

Hunting Partners – Chapter One

Jessi checked the time on her phone and shuffled her weight from paw to paw to avoid getting cramp. It was nearly midnight which meant she had been standing out here for the better part of two hours now. Stifling a yawn, she considered phoning Aura and asking if they could call it a night soon. They both had lectures in the morning and it was looking increasingly likely that tonight would be another failure. After weighing her options for a while she decided to stick it out for another half an hour or so and then give up.

Mere seconds later, Jessi's ears picked up the sound of rapid footsteps. Two pairs of them, one lighter than the other but both running fast and both headed in her direction. Suddenly wide awake, Jessi poked her nose out from the alcove she was hiding in and peered down the street in tense anticipation.

Moments later a mouse burst into view. She looked about Jessi's age, wore a little too much makeup, and was gasping for breath. Her panic was more than justified by the far larger feline barely a few steps behind her. As the mouse passed the junction at the end of the street her pursuer pounced, leaping forward in an attempt to catch the terrified rodent.

The cat's pounce was neither silent nor well aimed. The mouse had plenty of warning that it was coming and, as it was aimed towards her left, was easily able to dodge it by veering to her right and darting into the street that Jessi was hiding in.

The failed pounce cost the cat distance and much of her momentum. As she pulled ahead, the prey risked a brief glance over her shoulder to see how much of a lead she had gained. Still hidden from sight, Jessi tensed at the sound of footsteps drawing closer. She didn't risk revealing herself by peering out but was able to gauge the mouse's position purely by the sounds of her approach, waiting until the last moment before bursting from her hiding place.

The mouse's eyes widened in horror as the rat stepped out and blocked her path. She tried to duck past Jessi by swerving to one side but had too much momentum. Stumbling, she nearly fell then caught another glimpse of the feline rapidly approaching from behind and, in her panic, ran straight into Jessi's outstretched arms.

The impact was enough to knock Jessi backwards and the two of them tumbled to the ground. Jessi felt her shoulder scrape against the tarmac as they fell and then a flailing elbow caught her under then chin. She wasn't going to let a little pain dissuade her though. In a practiced movement she rolled over, trapping the smaller rodent under her and pinning the poor girl's arms behind her back.

Aura caught up a second or so later. "Nice ambush." she panted between deep breaths.

Jessi grinned at her feline friend. "Thanks. Although I got the impression that you could have caught her at the top of the road if you'd wanted." She had to shout the last words to make herself heard over her prey's screams.

"No! No, no no! Let me go! I'll do anything! Please! I just... ack!" Her protests were cut short as Jessi shoved the girl's head face down against the tarmac.

"So, I believe this one is yours?" the rat asked the cat, not quite hiding the question in her tone. It was undeniably Aura's turn as Jessi had taken the shrew they caught two weeks ago, but the issue wasn't as simple as that. As a rat, Jessi was too small to eat much of the prey they caught together. If Aura chased down two rabbits in a row, then she would get both of them and Jessi would just

have to wait patiently until they found one of the few species small enough to fit down her throat. Of course, that was balanced by the fact that Aura did most of the actual hunting and also kept her friend safe from other predators while they were out. If it were not for her feline companion, Jessi would not have been able to justify the risk of venturing out after hunting hours. In a way it was only fair that Aura got the larger share of their catches.

Aura inspected their catch for a moment, taking in the prey's mascara drenched eyes and the artificial gloss of her fur. "Pass." she muttered. "Too many additives for my taste and besides, she wouldn't be much more than a snack for me."

"Really?" Jessi beamed. "You're the best, Aura. You know that, right?" She dragged the mouse up from the road, forcing the struggling rodent into a sitting position before starting to undress her meal.

"Please?" the prey sobbed. "Please, I can pay you? I'll do anything you ... Urk!"

Again her cries were interrupted, this time by Aura grabbing her by the throat. "It's late." The cat hissed. "People will have work or lectures in the morning. The last thing they need is to be woken up by your whining."

The mouse wriggled feebly. Opening and closing her mouth in a futile attempt to draw breath through the feline's grasp. Jessi took advantage of the distraction to shred the girl's jacket. It was usually too much work to remove a struggling prey's clothing the normal way so, like most predators, Jessi opted to simply rip it apart instead. Besides, she thought as she bit into the material of the jacket and tore a gaping hole down the back, there was something primordially satisfying about using your teeth and claws to rip away fabric and uncover the quivering treat inside.

