

This is a story told from two disparate perspectives. As such, there will be overlapping information witnessed and repeated from different points of view. It is our hope that you'll enjoy the process of seeing these two points of view clash, then come together both figuratively and literally, as indicated by the right and left idents noting the shift in perspectives.

In the near future, the world as we know it is no more. The wasteland covers what was once the continental U.S, and only small pockets of humanity have managed to survive and settle in the new world. In this world, however, new humans with dangerous gifts have risen to prominence, preying on the weaker humans with their ability to change their size and density at will. These 'Shifters' roam the wasteland, struggling to survive much like the remaining humans, even with their natural, predatory advantage.

Here we find the story of two people living in this world. So different from one another, soon to clash, and from then on to relearn what it means to be human after humanity has fallen....

The following days proceeded unremarkably. Maya did her chores around the van, fed the both of them at meal times, and kept driving into the barren frontier. Beyond the settling tedium, Adam remained holed away in his cot. She didn't mind his self-isolation, by letting him get away with this behavior, he fulfilled his purpose as an item waiting for use. When she spoke to him, it was more akin to talking with herself. He'd remain expressionless when she mused on what to do with her day, and would grimly cringe when she outwardly hoped they found some humans on the road.

By all regards, her wickedness would appear benign to most, just another traveler looking to survive in a cruel world. Was this a trick of hers? Adam had seen her outright monstrous side, but he thought back on the horror stories of his youth. Shifters could look like any other person. They could seek refuge, sneak into camps, enjoy the company of decent folk trying to get by, and turn on them in an instant for a quick romp and meal. Did Maya do the same? Did she charm her way into parties of unfortunate souls that had their sociability repaid with death?

He'd stop her. As long as he was with her, he'd vow to warn anyone they met of her intentions. It might mean his own death, but he welcomed it. One good deed he could do with his pitiful predicament.

The Adam boy was atrociously boring. Didn't move or make a sound without her forcing him down for mealtime. Even then, he avoided eye contact and stayed silent,

even at her light prodding. Whatever, if he wanted to be a sorry ass, he could shiver in his bed all damn day. Less for Maya to worry about, she was used to being alone anyway.

Though she wouldn't be for long. They'd be coming in on her destination within the hour. She'd held off on making lunch just for the occasion. Climbing over a ridge along the broken but intact highway, a single, robust tower stood out among the grey plain, adorned with dozens of ropes and ribbons with small structures and tents around the base. An outpost, and a sorely needed respite on her trip.

"Right, Snack! You better make yourself presentable in a bit. Nearly there." She called back, not willing to check if he even acknowledged her order. Maya did turn back to look at the mounds of gear she'd accrued in the last months, slovenly piled throughout the living space without so much care for organization beyond the basic categories of guns, clothes, gear, and knick knacks. Most would be sold, getting her a pretty penny before she ate. They were arriving? Where? Without a proper view from his enclosed crevasse, he was left to wonder what she meant. He didn't dare hop down and go for a window. For how little he moved in her company, she might interpret it as escape. Maybe he should consider some kind of escape attempt? Perhaps, but first he'd have to see where they ended up.

And what did she mean by presentable? His looks? Not much he could do with his ragged clothes, dirt-caked skin, and dirty hair. Still, clearly she was calling him down to finally *use* him. When the vehicle came to a stop, he jolted forward from the sudden stop and his own nerves.

Maya relieved the ignition, letting the van come to rest as she hopped up into the main space. She stretched her hands over her head, earring a satisfying pop from her left shoulder blade as she let out a sigh, relieving the tension from the long drive.

"Come on, Snack! Get down from your funny hidey hole," Maya chirped, moving back to grab a jacket she'd placed over the dining table. Turning back, she found he hadn't moved an inch.

"Aww, are you tired? Do I have to come grab you down?"

He flinched at her tease, begrudgingly turning inwards to see her softly teasing face. Their eyes met for a moment before she was satisfied and went back to clothing herself. Adam sighed, inching himself out of the compartment.

His muscles ached from days of 'rest', though he hardly had the will to complain. Touching down on the floor, he started toward his usual seat at the dining area on instinct. What he hadn't expected was Maya pulling him in front of her. Adam froze, fearing whatever horrible thing she intended. Far from trying to hurt him, she simply assessed his appearance, firmly keeping him in place with a hand on each shoulder.

"Hmm... yup, you're about a medium," Maya turned his shoulders to look inside his shirt collar for an old tag of sort from the old world. No such luck, though she was confident in her appraisal. He wasn't the most pristine looking she could hope for in a companion, but it'd do until she got him new clothes. However, his hair could use some work. She stuck her thumb in her mouth briefly, getting it wet and fussing with his hair.

The prisoner couldn't look away when her hand went to her deadly mouth, even if just to moisten her finger before assaulting his hair. The strained tangles and musses struggled against her manipulation, though eventually gave way to her urgings.

