

The next morning was surprisingly uneventful, Thomas was shaken awake by an already dressed Adeline and was informed to get dressed while she went downstairs to make breakfast. Encouraged by the fact he didn't seem to be on the menu, he dressed in the clothes she'd laid out for him. That turned out to be, apparently, yet another set of left-over clothes of some kind that only just managed to fit him.

It was going to take a bit of getting used to her doing that, if his stay there turned out to last longer than he'd planned. Which might end up being quite a while, as she knew what he was and didn't seem to mind all that much. So, he shrugged into the clothing and went downstairs to see what Adeline was up to and perhaps get something to eat.

Adeline turned to give him a warm smile as he stepped through the door into the kitchen. "You seemed to sleep rather well," Adeline said as she stirred something together in a large bowl, "For a minute there, I thought it was going to some drastic measures to get you out of bed."

"Yeah... well, it was a rather busy day yesterday," he said with a shrug.

He moved over to the counter opposite Adeline and started to climb onto the counter to get a cup of coffee. While making several surreptitious glances over to where she was working in order to try and see what she was planning on having for breakfast. As part of him half expected the mare to take advantage of his *abilities*, which always tended to happen sooner or later.

It might not even bother him too much if she just came out and asked him directly. It would be far better than being pounced upon at some point and put through an annoying bit of culinary distress. Either way, having to reform that early in the morning was always somewhat bothersome.

She glanced over at him let out a chuckle at the look he was giving her. "It's just eggs," she said with a tilt of the bowl. Then added as she wiped her hands and walked over to him, "Do you need some help? I know you managed that by yourself once before, but I would rather you didn't break any of my coffee cups or dirty up my clean countertop."

He'd only just managed to reach the top of the counter when she sauntered over to glare at him. He didn't know what else to do, so, he stood there with a rather sheepish look and said, "If it's not too much trouble. Sorry, I'm just so used to doing everything myself."

She grabbed a small mug out of the cupboard, and filled it with the steaming black liquid. Seeing as he was already there, he decided to just sit on the edge of the counter and enjoy his coffee. Where it would be easier for them to talk without straining their necks to much.

Thomas took a long, grateful sip from the mug. “So, what’s the plan for today?” he asked as the warm feeling spread through him.

Lythian coffee is considered one of the strongest, legal stimulants available, if you can stomach it, that is. Their oddly engineered biology required something that could probably peel paint if applied correctly, while also being rather dangerous to non-lythians. Nevertheless, Thomas had acquired a taste for it several years ago, and even managed to get over the feeling of his teeth melting.

Adeline shrugged and walked back over to the other counter. “Oh, just the usual, I guess. Try to make money while not murdering the rubes that work for me,” she said sardonically as she began to pour the eggs into a large saucepan. “The real question, however, is what I’m going to do with you today.”

“Me?” He asked, then gave her a cautious look, “Why... what’s going on?”

She shrugged again. “Nothing, I just need to find something productive for you to do is all. After what happened yesterday, I was going to just have you do some light work around the house or maybe clean up the garden out front. Something simple that would keep you out of trouble and, more importantly, out of anyone’s jaws.”

He brightened up a bit, some light weeding seemed like an easy job and staying out of sight for the moment was a good idea. “Why not just have me do that then?”

She shook her head with a soft sigh. “It doesn’t really matter now, does it. You’re not all that fragile and if something fatal did somehow happen to you, you’d be fine anyway.” She turned around to give him a quick, thoughtful look, then added, “It’s almost amusing to think how worried I was about you. Besides, I kind of want to keep you close by today, you never know...” She trailed off with a wistful look in her eye.

He let out a long sigh of his own and looked at her silently for a moment. “I think you should stick with your original plan. The last thing you want right now is for someone else to find

out about me, I'm surprised at how well your taking it. But I doubt few others would be as... understanding."

Her mood darkened as a sudden surge of anger rose up within her, and she snapped at him without thinking. "Why should I care what you think, human. The only reason your... not..."

The sudden change of expression that came over him gave her pause and she trailed off as she realized what she'd been saying. Where'd that come from, it had just... came out, and there was real anger behind it. It scared her a little, and for several conflicting reasons. That she could've so easily turned on him like that, to quickly cast aside the feelings she was starting to harbor for him. And that she suddenly cared so much about it.

She stared at him for a long, silent moment in awkward silence as he sat looking back at her from the counter. Finally, after it seemed that there was nothing else to be said, he sighed, put the mug of coffee down gently on the marble countertop then hopped down onto the floor. Where he walked out of the kitchen and into the living room in silence.

