

His head was *pounding*.

Pri should have known a migraine would have come on sooner or later. Stress and anxiety were the most common triggers for him, and stress certainly hadn't been in short supply lately. It had been a miracle he had made it this far migraine-free. Everything that had happened since Jun and Lizzie showed up at the Markov's finally seemed to be catching up to him. He had to reach a breaking point eventually.

At least they had reached Eleven before the hell started. The throbbing head. The nausea. The lightheadedness. The sensitivity to bright light and loud sounds. At least he was inside now. Panya and Inky offered their little group food, shelter and a place to rest while Inky attempted to uncover the secrets Phil had left behind on the holo. Pri couldn't have been more grateful - even if Inky had enthusiastically started a completely unnecessary discussion about his unfortunate full name.

Pri let himself sink into the couch cushions Panya had dumped him onto as Jun and Lizzie headed into one of the bedrooms together. He fully intended to relocate to the other room and curl up into a fetal position as he waited out the migraine, but he needed a little bit to muster just enough energy to stand up again. After taking a few deep breaths, Pri glanced over at Panya, who was filling a kettle to boil water.

"Do you have a towel I could use for my head?" Sometimes a cool, damp towel on his forehead helped just a little bit, especially after being out in the sun.

"Oh, sure," said Panya. "There's a cabinet in the bathroom with them. Help yourself."

Pri nodded, thanking her as he slowly eased himself to his feet. He slung the little back he had packed himself with the essentials for this journey and willed himself to move to the bathroom. He felt so weighed down, despite the walk to the bathroom being only a matter of feet. Pri didn't bother turning on the light or closing the door. He paused at the sink, leaning against the cold surface and closing his eyes. Just for a moment.

Lizzie and Jun were just across the hall, he knew. Pri didn't mean to eavesdrop, but the house was small, probably the size of his mother's *kitchen* back home, so overhearing conversation was unavoidable. Especially since their voices caught his attention when he realized Lizzie's tone sounded... upset.

"Maybe you should try opening up instead of internalizing everything because it makes you feel better. Leaving me hurt and just confused."

"Lizzie, you couldn't even *fathom* - "

“Making mutts? Dropping bombs? Hired to make me like you and then kill me?” Pri frowned. What was going on with them? “*Talk to me Jun! Please..*”

“*I shot the bullet that killed Markov.*”

Pri’s heart stopped beating, or it may as well have. He took a sharp breath in and held it subconsciously, like his brain could only focus on the horrific words Jun was saying and not on ordinary bodily functions like fucking *breathing*. He jolted upright, swallowing the urge to vomit again as the room spun around him. No. No, no, no. It couldn’t be... what? How...? The words “killed Markov” echoed in his head. He had definitely heard that... but was he processing this right? Surely not...

But Jun wasn’t finished. “*This is what happens when you play with fire. I killed him. It was me. I was following orders. This whole fucking thing started because of me, and now all lives are in danger.*” He wasn’t yelling at her. That was the most startling part. His voice was... numb. Resigned. Broken.

Pri’s feet started moving on their own accord, as if he were being pulled along by a riptide. He crept out of the bathroom, hovering in the hallway as all too familiar tears started pooling in his eyes.

Lizzie finally broke her silence. “A...Are you sorry?”

“Of course. But you can’t apologize to a dead man, can you?”

Pri’s knees shook, barely able to hold him upright. He wanted to run, far far away. But he couldn’t. This wasn’t *real*. It had to be a nightmare, the worst one he had since those first few weeks after Phil was taken from him. Taken by... by *Jun*. The man *right in front of him*.

“I never wanted to hurt you, Lizzie,” Jun said, his voice unbelievably soft. “I never wanted to hurt *anyone*. But I did, and it’s a scarlet letter I have to wear for the rest of my life.”

Lizzie was crying, too. “Did you tell Pri?”

“He doesn’t *need* to know.”

Lizzie looked away from him, pain and disbelief evident on her face. It was then that Jun seemed to notice that he and Lizzie were not alone, and he turned his head to see Pri in the doorway.