When she managed to find a part on the left side of his scalp, she dug in to brush his hair to either side into what looked like a modestly maintained fashion. "There! Now you're at least some kind of cute." She snorted, gently patting his cheek so as to not ruin her handiwork.

"Now grab some gear and go outside," she finally released him, heading to the pile of guns and hoisting them up in a worn rucksack, a task that while insurmountable to a human came off as only a light nuisance to her, "You can get the clothes and whatever you can carry in one of those bins," she shared on her way to the door, her head gesturing to a stacked tower of plastic containers in the kitchen..

Adam regarded her casual strength with a shiver, then stepped forward to do as she said. Wherever they'd wound up, likely he was about to see the belongings from his brothers and sisters go away for good. Part of him wanted to sneak a few of their belongings onto his person, but any kind of treachery on his part felt like a death sentence if he were found out. Gathering up the substantial piles of clothes and dumping them in a crate. Once stuffed, he grabbed it by the handholds and head for the door.

She was outside waiting, of course. Likely she'd never give him the chance to wander freely again after the last stunts he pulled. Maya smirked at his thin frame heaving the large mound of garments, almost invisible behind the pile.

“There we go, Snack! You can do it all in one trip you think?”

He was confused by her question, then had his focus drawn to a looming shape in the distance. Not a mountain or a cliff... a building? And a tall one at that, dressed in hundreds of colorful flags that streamed to the ground from the top of the spire. Well, he guessed it reached the ground. The landmark was a ways off around a small canyon, Maya having parked the van out of sight.

No doubt this was a settlement of some kind. Likely a human settlement. A swell of hope and a tremor of fear wrestled inside him, relieved to see civilization again, and horrified that the horror he'd imagined was to come would soon take place.

“Yeah, long walk, but you'll do fine. Gonna need to make some trips anyway,” Maya commented, taking the dread in his face for disapproval of the distance they had to cover, “I try not to leave my things where humans can see. Less chance to be recognized. Oh! One more thing,”

She turned to him, one hand holding the sack of weapons over her shoulder while her free hand found and cupped his chin, “If you say anything, make any fuss, tell anyone what I am or try to save your skin, you may force me into an inconvenient position.”

Her gaze was friendly, but wielded the casual menace that'd keep him in line, “And really, I like this trading post. Would be a shame to gorge myself on it~”

Adam's eyes widened as she spoke, her thumb rubbing his cheek while those violet eyes distilled visions of torment and death from their lovely hue. Until she released him, he didn't realize he'd stopped breathing.

She smirked, content he got the message, “Great! Now keep up, Snack. We have a lot of work to do,” the well-built blonde turned heel and began her stride to the outpost.

The trading post wasn't remarkable, but the two buildings surrounded by more cars and tents surrounded by desert was new to him. There weren't any walls or patrols, just people talking, drinking, bartering. He now noticed the dozen or so stands of people eyeing the passerby's attentively, hoping for new buyers to peruse their wares. Food,

clothing, jewelry, weapons, everything Adam would imagine desirable to purchase in this age was there.

"Why did I come again?" He asked quietly, reluctant for any stray ears to pick up his presence, standing behind her where he could be mostly obscured under his load.

"We discussed this," Maya said. "You are my arm candy. You make men think I am taken. Less men will approach and try to fuck me." She pulled him forward and put her arm around him. "But they will only believe it if we look it, Adam. So smile at me." She smiled at him. It was a big, genuine smile. She did like him, at least that he was useful to her, but it was still a genuine like.

Adam offered a feigned, meek smile, if only to appease his captor. They continued on as such until they'd sold their stock. Adam hardly kept track, distracting himself by simply watching these strange, enterprising humans live their lives. He was forced to take it all in with trepidation, knowing that any false step could mean hell for these strangers.

With her goods mostly gone, and some extra money on hand, she walked him through the markets, pausing and stopping at different stalls and vendors. She picked out some clothes for Adam, trading one of the smaller rifles for the several sets of clothes, underwear, and shoes. Maya threw in some ammunition for a good pair of boots. The shifter turned and handed things to her little captive-partner.

"Here. These are yours. You keep track of them today. Put them in your satchel."

Holding his arm the way she did made him shiver for a number of reasons. Being dragged from stand to stand, he realized that she was parading him around like a mate. This was her meaning by calling him 'arm candy', instead of just being another pet name. Admittedly, it did appear to serve her purpose. Men would stare her way, then see him and turn away. A number of these men were large and intimidating, taller than Maya as she was. The way they would be drawn to her, then turn to him with distaste or genuine intrigue made him feel sick. It was at this time he found himself actually clinging to Maya's arm. Upon realizing this, he didn't dare shock her by pulling away. Better he act like he meant to do it, to keep up his act.

The boy was so nervous, every step they took Maya had to stop herself from laughing. Sure, he hardly looked like the type that could handle a woman like her, much to the

notice of every man ogling her and the runt she was dragging along. But he was cute.
Not a real man, but still cute.

"As I live and breath, that's Maya, ain't it?" A deep voice called from behind the duo.

