

# Disintegration

## Chapter 10

Even with darkness enveloping the tent, Sasha struggled to sleep. She found herself walking back and forth on the gigantic desk. Although Ishtar appeared to be asleep as she rested on her similarly massive bed with her tongue lolling from her muzzle, her previous words echoed throughout Sasha's skull..

*Whether I wake up in a good mood determines what happens to you.*

Pushing these thoughts aside, Sasha looked at the bundle of rope she was carrying. It was just one of the many items on her person. This included a winter coat and a backpack filled to the brim with bottled water, MREs, and other miscellaneous things scavenged from the RV. It partially weighed the woman down. Sasha showed signs of sweating as she approached Vasily. He was imprisoned within his cage, which was near the edge of the desk, and lying on the ground with nothing but a blanket and a pillow.

The man opened one of his eyes. "Sasha? What are you doing?"

She pressed a finger against her lips. "Shhh. Be quiet! I don't want to wake her up..."

"Ah, my bad." he whispered while looking at her bundle of rope. "Let me guess. You're considering breaking out of here?"

Sasha threw up her arms. "I don't really have a choice! Ishtar never clarified what she meant by not needing me anymore. For all I know, she might kill me, turn me in like the other prisoners of war, or something worse! I'd rather not find out. So... do you want to come with me?"

"I don't know..." he replied, "It might not be a good idea. Not to mention risky."

"If you say so. It's all or nothing for me at this point." Sasha started tying the rope around a single bar of the cage facing the edge of the desk. "Why the hell wouldn't you want to leave, though? I might be able to silently open the cage if we're careful about it."

Vasily shrugged. "I'm mostly concerned about the kid. Someone has to take care of him. Do you plan on bringing the boy with you or abandoning him?"

Sasha finished securing the rope, just to stare at Vasily with disdain. "Unfortunately, Suko is a massive liability. I thought about it for a while and figured he would be better off with Ishtar. I don't think I could take care of him, assuming we both managed to get out of here, and simply trying to do so would put us both in big danger. So... yeah, he stays here."

"Then I suppose I'll have to stay behind for his sake." replied Vasily as he crossed his arms.

"But what about making sure your family is okay?" she asked.

"That's something I'll need to worry about later. When the war is over. I can't do much about it now, and waiting out this invasion might be my best course of action. Besides, once I'm out of this cage, this might be a pretty cushy place with the RV. I won't really need to do much besides being a babysitter..."

"So you were a coward all along." said Sasha with scorn in her voice.

The alleged coward rolled his eyes. "I consider myself more of a pragmatist. Realistic. For example... I have no idea why you thought it was a good idea to antagonize Ishtar. You could have just played along. Now you're in a situation where she'll either get rid of you somehow, discover your apparent escape attempt, or you'll be freezing in the Siberian wilderness by yourself in a best-case scenario."

Sasha scoffed at his words. "And now you're just some old liar as far as she's concerned!"

"I'll deal with it." he said with a shrug.

"Either way, what would you suggest doing if you were in my shoes?"

"Well, I'm not too proud to beg." replied the colonel with a grin. "Just be on your best behavior, ask for Ishtar's forgiveness, and then I might be able to help you out by saying you're essential for taking care of the kid. I don't know. Regardless, are you sure trying to climb down to the ground with that rope of yours is the best option?"

"No." she said before tossing the other end of the rope off the desk. "But it sounds like it beats apologizing to that scaly cunt. She's the one that's in the wrong. Not me!"

"It's not about who's right, Sasha. It's about surviving. I don't think it'd hurt to at least say sorry for being disrespectful towards her."

She narrowed her eyes. "Not worth the risk."

"But what you're currently doing is worth the risk?" asked Vasily as he got to his feet and moved next to Sasha, albeit within the confinements of his cage. "I mean... what will you do once you reach the ground? What if you run into another alien if you get out of the tent?"

"I don't know..." answered Sasha with a sigh, "But I'll figure it out. Are you going to help me or not?"

The colonel stared at the rope tied to his cage. "It's your funeral. What can I do?"

"Just make sure the rope is secure and hold onto it, sir."

He nodded. "Will do."

