

Darkness. Solitude. That's how she liked it. She turned the water off, steam rising from her skin. She'd been around too many people lately, and it was grating on her nerves. The only people she had immediately taken liking to were Becky and Orare, and even then she could only be around them so long. That was the price she paid for expanding. Interaction.

This is how she liked it. Alone on her starship. The hum of the engine as she cleaned her armor was like a soothing lullaby. The isolation wrapped her in a blanket of contentment, and the cool floors of her ship on her barefeet were a welcomed comfort.

She pulled her long, dark, wet hair back and wiped condensation off the mirror. Her reflection stared at her. Sometimes she wondered if she was real. If her life was hers, or if she was staring through a portal to a different version of herself. One that hadn't killed in cold-blood and sold weapons for a living. One whose family was still alive. One who wasn't getting stupidly involved with someone who was emotionally unavailable. And then she just forgot about it and moved on. Nobody ever really understands themselves, anyway. Or others. Another benefit of being alone. You only have to solve one puzzle. Her thoughts lingered on Orare for a moment, then she shook it off.

*Don't distract yourself*, she thought. This contract was too important for self-reflection or emotions to get in the way. If she was going to make a name for herself outside the Sol system, then she had to get it together and take care of business.

What was the business? Weapons. High quality assault-rifles, pistols, grenades, and shields. Sometimes sniper rifles, too. As an arms dealer, she didn't want her product flaking out when people were firing at each other. It was bad for business. Had to be built to last. Her manufacturing facilities produced nothing but the best products. And she wanted to sell them.

She stared at her gray eyes in the mirror. Avoiding hearing her thoughts. Concentrating on the small, dark gray flecks in her irises..... A scream. A shotgun firing. Then another scream. She was hiding in a cabinet under the sink, one hand covering her mouth so they couldn't hear her whimper, and the other holding onto the pipes in case they tried to drag her out. Not that her grip would matter.

*Please... please....* Her brother's voice echoed in her head and the world spun, falling back into place. Gray eyes still in front of her in the bathroom mirror.

This is how she liked it. Alone.

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At 1600 hours she pulled into orbit, cloaked, and scanned the planet. There were mid-sized colonies scattered on its surface, with a large city located in a temperate area on the western hemisphere.

Her onboard computer verified that her intel was correct. She had given a few free shipments to the merc leader who ran the large city.

“Petrolo,” she said his name to herself. He had appreciated her generosity and liked her product. More importantly, he liked it better than who he was currently buying from. Of course he did. Her products were the best.

Petrolo had broken his arms contract with Voight. And Voight was less than pleased. He was a mildly influential arms dealer on the planet, who sold second-rate, faulty products. It was about time he had some competition come into town. Voight had put a bounty on her head, thinking she would break her contract with Petrolo to release the bounty, which would force him to deal with Voight again. As she put on her helmet while her ship dropped to the surface, she playfully wondered if her head was really worth 2,000,000 credits, glad that she upgraded her shields and that she had bigger balls than Voight.

Her frigate, The Valkyrie, was small enough to descend to the planet cloaked, with no detection. She had customized it for instances like these, where she had to move in and out. She preferred not to be seen by anyone she held contracts with. Not only was it safer, it also made her seem mythical, and people didn't fuck with what they didn't know. Especially if they heard rumors that it slit throats in the middle of the night.

The ship landed quietly on the grounds of Voight's operation. She didn't want to announce herself, so she cloaked her armor and headed out of the side airlock. The darkness was her friend as she quickly moved towards the main door, taking out the two mercs at the front with dual daggers. She pulled up her omni, and saw a cluster of thermal readings on the top floor.

“So cliché,” she said, knowing that's where Voight would be. She climbed the wall, reaching the roof of the first floor, which extended towards the main building for about 50 meters. There was a door there, with two more guards. She threw one of the daggers at one, hitting him in the throat, and then snuck up behind the other as he was checking on his friend and took him out as well. The second merc had cried out before he went down, and her heart raced for a moment as she listened to hear if an alarm was raised. Nothing.

Her omni hacked the lock easily, and she entered. There was no one on the other side as she shut the door. She kept her daggers in her hands as she moved through the hall, working her way upwards. She reached a stairway and started up, but stopped as she heard footsteps above her. The loud echoes of their feet made it hard to hear what direction they were going. She quickly moved up the steps, and saw the boots of one of the guards. They were going up. She followed them, and they exited on the fourth floor. Pulling up her omni showed that Voight was on the sixth.

*Good, she thought, less to deal with when I reach him.*

By the time she got to the sixth floor, she was almost concerned that she had only ran into four guards that needed to be disposed of so far. It seemed suspicious, but she called it luck and moved on, opening the door and moving inside. There were four guards huddled by a doorway, it looked like they were moving inside the room, so being cloaked, she walked past them avoiding that fight all together.

*No reason to be stupid about it.* If push came to shove she could easily take them out on her exit.