Adam turned first, surprised to hear her name from a human besides him. Approaching them was a man dressed in tight black pants, a dark tank top, and a heavy leather jacket littered with various patches. He bore a wide nose and strong jaw, green eyes peeking from behind a messy shade of blonde hair.

He stood a foot higher than Maya, grinning smugly at his suspicion confirmed, "Shit, Gorgeous; didn't think I'd see you this way for a decade at least. Was hoping you'd be ugly by then so I wouldn't have to put everything on hold to say hi."

Maya turned a moment after Adam did, her violet eyes widening at the surprise. She smiled at the man walking towards them, letting go of Adam and stepping out to embrace her long-time acquaintance. "Culver!"

Her strong arms wrapped around the man's torso, her face buried into his chest and shoulder. "Hah! What's that supposed to mean? That you'd want to be a hunched over old man? Well, looks like neither of us got what we wanted."

She hugged him tightly for a moment before stepping away. "How have you been? What, five, seven years since we split?" She looked him over and grinned. "I see time has done you some small favors. Ooo! You finally reached your father's height."

"Wasn't done growin' when we bumped heads, heh. Would you believe I'm still on the run from that sum'bitch?" he laughed for a moment and she reciprocated.

Adam saw a connection between the two he didn't think possible for a human and shifter; that was, if this Culver even knew he was talking to a dangerous predator.

"Hehe, where do the nights run off to.... Ya still hauling that shitty hatchback around? With your bed in the trunk?"

"Hey, that 'shitty hatchback' did it's job," Maya protested. "Far better than your motorcycle. It crapped out on you every day and offered zero protection from the elements." She waved a hand to dismiss the topic. "But no. That, eh, died out a while

back... So what are you up to these days? You talked of making a town. Did you manage that dream, or fuck it up?" She smiled impishly, playfully mocking him.

"Damn right I did!... Sorta. It's a caravan, but we look out for each other like a real, honest community. I'd be happy to talk about it over dinner if you're--" he stopped while observing Adam, dissecting his presence with his fierce eyes, "-- *partner* is up to it. My treat?"

Adam was uncomfortably intrigued by Culver. He carried the confidence of an Elite or Elder from back in Barstow, yet traveled the land just the same as Maya. He stood as a man that could handle himself out in the world. This was a reasonable assumption, given his looks, his rugged, worldly, and that he was the leader of his own clan. He'd forgotten to reply while lost in thought, though it didn't seem to matter. Culver only had eyes for Maya, and the scout's nod barely registered to the two as his affirmation to eat.

"Dinner sounds good," Maya agreed. "I'm having to teach him that it is good and normal to eat three times daily. I think his old village starved him." She took Adam's arm and pushed back a sleeve to show Culver how skinny he was. "He's scrawny! He needs one of those sandwiches that is terrible for you but so good. What was that name again? Remember in that big town we went through? It had meat and vegetables and sauces. It was round but big." She snapped her fingers in recognition as the word came to her. "Hamburger! He needs a hamburger. Perhaps that will fill him out."

"Hehe, you always make any old word sound so damn kiddy," Culver chuckled, happy to have his invitation answered. He offered his arm to her, a small gesture that would relieve Adam of his duties. Oddly enough, Adam looked conflicted. Sure, he was eternally out of ease having her hold on to him through their trip, but without her he'd feel more alone than before. Culver noticed the boy's hesitance. He'd come to his own conclusions about what Maya was doing with him, and took it upon himself to offer his other arm to the boy with a smirk, "Don't mean ta leave ya hangin, bud."

Adam felt a blush run to his face. A person of such stature offering their escort was a big deal back home. Normally, he'd refuse such a gesture on merits of his lower standing... and yet...

Cautiously, like a scared dog, he slid his arm in, and the man's muscled hold settled in around him. It was warm, secure, safe. The scout started to believe he liked this stranger.

Maya took Culver's arm and smiled up at him. "Where are we going for dinner?" She asked. "Does this town have beef? I haven't had beef in a long time." She licked her lips at the thought of the rare delicacy. "Mmm beef. It tempts me every time to settle down. But I don't plan to settle for a long time."

"Lord knows I couldn't get ya to. But you're in luck, lady. Got some of that synthetic stuff the old world used to make patties out of," both parties held onto each of his arms, Adam using him more as a handlebar in contrast to Maya's comfortable fit. To the people around them, he and the disguised shifter looked like an ideal pair, while Adam fit the role of a possible child or sibling.

Culver brought them to a mess area where a handful of travelers were supping for the night. He raised a hand holding three fingers up, the cook manning the exchange table nodded, putting in their order while the trio sat down. Culver let them sit next to each other, then moved around the table to face them on his own side, an attendant bringing over three mugs of ale by the time he sat on his own end, "So! Food's on the way. Plenty of time to chit chat."

Maya nodded and accepted the glass of beer in front of her. She smiled at Culver even as a look with her peripheral vision confirmed that Adam was seated as well. "So what has you coming through this town?" Maya asked in her heavily-accented alto, "We were headed opposite directions last time I saw you."

