

tell me where the good men go, before I wash away

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by [InterstellarSiren](#)

Summary

Cristobal Rios never forgot the things he gave up when he left Starfleet. But what will he have to sacrifice in order to get back the sense of normalcy the organization gave him?

Notes

Made with love for my friends in the Aramis in Space Discord Server. The song this was inspired by usually gives me vibes of Aramis and Anne from The Musketeers, but there'll be at least *checks notes* three. . . maybe five works (?) in this series.

There are days when a person wonders what their life might have been if they made different choices. For Cristobal Rios, those questions always came back to one thing he loved and had given up. It's hard not to wonder what might have been when a person is alone and some core part of him wishes things were different. He's thought about this so many times. If he could have saved his captain. . . But there's no point in thinking about Vandermeer now, not when he's gone and there's no way to bring him back.

He'd never considered coming back to Starfleet. Cris will only admit when he's drunk that it's only because he never thought the opportunity would present itself. He's got too many memories, too many nightmares, too much fucking baggage for an official command. He's earned it, hell, he's nearly owed it after all he's gone through for an organization he thought he'd long left behind. No. Not nearly. He deserves it, because he proved his worth, and now it's time to collect. At least, that's what he tells himself when the monster that is his self-doubt rears its ugly head.

He doesn't tell anyone about the days he got by with a splash of replicated aguardiente in his coffee. He doesn't tell them about the nightmares that remind him of seared flesh and the one person who actually gave a shit about him lying dead on the floor only a step or two away. A shake of his head, and the image is gone; for now, until it haunts his dreams again and makes him realize he should have been right next to the old man. Why did he have to be so goddamned stubborn and live? It would be so easy to do exactly what Alonzo had done— a quick motion of the phaser and. . .

There but for the grace of God..., he thinks. That's why it feels strange now, to be called back into Starfleet HQ when it's been a decade since anyone in Starfleet actually gave a flying fuck what he said or did. Ten years of loneliness and alcohol-soaked terrors that made him wake in a pool of cold sweat. Ten years of living like a mercenary because of the label they'd slapped on him. Some days, when it's bad, he thinks Vandermeer might have had the right idea. He almost wishes he'd thought of it first. But he can't think that way anymore. Not now when he's got a crew to guide home.

She's not his mermaid, but this Stargazer has become his all the same. He wants to be the kind of captain who leaves a legacy, one who inspires his officers. There are days when he wonders if he's perhaps a little too short tempered. He thinks they might have just taken Picard's word that he deserved this and gone with it. There's an irony in that situation which isn't lost on him; they take Picard's words as gospel now.

The thing he didn't see coming was Agnes. They'd been perfect when Soji announced she was staying on to travel the galaxy with them. Trouble is, it's hard to be a good man when you're still broken and battling your own issues. Then came the calls from Starfleet, and the seduction of power. It's a different kind of autonomy than he ever had as a civilian CO, and it's a heady mix. Then he'd fucked it all up by asking her the hard question.

“Will you wait for me, Aggie?”

“Hm?”

“If I take it— a command in Starfleet—will you wait for me?”

“Would I have to wait?”

“Not necessarily— I mean, it depends on where they send me. Anyway, you and Soji are gonna be traveling too, and I— I don’t want to lose you—this—us. Should I say no? ‘Cause I can, I . . .”

“Dating a captain does sound kind of hot. I mean, don’t get me wrong, it already is.” Agnes could feel the rumble of Cris’ laughter when she hid her face, now flushed pink with shame. How could a brilliant scientific mind be so obtuse?

“But this way I’d be official. Yeah, I get it. You’re free now too. They won’t charge you for Bruce, they know all about what happened.” Pain seared Agnes’ features. Cris realized too late that he’d struck a nerve.

“You think that’s what this is about?”

“Whoa. . . no, I— look, I didn’t mean it—.”

“You already made up your mind. You’re going to choose the job over me.”

“This could be my only shot to make things right, Agnes. I would have thought you, of all people, would believe in second chances after—!”

“*After what, Cris?!*”

“After everything we’ve just been through. You were tortured, you lost the man you loved, you were held by a group of Androids, need I go on? You’re actually *stupid* enough to believe I’d pick the job over you? For a scientist, you don’t use your brain often.” Agnes’ face twisted again, and this time, Cris wasn’t ready for the reaction. A stinging slap seared his cheek with pain. He’d figured she could hit hard, but. . .

Carajo, not that hard. . .

“How dare you? You know what, maybe you *should* run back to Starfleet. Maybe you can convince them you deserve a second chance, but you won’t get one with me. Do me one last favor—*never call me again, Captain Rios!*”

“Agnes, *wait*, I— *Agnes!*” But it was too late, and she was gone. With no other options, Cris did what he had done every other time a woman had walked away. He threw himself into another job. There would always be another task, another requirement, a chance to meet someone new. If Agnes had loved him, she would have understood why he wanted this so badly.

There are days now, as much as he knows he cannot and would never abandon the *Stargazer*, that he wonders how she and her crew—himself included—will face a conflict. He can’t bring himself to lose Agnes’ contact information the way she told him to, because deep down there’s a realization: they were both clinging to something. But taking command of this ship isn’t so much about what he wanted to hold on to, or even about him at it’s core. It’s about a desire to see what happens when good people step up to the plate when they’re needed. Even if he doesn’t like it, he knows a day might come when he needs Agnes again. Then, when it matters, she won’t care that he didn’t lose her number or about their fights. Maybe, just maybe, he can find out where he’s headed before the swell overtakes him. If he does, there’s no telling what waits on the other side. But if there’s one thing Cris knows better than anyone, it’s that those waves and ripples. . . well, they make for one hell of a ride.

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