Neither of them spoke. What *could* he say? Pri had been experiencing nearly all stages of grief over the past year, though not equally, and not always in the same order. Depression was easily the most dominant stage for Pri, but anger was also present. Anger took Pri away to the dark side of his mind, a side that wanted revenge against Phil’s murderer.

Whenever Pri imagined the soldier that took Phil, he pictured an older man - not a man, a subhuman *monster* - with a sinister smirk and as dastardly as Junius himself. Someone that he would be fully justified in hating. Not a fucking eighteen year old *kid*, close in age to his youngest siblings. Not the man he had let into the home of his *family*, the one he promised Phil's memory every damn night that he would do his fucking best to keep safe no matter what. Not the man he had trusted, who he thought was on his *side*. How could this *be*?! What kind of fucking joke was this?! And Wolf... He sent them on this mission!

Pri didn't trust himself to speak, but he couldn't keep silent. The tension was too damn high. When he opened his mouth, the voice that came out didn't sound like his own. "Tell me Wolf isn't so cruel. *Tell* me!"

Jun avoided looking at either of them. "No, Stellan doesn't know either. Nobody knows. It was a secret I planned to take to my grave."

*Fuck. This. Nightmare.* "I wish I had never known," Pri said, feeling a dozen emotions at once. He'd thought about what he would do if he ever faced Phil's killer, how he would feel. Never did imagine *fear* would be one of the emotions plaguing him in this moment. Not fear of Jun, hell no. There was nothing more Jun could do now that could be worse than what he'd already done. No, Pri was afraid of *himself*, and what he'd become if he stayed in this room. He didn't know exactly what his instincts were trying to tell him to do at this moment. Between his throbbing head and the bombshell revelation, Pri just couldn't think clearly. But he knew one thing... whatever it was, it was not reflective of the man Phil once knew and loved. Pri just shook his head, both in disbelief and in a futile attempt to clear his mind. "Just... Don't talk to me first. I just need to process what the *fuck* is going on."

Pri turned around, his feet leading him to the other room with a mattress. He wanted to slam and kick the door like a child throwing a tantrum, but he didn't. He instead shut the door gently, as if nothing was wrong at all. However, he could only keep up the act for a second or two before his legs gave out and he collapsed to the mattress in the corner, finally releasing an anguished yell that he had kept pent up inside him and could simply no longer contain.

Pri sobbed against the mattress, trying his best to muffle the sound. He had plenty of practice from trying to hide his ugliest moments away from Calliope. He was just... so fucking tired of this. So tired of relieving the pain and the trauma and the guilt of *not being there*. Just when he thought he was going to be okay, that he was slowly starting to heal, the wound would be ripped right back open again. He didn't want to cry anymore, but nevertheless, the tears came.

Grief was... unpredictable. It truly came in waves, and even when the pain did hit, it always hit differently. Sometimes it was numb. Sometimes it was guilt for all the things he should have done, but didn't. Sometimes it was longing for the dreams for a life with Phil that would never come to fruition. In this moment though, it was rage. Pure, hot rage. Where exactly the rage was directed, though, wasn't quite so clear....

Was it himself? Jun? Both? Neither? He didn't *fucking know*. How could he not *know*?!

*I hate him*, Pri thought bitterly. *I hate that son of a bitch!* But... did he? He wanted to.... He *did*, for the longest time, before he knew who the person who fired the gun even was. Pri needed someone to blame, just so he didn't eat himself alive with the guilt that he wasn't there when Phil needed a hero. It was only natural to hate the person who pulled the trigger. Funneling his anger towards the soldier at the party was the only way for Pri to distract the anger he felt towards himself. He didn't even know who did it, but he didn't have to. The person behind the mask was Phil's *murder*. They were nothing but a faceless, nameless murderer. It was so easy to hate someone without a face, so easy to envision a monster.

