

Leona packed the last of her things into her little green suitcase and zipped it up. She was taking precious little for a year away from her life but had been told to pack very light and stick to hard wearing clothes that can be washed often.

Her head was buzzing a little as she took a last look around her room for a while. She had drunk modestly at her leaving party but the anxiety of her trip was compounding the effects of a gentle hang over. The room looked sterile now; most of her stuff was in storage in her attic as she would be renting out her house to a friend on her sabbatical.

Leona had always wanted to spend a year travelling and doing something charitable. She had missed the opportunity before university and had gone straight from uni into her current job. Always positioning for the next promotion there had never been a good time to pause and on her 29th birthday she decided enough was enough. Like having children there would never be a good or convenient time so she wrote an email to her boss and started the ball rolling. It had taken half a year to negotiate but now she was really doing it.

She was broken from her reverie by an angry buzzing in her pocket. Her phone was letting her know the cab was here.

As she loaded her case into the boot, she looked back at the house and was glad she had insisted on doing her goodbyes at a party the night before. If there had been a crowd of tearful friends and family in front of her house right now she would have been a mess. Even the ghost of them in her mind's eye were making her a little tearful. She waved at no one in particular and climbed in.

The travelling part was uneventful and mostly involved a lot of waiting. She had to stop in a bunch of different countries on the way to her destination. It had been the cheapest way to get to where she was going if the slowest. Mostly small planes apart from the one that crossed the ocean so there had been no inflight movies or entertainment. Instead she had started a journal to record this portion of her life.

She had no intention of blogging this and sharing the experience with the world. She wasn't doing this to posture and show the world what a rounded person she was. She wanted the journal to reminisce.

The last leg of her journey was by train and then 4x4 across bleak terrain. The towns they travelled through looked more and more destitute and the effects of war on the country more and more apparent.

The country had suffered incredible violence in the first half of the decade and had lost a significant portion of its population to the war, subsequent famine and then as refugees fleeing for a prospect of a brighter future.

Those that remained had found it difficult to rebuild. Skilled labourers and engineers were thin on the ground and a lot of the country's infrastructure had been hastily cobbled together by the military engineers as land had been retaken. Little had been done but keep it ticking over yet what was really needed was to tear it out and start anew.

The charity Leona was joining worked in war torn and impoverished countries rebuilding and installing vital infrastructure such as water and waste. Leona was bringing both her youthful exuberance and her knowledge of engineering to the support effort.

At the end of her journey Leona met Daniel. Daniel had been there a month already. He was lean with the kind of face that looked as if it had been carved and not grown. Leona thought he looked like a young Tom Waits only with a mop of blonde hair and woollen hoodie. Coincidentally 'Rain Dogs' was playing on the tape player of the slightly battered looking hatchback he pulled up in.

Daniel smiled the second he saw her and just as instantly Leona had liked him. His smile reached his eyes and felt warm and honest. He had also won points by not offering to help with her case and a firm hand shake when she got in the car.

On the drive over to their base camp, he had briefed her on all she needed to know about their operation, including a robust talk on safety. With so many desperate people in the country living in abject poverty, it was important they all kept their wits about them.

Their base of operations was a town hall in a settlement, which was mostly in ruins. Enough homes with roofs stood to accommodate the few people living in the town, however as many more again were piles of rubble. The only source of water in the town was a hastily drilled well on the outskirts and the towns people that remained were mostly working to try and make something of the farm land.

Leona was in awe of the people who had clung to this life trying to make it work instead of fleeing their situation. She thought in their place she would have probably crossed a border and tried to find a new life elsewhere.

Her first month had been mostly helping to clear rubble from several plots around the ruined hall. It was a slow process, partly because of the stifling heat and partly because it all had to be carefully checked by UN explosives experts before work could proceed.