As he left, he flicked his eyes towards her for a moment, his expression unreadable. However, the look within the somewhat pale orbs pinned Adeline in place. Their gaze lancing through her that contained no anger or accusation, just a cold lack of emotion. Which had almost managed to seem piteous, which was somehow more fearful than anything else.

The smell of burning eggs wafted past her nose and roused her back to the present. She turned back around, removed the pan from the burner and shut it off. Then walked over to the table numbly to sit down and think as she stared out the window. The recent outburst having driven away her appetite, replacing it with more troubled thoughts.

Did she really see him that much differently now that she knew what he was? Of course... but should that change the way she felt about him? It wasn't just that she now had a handy excuse to do what she really wanted to with him without fear of hurting him, permanently anyway. And it actually had felt really good to tell him what she wanted to do with him that day.

But real anger had risen up at his suggestion. Which, to be fair, was an idea that had both of their best interests in mind. It was just like every other relationship she'd ever been in. Her own desires were getting in the way of her feelings, and would soon be all she'd be able to think about.

A soft noise made her look away from the window to see Thomas walking somberly into the dinning room. He stopped in front of her and stood there quietly as he held out the collar towards the confused mare with a resigned look masking his face.

He let out a short sigh and said, "If you want to have me stay by you today, I will, and you wont have to worry about resistance from me either. All I ask, is that we take some precautions when you want me to... *help* you. I'm serious about keeping certain things a secret for now, and if it means that my role around here needs to change n order to ensure that. Then so be it."

She reached out with tentative fingers and took the collar from him, however, she still found it too hard to fully meet his gaze. Any other time, she would have found the idea of his going along with it somewhat fun, especially now that she new what he was. But this felt wrong, all of it, and she hated herself for feeling that she shouldn't care about it, or even what he thought. She realized that she had begun to become just what she sworn not to be.

"I, um... I appreciate that..." she said quietly, "...But I think you're right. It's best we stick with what I had originally planned for you to do." Her expression shifted to a wry little smile, "I know you'd love for me to indulge in what I'm sure is one of your fun little kinks and all. But I have too work today to indulge you, and I think you'd be better employed around the house, where you'll be safest."

Thomas looked at her for a thoughtful moment, seeing the conflict in her eyes. Despite her efforts to hide it from him and play it all off. So, he nodded and returned a smile of his own while trying not to seem too relieved at how things were going. But he knew this was all pretty hard for her, and found such willingness to try and fight her own instincts rather admirable.

"If you think that's best," he said while managing a convincingly nonchalant shrug.

"I do, actually," she said with an almost playfully chiding air as her mood got better, "After all, it's best nobody finds out about what you really are just yet. So, we need to continue playing the part for now. Don't you agree?"

She leaned forward to firmly snap the collar in place around his neck. Where, despite a conscious attempt to suppress it, the act sent a small shiver of excitement down her spine. However, for a heartbeat, she thought he might have experienced as well. Which made her feel a little better about everything and helped settle her mind on the matter.

“So, I guess plans for breakfast have changed then...” he said with a disappointed glance towards the stove and the still slightly smoking pan of eggs on it.

Partially to further lighten the mood but mostly because he was actually rather hungry just then. Reforming always did make him rather hungry, especially after having to wait as long as he did to do so. And now that the threat of needing to do it again right away had passed, he wanted to replenish his energy supply

Adeline looked towards the stove herself and sighed. “Yeah, sorry about that... those were that last of the eggs too,” she said and turned a suggestively hopeful look at him, while trying not to lick her lips.

He frowned at her. “Its not magic, I have to eat too you know. Besides, while I’m sure Bernadette could manage it, I doubt you really want to spend the rest of the day trying to fend off a food coma. Do you?”

She shrugged, although still let slip a short, disappointed sigh. “Well... it was worth a try I guess. I think there’s something around here we can salvage for breakfast.”

She got up from the table and walked back into the kitchen. Where her nose wrinkled at the acrid scent of burnt eggs, so, she got the mess cleaned up as quickly as she could. Not just to clear the air and get something else cooking, but she didn’t want the reminder of what had just happened to linger.

When the mess had finally been cleaned up, she opened a window to air out the room and began to rummage in the massive refrigerator. Both ready to accept the challenge of making a good meal and hoping it would prove a good distraction for her mind. As she really wanted to just say fuck it and not bother with the days work or even care about the farm for a while.

She really wanted to sit down with him and have a long conversation on several topics that were on her mind. It would be nice to know what the plans for his immediate future were, perhaps even what his long-term plans might be. And what he really thought about maybe staying there with her, which was something she was having stronger feelings about as time went on.

