

zealOTry

Now

Fleshy smacks punctuated wet, soft sucking sounds.

The beat had no rhythm, only a consistency of continuation. What had started as hard, sharp *cracks* and vicious splatters like bell-chime accompaniment had slowed to heavy, more subdued notes, muffled and wet. But still the blows kept coming. Still, she just kept hitting. Again. And again.

And again.

Smack, went crushed knuckles against caved-in bone. Then a sucking noise, *sluurp*, as the first pulled back and lifted again for another hammer fall. Blood pooled fast in the crater of what had once been a cheekbone, or perhaps an eye socket. It was impossible to tell anymore.

The fist fell again, squishing into a gravelly pulp of sharp bone and pulverized muscle. She didn't flinch the slightest when more shards embedded into her own shredded flesh, didn't blink at the pain that lanced up her whole arm.

There was only the violence. The uncountable fucking *joy*.

Satsi chambered another punch and let it rip loose like a bullet from a gun.

Then

Deck plating hummed underfoot with the faraway rumble of hyperdrive engines. Lights flashed, most warning colors that had long since become dull to those watching them. The Arconan Proconsul adjusted his dun duster and shook his head once more.

"I get that you're worried, I *do*, but no. I'm not putting you on Besh objective."

"I'm not asking," hissed Satsi, fists curling against the top of the holodisplay between them. "I'm telling—"

"Sure, you're not asking, which is why you're here talking to me."

The Human scowled at him. The Kiffar stared levelly back. They both knew she couldn't just go off on her own, not without harming Arconan forces who would stop her; and *that* she was deterred from by her twin.

"We already have teams deploying on the lower decks to lead assault and infiltration. The prison is a main target. One way or another, we'll get control of it."

"Yeah, and at what cost? Don't talk to me like I don't know exactly how this kark goes."

"Do you think I *want* to lose our people? No. We're going to get everyone we can, Tameike, including...what was his name?"

"Ruka."

"Right. We'll get your apprentice all cozy too so just settle down—"

"That's my *son!*" snarled the woman.

She froze. Terran blinked in surprise. Satsi's face rearranged itself into astonishment, then warmed into bright shame, then pink embarrassment. Finally it closed on a visage of tamped-down coals.

"I mean to say, I'm not leaving my *apprentice* behind. You'll have to kill me if you want to keep me from that station."

"Careful now, you'll tempt me."

"I'm dead serious."

"Your job is to get Icasta, not search an entire karking prison station. Be realistic, here."

"Oh, I'll get Icasta. I'll rip her teeth out one by one with my bare hands and force her to swallow until her stomach grinds itself up when I press. She's going to lead me to my s— boy. One way or another."

The two stared at each other, diamond eyes to obsidian, both tempered in fire and hardened beyond any hint of warmth.

"Fine. You use the extra motivation to catch her, I'm not going to complain. You want revenge, I get that, really do. But you've got to complete that mission, Tameike. Don't go running off for anybody, stay on target. Remember that that's your best way to find our people."

"I don't plan on forgetting."

"And remember we need her ALIVE! Voice's orders. Mine too."

"Don't care," she replied, "except so do I."

The scarred woman didn't wait for a formal dismissal, just spun on her booted heel and stormed out before her superior had even finished lifting a lazy hand to wave her off.

Now

"Kark, kark, *kark*."

Bloody, bruised hands fluttered uselessly. Sirens and klaxons wailed in the distance. The hull rocked with explosions of laserfire from outside, even this deep in the station. There were slight groans, dying groans, of pain from the two *Shikari* huntresses elsewhere in the cabin.

And there was Satsi's breathing, once heavy and exhilarated, now going shallow with rising panic.

But there were no breaths from Icasta.

"Kark. Kark kark kark kark!" chanted the Arconan woman, reaching to place her hands on the Chiss' chest, an aborted movement towards resuscitating the Collective leader. But she stumbled, skittered, trembled. Of their own accord, her fingers found their way back to knotting in her own hair. She didn't know how to fix somebody. What if she broke *more* ribs? What if she punctured *more* organs? Made it all even worse? If it could even get any worse. Icasta looked like she'd been hit by a speeder. She was all but— no, she *was* beat to death.

Kark.

What had she done? What had she done? Kark kark kark, *what had she done?!*

"Think, you idiot," Satsi snapped to herself. "Just. Get her to some help. Yeah. The medics. Our medics. Not— yeah. Yeah, frak. Frak. Okay."

She made her grip unclench and wheeled her eyes about, assessing. There wasn't much in the room, not by way of medical stations anyway. Cursing, she turned her attention to her armor. She dug her shaking, numb fingertips into the plates and pried them up, stripping away the bulkiest portion of the suit on her arm, having been augmented. When a small casing was uncovered, she exclaimed in relief, scrabbling to work it free without breaking open the vial nestled inside.

"Please work," she hissed, turning back to the Collective woman and jamming the adrenal stim injector into her chest about over her heart.

For a breath, everything was still and silent. Then, Icasta's remaining red eye fluttered and her chest heaved. It was with a terrible sucking sound, but it moved, and kept moving. At least for the moment.

For a moment more, Ruka had a chance. If Satsi could just keep from fucking this up even more.

The woman gathered her enemy over her shoulders in a soldier's carry, not having a better solution. Blood dribbled down her back.

Kark and kark again.

Satsi grit her teeth, debated setting the Chiss' back down to try and tie her wounds up or *something*, but the station rumbled again, and her mind was a white hot note of noise, and she just knew she'd let herself lose control and now her only hope was *anyone else*.

So, she tightened her hold and ran.

Ran, and hoped, and hated herself for every bit of it.