Daniel had impressed her. He hefted chunks of rubble that defied his slim frame and did not seem to sweat in the heat. He assured Leona that she would find it easier but every day she soaked her t-shirt through and was glad she had picked dark bras and colours that would not go translucent. Often times Leona found herself distractedly watching Daniel work. The lean muscles cording in his arms as he lifted shattered timber and chunks of plaster and brick.

It wasn't many weeks before the two of them formed a special bond and were sharing each other's bunks. They bonded over the shared experience and an obvious animal attraction, but Leona also enjoyed his quirky tastes, his bad jokes, and how he would sing songs in the evening to keep them both amused.

Leona had gotten so involved in the work and her blossoming relationship with Daniel she had almost forgotten the Journal until the 3rd month of her stay when something happened that she had to get written down.

Luca had arrived from another site in the country which was already more established. She had turned up in a huge ex-military truck carrying materials for the next stages in the project for this town. The first thing Leona had taken in about her when she stepped out of the truck was her size. She had a massive frame that would have dwarfed most famous wrestlers. After that it was the horns...

Leona couldn't help but stare at what appeared to be a creature from legend stepping out of a modern-day truck. Her legs seemed to be those of a buffalo; she would later learn from Luca they were something called unguligrade. At first appearance they bent in an unnatural way and ended in an even toed hoof instead of feet. Her shoulders were broad and incredibly muscled her neck too and her face was human but broad with a wide mouth a flat dark nose and huge horns that jutted out either side of her head.

Luca has spotted her staring and simply snorted from wide nostrils, smiled and said in a rich deep voice "You're new here aint ya."

A sheepish "Sorry" was all Leona could manage.

Later as they all ate, and relaxed Leona sought out Luca and apologised for staring.

“Don’t think on it. You’re seeing something for the first time that you wouldn’t have thought possible.” She smiled, “Let’s not beat about the bush, you’re curious about how I come to look like this.”

Leona nodded, Daniel also.

“I was a skinny soft volunteer like you both at one time. I signed up over a gap year and enjoyed my time with the charity and the meaningful work so much I wanted to stay and make it my life.”

She took a swig of her beer, a precious resource out where they were and went on. “The charity offers ways to make the work easier and make you more suited to the life if you want to commit to it. Now I can lift great weights walk for miles without tiring and graze on almost anything.”

Leona couldn’t help but ask the awkward question. “Doesn’t it make a few things a bit difficult like romance?”

Luca responded with a wink “I’m not the only Water Buffalo working for the charity.”

After dinner Leona and Daniel, retired for the evening and Daniel had seemed fascinated by it all; it was all he wanted to discuss. How had they never heard about these anthropomorphic animals living and working amongst humans? How had the vast and connected world of social media not gotten a hold of it?

Leona suspected the answer was simply there was such a vast disconnect between the consumer world and little money to earn in reporting on charity work. Such marvels of science would certainly get out eventually but it would take a long time for the world to be shocked by mythical creatures walking among them and the western world would be sure to figure out how to monetise it first.

Over the coming weeks, Daniel continued to talk with animated fascination about Luca and her kith. Leona often found him chatting to Luca and plying her with questions. Leona wasn’t entirely surprised when he confessed to her one day that he wanted to stay on with the charity. More specifically he was fascinated with the idea of becoming a lion after talking through various species with Luca.

Leona’s initial response was shock, followed by being somewhat upset. What did that mean for their relationship? She did not voice these concerns to Daniel but she had found herself wondering just how much his body would change and whether she would still feel comfortable sharing his bed with him as what amounted to a different species.

Some of the answers came from Luca who had sought her out following Daniel breaking the news. For a brief moment in the quiet of an unused tent Luca took on a motherly role as Leona cried in the buffalo's strong arms. When Leona had that out of her system, she answered some very frank questions including offering answers to some frank questions Leona didn't know how to ask.

"Daniel is going to change a lot and his physical changes will only be part of it. There will be emotional and mental changes." Luca said while offering a clean handkerchief to Leona.