Minutes later, the girl sat stark naked in Jessi's lap. Aura had let go of her throat, but she no longer tried to scream. Tears were still streaming down her eyes, and leaving dark streaks of makeup through her fur, but even her sobbing was almost silent by now. Jessi turned her round so they were facing each other. For a moment she just stared into the mouse's wide pleading eyes, then she opened her jaws and pushed the girl's head inside.

As Aura had complained, the bitter taste of makeup was less than pleasant but it didn't bother Jessi. She wasn't particularly interested in the girl's flavor, anyway. What appealed to her was the texture. The rough, bristly scrape of fur against her mouth and the warm, trembling, fear drenched meat beneath it. She swallowed once and felt the girl's muzzle slip into her esophagus, stretching her throat in just the right way.

"Mmmhp! Pleath!" The prey's cries were still audible from Jessi's throat although the exact words were pretty hard to make out. "I'm nmph mrf! Mrf!" the little mouse screamed.

Jessi grinned around her gigantic mouthful. Each time the mouse tried to say something her muzzle massaged the inner walls of Jessi's esophagus in a very pleasurable way. Adjusting her grip on the frantically struggling meal, Jessi started work on the trickiest part, getting those wide shoulders into her jaws.

Aura moved in to help. Holding the girl's arms behind her back she twisted hard, forcing the mouse to lean forwards until she was practically feeding herself to the larger rodent. With the cat's assistance, Jessi made short work of her dinner's chest and torso.

Once the mouse was past the point where she would be able to scratch, Aura let go of her wrists and

grabbed her ankles instead, holding them together to prevent the girl from kicking and lifting them over the rat's head. A loud squeal came from Jessi's middle, as the prey found herself unable to touch the ground at all. Jessi, however, didn't have time to respond to that before her jaws were filled by the girl's large hips. She swallowed hard, helping to keep things moving. Aura may have rejected this meal for being too small but the mouse was actually quite plump and close to the limit that Jessi could swallow. Still, this was not her first time with such large prey and, with a little work, she managed to gulp down the mouse girl's butt and start work on her legs.

At this point, Aura let go and allowed the mouse to kick freely. She could see that her friend needed no more help and knew that, much like herself, Jessi enjoyed feeling her food wriggle as it went down. Finally able to kick, the mouse started making up for lost time. Her bare paws flailed furiously in the air but, from her current position, there was nothing she could actually kick. Bit by bit, her thrashing legs disappeared into the pink, salivating, rat maw.

Once her knees were inside the predator's gullet, the girl's kicks became a lot weaker but she still tried, jerking her legs up and down as Jessi made swift progress over her calves. As the meal's paws slipped between her lips, Jessi paused to give the mouse's bare paw-pads a last lick, making her toes curl and uncurl, then she swallowed and all that remained of her meal was a few inches of tail hanging from her jaws.

Jessi paused to admire the last trace of her dinner. The tail was pink and hairless, much like her own. Occasionally it would give an unhappy twitch but that was all the poor mouse could do right now. Smiling to herself, Jessi wound the last few inches of it round one finger then put that finger in her mouth and sucked the loops off. One last swallow and she was left licking traces of mouse fur from her lips and enjoying the squirms in her belly.

"Enjoy your meal?" Aura asked.

Jessi nodded. "Yeah." The squirming ball of meat in her stomach felt incredible. On the other hand, the large meal was already staring to make her feel sleepy. "Um, did you want to keep hunting?" She really hoped the cat would say no. She had already been getting tired when Aura had chased the mouse towards her and now that she had a full belly, hunting would not be a pleasant experience. Not to mention the fact that they both had a full day ahead of them tomorrow and would need their sleep. Still, Aura had just given up the prey that rightfully should have been hers. If she wanted to stick around and try to find a replacement, then Jessi couldn't really refuse.

"No, that's okay." the cat answered. "It's getting late and besides, I already have a nice plump rat right in front of me."

Jessi's ears flattened against her skull. For a moment she simply stared up at her friend. Had it been anyone else she might have been able to pass that off as a particularly tasteless joke, but she had known the feline since starting university and Aura wasn't the sort to enjoy that kind of humor. "S... seriously?" she gasped. "Two years of friendship and that's it?"

"Well it does feel a little mean, but I'm out here to hunt and you are currently a fat and very tempting little rodent. I've never had a meal stuffed like you before, which makes you even more appealing." The cat licked her lips and gave Jessi's swollen belly a poke.

