

The Weapon
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"Firing line!"

As one, twenty armed guards dropped into position, ten kneeling, ten standing...weapons trained down the corridor.

"Stand by..." their commander, a gruff orange feline barked.

The soldiers held their ground, doing their best to ignore the warning klaxons blaring around them...the chaos of the researchers running around, trying to save their notes or their projects.

Private Munroe, a grey husky, stole a quick glance out of the corner of his eye at the side corridor...where two techs were running to the elevator, reams of papers clutched in the arms...and shuddered a bit.

Jeez...they care more about their fucking notes than their lives, he thought, turning his gaze back to the corridor.

"Steady, men!" the feline barked.

Munroe trained his weapon...a M-16 armed with armor-piercing rounds...down the corridor, trying his best not to flinch or sway.

The world began to focus on the end of his gun...and his thoughts drifted back to a few hours earlier...

...

BREET! BREET! BREET!

Munroe looked up from the cards he was holding, surprised by the shrill sound.

"What the hell..." he began to ask.

Then one of his compatriots, a slender grey fennec, hit the comm panel.

"Oh, fuck..." the fennec said...then ran to get into uniform.

"What's going..."

"There's been a breach," the fennec said, zipping his uniform on. "A fucking **BREACH!** Bio-weapons lab!"

Munroe's eyes widened. *Bio-weapons...oh, shit...*

His uniform was on seconds later, weapon primed and ready.

"Rally point?" he asked, rushing down the hall with the fennec, fighting upstream against the panicked technicians.

"Corridor B-23! Safeties off!" the fennec responded, having to scream over the yelling and the alarms.

...

Bio-weapons...

If there was a breach there...

...we're all FUCKED!

Yet Munroe stayed still, his weapon trained at the end of the corridor...and the

titanium-alloy vault door at the end of it.

"So...which one do you think it was?"

He blinked, puzzled...then glanced to his left.

The fennec met his glance, then looked back down the corridor.

"Dunno. If it's any of them, we're fucked," Munroe replied.

The fennec chuckled. "Maybe. There's twenty of us though. Highly trained, armed to the teeth..."

"Just means we go down fighting, Forrest," Munroe stated.

Forrest sighed. "Ever the fatalist."

"Cut that Goddamned chatter!" the feline barked.

Both soldiers fell silent, eyes and weapons steady on the door.

...

It stood on the other side of the door, sniffing and examining the metal.

It reached out an appendage to the surface, feeling the smoothness and the texture of the metal...

...then it froze, its senses straining...

...and discovering the scents of twenty beings on the other side of the door...

...and the scents of weapons...and training.

Discipline.

Order.

It pulled away from the door...then scanned the room it was in...

...and found a metal grate in the ceiling.

...

Munroe's vision began to waver as sweat began to trickle down his face.

"Come on..." he cursed under his breath.

He felt Forrest edge closer.

"Maybe this is just a..."

Thump.

Both soldiers ears perked up, their eyes widening.

Thump.

They trained their weapons down the corridor...

...but Munroe blinked.

Wait...that wasn't...

Thump.

His eyes went even wider.

Oh, fuck...

"...it's in the vents..." he said softly.

"What?" Forrest asked, not moving from his stance.

"It's in the fucking **VENT!**" Munroe barked, spinning his weapon upward...

...as the ceiling behind the soldiers buckled, disgorging a large silvery shape.

Forrest and Munroe spun around...

...as the back line turned and began firing...

...and the...thing...stood up, dwarfing them...

...then instinct took over.

Private Harold Munroe, survivor of fifty missions in hot zones across the globe, top in his class in West Point, the only one to finish the Live Fire exercise without taking a hit...stared for a few seconds, his brain trying to process what was before him...

...then, he broke and ran.

...

He leaned against a wall, panting heavily...brain still trying to process what he saw.

He heard a scuffling sound on the other side of the corner and jerked his weapon up...

...as Forrest ran around the corner, panting heavily and shaking like a leaf.