"Frequent this outpost on our circuit. This is good country for the winter, but we'll be heading north soon," he took a hearty pull from his mug, savoring the fresh ale, "Ahh~ You're lucky you caught me at a good time. We'll be leaving tomorrow morning, crack o' dawn or whenever we feel up and ready." He nudged his eyebrows, keeping his gaze with hers, "though I'm prepared to delay a few hours if special accommodations are called for."

Maya looked back to Culver and smiled coyly at his offer, but didn't give an answer. She didn't have one yet, but her playful eyes answered from over the rim of her mug. Interested, but undecided, taking a long, hungry gulp from her drink. "We could make accommodations. For old time's sake."

In a moment, two men brought around the three plates with strangely stacked piles of food, hasty to serve their respected patron. Adam couldn't make sense of it. No utensils to be found, he looked to Culver for answers. The man had already clasped the

tall stack with both hands, bringing the whole thing up directly to his mouth to take a substantial chunk out in one bite.

So messy, but he had no choice if he didn't want to offend his provider. He'd spend the next few minutes mastering the art of the hamburger while the old acquaintances caught up.

"A little more than a hundred now. Families and whatnot, slowed us down quite a bit, but my boys each got the hankerin to settle down, and it seemed right to build our little crew as we went along. Love those idjits. Old gods know how many times I've put my ass on the line for 'em."

Maya smiled and nodded. She patted Adam on the back, "I saved him from his village. I told you he didn't eat but once a day. Plus, some others started shooting at us. I saved him from them, too. Now I feed him and make sure he's warm and secure at night." She caught his chin and turned his face to her, placing a quick kiss to his forehead. "Now he is my arm candy. Less men approach and try to fuck me with him by my side."

"Heh, no kiddin. Reckon that's a tried and true history for a lot of us," he looked sympathetically at the dark haired boy, raising his mug over to nudge his own in a small gesture of acknowledgement, "It's rough out here, but I promise it gets better kid. Just keep an open mind, and go with your gut. When the two don't get along, shoot or fuck your way out." He laughed, biting more from his sandwich.

Adam suffered a small smile in response, lifting his own food up in sequence, "...thank you."

Culver kept an eye on him for a second when a distraction came about. His eyes caught something coming from behind the two, dropping his sandwich to wave. Adam turned to see what it was to find a cluster of people in dark jackets approaching. They were smiling amiably, sharing jokes as they caught up with their leader after a fun day at the outpost saloon.

A stout man with long red hair helmed the pack, holding a mug of beer in one hand and a rolled smokable in the other, "Ey Archmeister! We was bout'ta head back. You comin'? Or, ah, looking for room and board?" His voice carried a thick accent that almost made his speech intangible.

Culver smiled back, "Yeah, he who lives in a glass house, Isaac," he responded, seamlessly joining in the camaraderie like it was the norm, "Just catchin' up with old traveling' buddies. Might hitch a ride back so we can finish eating, ya hear?"

"Say no more, Cul," a dark haired, thin man that looked close to Adam's age called out, "We'll make sure things are nice and tidy for ya."

Whistles and hollers accompanied his comment, which Culver masterfully took in stride. "Heh, get on out with those blankets. Marceline and Whitney are gonna need them for the nursery." Some thumbs up and nods of agreement followed as they were already on their way back to the small fleet of trucks they'd taken, returning to the caravan.

Culver returned to his dinner guests, grinning bashfully like he'd been caught by his superiors fooling around, "Good guys, loyal to the bone. Thing is, they take a negging tax to keep 'em happy. We have our fun though."

It was interesting seeing him equally humbled and in command while dealing with his people, though he quickly got back into the moment, "So, uh, how long have you been with her, little dude?"

Adam wasn't prepared to answer many questions, but felt warm being given the opportunity by his new peer, "A few days, Sir. She.... found my team and I... and..."

"A few days," Maya said confidently. She had no shame about what she had done. "His team ran into me when they were looking for something in the ruins around there. I was simply napping and they began attacking me. Except him. So I spared him." She ruffled Adam's hair teasingly. "He doesn't take up much room or eat much. So he's a good companion."

"Uh huh... quiet fella, ain't he?" As Culver studied the newcomer, he began to recognize familiar patterns he'd seen time and time again. He sighed and drank from his mug again, setting it down with a delicate hand, "Adam boy! I think I've finished my drink. Mind grabbing me an amber? That'd be a different kind of beer, in case you're wondering."

Adam perked up and nodded, standing without a word and heading in the direction Culver indicated with a slight tilt of his head. With him gone, Culver squared his shoulders and folded his hands together, facing Maya, "Were you intending to keep the boy as long as me?"

Maya arched a brow as she sipped her drink. "You didn't stay long, and you did just fine when you were with me. You were fine and so is he," she said plainly. "Adam was not well treated by his village. That much is clear. He is better off with me. You see what he is wearing. How worn it is? That's how he was the day I found him." She looked Culver straight in the eyes as she spoke, daring him to criticize her.