The obvious reaction would be to get up and start running but Jessi knew better than to try that. She was too full to outmaneuver a feline and even if she had not been weighed down, she would need a few seconds head start to have any chance of escaping a predator. Running would only confirm her status as prey and get her killed all the faster. Instead she glared at Aura, doing her best to mask any

signs of fear. "We've hunted together before. You've had plenty of chances to turn on me in the past. Why wait until now?"

"You just look tasty, right now." Aura answered. "This isn't some carefully engineered trap. I didn't invite you here with this in mind or plan any of this ahead of time. It's just that good prey has been kind of scarce recently. I was hoping we could turn that around tonight but it's taken us nearly two hours to get one mouse and the frustrating thing is that she's the best prey I've seen in weeks. Then you took her and in the process made yourself nice and fat for me."

"I didn't take her, you offered." Jessi insisted.

"Yeah, and you were foolish enough to accept." the cat countered. "Now would you be a dear and start undressing? I still like you and don't want to use any more force than necessary."

Jessi nearly refused and was tempted to throw a few insults at her so-called friend as well, but both of those things were prey behavior. If she wanted to get out of this alive then she needed to keep Aura treating her as a fellow predator. Prey would scream and beg when threatened. Predators knew that doing so would only increase their appeal as food. Reluctantly she started removing her shirt, taking her time with it to give herself more opportunities to escape but not moving so slowly that Aura would have reason to object. "It doesn't have to be me though." Her voice cracked slightly on the last word but she recovered quickly and continued in as neutral a tone as she could manage. "There's still plenty of hunting time left. We could finish our session and see if anyone better came up."

Aura raised a skeptical eyebrow. "Seriously, you're trying that? How many of our past meals have tried the surely-you-could-catch-someone-else excuse, and exactly when has it ever worked out for them?"

Jessi struggled to keep her breathing even and not show any signs of panic. "Yeah but they were all strangers." she pointed out. "It didn't work for them because there was no reason for us to want to find a different meal. Or are you saying that even if you had a fat bunny right here you'd still choose me instead? I'm kind of assuming that our friendship still counts for something here and, if so, it seems we might as well finish hunting before turning on each other."

Aura seemed to consider that for a moment. "And you're saying that, if I left to go look for a replacement, you'd stay here and wait for me? Do you really expect me to believe that?"

Jessi finished removing her shirt and placed it on the pavement beside her. "I would be here." she insisted, putting as little emotion or inflection on the words as possible. "I can't prove it if you don't trust me, but I would."

The feline hesitated for a minute then stared skeptically down at the stuffed rat. "Alright." she concluded at last. "I'm probably being pretty stupid here but I'll trust you for now. We'll do one more hour of hunting but if I don't find anyone in that time, or even if I do but they are smaller or look less tasty than you, then we go back to my original dinner plans."

Jessi nodded gratefully and quickly returned to her hiding place while Aura headed back the way she had come. At the end of the street she turned back and glared in Jessi's direction. "I mean it, rat. You had better be here when I get back."

Jessi stuck her head out and nodded. "I will." she promised, then ducked back into the alcove.

From her hiding place the rat listened carefully as Aura's light footsteps headed away. Once she was sure the cat was out of earshot she counted to five then stepped out and broke into a sprint.

It wasn't easy to run with a belly full of still moving prey but stopping to cough her meal back up would slow her down even more. Fear and a desire to see the next day, however, more than made up for the difficulties her prey was causing. Belly swaying from side to side with each step, Jessi tore through the darkened streets as fast as she could.

She had no idea how long it would take Aura to realize that she had broken her promise but, once she did, the cat would have no difficulty in guessing where she was headed. Jessi's apartment was the only place the rat had access to where she would be safe at this time of night and, as Jessi had invited Aura to her home many times since they had first met as freshers, the cat would know exactly where to find her. An experienced hunter like Aura would probably even be able to predict the route that Jessi was taking and, particularly in her current state, the cat was a lot faster than she was. Her only hope was to make it home before Aura realized that she was gone.

Sprinting down the last road, Jessi practically threw herself against the door to the university's Main Rodent Accommodation Building. As she did so she grabbed the set of keys chained to her belt, jammed the correct one into the lock and turned it. Moments later, she fell across the threshold to safety and lay panting on her back.

She had made it! In her panic-stricken state, it took a few minutes for that to sink in. Aura hadn't even been close behind. The cat probably wasn't even aware that she had escaped yet and she had already reached safety. As her heartbeat slowed to a more bearable pace, Jessi breathed a deep sigh of relief then struggled back to her feet, locked the door behind her, and headed upstairs to her apartment.