"What...the fuck...was that....that **THING**?" the fennec asked, leaning against the wall.

Munroe shook his head, his brain still sorting out the jumble of what he saw.

It was huge...maybe eight feet tall...

...built like a Greek statue...

...pure silver...even the tendrils on its back all looked like they were cut from the same block of silver...

...but those eyes...

Munroe shuddered.

"I...I don't know..." the husky replied. "That...that thing isn't in the files..."

"The..." The fennec's eyes went wide. "Oh, shit..."

"What? **WHAT**?" Munroe yelled.

Forrest began walking down the corridor, weapon sliding to check every opening.

Munroe followed, watching the fennec's six.

"What the **FUCK** aren't you telling me, Forrest?" the husky barked.

The fennec kept moving forward, weapon scanning the various side-corridors.

"I heard rumors...some kind of ultra-secret bio-weapon in the lower levels..." he began.

"Big deal. There are rumors like that all the time," Munroe countered.

"Not like this," Forrest said. "These are as close to real as it gets, man."

Forrest hit a door panel, causing the door to slide open.

Both soldiers swept the entryway, checking for any movement.

The room was still, silent...empty.

They entered, bodies still on high alert...and Forrest shut the door, engaging the lock on it.

He sat on a chair, finally unclenching his weapon.

"The rumors started with a recent discovery...a new gene that some tech here found," the fennec began.

Munroe slowly sat down, unclenching his body.

"A new gene?" he asked, puzzled.

Forrest nodded.

"Supposedly. They said they didn't know what it was for, but it existed," the fennec stated, leaning back in the chair. "That's why there was a mandatory genetic test on the application...to see who had the gene."

Munroe stared. "And, if you had the gene..."

"...you automatically became a "test subject"," the fennec finished.

Munroe didn't like the sound of that. "How the hell do you know all this?"

Forrest checked his gun. "Got a buddy working in the lower levels. He told me all this..." He looked up. "He also said that they began trying to activate that gene."

"Oh, shit..." Munroe said, weakly.

Forrest nodded. "That's right. Whatever that...thing...is out there...it was once one of us."

...

It scanned the corridor...and felt pleased.

The beings that were attacking it had been neutralized.

It looked around...

...at the seven dismembered bodies in the corridor...

...and the four that were struggling, trapped inside cocoons of silvery material.

It felt sated. Pleased.

It sent tendrils out...and collected the struggling forms, adding a second layer of its material to their cocoons.

Eventually, the motions stopped...

...and it felt even more pleased as it secured the cocoons to its back and shambled down the corridor.

...

"But...how?" was all Munroe could think to ask.

Forrest shrugged. "I dunno, man. Radiation, chemicals, maybe one too many MRE's...the point is that that thing out there...it was once just like you or me."

Munroe got up and paced a bit, his brain trying to sort out all the intel he had so far.

"So...why did it break out?" he asked.

"Pff. Probably a marriage of opportunity and desire," Forrest stated. "It wanted out and some tech didn't secure it properly. Who really knows?"

Munroe frowned...then had an idea.

He slid over to the terminal in the room, powering it up.

"What are you..." Forrest began.

"I'm going to try to access the security cameras," Munroe said, his claws dancing across the keys. "See if it's still out there, try to see where it's been...figure out where it's going."

He typed several lines of code...then hit enter...

...and was greeted with twenty small images on the screen.

Forrest stared...

...and Munroe felt his gorge rise...

...as the central image was the corridor where they had been not fifteen minutes earlier...showing the corpses of several of their squad. Torn to pieces.

"Wait..."

He glanced up at the fennec.

"Seven bodies...there were twenty of us...some of the squad are still out there," the fennec said.

Munroe nodded...then pulled up another image.

This was from a camera several floors down...showing a large holding cell, its door torn ajar.

"And that's where it came from, I think," the husky said.

He felt Forrest lean over him.

"Can you enhance the image? There's writing on the door."

Munroe tapped a few keys, then clicked the mouse on the section of the door with writing on it...

