

Amber needed to get away from her mother. The young rat couldn't take any more of her drunken rants and beatings. She didn't know where to run to except for Eklund Park; she'd hide away there all the time when she was little, because it was near her house. She wore what she would always wear when she retreated this time of the year: jeans that allowed her naked tail to stick out comfortably, whatever t-shirt she grabbed, and her favorite yellow, pull-over hoodie that also fit comfortably over her round ears and fiery red hair. She was never comfortable wearing the specialized footwear and gloves to keep her digits warm; she got used to the cold and the various textures on the ground that rubbed against her feet paws. Unlike her previous retreats, she left the key to her house and her mom's car behind; she only carried what she needed: one of her dad's old wallets for money and identity, a cheap pay phone for emergencies, and a desire to never return.

Like nearly all of the inhabitants of Axeford, she was one of the *Humanalia*: animal-like beings that had a general human-like figure to them. Some say they're better than humans, some say they're worse, some say they're just like humans but look a little different. Amber had no interest in those kinds of debates, or any for that matter; she had enough to worry about after graduating high school a year ago.

When she walked a fair distance from her house, she soon found herself at the usual trailhead that led into the park. Not too far off ahead, Amber could see how it forked once it reached the creek. The deciduous trees and fallen leaves covered the areas surrounding the trails and creek.

"Ok...no turning back this time," she tried to encourage herself, "maybe you'll find someone to crash with until you get it together."

She entered. The skies became overcast, ever so slowly greying out the sunlight.

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Every day became more and more of a blur to Jeremy, as if they were slowly morphing together into one unit of time and losing their distinction. Yet the young fruit bat remembers why he came here in the first place, why he had to run: he came out to his parents his senior year of high school. Since then, he hasn't gone back. He's lived in a cave in Eklund Park just trying to survive on his own.

The colder months were always the worst, and he hated asking passersby for supplies. He too was one of the *Humanailia* and, being a bat, his wings were attached to his arms rather than his back, like the avians he's seen around Axeford. His white fur wasn't thick enough to combat the cold, and long sleeves never worked for him. He could almost feel the chilling winds from outside passing through his thin, maroon wings; those sounds were too much for his large, sensitive ears at times. What he wore was the same as when he left his parents: an old, grey tank top ratted with age and use, loose jeans that also shown wear and tear, and a black leather belt that's seen better days. His short, black hair was greasy, even though he would sneak a bath in the nearby creek outside during the warmer months. Only his two ring piercings on his left ear were still shiny despite being exposed to the elements.

But with all this, he felt right at home. Jeremy was a natural cave-dweller, as all bats are, and his parents' house emulated that natural environment. The low lighting, natural moisture, various cave formations, the crystals reflecting any light that would come inside, and the right depth comforted him. He had no real reason to leave.

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Jeremy woke up in the middle of the afternoon, still clinging upside-down on his perch in the cave. He stretched his arms downward and yawned before gliding off his perch, righting himself up. Not having slept too far into the cave, he walked to the entrance when he noticed a pounding snowstorm outside.

"Winter came early this year," he muttered, his voice sounding a bit feminine, "It's only mid-November; and now this?"

The snow was coming down hard, carried by the fierce wind. It aided in knocking down any remaining leaves the trees had left, and blanketed the exposed ground in front of Jeremy's cave. The creek that flowed throughout the park, now becoming a frozen vein, passed in front of the deep cave in the park. The cloudy, mid-afternoon skies grayed out any sunlight as they continued to unleash snow onto the earth.

Jeremy quickly hugged himself, rubbing his wing arms. "Shit. Can't be going out today. Wish I would've prepared to hibernate sooner." He faced downward to keep his face out of the wind.

His ears became numb, but were still able to pick up something. He heard a female voice muttering profanities mixed in with a few squeaks of distress. He moved his head back up some, only to get a better view outside.

He noticed a small, petite brown rat struggling to make her way out of the woods in the deep snow, almost tripping with each step. When she got to the open area in front of his cave, the strong winds blew her hood off her head, exposing her hair and round ears.

He ran out of the cave towards the rat girl.

"Hey out there!" he shouted to her.

She looked up at him, squinting and shivering through the storm.

He motioned with a wing arm for her to come over to him. "It's a bit warmer in here!"

She looked around, nervous at what might happen if she went in. She sighed. "I guess have no choice," she said to herself.

She ran across the open, snow-covered ground towards the cave, keeping her head down to protect herself from the wind. As she kept moving towards the cave, she felt something on her back, guiding her inward.

"Thank you very much. It's a freezing hell out there," she said, wiping the snow off her clothes and body. She looked up at Jeremy, blood rushing to her cheeks when she saw him. "Oh..."

"It'll be warmer in here," he repeated in his slight, feminine voice. "Follow me; I'll show you around." He started walking backwards like some sort of tour guide.