"There are other things to know too. Me and my friend Janey both became buffalo together and by the time the changes finished Janey was a bull and our relationship shifted in dynamic greatly." Luca said while fishing a picture from her wallet of two young women with dirt smudged clothes leaning on each other.

She then handed over another picture with two water buffalo people; Luca and a massive bull. Apart from the larger size of Janey she also had a less human face and lacked the bulge of an udder inside her trousers.

"It seems most of those who change become a female of the species they change into, and only a few become a male. It is not necessarily those who start as male either; no one is exactly sure why", she explained.

"And the sex?" Leona sheepishly asked.

Luca smiled and nodded as if expecting the question. "After the change the way we viewed sex was very different. I no longer feels it is tied to relationships and while I have a long-standing relationship with Janey, now John, we aren't exclusive, and our urges are a lot more animalistic. Sometimes just the smell of a bull makes me want him and I have to fight the urge to invite him there and then."

"I don't think I could be with someone who is part animal." Leona said almost sadly. "No offense of course."

Luca had a rich hearty laugh. "Don't worry, its weird I get it, the first time I saw John's pink parts I gagged at the thought of touching them and its not like he can kiss me with that cows face of his, but his strong hands the feel of his hot breath on my neck. My body reacts to all that and then it is all good."

“What if he, I mean would you have calves?” Leona asked

“Ah, that is another change and important you should know. We are like mules and many other hybrid animals. We are all sterile; none of us could bear children if we wanted to. Really, we did this to ourselves to take on a higher calling so that suits us fine. Daniel will be given the low down on this.”

Leona looked and felt lost after all this so when Luca offered to take her with on the journey back to the other site she said yes. They needed hands in both locations and in Luca’s town Leona might get to put more of her construction expertise to use and spend a little less time shifting rubble.

Daniel seemed upset that she would be gone for a few weeks but understood he had dropped a bomb on her.

The weeks passed quickly and Daniel and Leona managed to talk once a week on the camp’s satellite phone to maintain their connection. They discussed how the work was going, the awful food they had eaten that day, or on one occasion the stash of new cassette tapes Daniel had acquired from someone whose time with the charity was done. They talked about everything but Daniel’s decision and their relationship.

Over the weeks Leona observed more anthropomorphic charity workers walking about. Giants like Luca lifting huge weights in addition to small nimble species with dextrous hands doing fiddly work.

There was a group of construction workers that were all lions in the town constructing new houses. Leona would have called them a pride if there had been a male amongst them. Leona wondered if Daniel would become that male; surrounded by all those women whose urges drove them to him. She was surprised to learn that despite being a carnivorous species a lot of them were vegetarian and the rest had almost the same relationship to meat as a human would.

Leona made a point of spending some time with the lions over her last week there. They were all very welcoming and eager to answer her questions.

One lioness Jamie who had been able to keep the same name post change became a good friend to her in that week. She had a long face and fluffy ears. Leona could see that the short sandy coloured fur covered almost all of her body and whenever Jamie reached for things her t-shirt rode up and gave a flash of Jamie’s teats that sat on her belly rather than her chest. Like all of the lions she had a mop of blonde hair with fluffy ears that peeked out from it and her irises were those of a cat. The lions were almost all a little shorter than Leona. Like Luca their legs were configured differently,

though Jamie explained they were walking on tip toe everywhere and what looked like a second reversed knee was her heel and ankle.

On the last night Leona stayed with the lions. They all shared a bunk house and slept together naked in one big pile. Leona got a really good view of what life would be like with Daniel if he became a lion. Sleeping amongst the fur of the pride was quite comforting.

The next day it was time for Luca to make another supply run and Leona went with her having made an important decision.

Daniel met Leona with a huge hug picking her up and spinning her around. Jamie took the day off with the Foreman's blessing and they spent it catching up. First slating their need for physical contact then with Daniel's head resting on Leona's soft stomach both tired from coupling they talked.