...and that writing swelled to fill the image. The letters, "PX-1" clearly visible, despite the blood on the door.

"PX-1..." Forrest said softly.

"Searching," Munroe stated, typing in a query string on the computer.

...

It secured the fourth cocoon in place, the occupant giving a brief struggle.

Then, it backed away, resting on its haunches.

Four glistening silver cocoons were arranged around it, each fed by a single tendril...and each emitting muffled groans or screams.

It ignored the sounds, focusing on its task.

Slowly, the cocoons began to shrink, the shapes of the occupants becoming clearer and visible.

...

"Here it is...Pacifier X-1," Munroe read. "Apparently, this thing is built to..."pacify enemy armies"."

"Pacify them? How? I doubt anyone's going to be soothed by that thing," Forrest stated.

Munroe nodded...then pointed back at the central image.

"Killing them works as pacification," he pointed out, then kept reading the file.

...

It felt the forms struggling in the cocoons as they got tighter...

...and it felt pleased.

One had already succumbed, and was still.

Two others were struggling, but getting weaker.

The fourth...it was still struggling as much as it could.

It shivered, excited.

It was doing its job...and it was pleased.

...

"Is that a video?" Forrest asked, pointing at a hyperlink in the file.

Munroe looked at the link...then nodded. "Sure is."

He clicked on it...

...and shuddered.

Standing in the center of a small room...was that thing.

Then, the camera backed out...and they saw that five people in orange jumpsuits were being shoved into the room.

"Are those...are those prisoners?" Forrest asked.

Munroe didn't reply. He simply watched...

...as the prisoners noticed the large silvery shape in the room with them...

...and it attacked them.

Two of them were beaten and torn apart...but the others.

The soldiers watched...as the three remaining prisoners were covered in a silvery substance, almost like webbing...that coated them from head to toe.

They stared, spellbound...as PX-1 made sure their entire bodies were covered...

...then it picked each silvery cocoon up, securing it vertically...

...then having one of its tendrils attach itself to the top of each cocoon.

Munroe felt his eyes widen...as the cocoons began to shrink around the occupants.

He watched as they struggled for a bit...then went still as the cocoon formed a perfect seal around them, their bodies securely trapped.

"Holy..." Forrest said...then turned away.

Munroe heard the fennec retch...but was too spellbound to care.

He felt his sheath harden at the thought of being in one of those cocoons...

...and then, it turned to the camera.

He stared right into its pure red eyes...and it felt as if it were staring back at him through the monitor.

Then, the video ended, causing the image to vanish.

"Ugh...oh, god..."

Munroe shook himself from the visuals...and slowly turned around.

Forrest wiped his muzzle on his uniform sleeve.

"Jesus fucking Christ..." the fennec said.

...

It felt very pleased as it ran a tendril along the newest batch of pacified enemies.

These had fought fiercely...disciplined.

But still...they were pacified.

It sat in the center of the room...nine cocoons surrounding it.

Four of the occupants had succumbed to its work. The others would soon.

It felt very pleased.

...

"That...that thing...can we...can we kill it?" Forrest asked.

Munroe went back to work, checking the files for any sort of weapon to use

against it...then sank back, sighing.

"Only completing its task will stop it," he said...then looked back at Forrest.

"When there are no more enemies to "pacify", it goes dormant."

"Oh great...we're on a fucking military base!" Forrest snapped. "Two hundred fifty armed soldiers! That thing isn't going to stop until it's pacified every single one of us!"

...

It was almost euphoric now.

It had pacified so many enemies.

Thirty freshly pacified enemies hung around it...the corpses of a hundred more scattered around the mess hall like discarded children's toys.

It was extremely pleased with itself...

...but then, it stopped being pleased.

It ran a check of its internal database...then felt dissatisfaction.

It got up and retreated into the complex.

...

"Okay...can you give me a live feed?" Forrest asked.

Munroe shut off the file and triggered the cameras...

...and both of them gasped.