But now.... There was no mask. Gone, in an instant. The secret was out. The truth was revealed. Never in Pri's wildest dreams would Jun *ever* be the person Pri wanted to see absolutely *destroyed*. To think if the secret never came to the surface, Pri may have seen Jun as a friend. *Friends*... with the man who stole the most beautiful soul Pri had ever known?! The thought sickened him. Pri wished he had never overheard Jun, but... what if he hadn't, and had continued on being hopelessly oblivious? How could Jun *fucking* show his face to him?! Even *worse*, shown up in the home of Phil's *family* and intruded into the space Phil had provided for them, where they were supposed to be *safe*?!

"Fuck!" Pri said to himself, punching a pillow a few times for good measure. Fresh tears continued to pour out of his eyes. *Make it stop, please. When would this pain ever end?*

Pri crawled over to where his bag had been discarded on the foot of the bed and dug around until he found what he was looking for. He left the portable cd player in the bag, not wanting to actually play the music and draw anymore attention to himself. Instead, he withdrew the cd case with his most precious gift tucked inside, clutching it to his chest as he curled back up again. At first, Pri couldn't bear to listen to the CD Phil had meant to give him for their six-month anniversary, the one with personalized songs sung by *him* that had meant so much to them as a couple. It had taken six months for Pri to finally feel brave enough to listen to it, but once he had, the little disk had become a security blanket. Now, he took it everywhere with him, never knowing when he might need the comfort of Phil's voice. He opened the case, reading Phil's neatly written note that he had read countless times before. *To my music*... To be compared to the thing Phil loved most outside his family and friends was truly an honor....

Another sob escaped Pri. Fuck, how he missed him. He missed his laugh, his smile, his dazzling blue eyes, his kisses. The little sleepovers they had, cooking breakfast together in the morning. The way they snuggled together on the piano bench, Pri leaning his head on Phil's shoulder as he played. He missed Phil's kindness, the way he saw the best in everyone, no matter who they were or what their story was.

Pri glanced up at the ceiling. He never really believed in an afterlife before. Calliope did. She talked to Heimdall all the time, especially when she was younger. She had suggested Pri try

talking to Phil more than once, but Pri just wasn't sure how that would help, knowing there was no one there to answer. And yet...

"I don't know what to do, Philander..." Pri whispered through the sobs. "I'm such a wreck without you here. You'd know exactly what to do. Hell, you'd probably forgive the bastard." Pri chuckled a little despite himself. "That's just who you were. You're a better man than I'll ever be. You'd probably tell me that I'm going to be okay, even though you're gone. But honestly... it doesn't feel like it some days. Sure, sometimes I feel like I'm healing, but then... something happens. Something like *this*. I don't know how I'm *ever* going to move on, Phil... You'll always have my heart. And it's not *fair what* he did. Why did it have to be you?"

I... I can't forgive him, Phil. Not like you can. But the infuriating thing is, I... I'm not sure I can hate him, either. I want to hate him, but somehow, for who knows what reason... I don't think I *do*. But maybe, deep down, I know what I really should be hating instead." The Capitol, the place he had once thought of as home. The system that they were fighting against, more specifically. The system that had given Jun the *orders*. Those were words Pri was too afraid to say aloud, even if he was talking to no one but a ghost. "But, I'm so angry, Phil. I can't help it. I'm sorry... I hope you're not disappointed in me. I just... I want to avenge you. I want you to be proud of me, and I want to make sure you didn't die in vain. That's why I'm here, really. It just hurts still, so much, and nothing I do will ever change the past... Only the future. I love you, Phil. Just please, if you can... help me through this."

Pri took a shaky breath, anger and pain bubbling inside him again. He needed to *tell* someone, that's what he needed to do. The world needed to know the truth. But who to call? Not Azrael. Pri loved the younger man like he loved his siblings, and he refused to burden him with that pain. Calliope was safe in Thirteen now, he knew, but he didn't want to bother her. She, Thack, and their band of rescued tributes had been through a lot to get where they were, and now they needed rest. Really, there was only one person he *could* call.

Pri needed to call Stellan. He needed to hear what this... this *rat*... had been hiding all along. Then, maybe Pri could figure out what the hell he was going to do next.

And maybe, one day, finally heal without completely shattering all over again.