Moving closer to the thermal cluster, she sheathed her daggers and pull out her silenced dual pistols. She felt more comfortable wielding them in an unknown location. Daggers were fun, but so was being alive.

Two guards turned out of a room in the hallway, and she fired four shots taking them down. As she approached one, she saw he was still alive and trying to call for backup. She stood over him and pulled the trigger a few more times.

“Nighty night,” she whispered. Her head jerked up as she saw another guard start down the hallway. Running towards him and holstering her pistols, she leaped in the air, twisting his neck with her heel and then crouching over his fallen body.

*So far so good.*

The door she needed to be in was right ahead. She took out a small tin can from her pouch and opened it. A thick, clear substance lay inside. Unsheathing her knives, and hiding in the doorway, she took a cloth and thinly coated her blades in the with it and then resheathed them, pulling out one pistol. Her omnitool told her there were two guards right inside the door, and about six surrounding her target.

She took a deep breath and then kicked the door in.

The first guard was down in a split second, her pistol fired straight into the back of his neck. The next guard she put in a headlock, using as a shield as the other guards fired at her. She took down three of the guards in the room, moving closer to Voight. Then she saw him.

“You stupid bitch,” Voight taunted, moving backward as a Krogan walked out from a side room. He hadn’t been on her sensors, probably thermally cloaked or some shit. She quickly put a round in the guard she was headlocking and opened fired with both pistols at the Krogan. He ran towards her with a long blade.

*What kind of a bodyguard uses a **fucking sword?!*** she thought, diving to the left into cover as he barrelled past her. She got out her Scimitar, moving backwards, and fired several rapid

incendiary shots as he ran towards her again. His sword fell to the floor as his body skid to a halt in front of her, his helmet hitting her boot. She looked at Voight, his eyes were wide and his guard's jaws were on the ground. She threw her gun on the ground and took out her pistols again, leaping over the crate she was using for cover and dropping two of the guards. She was officially pissed off.

All that was left was Voight and one guard, who was cowering in the corner as she put a bullet in him.

"You're smaller than I thought you'd be," she said as she approached Voight, pulling off her helmet. "By the way, enjoy the view. Nobody sees my face and lives."

He got in a fighting stance and she cocked her head.

"Really?" she asked in disbelief. She got ready, doing some footwork, but didn't have time to make the first move. Voight lunged at her and she ducked, swinging an uppercut into his jaw and mentally thanking Becky for teaching her that move. She blocked him a few more times, and then he kicked her in the shin.

Ow.

The next time he swung was with his right arm, and she blocked it. Twisting her left arm around his and forcefully pulling him to the ground, pinning him by the throat with her knee. She unsheathed her knife and put it on his throat, cutting him ever so slightly.

She was about to kill him, when she felt a sharp pain on the back of her head, slumping to the ground. She saw double. A man helped Voight up.

"That's why you never take your helmet off, you dumb cunt," Voight said as he dusted his hands off.

The last thing she saw while drifting from consciousness was a small, red trail of blood dripping from the cut on his neck.

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Electricity. Her legs were on fire.

She yelled, jolted awake. She could barely see out of one eye and her head was pounding. The chair she was sitting in was in a small room. Three guards watched the door. One of them left, bringing up his omnitool.

She assessed her surroundings. Her hands and feet were tied. There was a table in front of her. Interrogation maybe? She was still wearing her armor, but her shields were gone. Some kind of cables were clamped to her legs ankle straps. Probably where the electricity came from. She must have only been out for less than an hour. There was still a chance they hadn't found the Valkyrie. She saw a vent in the corner, could be easily kicked in to escape.

The door burst open and Voight walked in, the guard who knocked her out in tow.

"Like I said before. You. Stupid. Bitch." His voice boomed as he walked towards her. He leaned across the table, getting in her face.

"Are you comfortable?" he snarked, spitting slightly. "Can I get you anything?"

He was too close. She didn't like it.

"I'm fine, but you could probably use a breath mint," she said, coughing facetiously. "Or two."

He slapped her. Her hair came undone with the force and it fell over her face.

"Ugh," she groaned. And then she let out a laugh.

He slapped her the other way. She felt her skin open up on her forehead, and blood trickled down the side of her temple.

He walked around the table, and grabbed her face, gripping it and turning it towards his.

"Not so funny now, is it?" he asked.

She glanced down at his neck, the wound from her knife hadn't closed yet. She had only been out 20 minutes at most. Her odds were improving. She fiddled with her wrist restraints.

"Guess not," she conceded.

"That's better," he said, letting go of her face and walking away. "It'll be good for you if you learn to be submissive early."

Her heart pounded in her ears, knowing what was coming. He would never know the pleasure of her company.

She feigned fear, looking at him with wide eyes. She had misjudged how sinister he really was, who knows how many had fallen prey to him. It was going to be a treat to see him die.

Wincing slightly, she dislocated her right thumb, and slid her hand out of the cuffs. Quickly picking the lock, she released her left hand next, and then silently locked the cuffs on the back of the chair. Her hands were free.