The mess hall was an abattoir. Hundreds of bodies strewn all over the room...and thirty silvery shapes, all arranged into neat rows.

Thirty still shapes...resembling soldiers.

"Fuck..." Forrest said.

Munroe brought up other feeds through the complex.

The images were either empty halls...scenes of gore-littered battle sites...or neatly-arranged silver cocoons showing "pacified" soldiers.

"Are...are they alive?" Forrest asked.

Munroe brought up the file again, scanning it quickly.

"They're...they're in stasis, possibly," he replied.

"Possibly?"

He looked up at the fennec. "They didn't have time to properly analyze what those cocoons are or do. That video was shot three hours before it escaped."

"Fuck..." Forrest breathed, then turned on his radio. "US Army personnel! I repeat, any US Army personnel! Can you read, over?"

...

It stopped, senses flaring.

"US Army personnel! I repeat, any US Army Personnel! Can you read, over?"

It felt pleased. The last of the enemies was still here.

It began to track the signal.

...

Munroe read further along the file...then his eyes widened.

"Forrest! Stop broadcasting! **NOW!**"

The fennec let go of the transmitter. "What? Are you nuts?"

"This thing can track comm signals," the husky stated.

"Oh, fuck!" Forrest yelled, throwing his radio away from him...then reality hit.

He'd just told PX-1 exactly where they were...

...and it was coming for them.

...

It felt displeased.

The signal stopped broadcasting...and it was not happy.

It wanted to finish its task. There were still two enemies out there to be pacified.

It shuddered...then began to sweep the corridor with its tendrils...

...and it acquired two new scents.

It felt pleased. These were ones it had not met.

It slowly prowled the corridor, anticipation causing its tendrils to quiver and twitch.

Soon, it would finish its mission.

...

"Okay...okay, we need to think..." Forrest stated, trying to calm down.

"We need to leave this room," Munroe said, shoving away from the terminal and grabbing his weapon.

Forrest nodded, shouldering his own weapon and heading for the door.

They each took a side of the doorway...looked at each other...then nodded.

The fennec tapped the door panel...

...and they swept the corridor, one high, the other low.

Silence and emptiness greeted them.

"Clear?" Forrest asked.

"Clear," Munroe replied.

The two soldiers advanced into the corridor, calmness and discipline taking over.

They swept the corridor as they advanced.

"Where do we go?" Munroe asked.

"Not sure...we need to send out a signal to base," Forrest replied.

"Bullshit," Munroe hissed. "We need to get the fuck away from here."

"Granted...but if we don't send a signal, they'll send more troops here," Forrest pointed out. "More troops means more people to pacify."

Munroe stared, surprised.

"You want to have this thing go dormant..." he commented.

"That's the only way to stop it, right?" the fennec replied, sweeping the corridor.

Munroe swallowed.

"That means...we're alone here...with it..." he stated nervously.

Forrest didn't reply.

He didn't need to.

...

It was becoming frustrated.

The scents and signal had led it to this tiny room...but the enemies were not here.

It sent its tendrils out, probing the room...

...then it found scents...outside in the corridor.

It crawled out of the room and made its way down the corridor, anticipation making its tendrils twitch.

...

Munroe was silent as he and Forrest advanced down the corridor, gun at the ready.

He felt scared, but didn't show it.

Then he glanced behind him...

...and his discipline cracked.

A silvery tendril crept around the corner of the corridor they had come from...

...and PX-1 slowly slid around the bend, tendrils quivering.

"**SHIT!**" Munroe yelled, bolting past the fennec.

"What...**FUCK!!!**"

Soon, Forrest was racing alongside him as they ran.

...

It was eager...and pleased.

It had found the last two enemies...and they were running from it.

It was excited...as it followed them.

...

Forrest slammed the bulkhead behind them, jamming the latch...then backing away from the door, weapon ready.

"Fuck! It found us!" the fennec yelped.

"Forrest..."

The fennec turned...and felt his shoulders sag.

He'd just sealed them into the food storage bay...and jammed the only exit.