At these words, Vasily inspected the bundle of rope. He grabbed part of it as Sasha prepared to climb down. "Have you done this before?"

"Nope!" she answered while shaking her head. "I'm not even sure if it's long enough, either, but hopefully it'll do. Farewell, Lieutenant Colonel Coward."

He sneered at her words. "Right. God help you, woman."

With a roll of her eyes, Sasha glanced at the ground. By her estimates, she was about forty feet above it, while the desk itself was approximately several stories tall. The woman struggled to see the ground due to the darkness, however. Despite this, she grabbed onto the rope with two gloved hands, then proceeded to ease her way down the edge of the desk.

Almost immediately, the woman lost her footing.

It took every fiber of Sasha's being to stop herself from screaming. She clung onto the rope for dear life as her body rapidly descended downwards, complete with her legs flailing in the air. The rope cord itself slightly swung during this process, sending Sasha swinging as she made her descent. Soon, she ran out of rope. Then the woman began free falling. It wasn't long until she hit the ground with a thud, landing on her stomach. Her only solace came in the form of her gradual descent and the somewhat soft ground, ultimately breaking her fall to some extent.

Following a few moments of pure agony, the woman stood up with shaky knees. She felt some sharp pain within one of her legs, not to mention a headache. Her world started spinning. Pure

panic made her blood run cold once she heard some movement from the nearby bed as Ishtar shuffled in her sleep.

"No... NO!" hissed the zenari, saying one of the only alien words Sasha understood.

Consequently, the human froze in place. Her eyes went wide. She looked towards where Ishtar was sleeping, expecting the worst, but the alien remained in place. More bizarrely, additional hissing filled the air, and Sasha couldn't understand a word of it... making her realize that Ishtar might be talking during her slumber.

The woman let out a sigh of relief. "Ugh. Sleep tight, bitch."

From there, the human looked towards the ceiling and spotted Vasily silently staring down at her. She gave him a thumbs up.

Without wasting any more time, Sasha inspected her legs. Rolling up the fabric on her pants revealed a few large bruises. Once she began moving again, a bit of pain surged from a single leg, but otherwise, it still functioned properly. She didn't have time to assess the potential severity of the injury as she made her way to the perimeter of the tent, where fabric walls separated her from the outside world... and ultimately, her freedom.

A glance at the main entrance revealed that the tent flap was relatively secure. Sasha wasn't seventy feet tall, eliminating the possibility of opening it herself. Alternatively, she walked along the tent walls and looked for any possible weak points. Eventually, the woman spotted a fist-sized hole relatively close to the desk with fragments of light seeping through it. She rushed to the weak point as the venomous hissing of the alien randomly broke the eerie silence enveloping the area.

There was only one problem...

Sasha wasn't sure how to exploit this weak point. All she could do was peek through the hole, where cold air from outside graced her face, and she saw snowfall dusting some similar tents outside. She grinded her teeth at the sight and muttered to herself.

"Great. Now what?"

Looking to her left, Sasha saw a fishing pole. Seeing it made her raise an eyebrow. It was relatively small, all things considered, but a certain idea suddenly sprung up in her mind as she picked it up and stared at its hook. She retrieved a kitchen knife from one of her coat pockets, held the fishing pole with a free hand, and approached the hole in the wall. Using the blade, the woman began

attempting to slice and stab her way through the fabric while using the first incision as a baseline for hacking and slashing. Although the thick material had the same durability as canvas, it eventually gave way. What could best be described as a perforated line formed as a direct result of her efforts. It all culminated in Sasha using the knife to partially slice through the tent, causing a loud tearing sound to reverberate all around her. The human shuddered upon hearing this noise and rapidly looked over her shoulder, back at Ishtar...

...Right when her reptilian eyes abruptly shot open.

For a moment, they both remained still and stared at each other. The black pupils of Ishtar's amber eyes narrowed while Sasha blinked several times. Suddenly, the alien frantically sprung from her bed and snarled, encouraging the human to finish cutting her way through the tent as her hands began involuntarily shaking.

"SASHA!" screeched Ishtar as she tried to say a human name.