"Maya," he started, a gentle sadness coming through in his green eyes, "Me 'not staying long' ended up five years. Given, that was a special time in my life I wouldn't trade for a gun that shot gold. But... he seems delicate. He's a different breed than me."

He reached out to grab her hand, out of the corner of his eye seeing Adam having trouble getting the server's attention, meaning they'd have more time than he hoped, "The boy's scared. I know you do what you do, and you're a badass about it, but that boy's seeing ghosts. I've helped his type, again and again, gave them a home."

His strong thumb traced around her knuckles tenderly, calloused and thick, it felt nice to brush over her smooth skin, "How about you hang up the lone wolf act and join my crew for a while? He'd be in good company, we'd make sure he figured out how to acclimate out here." He looked to each side, making sure the other diners were out of ear shot when he chose to lower his voice, "If you're okay staying low key for that long. I can arrange for you to go out every so often. Just think-

Now a gentle smile came out of him, a hopeful earnestness in his tone, "the two of us back together. Your kid will be taken care off and healed in time, and if you ever want to head off, it'll be your call. What do ya think?"

Maya smiled and placed a gentle hand on top of his. "I appreciate the offer but I am better off by myself. I don't do well in large groups. Not for long. You know that." She pulled her hands out of his embrace and took another long drink of her beer. "Adam will survive. I'll see to it. He'll be fine in no time. He just needs to get used to things. Promise."

His smile diminished slightly, but he responded to her touch with a kind reaction, "Hmhm, Magic Maya..." he sighed, closing his eyes to savor holding her hand again after so long, "... you say it's only been a few days. If his account of how y'all met is true, I'm tellin' ya, that boy's seein' ghosts."

There was a new earnestness in his face, the warmth in his speech giving way to a determined logic, "Not to mention, if he's from those cult communes down South, it's

gonna be hard for him to adapt without his own kind to help him heal." His other hand joined, clasping hers between them, "You could just leave him with us. We'll take right care of him, get him trained to handle his own. He'll be happier with his own kind."

Now Adam was turning back to join them, a fragile smile on his clearly exhausted face, "I reckon he's too delicate for... your lifestyle." He finished his thought when the subject in question sat back down, handing the fresh mug of warm looking beer to his unknown advocate. "It'd be best for him, May. Think about what's right."

"I have," Maya said. She pulled her hands out of his embrace. "I do. He is best with me. I am not giving him to anyone else." She wrapped one arm around Adam's shoulder and pulled him into her side. "He stays."

"I-I'm sorry?" Adam was confused. They were talking about him? Why? What had he done? "Um, I'll finish eating. I didn't know if--" Culver stopped his apology right away, "You did nothing wrong boy." The claims set in stone, he sat straight, drinking a long few draws of amber before placing it down with a heavy hand. "If it's a matter of ownership, I'll throw in eight hundred piece, and a cash of weapons I've personally curated. Rare specimen, some long range." He clasped his hands together, resting his elbows on the table while placing them to his chin, "You know I can make plenty of better offers. Just say the word."

Culver was sticking to his belief that Adam should go with them. He didn't want to worry the kid who likely didn't figure he had any autonomy of his own without the guidance he'd get under his wing. He knew Maya was claiming him like a lost pup, and wouldn't treat him the way he needed to become a real man. Let alone a good one. From Adam's perspective, he was wrought with worry. Were they bartering for his life? Why did Culver want him? He was just a failed scout with no business in these lands. He looked back and forth, hopeful for some kind of context to relive his concern.

"No," Maya said sternly. "Adam is not for sale. He is mine and he isn't going anywhere." She was nearly glaring now as she kept Adam tight against her side. "He is best off with me, where he's safe. He has a purpose outside of living to die for someone else."

"C'mon, sweetheart. You at least owe me the benefit of the doubt." He looked over at Adam. Normally a sweet young man like him with bombshell's arm protectively around him would be blushing like the luckiest man alive. The kid across the table was scared stiff, anxiety plainer than the color of his eyes while she guarded him like the last cookie in the jar. He considered his options, committed to his resolve.

"Look honey, seems we're at an impasse. And we're all here to have a good time and take it easy after a long day." Culver finished his drink in a few solid gulps, letting loose a refreshed sigh having finished his dinner, "I have it on good authority that the folks here have little sisters on hand. I'm sure you're familiar. Now, what if I was to, say, inquire about your last meal that squirmed out loud?"

Adam's eyes widened. So he did know! Obviously they traveled together, though the boy might've guessed she played human for that time, however long it was. Culver was threatening her for his sake. It then occurred that Culver was potentially saving Adam. A transfer of ownership meant he'd be back with humans. Maybe even find a way back home. If this worked out, his ordeal would be a nightmare of the past.