Jeremy showed the rat girl everything: his perch, the storage holes where he kept anything he could get his paws on (all organized), and even the area where he relieves himself. All of this was in one large room deep within the cave, with a few smaller crevices he's never used that lead farther in. He even told her everything he knew about cave systems from living here and at his parents', before he ran away. Even though the grey, outside light barely illuminated the cave, their natural senses and reflective crystals kept them from running into the walls or stalagmites, or tripping over themselves.

He admired the rat girl for asking a lot of questions about his home and himself, though he was a little concerned as to why she's taken such a keen interest in him right away. It was then when he noticed her red hair. It fell just below her neck, and her bangs just covered her black eyes some. "Wow...I never realized how pretty you were," he muttered to himself. He noticed how her hair glowed in the low light, and how it complimented her brown fur and yellow hoodie.

"Come again?" she asked him.

"Umm, nothing," he said, rubbing the back of his head with a paw. He hoped she didn't notice him blushing through his white fur. "Oh yeah, I don't think I properly introduced myself. I'm Jeremy and, well, this is my home." He stuck out a paw.

"Amber," she replied, gingerly shaking his paw with hers. They both let go. "So, um, why did you decide to run away from your parents?"

Jeremy looked to the side. He could feel the mix of emotions he felt when he first left tensing his gut. "Well, you see, um..." he began as he held one wing arm with a paw, rubbing it gently. His ears lowered. "L-Let's just say my story was just like many other *Humanalia* who were attracted to other species along with their own." He looked downward. "I'm sure you've heard about them...us."

"Yes I have, but I don't believe you're wrong about that," she quickly replied, "I'm a little the same way."

"Really?"

"Yeah," she chuckled. "Funny...my first girlfriend was a rabbit; I guess I was being taboo in more ways than one." She chuckled.

Jeremy motioned her to the side of the cave and asked her to sit down before they continued. They both leaned their backs to the side of the cave, just far enough away from the mouth that the grey light from outside illuminated the opening.

He continued. "You're a little rebel, aren't ya," he teased, giving her a playful punch on the shoulder.

She rubbed her shoulder where he hit her, and felt flushed in her cheeks at his teasing. She chuckled. "I guess I am."

"And is that why you were crazy enough to come out here in this weather?"

She nodded. "In a way, yes, but..." She trailed off with what she was going to say and sighed. Her round ears lowered. "Never mind...I don't want to talk about it."

"You sure?" he turned toward her and reached a paw to comfort her.

She pushed his paw away. "It's nothing," she quickly replied.

He still reached over around her snout and gently touched her cheek. He turned her head to face his. "I may not have the best eyesight, but I have damn good hearing, almost too good. I can hear every drop of sediment dripping from the roof back there. I can hear everything outside being hit by the wind and snow, at least what's close to the cave; it actually hurts my ears if I get too close to the mouth when it's this windy out.

"And I can damn well tell you I can hear your pulse change when you say that. When someone's pulse changes suddenly like that when they speak, it usually means they're lying."

Her eyes became downcast.

He removed his paw from her cheek. He sighed. "I know it's not nothing. You don't have to tell me if you don't want to." He turned away from her, now looking at nothing in particular.

She looked back up at him, giving a half smile. Then Amber did something even she wasn't expecting her to do.

She leaned in and pecked him on the cheek.

Jeremy squeaked at the sudden gesture, his face becoming warm with embarrassment.

"Wha...What was that for?" he asked softly.

"I don't know..." she replied, "I guess...I guess I think you're a sweetheart." She smiled, still embarrassed by her sudden expression towards him. *I shouldn't have done that*, she thought to herself.

He smiled for a moment, then his expression went neutral. "Amber, I'm sorry but..." He tried to find the right words to say. "If you have feelings for me right now, I don't for you." He couldn't look her in the eye.

She frowned. "Ok...I understand."

"Well, see," he began, "I need to get my life together first. Frankly, I don't want to live like a raccoon in a cave for the rest of my life. I need to get some ground first." He paused to let her take it in. "Ok?"

She looked at him. "...Ok."

"You can stay here as long as you like though. I'm sure you don't want to go back home, whatever that reason may be."

She nodded. "Thanks."

They both leaned their backs against the cave wall, slightly exhausted from being emotionally drained. The storm still raged on outside; and the skies became darker and darker as the sunlight behind the cloud covers faded. They continued conversing with each other into the night about nothing in particular, until they were both too tired and fell asleep.

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Amber stirred awake. The wind died down, and the late morning sun shone through the mouth of the cave. She saw its light reflecting off the fresh, powdery snow,

giving it a glittery shine. The little bit of light that leaked into the cave bounced off the crystals, illuminating the inside as well. When she looked the other way, she jumped. Her and Jeremy fell asleep next to each other against the cave wall. Her sudden movements woke him.