Once in her room, Jessi collapsed onto her bed and took several deep breaths. Part of her was still amazed that she had survived. Part of her wanted to know how close her escape had been. Had Aura already found her gone? If not, how long would that take? Yet another part of her was wondering if Aura had deliberately let her escape, but that seemed unlikely. Her arms and legs were shaking as the adrenaline rush started to wear off so, once her breathing had returned to something approaching normal, Jessi staggered back out her room and into the communal kitchen for a drink.

Five minutes later, the rat returned with a large mug of chamomile tea. Her hands were still shaking so badly that she had only been able to fill it half full or risk spilling it. Sitting on the corner of her bed, she took a sip and managed to calm herself a little.

The same could not be said for her unwilling passenger. As the first mouthful of tea entered Jessi's stomach, the unfortunate mouse within let out a miserable squeal and redoubled her struggles.

Jessi ran one paw over her belly and smiled to herself. "You know, I almost forgot about you." she commented.

That prompted another indignant squeak and another kick to her stomach walls. The attack didn't hurt in the least, in fact she loved the sensation of an active meal, but she still decided to punish the girl with another sip of chamomile. "So," she asked once her mouth was empty again. "I normally ask this before swallowing but in this case I never actually got your name?"

Several more kicks were the only response she got to her question. Growing impatient, Jessi decided to give her prey a quick squeeze and clenched her stomach muscles. "Come on, mousy. Talking to me isn't going to make your situation any worse and I can easily make things far more

unpleasant for you if I wanted. Being polite doesn't cost you anything so you can at least answer civil questions."

The mouse squealed in alarm as the stomach walls clamped down on her, the frightened noise ending in a choking sound as the air was crushed from her lungs. For nearly a minute, although it probably felt far longer to her meal, the predatory rat squeezed down on her prey.

Just as the poor girl was starting to pass out Jessi's stomach relaxed and allowed her to breathe again. "T... Tayla." she gasped the moment she was able. "Tayla." She repeated it in case the rat hadn't heard the first time. Anything to prevent herself from being crushed like that again. She took several deep gulps of air and, gradually, the flashing colors in front of her eyes faded back into the blackness of the rat's belly.

A wide smile spread across Jessi's lips. "Nice to meet you Tayla, and can I ask what you used to do? You look like a fellow student but correct me if I'm wrong with that assumption."

"Y... Yes? I'm an engineering student. Um, second year?" her dinner quickly volunteered.

"Oh, brain food then." Jessi smirked. "And the proper tense is was. I've no intention of letting you go. You're not a student any more, just food."

Her prey whimpered. "Why not?" came a quiet whisper, evidently unsure if asking this question might result in another bone crushing squeeze.

Jessi shrugged. "Why should I? I like mice and, apart from the makeup, you were very tasty."

"I ... I could find someone else for you?" Tayla tried. "Someone without any makeup who would be even tastier and more filling."

Jessi laughed. "Sure. Good attempt, but you don't get much credit for creativity by trying the same trick you just overheard me use on Aura. I've been hunting people for years and that is the first time I've ever seen someone fall for ..." She trailed off abruptly.

That trick really shouldn't have worked. In her past hunts with Aura plenty of prey had begged her to at least look for someone else instead of them. The cat had never fallen for it before so why had she agreed this time? Sure, they were friends and all, but Aura had clearly been willing to put that aside for the sake of a good meal. Thinking about how narrow her escape had been set Jessi's fur on end.

"Well, isn't that a reason in itself?" Jessi's thought chain was interrupted by her meal who was still on the previous topic of her own freedom. "Your 'friend' just tried to do the same thing to you so you have to know what this feels like. Can you really justify doing this to me after coming close to being eaten yourself?"

"Sure, I can." Jessi answered brightly. The 'How would you feel if you were in my place?' argument was another common tactic prey liked to try and one that Aura had taught her the answer to on their first hunt together. "I'm responsible for my survival and you're responsible for yours. The fact that I'm doing a much better job of it than you are doesn't mean I owe you anything." She gave her belly a pat. "Just keep squirming in there and I'll ..." she was interrupted by a loud beeping from her pants.

Fishing in her pocket, Jessi pulled out her phone and looked at it. Aura's picture grinned out at her

from underneath the number but Jessi got the feeling that the cat was anything but smiling right now. Of course it could be that Aura had made a catch and was phoning to let her know she was off the hook, but Jessi doubted that. She wasn't sure what time they had made their deal but it must have been somewhere around midnight and her alarm clock currently stated that it was ten past one, meaning that the promised hour had likely run out. Even if Aura had caught someone, she would likely have still come back to check on Jessi and found her gone.