"I don't know what it will mean for us..." Leona said gently stroking Daniels mop of hair, "but I've decided I'm staying on with the charity like you. I feel like I've lived more in these past few months than the past decade and I think there is so much more to do that even a life time isn't enough."

"Does that mean?" Daniel asked hopefully turning his head to look up at her.

"Yes I've met the lions. I do not know what it will mean for us. But I'm going to go through the process with you. I've decided a fluffy tail and ears won't be the worst thing in the world."

"And the rest. Tell me what were they like, what else will change?" Daniel asked rolling off her to sit on the edge of the bed.

"Didn't Luca explain this to you?" Leona asked.

"No, she mostly told me about her experience and she told me about the various animals and the roles they wound up filling. I was torn between being a lion or a buffalo like her but in the moment I told you I knew which one I wanted."

Leona smiled then hefted her modest breasts. "First off you can say goodbye to these" Lions have a collection of small teats on their abdomens not big human breasts."

Daniel looked a little crest fallen at that but nodded for her to go on.

Stretching a long leg out from the sheet that covered her to the waist she added. "And these will be a very different shape with fluffy paws. Fur covers most of their bodies apart from their teats and face. Though some of them had more lion-like faces, I'm not sure if that is just something that happens with time. It is actually one of the few questions I didn't ask!"

What she didn't say as she stared down at his soft cock is she had no idea whether he would keep that as not a single lion had changed as male so far. Would she want him as a lioness, was there such a thing as lesbian lions?

"I've spoken to the Foreman" Daniel said his eyes clearly looking off into the distance as he imagined the changes. "She says I can start any time I want. I suppose the same will be true for you."

The next morning the two of them went to the Foreman and signed on for the long hall and requested to become lions.

The change wasn't as scientific as Leona had imagined. There was a strange rock with runes that they placed under their shard bed as they slept. Every night they went to bed and every morning they woke up a little changed.

The first changes were noticed by Leona as her breasts shrank away daily till her chest was as flat and muscular as Daniels.

While that happened, they both noticed the goose pimples. It was like an intense reaction to the cold all over their bodies. The goose pimples each marked fine hairs that grew thicker darker with every day. As their fur spread up arms and legs their old body hair fell out. By the second day everything that had been covered in thick dark curly hair was now bald or being replaced by the growing fur.

After a week their legs started to change, deep aches in their muscles and bones made it tough for them to walk as their legs shifted. Feet became paws and they found their viewpoints shifting as they looked at the world from a slightly lower vantage point.

It was after these shared changes that Leona started to notice a difference. While her clitoris was swelling and her labia was knitting together Daniel's penis was shrinking and his balls receding. One morning they woke up and their genitals looked almost identical, they both had empty scrotums and her clit was in a sheath of skin that completely covered it.

It was already clear to Leona what was happening and it was confirmed over the coming days as her body bulked up and she grew a mane of hair while Daniel grew teats on his belly.

"I guess you can call me Danny now." She said in a slightly higher register.

Leona looked at Danny with a hungry expression. He was clearly a lioness now, his body completely female. She sniffed the air and plodded lasily over to him. Inside their room they found it was quite comfortable to walk on all fours though they walked on their knuckles like apes as they had hands instead of front paws. He sniffed at Danny's genitals like an animal and felt his cock start to stiffen. He didn't respond to him as his head had become fully leonine and he was embarrassed by the mess he made of trying to talk with a big cats mouth.

"I think its fitting you should be Leo" she said breathily.

Rolling over onto her front. Danny enjoyed Leo's hot breath on her throat and thrilled when his teeth grazed the skin at the back of his neck. Her whole body reacted, and she gave herself up to him.

Leo and Danny took some time to adjust their relationship and to their new bodies and when the next opportunity arose, they joined the pride and became part of the construction crew building homes. The pride welcomed their first male particularly Jamie who knew Leo when he was Leona.