Which she also really wanted to lay out and see what his were on the matter. As he seemed to have some reciprocating emotions of his own towards her, so far as she could tell. But most of

all... she wanted to see just what, if anything, that this *relationship* of theirs was going to be, one way or another. A prospect that she had several uncomfortable feelings about in and of itself.

Adeline had several interesting ideas about what she could have made of it before. But now, this revelation about what he was had an old, ever-present hunger stirring within her. Which poked its head out of the place she had tried to lock it away to leer at her with dark, lascivious intent. With the knowledge that she couldn't keep it caged up forever, especially with such a virile little male around to have fun with.

It had ended most of her relationships at some point, usually around the time they got serious enough to allow for bedroom activities. No matter what she tried, it always wanted feeding and could never be properly sated. It would always just want something more. Sure, her previous partners had found it fun, perhaps even attractive, at first... but it would soon progress past a point they couldn't go.

Her last real serious relationship had ended that way. He'd been that rather handsome, young stallion, a fellow sergeant with good career potential and a charming personality to boot. It had been going very well, they dated for some time and the relationship had soon grown intimate. Which was when things began to fall apart, she thought she'd been careful and that things hadn't gotten too intense.

However, after only a couple of months, he said he had to brake it off with her and she never heard from him again, even at work. But the worst, and by far the most intolerable, part about the whole thing was the various *rumors* that began to circulate around about her shortly afterward. Which eventually led to her having to her having to take drastic measures.

"Are, ah... are you ok?" asked a quiet voice next to her.

Adeline stood blinking as it dawned on her that she'd been standing at the counter, staring off into space. All while holding a knife over the calga-melon she'd found as her mind dredged up the past. She must have been there for some time as Thomas was standing near her with a concerned look.

She spun reflexively to look at him, the knife still in her hand. Which had him take a step backwards at the sight of the gleaming blade pointed in his direction.

She glanced down at the knife, realized it was there, and lowered it with an apologetic look. “Yes... sorry. I just, um... got lost in my own thoughts for a moment... is all.” She turned back to start cutting the melon in silence as a rather telling, pink flush worked its way up her ears.

Thomas shrugged and wandered back into the living room as the sounds of food preparation began in earnest behind him. Where, after clambering back onto the huge couch, he resumed watching the morning news. Not in the hope of getting any real information, but just to enjoy the long-forgotten and relaxingly normative activity.

When the local news had ended, he flipped through the multitude of feeds for several minutes. Looking to see if anything caught his eye. Adeline had a good live-net package that offered pretty much everything, from traditionally scheduled broadcasts to on-demand content. There was even a nice selection of holographic content, which her unit didn’t seem to support.

Perhaps it was the part of him that had worked so hard to stay human, but he’d never fully understood the lythian attitude towards technology. They had stayed in a relatively stable tech level for nearly three thousand years, mostly due to a self-imposed ground state. Where they only made any noteworthy advancements when absolutely needed or could be done without major environmental impact.

However, he didn’t really fault them all that much for it. As the lythian mindset on technology, and society as a whole, was deeply rooted in their history. Where many of the first Splicers had chosen to forego their humanity and strive become something new. A reversion to a simpler way of life while engineering their ideal perfect being. One created from all that was good in both man and animal.

Then, after the fall of the Empire, the cataclysm that came with it, and the eventual War of Subjugation that followed not long afterward. They came to the universal understanding that they needed to bury the sins of the past and forge a new future. One where technology and any advancement of it was limited as much as possible.

Although, he did enjoy the lack of retinal scanners over every doorway and DNA filters built into almost any surface that he might touch. As it made it easier for him to avoid detection. Which had become an almost constant issue as the lythian world grew more aware of not just his, but the others presence.

After several minutes of searching, he finally settled on a program where a couple of Canines were busy discussing the latest small advancement in technology. One that was starting to get rather trendy in several of the larger cities across Cindar. As well as what it meant for those who cared about that kind of thing and how it might effect society as a whole in the coming years.

He couldn't really pay attention to what they were saying though, as his gaze was continually drawn to the window. To look out across the fields and through the various orchards, towards Helmsdale. To the where spot green house lay and, who must even now be sitting within it, Elijah. Which soon was all he could focus on and it became harder and harder to sit still, knowing that the culmination of eight long months of careful, and occasionally haphazard, planning was so close.

With great effort, and because he had little other choice, Thomas managed to look away from the window and over towards the kitchen. Where Adeline was still quite busy with food preparation. He watched her work for a short time, letting his mind wander onto other issues. Such as his feelings for the strange mare he'd unwittingly placed himself into the care of.