Culver, on his end, was making a bluff. There were some of the fabled armaments hidden away somewhere that hadn't been set to fire in ages. She had nothing to fear. But he had a damn good poker face, and his call put it in her hands to make the wise choice.

"Everything I promised, I'll even make it an even thousand caps," he reached his hand out, a small smile on his face. He was doing what he thought was right, yet still saw her as his trusted friend. An old lover, and the person who helped shape him into the fucked up charity case he'd become. "C'mon May. We'll take care o' him."

Maya was livid. She was burning inside that he had dared to threaten her. Especially after all the help she gave him when they were together. She worked her jaw and clenched one hand under the table. She couldn't do anything here. Not with him being so respected. She would lose any hope of continuing to trade here. So instead she
smiled.

"Fine. By the way, I found an abandoned solar van on my way here. I claimed it and brought it. Currently it's outside the city. Come with the caps and weapons. And extra.
We can make deals for the things I found."

She stood and pulled Adam with her. He had only picked at his burger so she grabbed the plate of food and handed it to him. 'See? She was good!' was the message in her actions. "You can't miss it. It's solid white with solar panels on top. But it's a bit out of town. I'll see you there." She turned and walked off, Adam still under her arm, holding
his plate of food.

"I'll join you now," he replied, standing up and leaving a handful of coins on the table where they'd left their plates and mugs. "I hope I wasn't too presumptuous, but I did kinda make you my ride earlier, heh." He was smiling again, a friendly, warm attitude that helped amplify Adam's change in mood. The boy was softly smiling as well, touched that things were turning out well for him.

"If you have a car, we can take it to my train and make the trade there. He'll be yours until I make good on my word." Striding around the table over to them, he placed a hand on her shoulder, eyeing her apologetically. "I'm sorry May. I just needed you to understand. He'll be safer with us, and at least you're not goin' empty handed, right?"

That did it. She was just going to scare him shitless. But no. Now that he was implying that Adam wasn't safe with her, that she was a threat to the boy, she wouldn't let it slide. Her eye twitched at his touch, though in a blink, she managed a shrug, passing it off as friendly hesitation, "If you say so, big man. This way..."

She silently led the way out of town and to her van. Once it was in view, she pointed it out. "Here. I found it a while back. Runs on the sun, so I just need to remember to leave it out for a few hours and it's back on the road."

"Nifty ride! Must be handy not needin' sole battery power," Culver admired the worn yet innovative vehicle, "Would kill for a few of these for the crew."

"Very handy... Adam, go inside for a moment." She let him go and watched as he entered the van, a nervous optimism hanging from him. This upset her even more, how could he give in to Culver's bullshit so easily? Maya didn't know whether to punish him later or to forgive him for letting the man's famous charm work his magic on him.

When he was safely inside, she closed and locked the door. She ditched her jacket and kicked off her boots, smiling at Culver the whole time. "I've thought about your 'accommodations~'. We shouldn't waste this chance. If I am your ride, I think it's fair you be mine.

The strong, friendly man stood in building lust as she laid her implications out to simmer, seeing the first hints of her hidden skin under the heavy garb that adorned her, "Uh huh," he started. He was pleasantly surprised when she'd started undressing. After the stunt he'd pulled, he was lucky if she still considered him a friend. He wasn't afraid of her. They knew each other. They risked each other's lives for the other more times

than he could count. When he left, she was sad, but let him go with a similar goodbye she was about to give again. Maybe this was just tradition. She'd presented herself to him, and he wouldn't refuse the invitation.

She let her pants drop to the floor and stepped out of them. Then she peeled off her shirt and bra, letting her breasts hang heavy on her ribs. "Come on then. Don't keep me waiting," she said. "This might be the last we see of each other. Let's make it count..."

"Heh, your dirty talk could still use some work," Stepping forward, he brought his hand to her chin, tilting her head up where he could lean down and kiss her tenderly. A familiar exchange that warmed his heart. No woman kissed with the same passion as Maya. A predator's kiss, the kind where you know they get more out of it than you each time. He brought his hand behind her back, holding her close to him as he undid his belt and pants.

When both hands were free, he brought one up to her breasts, kneading them in a queer fashion from underneath that he recalled she enjoyed. His other hand held her back, pressing into the side of the van. "Tell me when you're ready," he whispered into her, his lips nibbling her lobe beneath her heavy hair, "Don't think I've gone rusty when it comes to your type."

Maya growled as he nibbled her ear. Oh she loved the pain. She wrapped her arms around his neck and threw one leg over his hip. Her lips curled into a smirk as she rocked her body against his. "Then let's see, Culver. Let's see how you fuck a real woman. To fuck a real woman." She reached between them and grabbed his member, squeezing and stroking to bring it to its fullest attention. "Did you forget, little Cul, how it feels to be inside a real woman?"

She stood on her tiptoes, used the leg on his hip for leverage to get higher, then dropped down on top of him, hilding his member in one smooth move. "Did you only fuck little human women while you were away from me?" Despite the size difference, she set the pace. She controlled their movements. "It's too bad we didn't work out. I was the best fuck you ever had. The best you ever will." She punctuated her words by biting his chest. And she was not gentle in the least. She sank her teeth deep, drawing blood that she eagerly lapped up.