She knew there was only seconds left for him.

One of the guards came up to her chair and stood close behind her, oblivious to her hands being un-cuffed. She eyed the pistol in his holster and waited. The guard put his hands on her neck. It made her shiver, but she didn't take her eyes off Voight. Who was now looking pale.

"Take your fucking hands off me, you pig," she growled. She clenched her jaw as she felt his slimy fingers touching her hair.

"I don't think you're going to be giving orders from now on," Voight said, walking towards her with a knife.

*Come on....*

"After all, it'll be difficult without a tongue."

The guard grabbed her jaw and forehead, pulling her mouth open. She panicked a little. Why wasn't it working? She had to bide some time.

"You think cutting my tongue out is going to keep you alive? I'll make you eat your... own..." she stopped, noticing Voight drop his knife.

He lurched forward, blood vessels turning dark purple on his pale face.

*Finally.*

He grabbed his throat, looking at her confused. "What did you do to me you bitch?"

The guard released her, and started walking towards him. As he moved, she grabbed his pistol and shot him and the other two guards in the head before they could even draw their weapons. It was her and Voight now, alone. Just how she liked it.

She shot the restraints on her legs and unclamped the cables, wincing at the realization they had pierced through her armor and into her skin.

"Let me guess," she said, getting up and booting up her omnitool. She was in the basement. That explained the smell. The Valkyrie was still cloaked and on the grounds, and was thankfully close.

“You’re experiencing hallucinations. Horrific visions. Trouble breathing. Fatigue in your limbs. They’re tingling, I bet.”

He fell to the ground as she walked over to him and crouched down to his level.

“What... What...” he sputtered, foam coming out of his mouth. As he looked at her, he saw a horned demon. Eyes glowing and wings about to engulf him.

“I poisoned you, you idiot. I’d love to drag this out, but I’ve got somewhere to be. And after all, I can’t make an exception. I never let someone see my face and live.”

She aimed at his head and pulled the trigger a few times.

“Boom.”

She made for the vent. There were sure to be guards if she used the door, and she was in no condition to fight. Not to mention her shields were down and her weapons were gone. All she had was a pistol. She holstered it.

The vent gave in easily, it must have been a few decades old. She entered and found herself in a maintenance shaft that made its way to a ladder. Her schematics told her it led topside to a grate that opened up outside the facility, fairly close to the Valkyrie.

*Goddamn, that’s lucky*, she thought, putting her omni away and hearing an alarm go off at the same time.

“Fuck,” she said out loud, quickening her pace. There was a ladder ahead, she started to climb it, shining a light up to see how high it went. She kept moving. Her hair was sticking to her forehead and dirty water covered every surface. It felt like an eternity as she heard the alarm continue to go off. She was praying that they didn’t scan the maintenance shaft as she climbed closer to topside. This was too dangerous of a mission to go on alone, she realized. She would be lucky to make it out alive and damn lucky to make it out intact. As she climbed each rung, her thoughts drifted to the Normandy and it’s crew. If she had taken Becky’s offer for help she might not be in this position. She was sure a few ribs were broken and the puncture wounds on her calves were definitely slowing her down. Her head was throbbing where she had been knocked out, and blood from her forehead kept running into her eyes. She couldn’t distinguish it from the dirty water raining down on her. In this moment, she missed the crew. She didn’t want to be alone. She couldn’t afford to be alone. She wished she was in that blanket fort in the AI core with Becky, Gabby and Jade. Drunk on stolen vintage cognac and cozy and blissfully happy for the first time in her memory.

As her hands hit topside, she pushed open the grate and climbed out. The Valkyrie was only a few hundred feet away, so she ran for it, limping towards safety. She heard shouting. They had

spotted her. There were only a few guards left in the facility, but she couldn't take them on her own. Going at full speed now, she started up the engines on the ship and locked in an off world departure. Her left leg dragged on the grassy lawn. She turned around, firing at the guards closing in, her aim still impeccable even with one eye swollen. The airlock door opened, and she ran inside, falling backwards and continuing to fire until she heard the sweet sound of the airlock closing, hissing to decontaminate.

She pulled up her omnitool, ordering the ship to take off and it blasted into orbit.

*It's done*, she thought, gasping for air and pulling herself up, leaning on the doorway as it shook from the takeoff.

"It's done."

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After a few moments, she stumbled to the cockpit, setting a course for the Normandy once she was in the upper atmosphere. Leaning over the pilot's chair, breathing labored. Once the course was finalized, she engaged the engine at FTL and it took over.

The straps on her armor seemed more difficult to get undone than usual. Every muscle she was using ached. The pieces of armor dropped to the floor as she made her way to the bathroom. Puncture wounds on her legs left bloody footprints on the way there. She peeled off the under armor, eyeing herself in the mirror and seeing bruises covering her whole torso. She lightly touched the cut on her forehead.

*You look like shit*, she thought, turning the water on. She couldn't hold herself up, so she sat down and let the water wash over her. Trying to rinse away the memories before they took hold.