

Something wakes me up. I don't know what it is, but I sit straight up in bed. The suns shine through the cracks between the black, light blocking curtains. I look at my alarm clock.

2:45 PM September 14, 2278.

I rub my forehead. "Why do I always wake up earlier on my days off?" I talk to myself.

I throw the covers off my body. Blue gray sheets and an olive green blanket sail to the other side of the bed. The air is cool. I stand up. My legs are stiff. My joints hurt. I feel a familiar pressure in my bladder. The first step towards the bathroom and my right knee tweaks and I stumble, catching myself in the door way. It didn't hurt, never does, it just gives out sometimes and down I go. Yeah, I could probably get it fixed at the doctor's office. But it doesn't do it often enough for me to warrant going. Besides, there are others that need the good Doctor's attention more than I.

I stand in front of the toilet and drop my black boxer briefs down. Just low enough, while still keeping my balls warm and release the pressure that built up while I slept. I squeeze that last bit out and stuff myself back into the warm undies.

I reach for the medicine cabinet and open it without looking in the mirror first. I hate that guy in the mirror. He's a douche and a dumbass. Tooth brush and some paste, and I'm brushing my teeth. Making sure to get around my fangs and rear molars. A spit into the sink makes the water come on automatically, washing everything down the drain. I close the cabinet door and look into the mirror just long enough to semi straighten my hair. It's a useless attempt, because it never goes where I want it. I never look at the reflection in the eyes. Instead I turn away and walk back into my bed room.

I have no plans today. I think I'll tinker with that old computer and see if I can't get it to boot it's old magnetic diskette. On my way through my room I slip on a blue t-shirt and pair of grey jersey shorts. I walk across the living room, behind the couch to get to the other bedroom next to the kitchen. But something catches my eye through the large windows looking out front. My plants are over grown and are in terrible need of a trim. Their branches almost touching the roof of my front porch.

Change of plans, that 300 year old computer won't go anywhere. Besides, deep down, I know the memory card needs to be rebuilt. 36 old style chips, each with 16 pins that all have to be desoldered and replaced. An extremely tedious adventure that I don't mind putting off a little longer.

I find the trimming sheers in the closet next to the front door. Yes, I prefer to do things the old fashioned way, if you haven't already figured that out. It's warm outside so I don't need shoes. I touch the button next to the front door, unlocking it and open the door.

There's a loud yelp! Someone is there! I yelp too and jump back, startled. But it's Cory. The grey fox with orange and white markings. Diane's little brother.

"Cory!" I pant, catching my breath. "What are you doing here?"

I haven't seen him since my surprise birthday party several months ago. He had passed out shortly after complimenting my physical structure in front of everyone there. I just assumed he was busy with school, was why I hadn't heard from him since. He looks panicked, and like he's about to cry. He also looks... older, somehow.

“S-sorry, Allen. I didn’t... I mean... I was about to knock. But I wasn’t sure you were awake.”

His voice is shaky. His black ears are back and his fluffy gray and white tipped tail is tucked. “You ok, Cory?”

“Yeah!” He says quickly. “I’m fine.” He’s almost as tall as I am, unlike his sister. “I- I got accepted into the space academy...” His voice just trails off as he just stares blankly at my chest... or at some point between my chest and him.

But this isn’t the reaction I was expecting him to have. He’s worked hard to get into the academy. It’s all he’s ever talked about since, forever. “Well that’s great!” I make a point to sound cheerful and clasp a hand on his shoulder. But he doesn’t look happy. I keep trying. “That’s awesome! You’ll get to be on a star ship and fly across the galaxy and see other worlds!” He still looks like he’s about to cry. I really am happy for him, but his mood is confusing me. I do, the only thing I can think of. I pull him into a hug. “I’m so proud of you!” He grabs me tightly and clings hard. His claws dig into my back but don’t draw blood. “Cory, what’s wrong?” I’m worried, not only for my skin under his claws, but now he’s sobbing.

“I’m sorry for ruining your birthday!” He sobs uncontrollably.

Why is he apologizing for something that happened over six months ago. Wait... has it really been that long? Days turn into weeks. Weeks turn into months, and before I know it... 7 months have passed and I haven’t spoken to him at all during that time. No wonder he thinks I’m mad at him.

“Cory. You didn’t ruin anything.” Choose your words carefully, Allen. “You said what was on your mind. And... I was flattered.” I chuckle. “Not everyday someone calls me sexy.”

He pulls back and looks at me seriously. “I wasn’t just drunk, I meant every word!” He sniffs back some tears.

I reach up and playfully grab his muzzle and wipe his face with my other hand. Then I playfully push down on his muzzle, pushing him away slightly. “Yeah right.” I laugh softly.

He recovers, grabs my hand and pulls it to his chest. “I’m serious, Allen! Why is that so hard for you to understand? You feel that?” He’s holding my hand to his chest with only a thin t-shirt between my pads and his chest fur. I can feel his heart beat thumping in his chest. “That’s for you!”