"That's unfair, sweetheart" he responded as he gained traction with his hands around her thighs, hoisting her up against the van, rocking it in the process, "How can they help it when ya set the bar so *-unfgh-* high?~" He grunted as they found slow rhythm, gritting his teeth when she nipped at his left pec. She was always one to take the hard way. She taught him the hard way.

"Why you little..." his right hand left her thigh, keeping her suspended with his cock and thrusts. He brought to her neck and pushed her head back roughly into the van. Her head restrained, he pushed his to hers and aggressively met her lips with his. The taste of his own blood was fresh in her mouth, and the taboo of it all fueled his lust as he increased his pace, hitching her against the van again and again and again.

Inside, Adam was worried by the shaking. Was there a quake? The voices outside only became apparent after a minute or so. Cautiously, he looked out the window to check on his companions. What he found made him go pale and hide behind the table. "They're... they're... oh my..."

Was this normal? He shook his head in disbelief, shocked out the audacity. There was a proper ritual that must be followed to perform the sacred act, not this barbarous... no. Life was different out here. Culver said himself. Was this normal in the wasteland? Adam's courage returned in sparse supply, egging him on to feed his curiosity. Outside, he saw the incredibly tall, handsome blonde man, his pants at his ankles, jacket on the ground, the collar of his shirt torn open and a small bit of bleeding, and the brief glimpses of his genitalia emerging and disappearing from view inside Maya. The boy watched her attentively, whether he was aware. Seeing her large tanned breasts jump with each entry, her thick, strong legs wrapped around Culver's waist. He couldn't see her own intimacy from above, but the look of blind ecstasy on her face spoke to her experience.

Their love making literally rocked the world. So violent, sloppy, and at the same time natural. They fit into each other like a well oiled machine, powering their passions mutually as their pace increased. Watching the enjoyment in Maya's, it made her look human. She was a being with needs, all of which he didn't understand. Now, with a slightly pained pressure mounting in his loose pants, he could imagine himself opening up to one of those needs.

Maya grinned down at her partner, bloody lips spread wide in a smile. The thrill washed over her face, the anger and conflict rocking into each hump and pull from her loins on

him. Despite how exhilarating this was shaping up to be, the malice she'd nursed since dinner had swelled in her. He was going to pay just as soon as she had her fun.

"I do set it high, don't I?" She chuckled and pulled her hair from his restraint as she leaned forward to bite his neck. "No one will ever match me." She rocked her hips into his again, using her pelvic muscles to squeeze and work his member. She wondered how long he would last this time. When he was with her previously, he was more of a sprinter than a long distance runner as it pertained to sex. "Come on then, Little Cully, blow your load!" She ordered. She bit his neck and licked the wound. "Fuck me like there's no tomorrow." She bucked her hips hard against his, working, and squeezing and doing all she knew and remembered to get him off.

"Little Cully's been hungry~" he loved the shift in power. Another bite to his neck, pulling her head locked into him as she was now shoved repeatedly into the wall. His thick cock slipped easily deep into her folds, making small adjustments to course over every nook and cranny inside. She would always be the wildest flower he'd ever known, and just revisiting this old meadow had him desperate to cling on and last for her. She always deserved better than a human could give, and if memory served, he'd come the closest to doing so.

Adam, meanwhile, had been quietly fascinated watching the two in coitus, wrestling with the unknown feelings brought up on watching the spectacle. It almost felt forbidden, but he couldn't turn away. Maya simply looked beautiful; and Culver was a man's man, something Adam knew would earn him the highest of honors had they shared a city. When they finished, the passion on display was inspiring, Adam left in wanting with a strain in his trousers.

Outside, her body hiked up violently, and another three comedowns brought Culver to his limit. A loud grunt turned moan rang into the night as he sent shot after shot that filled her pussy up. He slowed his rhythm, allowing her room to unbind her legs from his waist. There were now several cuts on his chest, neck, and back, and still he panted with a smile. "*pant...pant...* You really should... just come with us, sweetheart."

"Not happening," Maya said. She was breathing heavily as well but was not nearly as affected as Culver. All thanks to the genetic aberrations that made her what she was. She slid off him and leaned against the van for a moment, smiling at the sky. "Oh that was nice... Hehe, your shirt is ruined, though. You should take it off." She rested for another couple moments before standing and stretching.

There was no one around. They were some distance away from the trading post and it was pitch black aside from the stars and the crescent moon. She turned and smiled at Culver, still panting against the van. Perhaps his age was catching up to him. Not her. Every year passed she grew stronger. This was an indisputable truth that validated her claim to do what was right.

She kept this in mind as she let her height expand to her larger stature. Not so tall that she'd be seen over the canyon edge as she kneeled to hide her growth, but enough to do what needed to be done.