"Shit..." he breathed., kicking at a bag of potatoes.

Munroe sat down, defeated.

Forrest sat next to him, dejected.

"Well...no signal...that means the base'll be swarming soon," the fennec stated.

"Maybe it'll leave us alone once it has others to play with."

Munroe stayed silent, staring at the door.

...

It followed the scents to a metal object...then paused.

It sensed the two enemies inside...but it sensed what they felt as well.

Resignation. Defeat.

Loss.

It sat outside the door, puzzled.

They...do not want to be pacified?

It felt confused.

They must be pacified...they MUST be!

...

Thump!

Forrest and Munroe both bolted upright at the sound, coming from the door, weapons ready.

They stared...as the door was torn off its hinges...and PX-1 entered the room. Munroe stared at it, spellbound.

It was massive...easily five hundred pounds...yet it moved silently and gracefully.

The tendrils on its back writhed as it entered, moving as if they were sensory organs.

And then, it looked right at him.

He stared into its pure red eyes...and the world fell away.

"Fire!" Forrest yelled, squeezing off a round.

The bullets tore into the flesh of it...then it surged forward, a tendril sweeping Forrest away.

Munroe did not move. He stared into those red eyes.

...

Forrest squirmed, pinned under the tentacle's weight, his weapon knocked from his grasp.

He struggled...then noticed Munroe, standing scant feet away from him, frozen in place.

"Fire, Munroe! FIRE!" he yelled.

The husky did not move.

Forrest watched...as the weapon fell from his comrade's paws...then squirmed free of the tentacle.

He ran over to the husky, shaking him.

"Dammit! FIRE YOUR GUN!" he yelled in the husky's ear...

...then was yanked away by two tendrils.

He felt himself be pulled away from the husky...then felt his arms being forced to his sides by more tendrils.

He glanced down...and saw the tendrils beginning to coat him with their silvery webbing...and struggled, trying to break free.

The fennec fought...but the silvery webbing covered most of his body, immobilizing him.

A tendril slid its way up to his face, hovering at eye level...

...and he stared at it...as silvery webbing began to seep from the end of it.

...

You...are frightened...

Munroe felt the voice echo in his head.

You are frightened...yet you do not attack me, like the other did.

The rational part of his brain told him that Forrest was in danger...but he couldn't hear it.

You do not wish to be pacified.

*I...I don't wanna die...*he thought.

He felt the presence behind the voice examine him...and his eyes slid shut.

You will not die.

Relief slowly crept over him.

Remove your uniform.

Silently he obeyed the voice.

...

Forrest pulled his eyes from the drooling tendril...and watched, stunned.

Munroe...was undressing. He removed his uniform and stood there, naked, in front of PX-1.

"What in the fuck are you doing?" the fennec yelled.

Then, he felt something slide over his muzzle, gagging him.

He looked...and saw that the tendril was forcing his muzzle shut, the silvery goo beginning to cover it.

He thrashed his head about...only to cause the tendril to move with him.

Then, it pulled away...and his muzzle was coated in silver goop, becoming one solid mass.

He took a breath...and was surprised that he could actually breathe through the material.

He tried to move his jaws...only to find that they were firmly sealed shut.

Shit...I can't talk...

He looked back at Munroe, who was standing there, still naked...

...then PX-1 moved closer to the husky.

...

You have seen what I have done, the voice stated.

Yes, Munroe replied.

It...arouses you?

Munroe became remotely aware of a blush.

Yes.

You wish to experience that...the feeling of confinement.

Yes, he replied mentally.

He was remotely aware of something brushing against his leg...but all he could see were the red eyes.

All he could hear...was the voice.

You shall experience that...and more, the voice replied.

More?

...

Forrest watched as one of PX-1's tentacles slowly caressed Munroe's legs...but did not leave any silvery webbing on it.

He felt puzzled.

What the hell...

Then it hit him.

No weaponry...no armor...he's not a threat!

Then, he felt dejected.

And I shot at it...I'm fucked.