I’m stunned... I don’t know what to say.

He’s waiting for my reply. But I can see that he already knows what my answer is going to be... and it’s killing him. I try so hard sometimes, make other people happy. But I have to do the right thing here. He’s far too young, and needs to be with someone his own age. I know he’ll be upset with me, but in the long run he’ll be better off.

His chest rises and falls, faster and faster. His heart beat thumps harder and harder under my hand. Mine is starting to do the same. I try to pull my hand away and suddenly his face contorts as if in pain. Before I can react, he pulls back, my hand drops and then he lunges forward and pushes his lips to mine.

The kiss is...

electrifying...

his lips are soft...

they quiver with emotion, with wanting...

...

and now...

the line has been crossed...

My heart is pounding in my ears. Now I'm the one who's crying.

I want him...

But it's wrong...

or so I keep telling myself...

He's seventeen years younger than I am. Almost half my age. I can't do this to him. Though I admire his courage to at least try. It's more than I have ever done. I'm a fucking coward.

I need to stop this. This kiss has gone on far too long. But I really don't want to. I gently caress the sides of his head. He whimpers. And that just makes it harder to pull him away.

"Cory, I'm sorry." I say breathlessly. My voice cracks.

He's panting. I don't think he was breathing the whole time we were kissing. I'm still holding his head as he falls on cries. I'm a jerk. An insensitive asshole.

I try to smile, "Besides, you're joining the academy. You'll be gone for what... five years?"

He collects himself, quickly. "Three! And I would drop all that in a heart beat to be with you."

The way I'm holding his head, I use my thumbs to dry his eyes. I don't think I've ever seen him this serious before, this sincere. "Are you kidding? You'll be able to go where no one has gone before. You can't just throw that away."

He takes a step back, my hands fall away. "I'd drop it all for you." He repeats. "I love you."

There's a sudden roll of thunder. We both look up at the sky. It's getting dark, a storm is rolling in. I can see my neighbor across the street now. Has he been watching us? The tall, lanky Coyot quickly looks away, looking up to the sky, towards the dark blue/black clouds. Then he closes his garage door and is gone.

Cory takes a deep breath. "I didn't think you'd say yes."

"I'm sorry." Is all I can say. I can't even tell him that I love him too. I can't do anything right. That's why he's better off, with someone else.

A cold wind blows in, making the large oak trees sway. "Well... I better get going." Cory says as he sniffs one more time, wiping his face off.

"Yeah." I say just above a whisper. My strength is gone. I wipe my face off too, drying my own tears.

"I'll keep in touch." He reassures me.

I smile. "You better." He smiles back.

There's a flash of lightning followed by more rolling thunder, louder than the first.

He looks at the dark clouds rolling in, his ears perked once again. "Wow, it's moving in fast." He leans in and kisses me again, on the cheek this time. "I'll send you vid messages as often as I can." He smiles, but he still looks sad.

"I'll be looking for them." I feel terrible, like I'm never going to see him again. And it hurts. It hurts like a dagger being shoved into my gut and twisted around. Why do I feel like I'm making a terrible, terrible mistake.

Then he's down the stairs and into his compact hover car, before I know it. With a final wave, he drives off.

I don't know how long I stood there under my front porch, staring at the place where his car disappeared around the corner. The storm is here and the rain is coming down in buckets. And I stare.

The storm progresses through both the suns sets. It's dark now. The street lights are the only illumination, save for the occasional lightning strike.

And I stare...

Two weeks pass...

He starts off sending me messages everyday. Then two to three times a week, as his schedule increases in work load. Then once a week. The last few messages, there's someone else in the video. The new guy, a redish wolf, seems to be giving Cory 'that' look. The next message, this other guy is sitting next to him, very closely. Looks like a potential boyfriend. The next message confirms. They are dating, though he assures me that I'm still at the top of his list. I reply with my support for his new found boyfriend and wish them both well. The messages get fewer and farther between now. One a month now. And his boyfriend is always there. They look happy.

I turn off the screen after the last message. They'er getting married. I replied with my best wishes. It's the polite thing to do.

It's dark in my house. It's quiet. It's lonely. And of course, it's raining again. Don't get me wrong, I

love the rain. So calm and peaceful.

Do I regret my decision? No. He's clearly happy now, and that's how it should be. He's with someone his own age. Someone he can share experiences with. Someone he can grow with. Not some old cranky fart like me.

The light is on in my bed room. I walk toward it. It's been so long, I've forgotten his scent. I pull the sheets back and crawl into bed. The ceiling fan hangs from a wooden beam in the open ceiling. It blows enough air to keep me comfortable. I stare at it as it spins.

I stare...

What have I done?

I did, what I always do. What I feel I have to do. Think of others before myself.

And where has that gotten me?

An empty house...

An empty bed...

An empty heart...

An empty soul...

My god, what have I done...