
Chapter 9: Some Reassembly Required.

♪Sun sets on the evening, another bottle dry. Another day, another lonely street, strangers pass me by...♪ Sitting on Tibidni's finger like a literal songbird, Sean strums away forlornly on his mahogany guitar, the sad lyrics of the song catching his holder's ear.

"Sean?" Tibidni asks gently, Sean ceasing his singing to address his lover.

"Yes, Tibidni?" Sean answers, open and relaxed, still strumming away with wide, calm motions.

"Why didn't you drink anything at the bar?" Tibidni asks. The playing stops.

"I don't drink." Sean responds flatly with a shrug.

"But... Why...? The other charges say that humans from Eye-err-land love to drink. So why don't you?" Tibidni asks in the broken English Cyrilla has been teaching him so he can talk to his beloved in his own language, getting most words right but butchering every noun he's faced so far.

Sean ponders for a moment, not expecting this conversation, and never really enjoying dealing with the stereotypes.

"Does it bother you that I don't drink?"

"Not at all. It's actually nice having a boyfriend I know will still be awake at the end of the night, even if he *chooses* to sleep in my hand to *seduce* me..." Tibidni coos playfully, the jovial response putting Sean in a less tense mood as he starts strumming again.

"So why did you ask? Is it just because the marines were making fun of me for being a 'sober Irishman'? Don't worry, I've heard all the jokes before." Sean isn't exaggerating, with neither Jamie nor him partaking of alcohol, a Scotsman and an Irishman, the jokes came rolling in everytime they were out in human company.

"I just want to know more about you is all... I figure there must be a *reason* you didn't have a single drink when all the other humans were determined to be carried home in a drunken stupor by their guardians..." Tibidni answers, still feeling a little insecure over how little he knows about Sean's personal history or homeland.

"Fair enough." Sean shrugs ambivalently. He never likes having this chat, and has managed to avoid it quite efficiently thus far whenever the subject has come up, but it's probably about time Tibidni knew.

"After my parents kicked me out for being 'an abomination against God', I fell in with a bad crowd on the streets. I pretty much drank my way through the Rynar occupation. Jamie did much the same. That's actually how we first met. I was busking in the streets of Dublin for enough to buy a bottle of whiskey, and Jamie'd just sobered up himself. We've been sober together ever since." Sean explains casually, as if talking about how his English class went or how work was today, before looking up to see Tibidni's giant face mere feet from him, staring down at him like a wounded puppy.

"What?" Sean demands, knowing full well that the pity party has been booked, and the sympathy cards are in the mail.

"You were *homeless*..." The colossal canid whimpers worriedly.

"Please stop looking at me like *that*, Tibidni..." Sean rolls his eyes, having had the pity party before, and never much caring for it.

"Like *what*..." Tibidni asks obliviously while ironically petting Sean comfortingly like the aforementioned wounded puppy.

"Like I'm an invalid you need to console. I just went through a rough patch in my late teens. I'm fine now; you don't need to worry about me..." Sean reassures Tibidni with a pat on the furry finger currently petting the little musician's hair.

"I just don't like to imagine you out on the streets by yourself..." Tibidni coos down to his poor little songbird, his ears fold back against his head as he imagines Sean out in the cold all alone, especially when he needs so little.

There was *so much* unused space in Tibidni's home, how many humans could his family have housed? Sean on his desk? A family or two in his closet? They could probably fit Sean's whole village under the stairs alone.

"I'm not on the streets anymore. I'm an engineer. I'll *never* be back on the streets." Sean reassures Tibidni some more, bringing a wag to the vast vulpine's tail. **"Now... I've told you about *me*, how about *you*?"**

"About *me*...? What do you want to know?" Tibidni asks, not sure what he could say about his fairly comfortable background that could possibly be as personal as what Sean just shared.

"You have a bunch of Cyrilla's dolls' clothes hidden in your nightstand drawer, and you were looking forward to having an 'extremely fashionable' little human for a charge. Please, Tibidni, *connect these dots for me*..." Sean grins, leaning over his guitar as Tibidni's face retreats behind the edge of the desk in guilt...

"You know... When I agreed to talk to a polarity psychologist, I didn't think it'd be *you*..." Jamie says sheepishly.