Jessi sat and stared at the number for several minutes, barely noticing the squirms from inside her. When at last Aura gave up and cut the call, Jessi turned the phone off so she would not be able to ring again then placed it at the bottom of a draw, as far as possible from her bed. It wasn't very logical. If Aura called again she could simply continue to not answer, but she couldn't even imagine what talking to the cat would be like right now. On an emotional level, she felt better if the phone was as far out of sight as she could get it.

Realizing that her fur had puffed up again, Jessi did her best to pat it back down. The food in her stomach was screaming something about what was or wasn't fair but Jessi ignored it. It was understandable that she felt tense after an argument with her best friend and a narrow escape from a predator, particularly when both those events were one and the same. Still, she needed a good way to relax right now. Grabbing a towel, Jessi headed to the shower room. Nobody else was using it at this time of night, so she went inside and started undressing.

Only at this point did she realize that she was still not wearing a shirt. She had taken it off for Aura and had been wandering around in her bra ever since, too fazed by her narrow escape to notice. A hint of red stood out from beneath the otherwise gray fur on her cheeks. She was so glad that no one else had been around to see that. Turning on the water, she waited for the temperature to reach an acceptable level, then stepped inside.

The university-maintained shower never seemed to reach the temperatures it should. At best, it alternated between luke-warm and barely-above-freezing. Tonight, however, it seemed to be in one of its better stages and the water felt pretty good as it washed through Jessi's fur. Tayla kicked up another fuss when Jessi angled the water stream towards her rounded belly which felt even better.

Rats were omnivores and, on the whole, not very carnivorous ones. Many even avoided eating meat altogether, an attitude which Jessi had always felt was a large part of the reason that her species were not considered 'real' predators and were often lumped in with the other prey. Much as she hated that assumption, Jessi could not deny that her digestive system usually took a long time to get started on her meals, especially when she dumped a large quantity of raw and still kicking meat on it all at once.

Under the soothing stream of warm water, however, her stomach was finally beginning to wake up and start work on the plump little mouse she had given it. Her internal walls were secreting the enzyme-rich fluids that would eventually turn the kicking rodent inside her into a thin nutrient soup. It didn't take long for the liquids to soak through Tayla's fur and reach her skin and then the struggles really started.

Talya wasn't in any pain, at least not yet, but the digestive juices caused her skin to tingle wherever they touched and the poor mouse knew all too well what that meant. "Let me out! Please? I'll do anything you want! Don't do this to meeee!" She wailed.

Jessi suppressed a giggle. "Come on. It's not that bad. I've barely even started yet." She went back to rubbing shampoo into her fur as Tayla thrashed about in her belly.

Tayla could feel the stomach walls around her begin to undulate, rocking her from side to side. A vaguely remembered biology lesson told her that this was designed to ensure that the digestive enzymes reached every inch of the intended meal. Right now she couldn't see why that would be necessary. The rat's stomach juices had already covered her completely and still more of the pungent fluid was dripping down over her head. "Please? There's got to be something I can do?" she begged, but Jessi had already lost interest and was ignoring her again.

By the time Jessi finished her shower a pool of the juices had formed in the pit of her stomach and Tayla's screams had faded into pitiful sobbing. Drying herself off, Jessi let out a satisfied belch, expecting to taste the rich meaty flavor that would let her know her stomach acids had begun unraveling the complex proteins that made up Tayla's body.

She got the expected meaty flavor, but it was heavily masked by a far stronger and sickly sweet one that did not compliment slightly-digested-mouse in the least. Moving to the sink, she spat into the bowl in disgust. "Gah! You know Tayla, there is something to be said for natural beauty. A little less makeup and a lot less perfume and you'd have been a much nicer meal."

That caused the crying to stop and the mouse to deliver a furious kick to her internal walls. "Settle down, it was a joke." Jessi chided. Wrapping the towel around her, she headed back to her room. "So, I should probably get some sleep now. After all, some of us still have lectures to attend in the morning. In the mean time, why don't you tell me a bit about yourself? All I really know so far is your name and your course."

"Fuck you!" Tayla screamed back. The tingling on her skin was growing steadily more intense from exposure to Jessi's acids and, in sensitive places and anywhere that was submerged beneath the gathering pool at the bottom, she was starting to itch. She twisted uncomfortably and tried to scratch at the irritated areas, only to find a clump of her own fur come loose in her paw. Horrified she collapsed again into fretful sobs. She couldn't cope with this. She just wanted to wake up in her own bed, safe and whole again.