True, events had not worked out completely according to plan. However, things seemed to be going well enough, for the moment at least, and he might even be able to settle into a regular existence again once it was all finished. But that really depended on how she ultimately reacted to the recent turn of events.

He'd started to sense a growing conflict of some sort within her. Which seemed to be over far more than what he was and how she was going to deal with it. It made him a little uneasy, as such things always did, but something inside said that she could be trusted. That she didn't really mean him any harm, at this point anyway. The first night he'd shown up notwithstanding.

Thomas turned his gaze back to the entertainment set, although, still not fully paying attention to what was on as he continued his train of thought. Which were dispersed several minutes later, when she called for him to come eat.

After he'd climbed up to stand on a chair, he found assembled on the table an impressive collection of improvised foodstuffs. A mixture of fruits, bacon, some vegetables, and a bit of the eggs she had managed to salvage. It was a nice spread and the smell drifted up to tickle his nose and remind him that his hunger was still there and only getting stronger by the moment.



They ate in a rushed silence, at first. Concerned more with satisfying their hunger than conversation. But also as a nervous tension had built up between them and neither wanted to ruin the salvaged morning with another outburst. However, the awkward hushed atmosphere soon became too much for Adeline to deal with.

She cleared her throat and looked over at Thomas with an somewhat anxious expression. “So... you're fine with just the, ah... the garden today? It really does need some work, I've just been too busy to give it the proper attention it deserves.”

“Sure,” he said with a shrug as he grabbed another piece of bacon, “It'll give me some time to think.”

“About what?”

He looked over at her and saw the look on her face and smiled reassuringly. “A lot of things... but mostly what the next few days will bring, and how I'm going to deal with it.”

“Oh... I see...” she said softly and looked down at her plate to give her eggs an uneasy glare.

“It's not that,” he said with a dismissive gesture, understanding what she thought he meant by it. “I'm hoping that with everything that happened last night, I've set things in motion that will finally bring an end to this. So, I need to try and plan things out, or consider my options at the very least.”

“Right... right...” she said, her expression growing more thoughtful. But then she looked over and gave him a shrewd look, “So... what all happen last night?”

Thomas gave her a rather perplexed look and a small, shrewd twist of his lips. “You really want to know?”

She shrugged and edged her chair a little closer to his. “Of course I do,” she said as she lowered her voice conspiratorially. “I mean... clearly *something* interesting happened, judging from the state you came back in.” She paused for a moment and shifted in her seat with mild embarrassment before adding, “And... well... I might've been, um... a little concerned... about you.”

He watched as a bashful redness began to creep slowly up her ears, the heat of hit seeming to warm his face. "Alright," Thomas said with a shrug and a wry smile at her apparent discomfort, "If you really want to know."

Thomas related the events of the previous evening, starting from when he'd left and leaving nothing out. Which she listened to with rapt attention, not even seeming to be at all bothered by any of the more sordid details within it. After a good half hour or so, he completed the recount with laying out how his encounter had ended and the information he had gained from it. Included the memory it had elicited and the emotions that welled up within him afterwards.

When he'd finished, he looked over to see Adeline, sitting almost rigid, with a stricken look masking her face. All while her eyes danced with emotions that he couldn't quite place. Which surprised him a little, as he didn't think she'd care all that much about what happened beyond idle curiosity.

Of course, the thought then occurred to him that she might take issue with what transpired between him and the other two lythian females. He didn't know why she would, but he couldn't think of any other reason she would be staring at him like that.

"Well..." he began while edging away slightly, "...It's not as though I *enjoyed* it that much... and I had to go through with it... to get the information out of them."

She blinked at him for a moment, then fully she processed what he'd said. "No... not that," she said with a small shake of her head, "Did you... did you really care that much about a Lythian?"

Adeline's face softened as she flicked her eyes over him, as though truly seeing him for the first time. He looked back at her quietly for several heartbeats before answering, not sure whether he ready to have that conversation yet. But the intensity of her gaze, and the emotions within it, seemed to encourage him.

Thomas let out a heavy sigh and nodded. "Yes... I did," he answered in a soft hushed voice, only just managing to keep the sorrow out of it.

His eyes never left hers as he carefully gauged her reaction. The look within them daring her to react the way he expected anyone else to. As he assumed she, like everyone else, wouldn't understand and simply cast judgement. But also, because it would give him a good excuse to end the conversation right there.

She tried to speak several times. Her mouth opened and closed like a fish as she made multiple efforts to put words to the thoughts racing around her mind. This was the first time he had spoken about what his relationship with Kelly had really been, and she could understand why. Part of her had even wondered if she really was lythian or not, he'd never been very specific on that point.