The woman in question forced her body through the incision she created. It was a tight fit, but Sasha mostly squeezed her way inside with hot air surging against her back. She also heard a few loud stomps and thuds behind her. As a result, her heart rate increased. Sasha could hear it beating like a drum in her ears. Sasha soon managed to get entirely through, albeit she landed face first in the snow and dropped her kitchen knife. That didn't stop her. She scrambled away from the tent while in a prone position with her fishing pole in tow, albeit they were frenzied and chaotic movements.

Mere moments later, a scaly hand abruptly erupted from the incision as claws cleaved through it. Ishtar swatted her hand in the air several times before raking her nails across the snow, where it came towards Sasha over time. Not knowing what to do, the human poked Ishtar's palm with the fishing pole. Consequently, Ishtar pinched the fishing pole and yanked it out of Sasha's hands before bringing it back into the tent.

A venomous hiss came from the tent afterward.

This minor distraction bought Sasha just enough time to stand on her feet and run away. Afterward, a scaly hand emerged from the tent once more... then fruitlessly tried to grab her. With no destination in mind, her head throbbing, and her legs quivering, Sasha dashed through the snow and passed by a series of massive tents. Thinking quickly, she took a pathway that would be inconvenient for any aliens by running through narrow openings between the tents for several minutes, up until she reached the edge of what appeared to be an entire enemy camp.

This prompted Sasha to stop and recuperate after what felt like an eternity. With her face turning red, she looked up and discovered a new reason to be short of breath as she muttered to herself. "Oh... oh, fuck...!"

The mere sight of the overall deployment zone was nothing short of overwhelming, to say the least. Ships that were as big as entire neighborhoods were darting up, down, and across the skyline, ferrying troops and supplies. Countless alien soldiers and vehicles were swarming the area. Worst of all, this large landing zone was just the center of an ever-expanding base, with fortifications and structures varying in complexity. Not to mention the city of Volgograd directly bordering it with faint lights in the distance.

Sasha knew she didn't have much time to take in the sights and sounds. While heaving in and out, she resumed sprinting, albeit in the opposite direction of the occupied city. The massive structures provided some degree of cover from the snow alongside shadows that could hide her from plain sight. All the human had to do was avoid the rare guard as she moved around like a mouse. It was a long and tedious process, but Sasha managed to make her way to a region with crates and other small containers scattered across the area.

The sound of several hisses varying in tone and pitch made her stop in place.

As for the source, it became painfully apparent when three alien soldiers appeared in Sasha's vision. One reminded her of a snow leopard, another an avian, and the last was a zenari. The way they stomped around in their armor made plenty of noise, encouraging the human to hide behind a crate. The trio passed by without paying the ground any mind, and Sasha spent some time resting until the heavy footsteps became far more distant.

With snowfall gradually increasing in its intensity, Sasha emerged from her hiding place. Everything but the snow seemed to be dramatically scaled up regarding size as she navigated through a maze of various supplies. What were presumably food rations, water canteens, and cartridges were either carelessly strewn across the area or tightly packed into containers. An unusually large drone flying overhead made Sasha shudder as it carried a crate before disappearing from her view.

Squinting her eyes, Sasha spotted an open area without any more crates. In other words, the edge of the base. There was a ten-foot-tall barrier that looked like a barbed-wire fence, allowing the aliens to step over it, but keeping humans out. She beamed up and rapidly moved towards it, but hearing a familiar voice caused her to stop in her tracks...

[I know that you're here, Sasha.]

Immediately, the human darted to a nearby crate. It was turned to its side, wide open, and some of its contents were missing. This included various foods in the exact same containers. Sasha discovered a small nook inside thanks to a missing box, allowing her to hide behind a low wall of foodstuffs. She shivered from a combination of the cold and hearing abnormally soft footsteps accompanied by snow crunching.

Unbeknown to Sasha, Ishtar approached the crate and flicked her serpentine tongue. [I can smell you. How do you think I was able to find you?]

More bizarrely, the zenari woman only wore a helmet rather than full armor. Her skintight jumpsuit covered most of her body, while her hands, feet, and tail were exposed to the cold. Ishtar resumed making a mix of vocalizations and hisses as she walked around the vicinity of the crate.

