

Farewell to Emma

Sanctuary was a dark and silent place. Several computer screens, which were never turned off, shed a dim bluish light, too little to provide real illumination but enough to keep total blackness at bay. Brennan was sitting on the floor in an out-of-the-way corner, with his back against the wall and his knees drawn up. At his left foot, within easy reach, stood a half-empty bottle of tequila gold. It was late, and he should be asleep but had found his room too confining. It was too small to be in, alone with his thoughts. Thus, he had come here.

He took a slug from the bottle, enjoying the sensation of undiluted liquor burning down his throat. He rarely drank. Sure, he had the occasional beer, in a bar or club, just to blend in with the crowd. But he never felt safe enough to let down his guard and allow alcohol to cloud his judgement. Tonight, however, he needed the solace it could bring. Because the pain was too sharp, like a knife constantly twisting in his gut.

She was gone. Emma. Bright, beautiful Emma. And there were so many things he never told her.

A soft noise to his right startled him out of his reverie. A shadow flitted across the wall and Brennan reacted without thinking. Blue fire crackled along his fingers before he realized he was in Sanctuary. He should be safe here. Nothing here could hurt him. Nothing, except the memories that lurked in every corner.

"Hey." The shadow materialized into Shalimar, her long blond hair gleaming in the faint glow of the faraway computer screens. "What ya doin' out here in the middle of the night?"

"Thinking," Brennan grunted. He wasn't sure whether to welcome the distraction his teammate offered, or to resent it.

"About what?"

"Nothing."

"Ah." Shalimar settled herself on her haunches in front of Brennan. She reached for the bottle and brought it to her lips. She swallowed before she spoke again. "Emma."

"Yeah." He was silent for a beat. "I miss her."

"We all do." The unexpected voice made them both look up. Eyes hooded with shadows, his sharp features barely visible, Jesse gave them a tentative smile. "I guess you guys

couldn't sleep either, huh?" He shrugged one shoulder. "Mind if I join you?"

Brennan shifted on the floor to make room for Jesse, who slid down the wall and mimicked Brennan's position with his knees drawn up and his feet flat on the ground. Shalimar offered him the bottle. Jesse surveyed its contents. "Does it help?"

"A little," Brennan said. "Not much."

"Emma would have known how to fix this," Shalimar muttered, looking at the floor. One finger was trailing aimless patterns on its smooth surface. "How to fix us."

Jesse chortled softly. "She'd have told us grief needs to be expressed. She was smart about these things."

"Sometimes I think she was the smartest of us all," Brennan confessed. "We have all these powers, you know, but she -- she knew people. Really knew them."

"She figured out something was up with Adam before any of us did," Shalimar said, a hint of bitterness in her voice. "And she stood up to him. I don't think I would have dared to do that. Not then."

"Emma was a brave girl," Jesse agreed. A sad smile played around his lips. "Remember the Iceman?"

"Oh yeah," Brennan said. "How could I forget. She was really freaked out about that thing."

"And yet she set herself up as bait. To save us," Shalimar added.

They were quiet for a while. Jesse lifted the bottle to his lips again, took a gulp, and passed it on to Brennan. The other man studied its contents, admiring the way the meager light turned it dark golden, before he followed suit and took a big swallow.

Suddenly Jesse broke the silence with a snort of laughter at a private memory.

"What?" Shalimar and Brennan asked as one.

"Remember when there were two Emmas?"

"Damn, that was something!" Brennan exclaimed. He grinned, recalling the shock he felt upon seeing both Emmas at once. "Talk about a case where the whole is more than the sum of its parts!"

"I was thinking about when she first came here," Shalimar said softly. "You remember, Jess. She was so young, and so scared and confused."

"Not so confused that she couldn't fool you and run off again," Jesse reminded her with a grin.

Shalimar smacked his arm, and he rubbed it with a pained expression. "That wasn't me, silly. That was Allison. But she was a strong telepath. There were times when I knew what I was seeing wasn't real, but she had me believing it was."

"Me too," Brennan agreed. "You know, if it weren't for Emma, I would probably still be out there robbing banks and being a thug. She was the first person I cared about beside myself."

None of them spoke for several long seconds. One of the computers dinged softly, announcing it had finished a task, or was beginning on a new one. A lot of Sanctuary maintenance was on automated schedules these days.

"You know, I always wondered, were you in love with her?" Shalimar's question startled Brennan. It was one of those things they never talked about.

"For a while, yeah, I guess so," he admitted. "But then I realized she was more like the little sister I never had, so I suppose it was more about 'love' than being 'in love'."

"I had..." Jesse hesitated a moment, "... lusty feelings for Emma once."

"You didn't!" Shalimar looked up at Jesse in surprise. Her eyes sparkled. "I never knew that!"

"Emma knew. Right away. Before I even did." Jesse chuckled at the memory. "She threatened to make me never have such thoughts ever again."

Shalimar laughed, shaking her head. "Well, that has to be a mood killer."

"It sure was," Jesse agreed with a laugh of his own.

"She'd never have done that, though." Brennan said seriously. "She'd never hurt us. She was our friend."

"That she was," Jesse agreed. Shalimar nodded.

Brennan raised the bottle. "To Emma." He took a gulp.

"To Emma." Shalimar accepted the bottle with a nod and swallowed down a sip.

"Yes," Jesse said. "To Emma." He put the bottle to his lips and emptied the last few drops into his mouth.

Silence reigned once more over the darkened Sanctuary, broken only by the soft hum of machinery and the steady breathing of the three mutants, each engrossed in their own thoughts. Outside, unseen, the thick cloud cover broke open briefly to display the fiery path of a falling star. It flared up brightly for a second before it extinguished and the clouds moved back in. Morning was still many hours away.

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