading off planet. Probably to meet up with your partner.”

“Are you insane? How many times do I have to tell you? I’m not Tristan’s partner. He took Jack from me. I’m going to save him.”

She rubbed her face. “Why are you keeping to that damn lie? It’s just us. I’ve turned off the camera’s here, and no one knows you’re in the port. What’s the fucking point of continuing to lie?”

“I’m not lying. Why can’t you understand that?”

“Just tell me where Tristan is. Where were you two supposed to meet? You do that, and I let you go. I don’t give a damn about you; you’re just a way to find that killer.”

Alex sighed in exasperation. “I don’t know where he is.”

“Then where are you going?”

“To try and find him. Didn’t you listen?”

She shook her head. “I don’t buy it. There’s no way some desk jockey like you just decides to up and leave the only things he’s ever known to go after a killer like Tristan. I know you’ve read the file we keep on him. No, there’s something more to this. You’re going to tell me what it is.”

Alex couldn’t believe her. She just wouldn’t listen. “Are you telling me that you wouldn’t turn the universe upside down to save someone you loved? That you wouldn’t leave everything behind if there was even one chance you could get your husband back?”

Anger flashed in her eyes, but then surprise. “You love him? You actually love that monster?”

“What? No! I love—”

“What is wrong with you! He’s a killer, he murdered my Tom. He’s killed hundreds of people with his bare hands. What? You like it rough? Humans just aren’t rough enough for you? We’re too soft? You can only get off when an alien had his way with you? Is that it?”

“Shut up,” Alex growled. He felt his hand tighten on the case’s handle.

“What? You don’t want me pointing out how sick it is that you need one of those things to shove their—”

“Shut the fuck up.”

“Or what? What’s the fat computer shrink going to do? You’re going to deny that you like being denigrated? Treated like a thing? How much begging did you have to do before he shoved it up your ass? Or did he make you lick it?”

“Jack loves me. What we had was right.”

“That Jack of yours is a monster. A killer. That’s what you love. You hate yourself so much you want him to hurt you. Will you at least admit that? You want to be punished because you’re human. That’s all that Jack is, someone to hurt you because you weren’t born one of them.”

“Don’t say that about Jack,” Alex growled. His hand squeezed the handle of the case so hard, his knuckles were turning white. “Jack cares about me. He loves me.”

She snorted and he took a step, only to stop when she glared at him.

“You’re going to take me to him. I don’t fucking care how nice you think he is, I’m going to avenge Tom.”

Alex opened his mouth to scream at her, but in the distance a door opened, then banged close. She didn’t react to the sound, never taking her eyes off him. The steps were faint, but coming closer. Someone spoke, the words too soft to be understood, but the tone was clipped, precise. She cursed under her breath. She turned away from Alex and opened her mouth to yell something.

Alex acted without thinking. He closed the distance, and the case was moving in an arc just as she noticed him. She reached for the holster under her jacket, but the case hit her on the side of the head first. She dropped to the ground and didn’t move.

She was still alive, she was breathing, and Alex felt like kicking her for the horrible thing she’d said about Jack. It was Tristan she was pissed at, couldn’t she realize it? He was so angry at her, he wanted to bash her head in with the case, over and over. He might have done it, but someone spoke, still too far to make out what he was saying. It was a reminder Alex couldn’t be caught here, not with her unconscious at his feet.

He ran by two guards, one of whom called after him, but Alex ignored them. He reached the door and opened it, the sounds of the concourse enveloping him. He went to the first bathroom he saw, in a stall, and changed clothing. He gave himself a moment after that to catch his breath. He was pretty sure she was still alive; he didn’t think he’d committed murder. He hoped he hadn’t, because being wanted would make it hard to go after Tristan.

He couldn’t stay here any longer. He didn’t bother hiding the shimmering jacket and pants. He headed for the public transport to the station, and to a ship that would get him on his way to rescue Jack.