...

More, the voice replied. *I shall change you.*

Munroe felt confused. *Change?*

You shall become my progeny. My offspring, the voice replied. *All that you were before shall be washed away.*

He felt pleased at that thought...then something hit him.

Forrest...

The other has proven to be violent and aggressive, the voice replied. *He will be pacified.*

No! Munroe yelped mentally...then blushed.

The presence behind the voice examined his thoughts...then deduced something.

You care for this one...this Forrest, it said.

Mentally he nodded.

Shall I change this Forrest as well? the voice asked.

Change...Forrest...

Munroe felt himself slipping away, sinking into the red eyes.

...yes...

...

Forrest watched as the tendril slowly hovered in front of his face again.

He braced himself for the end...

...then felt himself being set down gently onto the ground.

He forced his eyes back open...and saw the tendril cutting his body free of the webbing.

Then, it slid up to his muzzle...and jerked along it.

He tried to open his muzzle...and it opened, the webbing falling away and clattering to the floor.

"I'm...free?" he asked, stunned.

Then his training kicked back in.

He spun around...

...only to stare directly into PX-1's pure red eyes.

He froze, staring into those vacant red orbs.

You are called Forrest, correct? a voice said in his head.

Slowly, confused, he nodded.

You...you can talk? he asked.

In a way, yes, the voice replied...and he felt a presence behind the voice.

What...what are you? the fennec asked.

He felt it pause, as if it were thinking of how to answer the question.

I am...was...like you, it replied. *I was brought here...and they changed me.*

Changed... Forrest thought. *The gene...*

Yes...I have that gene. That is why I was brought here.

Forrest felt despair crash over him.

You have the gene as well, the voice added. ***As does he.***

He stole a very brief glance over at Munroe...who was still standing there, still and naked.

He does not wish for you to be pacified, it went on.

He...wait, you talked to him?

Yes. He does not wish to be pacified. He wishes to be changed instead.

Changed? Forrest asked. *Changed how?*

He will become like me. My progeny. My offspring.

Forrest tried to move, to run, to do something...

...but his body didn't budge.

He cares for you, you know?

Forrest felt confused. What?

He cares for you, the voice repeated. ***He wishes to be with you...to have you be changed, as he is changed.***

Forrest's mind wandered.

He cares for me...wait, he CARES for me?

He felt the presence nod. ***It is what you call...love.***

Forrest felt very confused.

He...loves me? But...male-on-male love is forbidden...punishable by death...

He knows that, the voice responded. ***Yet, he still loves you.***

Forrest saw images...

...of Munroe and himself, lazing on a park bench, looking up at the sky...

...nestled next to each other in a bed, smiling and cuddling...

...of him being surprised with a gift from Munroe on their anniversary...

...and he felt warmed by it.

He...he does love me...

He does. He wishes for you to be changed with him, to be able to love you without fear.

Forrest felt warm inside, for the first time in years.

He...he loves me...

Do you wish to be changed, to be with him?

Forrest closed his eyes, awash in the warmth.

...yes...

...

He will be changed with you. He has consented.

Munroe felt his body relax, relieved.

Thank you, he thought.

The presence felt as if it were smiling at him.

I shall give you a few moments to talk to each other, it said...then he felt it withdraw from him.

He slumped a bit, drained.

His body reacted, sinking to the floor, panting heavily.

"Fuh...For..." he gasped.

"He...here..." he heard a voice near him, panting as well.

He looked off to the side...and saw Forrest slumped on the floor, sweating heavily.

Slowly, Munroe crawled over to the fennec.

"Are...are you okay?" he asked.

The fennec gulped...then nodded. "Are...are you naked?"

The husky blinked...then blushed. "Um...yeah...I..."

The fennec cut him off by placing a paw over his muzzle.

"I...I'm too tired...help me...get my uniform..." Forrest breathed.

Munroe nodded...and slowly unzipped the fennec's uniform, easing his slender body out of it.

"There...all naked now," the husky said, a slight smile crossing his face...then he blushed.

