

Incident

[Timestamp: 13:49, 1 Minute After Cascade]

“Fuck, fuck, fuck—Ellie, fucking stay with me!” I practically yelled into the radio, my voice breaking. Silence answered me.

She can’t be dead. She can’t be. I’d never forgive myself.

I rounded the corner to the maintenance lift, skidding to a halt as my boots slid through a pool of blood. My breath caught in my throat.

"Fuck!"

There she was—lying crumpled on the ground, a growing pool of crimson spreading beneath her. My heart stopped. I dropped to my knees beside her, my hands trembling as I pressed two fingers to her neck. A pulse. Weak, but there.

Relief hit me like a punch to the chest, followed immediately by a wave of panic.

“Ellie?” I rasped, my voice barely above a whisper.

Her eyes flickered open, unfocused and glazed. “Viper?” she murmured weakly. “Where are you?”

“I’m here, my angel. I’m here,” I said, choking on the words. Tears blurred my vision as I brushed blood-soaked hair from her face. She was alive. That’s all that mattered.

“I... I can’t feel my legs,” she said, her voice shaky, strained. “What happened?”

I forced myself to look her over, to assess the damage, even though every fiber of my being screamed to look away. There was a deep gash across her face, blood pooling in her eyes and matting her hair. Her left hand—what was left of it—was shredded, tendons and sinew glistening where the muscle had been torn apart. But it was her legs that made my stomach churn. Burned. Shattered. The upper thighs were mostly intact, but below that—nothing recognizable. Just jagged remnants of bone peeking through what used to be flesh.

She was dying. And if I didn’t move fast, I’d lose her.

The lights flickered overhead. Backup power was failing. Once it went, artificial gravity would follow, and there’d be no getting her out. I reached for the radio on my shoulder, switching to the main crew frequency.

“This is Lieutenant Commander Damien Thorne,” I barked. “Is anyone still on board the USS Chara? Respond.”

Static crackled in my ear before a voice finally cut through. “It’s good to hear your voice, sir,” came the familiar, steady tone of Lieutenant Adrienne Wolfe.

“Wolfe,” I said, relief washing over me again. “Do you have anyone with you?”

“Yes, sir. Fifteen total, mix of engineers, technical, a couple medical staff, and a frigate in the hangar bay. Pilot’s ready, but he says he’s leaving in five minutes with or without us.”

“Tell him to hold position. I’m coming up from the engineering deck, and I’m bringing Keener. How long until backup power fails?”

“Fifteen minutes, maybe less,” Wolfe replied. “Secondary power bank’s still holding, but barely. What’s her condition?”

I glanced down at Ellie, my heart clenching as her eyes fluttered shut again. “Severe,” I said tightly. “Massive blood loss, avulsions on her head and legs, and her left hand’s a mess. Is Dr. Calder there with you?”

“Yes sir, she’s here with us, currently tending to some of the others, I’ll give her the sitrep” her voice still steady, I never understood how she maintained that calm air of control.

“Get Dr. Calder ready. We’ll need every ounce of magic she’s got.”

“Understood, sir. We’ll meet you at the hangar entrance,” Wolfe said, her voice growing more urgent. “Keep her alive.”

“I’m trying,” I muttered, grabbing a coagulant pen from my med pack. I stabbed it into Ellie’s thigh, just above the worst of the damage, watching as the blood flow slowed slightly. It wasn’t enough, but it would have to do for now.

The lift was gone—collapsed into the bottom of the shaft. Of course. The cables, though, were intact. I pulled out my zip-line tool, muttering a quick thanks to whatever cruel god had spared that part of the infrastructure.

“Hold on, Ellie,” I whispered, hooking the line to the cable. “We’re getting out of here.”

I secured her to me, her small frame limp against my chest, and began the climb. Every second felt like an eternity, every sound of groaning metal a reminder of how little time we had left.

[Hanger Bay]

[Timestamp: 13:52, 3 Minutes After Cascade]

The hangar was a war zone—scrap metal and bodies strewn across the floor, fires still burning in pockets where fuel had ignited. The frigate, Argos, loomed in the distance, its ramp lowered and engines humming, ready for a quick escape.

Wolfe and Calder met me halfway across the bay. Wolfe's usually calm demeanor cracked as her eyes landed on Ellie. "Fuck," she muttered, rushing to take some of Ellie's weight. "Glad you found her. She wouldn't have lasted much longer."

"No time for pleasantries," I grunted, shifting Ellie into Wolfe's arms as I adjusted my grip. "Let's move."

Calder stepped in, her face pale but determined. She jabbed Ellie's arm with a yellow auto-injector, muttering something under her breath. The blood flow slowed further, but her breathing was still shallow, her face ashen.

We pushed through the wreckage, every step a struggle. The Argos loomed closer, its engines roaring as the pilot prepared for takeoff. Inside, the space was cramped, filled with wounded crew members—engineers and technicians mostly, their faces etched with pain and exhaustion.

Calder and Wolfe took Ellie from me, laying her carefully on a stretcher. I lingered for a moment, watching as they worked, before stepping back to check on the rest of the crew.

"Is everyone accounted for?" I asked Wolfe, who was already shouting orders to the remaining engineers.

"All we've got," she said grimly. "No one else answered the last call."

I nodded, my gaze drifting to the viewport. The Chara's remains hung in the void, a twisted skeleton of steel and fire. The secondary power bank gave out as we breached the initial debris field, I watched as the artificial gravity fields collapsed and the hanger's containment fields failed. Debris and bodies spiraled into the vacuum of space, a morbid ballet of destruction.

I turned back to Ellie. She was pale, barely clinging to life, but alive. For now, that was enough.

"You're safe," I murmured under my breath, more to myself than to her. "You're safe, my angel."