"That was a good fuck. Thank you. I'll always have that memory of you," she saw the man react to the louder voice, finally turning to see her enlarged figure, "but, see, you really pissed me off. Saying little Adam isn't safe with me. Because he is. It was humans who fucked up his mind so bad. Why should I send him off with more humans?"

"Wh-wha?" He was too late to see her grow before she was towering and naked in the moonlight, an awe inspiring sight he never got used to even while living with her. Being buzzed and lost in their afterglow, he found it a lovely spectacle. Then he considered her words, recognizing the air of threat in her tone, "N-now hold on, kitten-"

Watching her grow after stepping away had renewed Adam's fear, even while his admiration for her bare figure clouded his pure instinct to hide. He knew what it meant when she grew, and the tempest of fear stormed between self-preservation and the desire to cry out to Culver, to tell him to run, to hide with him. Anything to avoid the looming eventuality hovering over them.

She didn't give her ex-lover a chance to run, grabbing him and ripping away his clothes and pants. "Too bad. If you hadn't threatened me, I was just going to scare you to make you leave us alone. But you did this to yourself..."

He was hauled away from the ground at a sickening speed, then entirely stripped. This was familiar too, but a layer of menace laid over their exchange, "Hehe, alright. Ya can still spook me, I'll admit it. Don't think the theatrics are necessary."

He was joking, convinced this was all an act to get back at him for earlier. The closer look he got at her powerfully deep violet eyes made the hairs on the back of his neck stand up. They'd just made love, she wouldn't...

"...May?"

“It will be quick, I promise,” Maya said simply. “I just fucked. You should know what that does to my metabolism. Too bad. I really did like you.” She pressed a mocking kiss to his face, letting it forcefully press into him like a reluctant sendoff. After all, it was a goodbye to someone she truly cared for... once.

“Should have just kept your mouth shut, Cully,” With that, her scowling lips smacked up, and she slid him into her mouth. Obviously he kicked in protest, elbowing her teeth and palate on the way in before her lips sealed around his thighs. She let him linger there for a minute, to realize the truth of it all, then slurped his squirming legs in. She promised it’d be quick, though she ventured a few suckles of his musky-laden, masculine body for a few moments longer than intended.

Adam cowered when Culver was lifted up and stripped, like so many before him. They liked each other, right? She knew he had people counting on him, right!? None of that seemed to matter when the honorable man slipped between her full lips. His strong legs began to kick until they sealed behind them, trapping him inside. The boy watched in horror as she contemplated her lover’s flavor, praying to each of the old gods that this was some farce.

Keeping to her word, she steeled herself, tilted her head back and swallowed. His firm, fighting lump wriggled down her throat into her collar bone, sighing at the pressure riding into her being.

“NOOOOO!!” Adam screamed from the window, witnessing the whole scene.

A heavy gulp settled it, launching the squirming, once respectable man into her being. Now was when Adam screamed, watching his newest hope for freedom disappear from the world just like all of his friends had.

Maya sighed as she felt Culver settle in her stomach. She hoped his struggles wouldn’t last long. Though, much to her expected chagrin, the rough rider fought away at her insides. Futily.

She had no wish to prolong this, reducing her height in a matter of moments, crushing him almost instantly. It was a mercy, though her gut bulged heavily, making the van tilt as she stepped inside at nearly eleven feet tall. Not quite able to reduce to her comfortable, normal height, she had to duck and bend in half to fit inside.

Crouched in the living area, she wedged her arm back to shut the door behind her. She proceeded to crawl to her bed, hoisting herself and her engorged stomach onto the mattress with her feet still partially out the door. She wouldn't care for privacy tonight, opting to sleep with her feet still out in the hall while she nestled into her pillows and covers, snuggling her stuffed cat. She didn't need to worry about Adam. The locks were all set, and he'd stay put if he knew better.

Maya wished that it didn't have to end like this. Culver had been a friend, and a wonderful lover. But those seasons were over. Now, he was another meal, like so many stupid humans before him. She would be sad, but would move on like always. She had Adam now. He would work out far better than Culver ever did. She was sure of it. Pulling the blankets over her body as much as she could, she let an arm rest on her distended gut as she fell asleep.

When she reduced her size to return inside, Adam practically leaped up into his cot to avoid her. Her gut was grotesquely shaped, no doubt already killing the man she'd called friend. As she retired to her chamber without closing her door, eventually falling asleep, the breath he'd been holding gushed out in a string of frantic pants.

He had to leave! Hopping down from the cot, he ran for the door and tried to push it open. It refused, and fiddling with the locking mechanism did nothing. He was trapped. Knocking down the door or shattering glass would alert her, and there was no other way to get out. Defeated, miserable, he returned to his cot. He wanted to cry, to shed tears for the loss of his possible rescuer. None of his people would know what happened. They'd think he went off with an old friend and disappeared. Adam would know. He'd carry the knowledge with him for however long he had left to live. Shivering through more than the cold, he curled around himself and did his best to sleep.