She'd simply assumed that Kelly had been someone he owed some kind of loyalty to, for some reason. But that they had been something more... something much more than that. The reality of it was a shock, but once it passed, it left her with a new appreciation for him.

"How..." she said but was unable to go on, as a lump formed in her throat and the racing thoughts still kept the right words from coming out.

"It's a long story... well, maybe not that long," he said with a shrug.

"Well?" she said as her expression became ravenous to hear about it.

He took a long, deep breath as the memories came flooding back. "We met in an odd turn of fate, in San Harbor. She was working at a shelter that took in... *unwanted* humans; I'm sure you know which ones I mean, the old, sick, and very young... mostly. Too old or sick to care for and too young to be of any use, well... other than the obvious, that is."

She grunted and made a solemn nod. "Yeah, I've seen how that can be sometimes. Back when I..." she trailed off, catching herself before saying something she too still had strong feelings about.

"Well..." he continued with a gesture, "I needed a place to lye low for a while after... an *incident*. So, I just slipped inside, was welcomed with open arms, and given a quiet place to sleep."

Adeline's eyebrows inched upward, noticeably intrigued. "I've seen a few of these places before, went into one once for... a reason. I'm surprised they didn't welcome you in other ways as well, since you're clearly healthy enough to work. Or be used for other *purposes*. Some of the places back up north, that I know of, usually weed out any humans that are still marketable... I have a feeling you know what they do with the rest."

Thomas nodded, having had an experience or two of his own with such places. "Oh yes... which is why I tend to avoid them. But I'd heard that this particular shelter was being run by a local

“Human Rights” group at the time. I’m sure you’ve heard of their views on how humans are treated... Kelly was one of the volunteers that just happened to be working the day I showed up.”

He took the opportunity to shovel in several mouthfuls of food as Adeline processed the information. As despite the haphazard appearance of the meal, it really was quite good. Which was quickly becoming a major factor in him wanting to stick around the place for a while.

“Yeah,” she said with a small nod, “I’ve heard about some of those groups. I don’t exactly agree with them on everything. But... I guess they make some good points, on a couple of issues.” She shrugged and looked at him for a short, thoughtful moment. Then added with a little smile, “And after the events of the last couple of days, I may be coming around to seeing their point of view.”

Thomas gave her a brief searching look before continuing, “So, after a few days of laying low and trying to fit in, Kelly figured out that I wasn’t supposed to be there.” A low chuckle escaped his lips at the memory. “She pulled me aside and asked me what I was doing there.”

“I bet that went well,” Adeline said with a wry smile.

“Better than you think, I’m sure,” he replied, returning her smile. “She was justifiably pissed at what I was doing, and even made a couple vague threats at one point. But after a short, mostly made-up, explanation and a couple of well-placed pleading looks... she let me stay. I guess, for some strange reason, she took a liking to me. As I never got a good explanation about why she didn’t simply toss me out right then.”

He shrugged and quickly finished the rest of the food on his plate. Then washed down with a couple healthy quaffs from a glass of juice. Which he had to lift with both hands as she didn’t have any that were made for someone his size.

Adeline bobbed her head with approval as he added a second helping onto the dish. “I guess you were hungry, glad to see you enjoy my cooking at the very least.” His response was just a quick thumbs up, since his mouth had once again become occupied with a fresh load of food.

She watched him eat for a moment as she lapsed into thought. Thinking that perhaps it could work, forming some, kind of strange relationship with him, as it clearly had in the past. As she mulled the idea over, her gaze moved outside, to the broad fields the stretched to the base of the far-

off mountains that edged the valley. Where the ever-faithful rising of the sun was already spreading new day's light across the landscape.

The scene made something click in her brain. The sun was already that high, how much daylight had she already wasted? The others would be arriving soon, so, she'd better get outside right away to line out the day's work.

She crammed food into her mouth and ate several hurried mouthfuls. "Just... head out... to the garden," she said to Thomas between bites and loud gulps as she ate with increasing haste, "And make... what you can of it... for now. I'll swing by... later... when I get a moment." She paused just long enough to empty her own glass in two or three large swallows. "Yeah, that's good for now... just, um... stay out of trouble long enough for me to get things squared away, alright?"

"Sure thing," he replied with a slow nod, still working to comprehend the gluttonous display he'd just witnessed. While trying to not let her see the little sensation it sent through him.

It was a good thing he'd already eaten his fill, as there was practically nothing. Since she'd crammed whatever she could reach into her mouth as she rushed to finish eating. He was just glad it hadn't included him.

She grabbed a large piece of toast for the road and rushed out of the room without another word to head outside. He finished the food left on his plate, cleaned up what he could of the kitchen, and left the house himself to start the day.