

Chapter Two – Quiet

Sunday, July 4th

The soft hum of cicadas dances through my bedroom window, their low groans mingling with the joyful song of the birds perched just beyond the apartment. Their odd little tune manages to slowly shake me awake, a tired grunt parting my lips as I press my spare pillow to my chest.

What day is today...?

The thought lingers in my mind for a moment as the cogs in my head begin to turn.

Today's Sunday... No work... Just a day alone... Probably need to go grocery shopping, though.

A muffled grunt parts my lips as I push myself into a sitting position, my hazy gaze scanning sparsely furnished room.

“Bryan?” I call out as I look through the small crack left between the door and its frame.

Probably went to work already...

My gaze shifts to my digital clock, noting the time I pull back the covers and slip out of bed.

Nine twenty three. Got plenty of time for breakfast and a shower before I go out for groceries. I just hope Bryan left out the list.

The distinct sound of my feet against the hardwood floor accompanies me as I meander into the kitchen, noticing the small sheet of paper resting on the counter. Of course, instinct prompts that I have a look.

Adam, I'll be at work for most of the day so I'd appreciate it if you could head out and get groceries for me. I left some money on top of the fridge to cover the expenses. If there's any left over, feel free to grab a tea while you're out. I attached the shopping list to the calendar in the kitchen, so don't forget to grab it when you head out. Thanks in advance and I'll see you tonight. Bryan.

I glance over to the calendar hanging above the table, a relatively short list attached to the top right corner by a clothespin.

“Well... best get ready, then,” I sigh before strutting back down the hallway and into my room.

“Shower, get dressed, have something to eat, and then get the groceries so you’ve got the rest of the day to yourself,” I grumble as I swing open the door to my closet, snatching a darkly colored shirt and shorts before crouching down to grab a pair of fresh boxers.

I pause for a moment, feeling the fabric between my fingers with an almost childlike fixation. I lift the articles to my nose, taking a long, deep breath of the faintly flowery scent.

Bryan used the wrong detergent again... Forgetful possum...

With a quiet chuckle, I get back up and trudge into the bathroom, flicking the light switch with my free hand. The lamp sputters to life after a brief pause, illuminating the room with its muddy, yellow light.

“Alrighty. Shower time,” I mutter as I set my fresh clothes near the sink before slip out of my boxers and into the shower, pulling the curtains closed behind me.

With methodical motions, I begin to turn the knob above the faucet, the steady torrent of water quickly reaching the desired temperature. As it does, I pull down on the faucet, the showerhead above dowsing me in a pleasantly warm drizzle.

As if on cue, I slowly begin to turn in a circle below the cone of rain, gently scrubbing my coat as I do.

“That’s the spot...” I sigh as I run my hands through my greasy hair, the hot droplets of water tracing the contours of my broad frame.

A steaming hot shower never fails to make me feel refreshed, though it does tend to make me more thoughtful than usual.

I reach to my left, grabbing a sleek, black bottle labeled “Canine Body Wash”. With a gentle squeeze, I squirt a generous amount of the sticky substance into the palm of my hand. I can’t help but sneak a quick whiff of the strongly smelling body wash, the strong, masculine scent making my cheeks light up in delight.

Without any further hesitation, I begin vigorously scrubbing my coat, white suds slowly starting to appear all over as I do. Once completely coated in the fluffy clouds of foam, I step back under the showerhead, allowing the suds to be washed away by the pleasantly warm drizzle.

Damn, this feels so good...

I absent-mindedly stand there for a moment, letting the warm sensation soak me through and through. It felt good to stand there like that, just letting the delicate

droplets inch along my contours, like a pair of eager hands running their fingers through my fur.

I just wish I had someone else to share this with me... Hell, any company would be good to have. I just wish I had someone else around... someone to go out to the woods with... to read stories under the same tree and to enjoy each other's company...

I let out a long sigh before turning the knob back to its original position.

“No time for that. You’ll end up standing here all day with that kind of wishful thinking.”

I swing the curtain aside and grapple my towel from the metal hanger mounted to the wall, swiftly drying myself off from head to toe before stepping back in front of your mirror.

My eyes slowly scan the image that looks back at me: a tall, broad shouldered canine with short hair, lavish, green eyes, and a coat of black fur peppered by brown splotches. As I my gaze begins to lower, I see the thin trail of white that runs from the middle of my chest down to my navel, drawing attention to my slight belly and plump sheath. The longer I stand there, the more embarrassed I begin to feel, my cheeks lighting up as I shake my head.

“Done admiring yourself?” I chuckle, as if teasing myself.