Forrest smiled up at him...then sank back onto the floor.

"Do you...really love me?" he asked.

Munroe fell over next to the fennec, stunned.

"It...it told you...?" the husky began.

The fennec looked at him...and nodded.

Munroe's blush deepened...and he nodded.

Then, he felt a gentle touch on his cheek.

He looked down at the fennec, who was caressing his cheek with a slender grey paw.

"I love you too," Forrest said, smiling...and blushing a bit.

Munroe felt his heart soar...as he hugged the fennec gently.

Are you ready? he heard a voice ask in his head.

He pulled back a bit...and saw that Forrest was surprised.

"You heard it too?" the fennec asked.

The husky nodded. "Are we ready?"

Slowly...then fennec nodded.

The husky turned to the silvery form in the room.

"We are ready," he said.

Stand up.

Munroe slowly stood up, helping Forrest to his feet...then they waited.

Face each other.

Munroe saw the confusion on Forrest's face. "But..."

You will be changed together, the voice said. ***At the same time.***

Munroe felt himself blush a bit...and Forrest let out a chuckle.

"Do we still need to talk?" the fennec asked.

No...your voices will no longer be necessary, the voice replied. ***Simply think toward each other.***

Forrest looked at Munroe...and smiled.

Can you hear me? the fennec asked mentally.

Slowly, the husky nodded.

I can, he replied.

And I can hear you too, Forrest replied, winking.

Munroe smiled...and edged a bit closer to the fennec.

I shall begin now.

The two slid close, in a gentle embrace...and shut their eyes.

...

It felt very pleased.

It sat down, watching the large cocoon it had created.

It felt at peace...fulfilled.

The tendrils gently stroked the surface of the cocoon, the full surface pulsing under their touch.

It sensed the thoughts of the two inside it...and felt warm and pleased.

We will remain here, it thought.

We shall be...a family...

...

Forrest swam through a dreamy haze, knowing that his love was near him...not caring one bit about the nagging voice in his head that screamed that it was wrong or that he would be killed for his love.

The fennec did not care.

He was in love...and he was with the one he loved.

...

Munroe's thoughts swam with warmth.

He was aware that the fennec was near him...and was soothed by his presence.

He knew that he was loved...and that he loved the fennec.

That was all that mattered.

...

It felt pleased as the cocoon's movements began to slow.

It knew that the fluid, rich with its DNA, was altering the two inside it into beings similar to itself.

It felt very warm...as its tendrils slid across the surface of the cocoon, causing small sections to swell and pulse.

Soon, they will be born...

It settled down next to the cocoon, pleasure and contentment coursing through it.

...my children.

...

The cocoon opened, the sides peeling apart like a flower's petals...

...and slowly, two silvery forms emerged from it, their bodies glistening.

The two forms slowly stood up, adopting a bipedal stance.

One of them, a smaller form, noticed the large silvery mass near the cocoon...and bent over to investigate it.

Is...is... a soft voice said in the large biped's head.

The large biped investigated the silvery mass, a slender tendril sliding from its form to explore the large mass before it.

After several minutes, the tendril retreated back into the large biped's body.

Mother is asleep, it told the smaller form. *Mother lives, but is resting.*

The smaller form nodded...and slowly walked next to the taller biped.

Shall we rest as well? it asked mentally.

The larger biped fell mentally silent for a bit...then slowly nodded.

We shall rest, it told the smaller form...then sank down next to Mother.

The smaller form settled next to the large biped, resting an arm across its chest.

The larger biped draped an arm along the smaller one's shoulders, pulling it close.

I love you, Forrest, the larger biped said.

I love you too, Munroe, the smaller biped replied.

The smaller form nestled closer, seeking a comfortable spot.

And I am glad Mother is okay, the smaller form added.

As am I, the larger form added.

...

The two bipeds went still, nestled against each other...

...and slowly, a tentacle slid over both of them...

...as Mother slid closer to her children, keeping them safe in a protective embrace.

...