"Why is that? Do you feel that my position makes me *too important* to talk to you?" Dr. Wu asks back genuinely, busily writing away with little more than the occasional glance down to her yutri to deviate from her near constant eye contact with her patient.

"Honestly? Yes. I figured you'd be off solving more space crimes and investigating stuff." He elaborates, kicking his feet idly but energetically the whole time.

"It is true that my education and experience has garnered me a position of authority and responsibility as a GCIA Lead Investigator, but I am first and foremost a doctor. And most importantly, like yourself, I am a civilian. If I want to spend a few weeks on follow up counselling for the victim of an abuse case I've investigated, I have that freedom." She explains warmly, Jamie's mood souring slightly at that last word for reasons he can't quite put his finger on.

Looking away briefly as the conversation pauses, his feet swinging wildly as ever, Jamie finally asks the question that had been on his mind since agreeing to these sessions: **"So... Are we going to talk about my abduction again?"**

Pausing in her writing to give Jamie her full attention, Doctor Debra Wu asks sincerely: **"Do *you* want to discuss that event?"**

"Not especially, no." Jamie answers flatly.

"Do you feel you have anything to add about that subject that you didn't already say the last time we discussed it?" Dr. Wu elaborates on her previous question.

"Nothing I can think of. I kinda vomited it all out over you and Richter during the interrogation." Jamie answers apologetically, Debra smirking slightly at the colourful description of his previous tirade.

"Do the events of your abduction and rape still dwell on your mind? Are you still affected by memories of those events when you try to 'jack off'?" She asks, bluntly but respectfully.

Jamie rubs his neck bashfully at the intimate nature of the question. **"Uh... No... That... That hasn't been an issue since. Though I'm not sure why you would *assume* that I would have, uh, *masturbated* in the week since leaving the hospital."** He *had*, and he had *enjoyed* it a lot more than he had in a long time, even with his reduced feeling, but he still didn't appreciate the assumption.

"You're an adult male with no sexual partner who recently regained feeling in his lower body after several weeks of paraplegia; some assumptions *are* warranted..." Dr Wu smirks slightly as she returns to writing on her yutri. **"But to answer your original question, no, I don't see the need to discuss that event if it isn't causing you any distress. There are more pertinent things to discuss, starting with that..."** She points her stylus towards Jamie's swinging legs and nods observingly.

"Oh... Sorry... I'll try not to fidget..." Jamie apologises bashfully.

"Actually, I'm quite glad to see you 'fidgeting'; it's an encouraging sign to see you already enjoying being able to actually *move* your legs again. Have you been doing much with your returned motor functions?" Debra asks.

"Doctor Harriet's physio has been leaving me too tired to do much actual exercise or walking on my own time. But I've been trying to get back into drawing on my sketchpad." Jamie answers.

“Good. How has that been going?” Dr. Wu asks inquisitively, glad to hear her patient is starting to return to his normal habits.

“Miserably... I’m back to stick figures... I gave up in frustration after it became clear I’m worse at art now than I was ten years ago...” Jamie mutters bitterly.

“Those skills will take time to recover as your brain forms new pathways to compensate for the damaged ones; your muscle memory has been destroyed, but your intellectual understanding of art is still intact. Persevere with your passions; this is a setback, but it isn’t a complete undoing of all the hard work you put in to gain those skills the first time.” The conversation goes quiet for almost a minute as Dr. Wu writes up her report.

“What happened to them...? Colonel Haynes and Sashana I mean...” Jamie finally asks curiously, Debra ceasing her writing in order to contemplate her response.

“Does it really matter? As *Major* Stummann should have informed you last week, both have been convicted of a myriad of charges including attempted murder and false imprisonment. Were you hoping for more information than this from your question? Were you hoping to hear that they are suffering for their actions? That they are getting their just deserts?” Dr. Wu asks, hoping to tease out some hint of how Jamie feels about his ex-guardian.

“No... Maybe...? I don’t know... I’m just... I’m still *angry* about it...” Jamie admits, his legs going still and his fists clenching.

“That anger is completely understandable, and completely justified. But it is not healthy. I encourage you to try, hard though it may be, to forgive them for what they’ve done to you.” Debra explains gently.

“Forgive them?!? But they almost killed me!!!” Jamie splutters, the anger in question out on full display in his voice and expression.