I shift my gaze away from the mirror and to the pile of clothes sitting on the ceramic counter. I peel apart the lump of fabric before slipping into my chosen selection of attire: pale, blue boxers, a black shirt advertising an old bookstore I used to work for, and a pair of loosely fitting shorts.

“Much better,” I chime as I look myself over again, the dark color of my shirt and calm shade of my short complementing my coat quite nicely, while the cut of my shirt suits my frame snugly.

Without further ado, I meander back into my room, mumbling to myself as I begin to plan out what I’m going to take with me.

“Might pack myself something to eat when I get back. Oh, and I’ll be able to bring my new book with me, too. Just me, a good meal, and a great book to waste the day away. But that would imply that reading a book is waste of time... Bah, whatever. Let’s just get some grub before I buy groceries so I can go read.”

I step over to my desk, removing my messenger bag from the seat of my chair before grabbing the rather sizeable novel resting atop the quaint little piece of furniture.

A distinct click followed by the ruffling of fabric mingles with the quiet ambient of the outside world, my novel of choice now safely packed away for later.

“I definitely need to take some water with me since it’s supposed to get pretty hot today,” I mutter as I make my way back into the kitchen, my bag in-tow.

As I rummage through the kitchen, my lonely musings begin to fill the air, my own words seeming to serve as my company when I am otherwise without. I’ve grown accustomed to hearing my own voice in a setting such as this. Being able to hold a conversation with myself is likely why I’ve been branded as the odd one out, but I never saw much wrong with a bit of one sided conversation. Besides, some of the most interesting topics come to mind when you get to talk to yourself.

“Just some toast with cheese for breakfast,” I murmur as I place two slices of bread into the toaster, pushing down on the small handle to lock the bread in place.

As the inner lining of the toaster begins to turn a hot red, I open up the fridge to retrieve two slices of the unmarked cheese resting in one of the drawers. Cheese in-hand, I pull open one of the countless cabinet doors, snatching a small plate from atop the tower of porcelain dishes. A comical slap breaks the quiet atmosphere as I set the two slices on my plate, managing to pull an amused grin out of me.

The familiar creak of my chair greets me as I take a seat at the table on the other end of the kitchen, my wandering gaze shifting to the slowly spinning fan above my head.

Probably should turn up the speed. ‘s a bit too slow for the heat we’re gonna have today...

I reach up and tug one of the two dangling switches, the speed of the fan starting to increase as I sit back down.

“Much better,” I sigh as prop my chin up with my right paw, the other beginning to rhythmically tap the wooden tabletop.

Guess today’s just gonna be another lazy day... nothin’ to worry about and just a quiet day to look forward to.

My lips begin to curl into a smile as I shut my eyes, attentively listening to the gentle rhythm of my finger dancing on aged wood.

I might have to go into town to get groceries, but that's a fair trade-off for a day to myself in woods. No one to bother me and my own thoughts... just the way I like it...

As I sit in my own little bubble of quiet, I happen to overhear a sound most peculiar; dull, almost inaudible thumps come from the floor above me, as if someone were trudging about on the second floor.

What in the...?

My ears begin to twitch, subtly adjusting themselves as I listen for any other noises from above. Moments later, I hear them again: heavy, forced footsteps.

Who the hell is up there making all that noise...? Better yet, who would even be up there in the first place?

I give a thoughtful pause, pondering the possibilities.

Could it be... the figure from yesterday...?

I shake my head at the idea, a lofty chuckle parting my lips.

No way. It's been forever since we've had someone new move in, and it's been even longer since it's been someone from the city. So what the hell would someone like him be doing in a little town like this...? If he's even here, that is...

The sudden pop of the toaster yanks me back from my thoughts, once again grounding me in reality.

Whatever... I shouldn't dwell on it too much. Besides, I was probably just hearing things; no need to get all paranoid over something that was just my own imagination.

I wander over to the toaster, carefully snatching my slices of bread from within the thin slots.

*But what if it isn't just my imagination... what if someone actually **is** up there?*

With mechanical motions, I adjust the cheese slices to perfectly align with the edges of my toast.

Should I go to greet them? Or should I be the reserved and not even make my presence known to the new resident?

I take a step back, my gaze shifting back to the ceiling as I listen attentively for any other signs of their presence. To my dismay, I hear nothing; only the gentle hum of the fan masks the buzz of the cicadas.

Maybe it was just my imagination... No use fretting over something I'm not even sure was real... 'd be nice to have a new neighbor, though... maybe... if someone is there... maybe I can make a new friend...