

The emergency goes on, because emergencies, despite their urgency, are never neat, clean, or pretty. Disaster clean up takes hours, days, *months*.

Foxen and Flyndt aren't staying on this fraking Corvette for a month, but Siva is still sleeping off healing herself into a coma, so they'll stay a little longer.

The Chiss' breath hitches, almost a snore, then evens back out.

Flyndt has not looked away from the ostentatious fish tank set into the wall for 26 minutes 39 seconds.

Foxen keeps his commentary about said ostentatiousness firmly to himself and has already gone through three peer-reviewed articles about fishtank maintenance and keeping of tropical aquatics.

Maybe one can go in the living room.

"*Hoo*, a tank? Here? Why?" the Omwati had asked, curious, feathers lifting with his interest as he peered through the glass. The extremely blue water warped and cast shifting shadows over his face — beautiful — and his sunset eyes tracked each delicate movement of the eleven unique fish species docilely swimming inside.

He pressed *very* close. Nearly nose to nose.

For 26.3 seconds, Foxen's world goes sideways. It is. Surreal. To see it from this angle. From this side. To watch Flyndt peer into a tank with interest, open and easy, his body at ease, and not be *inside* the tank, looking down, weighted by even more kilos of durasteel chain than he can lift, shackled at ankles/wrists/neck, meeting eyes pained by suspicion/regret/betrayal/hope.

But then the Nautolan inhaled, and rubbed at the necklace of feathers under his armored chest piece, and reminded himself where he was. Not safe, exactly; something could still happen to this ship while the rescue operations commenced. But safe with *Flyndt*, whose name he had been given, trusted, *honored* with, who he *Knew*, who had stood on the other side of that thick glass, refusing his begging, and stood by him.

Then:

The medical ward of that horrible awful fraking pit. Flyndt with his arm bound, the arm Foxen *broke*, *crunch*, creeping over from his bed, towards the tank where Foxen floats, chained, muzzled, and collared while a hole in his chest closes. Red eyes peering back at him as he approaches the glass, watching. Staring at him, at his arm. Regret/pain. Staring at the collar. Trying to gesture to it with limited success.

Flyndt presses his hand to the glass. Their little exchange, hand to hand but separated by the tank. Through charades, Foxen tries to get Flyndt to breathe on the glass, and then motions to draw following his finger. Trace for him. One word at a time.

DID. WORK? and he points at collar. The realization that washes over Flyndt's face. The nod. Foxen rapping hard on the glass, as if to push through it. To push Flyndt out the door.

Confusion. They trace again.

GO. RUN. OK. and then he makes the sign afterwards, *go! Run. O.K.*

Thinking to himself, begging, *you're free. You're free. Fly away, pretty bird, fuck, get out of here!*

And as that computes, those simple words drawn on the glass, Flyndt's crest flattening, then raising sharply, and surprising them *both* in that moment, struggling to whisper, "*hoo*, not without you!"

He looks shocked, having said it, but then he lifts his chin, and his foot stomps, and it is a declaration. Red eyes go wide, the heart rate on the monitors skipping and stalling before kicking up. He turns to look at it, glaring, knowing that will alert the medics, be watched, recorded. Danger alert. Twists back, shakes his head at Flyndt. Points at him, then makes the sign again.

No. GO!

And Flyndt, beautiful Flyndt, just *lifts his chin*.

"Not. Without. You."

They stare each other down. Time is ticking, Flyndt needs to get back to bed or they'll find them interacting.

Foxen gives first. Hesitates. Then folds, like falling to knees at an altar. He can't ask *are you sure?* There's not time for more fog writing.

So he just signs, *O.K.*

And now:

A quiet, absconded Captain's cabin. A friend, sleeping off her virtue without barely a sound, as if even in her sleep, she was trained to be silent and unimportant— *bullshit*, that. They are both free. Both alive. Together.

And Flyndt looks happy, engaged, watching little fish swim in a stupid, expensive, wasteful tank on a *spaceship* that probably takes ridiculous effort to clean and recycle that water.

Foxen is *definitely* already ordering one. They'll just have to pick some fish.

He pauses, thinking about that for a second in the abstract. Hrm. The idea of a pet store with fish does not cause the body panic.

Small victories.

"Flyndt," he whispers, the only volume he *can* reach, calling the Omwati's attention gently. Snapping seems rude, with a guest. Even if that guest is dead to the world, since none of Flyndt's delighted and enraptured warbling has woken her yet, and neither have the various sirens.

"Hoo?" His head twists around 279° to look at Foxen where the Nautolan has taken up *lounging* on the Captain's white suede couch, legs crossed over each other, datapad in one hand, a knife twirling idly in the other. Foxen spins the blade around his fingers one last time before it disappears back into his sleeve, and he crooks one at his Omwati, beckoning him over.

With some reluctance, the bird peels away from the tank and joins him, considering a moment before shrugging and perching on the armrest. Foxen pouts at him. Flyndt catches it, furrows his brows, then huffs in amusement and shakes his head, cheeks peaching.

"Really? Here?"

Foxen's shrug is unrepentant. Flyndt chews on his lip, looks at the door, looks at Siva, then hops down to perch instead in Foxen's lap. The Nautolan's deep, bass rumble is pleased and low, and the Omwati shivers slightly.

"What looking at?"

"Fish. You like...it?" he asked and nodded to the tank, then showed the pad. He coughed once, and signed, *We could get some.*

"*Hoo...why? You want?*"

You want?

"I...do not know." He looked at the images. "They are interesting, though."

Foxen hummed, then pointed at one fish. *This one looks like my mother.*

"Really?" Flyndt suddenly peers close, studying with great intent. He hums again. "Maybe...no keep in tank, then." He frowns, clearly thinking now what Foxen was. "You O.K?"

The Nautolan gave a soft smile, pressing lips to his forehead, his cheek.

I'm with you. Yes, I'm O.K.

Siva slept, and the rescue continued, and in their little bubble, they were free.