"Now don't be like that." Jessi pressed. "Just talk to me for a while. After all, it might turn out we have a friend in common or something. I don't think I'd be able to digest someone if I knew it would hurt one of my friends." This was another trick Aura had shown her. If you wanted something out of your food, phrase it to include a chance of freedom. It didn't matter how slim the possibility was, most prey were more interested in believing that there was still hope than working out the odds that they would actually be released.

As predicted, Tayla plunged into a rapid list of everyone she knew or had met since arriving at the university along with a few people she knew from outside, that Jessi almost certainly wouldn't have met, thrown in as well. "No. Not like that." Jessi interrupted. "I'm not going to let you go just 'cause you mentioned a familiar name. Tell me about yourself. If you mention someone, tell me how you know them. That way, even if we don't know anyone in common, maybe I can get to know you well enough to justify..." she left that sentence hanging. Dangling the half-finished promise in front of the desperate girl to ensure her cooperation.

Tayla shuddered. The itch was spreading and getting worse. In some places, her nose and lips in particular, it was now beginning to sting a little and she wondered how long it would be until her whole body felt like that. The last thing she wanted to do right now was to tell her life story to an unsympathetic predator but the hope of being let go was too great to ignore. Unfortunately, she had no idea where to begin. What would increase her chances of freedom and which topics should she avoid for fear of decreasing them? "Well... maybe you could tell me who some of your friends are, or which course you are on? Then I'd know where to start." she asked timidly.

“Sorry, but I’d prefer to hear about your life than to talk about my own.” Jessi responded. Yawning, she lay down on her bed and pulled the covers over her. “If you don’t know where to start then why not tell me about your first day at university. That’s usually a good place to begin.”

Tayla squealed as Jessi lay down and the pool of corrosive juices washed over her body before settling to the new lowest point. She wriggled a bit to try and minimize her contact with the acids but it didn’t help much. All she could really achieve was to control which parts of her were submerged and suffering from the brunt of that rat’s digestion. Not that it would matter much anyway. If she couldn’t talk her way out of this soon then every bit of her body would dissolve be poured into Jessi’s intestines as a nutrient rich slurry. With no better plan to avoid that fate, Tayla plunged into a description of the day she had first arrived at the university.

Jessi smiled as her meal started talking. She wasn’t really interested in the girl’s boring life and only half listened to the story. She just liked to hear her food talk. There was something immensely satisfying about knowing that this was the last time Tayla would ever tell anyone a story and it was just for her. Beneath the blankets she ran her fingers through the fur of her belly, starting around where Tayla’s head was then tracing the curve of the mouse’s spine. She could feel every inch of the girl’s trembling body through her stomach walls, giving her a warm satisfied feel.

“Please let me out! It’s burning!” Tayla suddenly yelled.

Jessi frowned in annoyance. “I’ll consider it.” she promised, “In the mean time, go back to your story. You were telling me something about your sister?” she guessed. She was fairly sure a sister had been mentioned but couldn’t remember when.

“You’re not even listening!” Tayla squealed. “Please? You’ve no idea what it’s like in here. You’ve got to let me go!”

“I was listening.” Jessi told her. “I just tuned out for a bit. Go back to what you were saying.” There was some muffled whimpers from her belly and an attempt at a kick but no other coherent response. “If you’d prefer I could just push your head under and end this now.” Jessi offered, “But I promise you I have been listening. I’m actually feeling pretty bad about doing this to you and, if you tell me just a little more about yourself, I might have to let you go.” By now she was too sleepy to put much conviction into her words but it didn’t matter. Prey in Tayla’s situation were pretty much hardwired to look for an escape. If offered one, even if it was obvious that she was lying, desperation would force them to believe her words.

Miserably, Tayla went back to describing the day she had met her boyfriend. Jessi listened for a while in case the mouse decided to test her on it but gradually tuned Tayla’s words out again. Glancing at her alarm clock, she saw that it was now half past two in the morning. She was going to be exhausted tomorrow but she had known that would likely be the case when she had agreed to go hunting with Aura. Getting to enjoy a live meal was worth the cost of feeling a little rough the next day. On the other hand, if she stayed awake much longer it probably wouldn’t be worth the effort of showing up to her lectures at all. With one paw still stroking Tayla’s form, Jessi let her eyes close and soon drifted into sleep.