[I know that you're afraid. Don't worry. I'm not going to hurt you... and I'm not angry. Just very disappointed.] Ishtar paused to look behind several crates before flicking her tongue once more. [I'm assuming that my vague threats encouraged your little escape attempt. Is that right?]

Sasha didn't answer this question as she got into a fetal position and watched her breaths fog up the cold air.

Meanwhile, Ishtar's tail swayed in an annoyed fashion. [This is what's going to happen now, human. You have three options.] She slammed a fist against a crate, making Sasha flinch. [Option one: I find wherever you're hiding and drag you back to the tent kicking and screaming if the need arises. From there, I decide if a cage will become your permanent residence or if you'll join the other prisoners of war.]

The alien got closer to Sasha's crate and narrowed her eyes. [Option two... you reveal yourself willingly. It's cold out here, especially for a cold-blooded creature such as myself, and I'd prefer for this ordeal to be over with. So I'm willing to be lenient. Just this once. We can just go back to the tent and pretend none of this ever happened. However, I will take some security precautions, and you will need to apologize to me before making a promise to refrain from berating and insulting me in the future.]

Ishtar got on her knees and looked inside the crate, where she saw various MREs. [Option three. You escape against all the odds. You'll likely freeze to death in the wilderness or suffer an even worse fate. Would you really prefer to do that to yourself when you can come home, where it's nice, warm, and safe?]

Sasha had to bite her tongue to prevent herself from screaming something along the lines of no.

[Believe it or not, Sasha, I actually like you. You remind me of my daughter. Yet... you're also an enemy combatant due to the current circumstances. I really don't want to hurt you unless I have to, so please make this easy for everyone involved]

As before, Sasha remained utterly stationary. She didn't say a word. Meanwhile, the alien stalking her flicked a forked tongue and resumed strolling around the crate. The human shuddered with every step she took as the soft crunching of snow made itself known, but the hissing became increasingly faint.

[Hopefully, I'm not losing your scent and just talking to the wind.] Ishtar stopped speaking to look down at her bare feet, where snow was continually coming into contact with her caramel brown hide and bronze-colored scales. [Which just makes wasting time even more dangerous.] With a flick of her tail, she wandered off in a different direction, following scents as she repeatedly flicked her serpentine tongue.

Sensing an opportunity, Sasha peeked from her hiding place. She quickly moved the exterior of the container, glanced outside, and saw a scaly tail slowly disappearing from sight as Ishtar turned around a different corner composed of crates. Except for Ishtar, the coast appeared to be clear. All that separated Sasha from the surrounding wilderness was a few hundred yards of open ground and the small barrier.

Mustering what remained of her strength, Sasha made a mad dash for the barrier while ignoring everything else and focusing entirely on making her escape. A particular voice only made her move faster...

[Are you on the move?] asked Ishtar interspaced by the sound of light footsteps. [Which option are you going to choose?]

Once Sasha approached the barrier, she realized that there was an opening just large enough for her to fit through. Naturally, she dived into it. Some barbs managed to shred the shoulder of her winter coat while slightly slicing her arm. Despite this, the woman bared her teeth as she ignored the pain, got back up, and fled towards the forest.

[I smell something metallic. Is that blood? Ah... There you are.]

Sasha made the mistake of briefly looking over her shoulder. There, she saw Ishtar towering over her, albeit the alien was standing behind the barrier. Ignoring the pain plaguing her body and the

sheer futility of it all, Sasha resumed making her way to the forest. Thoughts of what Ishtar might do to her if she was captured again only encouraged the human to force her weary body, mind, and spirit to move as fast as possible.

Yet... Ishtar stood still. The alien simply watched as Sasha fled from her, even though it would have been easy enough for the zenari to catch the human. Instead, she frowned, and a far more predatory expression replaced her previously calm one. With bared fangs and narrowed eyes, she snarled...

**[So be it!]**

From there, Ishtar turned around and walked away, allowing Sasha to flee into the forest unhindered. The human didn't seem to know or care as she kept running away from one of the many monsters that intended to take her home and make her a slave in all but name...