“That’s true. And it was unfair that you had to endure such a thing for no good reason. But *life* isn’t fair. I know that’s a hard pill to swallow, but it’s the truth. Often in life you have to choose between being right and being *happy*. That resentment you feel, it can do nothing to them; it can only serve to torture *you* with feelings of victimhood.” Dr. Wu continues.

“But... I can’t just pretend they didn’t do anything wrong! I can’t just call it water under the bridge... What they did was *unforgivable*... And I refuse to let them get away with it!” Jamie expands upon his previous feelings.

“Forgiveness isn’t *absolution*. By forgiving someone you aren’t declaring that they’ve done nothing wrong; you’re acknowledging that they *have* wronged you, but are choosing to let go of your anger over it. You *will* never, and *should* never forget what they did to you. But you need to let go of that anger inside of you, before it starts to change you for the worse.” Jamie can’t help but think about a few weeks ago when his anger made him lash out at Sean.

“I’ve seen people destroyed, not by the wrongs done to them, but by the seething resentment that festered inside of them afterwards until it consumed their whole lives. Keeping them awake at night and driving away their friends. Turning them into bitter, hateful husks of their former selves. Don’t let that happen to you...” Dr. Wu warns Jamie, the weight of experience heavy in her words.

Jamie quiets as he contemplates her words, Dr. Wu taking this pause in conversation to finish up her assessment before placing her yutri onto her desk. Then she rests her elbows on the table and brings her hands together to touch the pointed fingers on her lips. **“You are aware that this will be our last session together, correct?”**

“Yeah, I’m aware...” Jamie nods, a little apprehensive about what his future will involve after he is released from the hospital’s care.

“Well, I have come to some conclusions regarding your treatment going forward.” She nods her head and raises her eyebrows as she implies the significance of her decision. **“I do not believe you will experience any permanent trauma. This experience has most assuredly *changed* you, but I do not feel this change to be crippling or entirely negative. You have taken on a more cautious and less impulsive attitude to life. Despite the unfortunate means through which this attitude has been reached, I believe it was long overdue. As a result of these conclusions I have not scheduled you for any compulsory counselling from the base’s normal psychologist after I leave..”**

“That’s good, ah don’t have the best track record with councillors...” Jamie lets out a long sigh of relief.

Debra smiles briefly at his redundant assertion. **“I’m well aware, that’s why I’ve left it at your discretion, but make sure you talk to *someone* about your feelings. I’ve left it with you because I feel you have a robust support network in your friends, use it.”**

“So what happens next?” Jamie asks, raring to move on with his life.

“Well, I’ll open with the good news first. Now that you’ve regained most of your motor functions, you’ll be able to use one of the non-neural civilian mechs on the market. You’ve been put on a waiting list, but even with your condition granting you priority, the queues are long and it will likely be several months before you actually receive your mech.” Dr. Wu explains with tempered optimism, trying to avoid getting Jamie overly hopeful just yet.

“In the meantime, I’ve organised accommodation at floor level for you. It is unusual and generally discouraged, but I feel with your inability to use a mech it would be best to give you as much independence as possible.” Jamie nods in understanding and agreement as Doctor Wu continues with her debriefing: **“*Major Stummann* will be coordinating with the GCIA to provide you with a suitable guardian, but I have made arrangements to ensure that certain protocols requiring you to be carried everywhere by a guardian have been loosened temporarily. I expect you to apply your own discretion in avoiding busy paw traffic and make sure your presence is known to any mesomorphs near you at all times...”**

“Be loud and obnoxious, I can manage that...” Jamie grins smugly, looking forward to having an excuse to be the centre of attention.

“And finally, be patient. You are on the road to recovery, but it will take time for you to return to your old self again. I have ensured your independence to give you space and time; use it. You will need to make use of a guardian eventually, but this should be on your own terms when *you* feel ready.” With that Debra stands up and comes around the side of her desk towards Jamie, reaching out a hand to say goodbye to her patient. **“But now, I’m afraid this is where I must leave you. I wish you the best of luck in your future endeavours, and I have the utmost faith in you to put this whole affair behind you with time.”** She concludes with a hopeful smile.

Jamie rises to his feet, then takes her hand in his to shake it gratefully. **“Thank you for everything Doctor Wu. You’ll never know just what you’ve done for me...”**