Crap! I hope he doesn't get the wrong idea. She thought.

When he saw she was awake, he stretched his arms and yawned, though it sounded more like a drawn-out squeak. "What's wrong Amber?" he asked.

"N-Nothing," she replied, brushing her hair back. "Guess I'm just, uh, not used to sleeping in a cave is all." She gave a nervous chuckle.

He got up from where he was leaning. "Huh; that's surprising."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, I would imagine rodents would be used to living in conditions like this. Maybe it's just those that live on the 'wild' side of life."

"Yeah...maybe." She pondered a moment, not wanting to make things more awkward between them. But she knew this is something she needed to get out before staying with the fruit bat any longer. "Jeremy? Can I tell you something a bit...personal?"

He gave a curious look. "...Sure."

Amber looked towards him as she spoke. "Listen, I know we practically just met, but this is something that's been bothering me since last night. That kiss I gave you? I never meant to do that. Actually...I shouldn't have done that."

"Why?"

"See, I recently broke up with my girlfriend. I've promised myself never to get into any relationships until the pain's gone." She breathed deeply. "It was a long-distance relationship."

"I see." He kept eye contact on her. "How was the breakup?"

She had a hard time looking at him as she spoke. "It was a clean one; we're still good friends but...but..."

Jeremy put a paw on her shoulder. "I get it; you still wanted it to last forever." She nodded.

"Listen, I know something that will cheer you up. Since it's an early winter, there's hardly going to be any wild food to gather in this park. You want to come into town with me and see how I get 'free' food there?" He asked as he indicated the "free" with finger quotes.

"Wait. You're not suggesting..."

"Eeeh, yeah pretty much." He gave a toothy grin.

She shoved his paw off her shoulder, looking at him sternly. "Look, I may have run away and chose not to go back home, but I'm not going to let you turn me into some...thief!"

"If you want to survive on your own while trying to get your life back together, you're going to have to take some risks."

"We don't have to steal anything; look," she showed him her dad's wallet, "There's at least \$100 in here."

Jeremy rubbed his chin with a paw, looking at the wallet quizzically. "How did you get that?"

Amber's eyes went downcast. "I...I stole some of it from my mom; the rest was all I had left in my account." She looked up at him. "But I'm *never* going to steal again, ok?"

Jeremy was still looking down at the wallet for a moment, almost staring at it in awe. "I can't remember the last time I had a good look at bills, let alone use them." He looked up at her. "We'll have to use this sparingly for now, obviously." He got closer to her and embraced her with his wing arms. "Thank you Amber."

She wiggled her arms to put the wallet back in her pocket and returned the hug, squeezing tightly. Jeremy did so in response. He could feel and hear her steady, beating heart against his chest. *I like the idea of us*, he thought to himself, *I want to tell her but...I think I should wait. No, I KNOW I should wait.*

She let go of the fruit bat before he did the same.

"Let's get going then before it gets while it's still calm out. Trust me, my eyesight's bad enough, and the cold and wind doesn't make it any better."

She nodded and followed him out of the cave.

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Jeremy would normally fly to wherever he planned to steal from, usually the Walter's drug store that wasn't too far from Eklund Park. He was used to carrying a few things at a time when he would rob the store. Amber was a great help for him, even if that meant he wouldn't be able to fly to and from his cave like he normally does when he went on a heist. *This girl...I don't think I ever got this lucky before. I'm so used to being just a passing glance or an excuse for sympathy, but with Amber...* His thoughts and fantasies trailed off when he realized they exited the Walter's drug store.

Amber spoke first after setting down what bags she carried on a nearby bench, covered in a light layer of snow. "We should call a cab; my paws can't take much more walking in this cold." She tried wrapping herself further to keep warm while she talked on her cell phone.

Jeremy set his bags down and embraced Amber, trying to keep her slightly warmer from the cold with his thin wings. The day was late, the winds colder and harsher, his wings and arms began to numb, but Amber's small, rodent body gave just enough warmth to keep the pain down.

After Amber got off the phone, they stood there in an embrace for a few quiet moments. Jeremy was about to say something when a light grey, green-striped tiger in a taxi van pulled up in front of the Walter's. Jeremy and Amber grabbed their bags and got in the vehicle. They both noticed the pungent smell of his natural odor and cigarettes in the taxi as soon as they got in. He only wore a blue plaid shirt, loose jeans, and a grey trucker hat that covered his brown hair that was tied in a ponytail; his feet paws were bare against the pedals.

"It's a little too cold for a picnic eh?" the tiger joked. The couple chuckled awkwardly. "Don't worry; I can get you two to Eklund. I've driven around plenty of homeless kids like you before." He then headed to the park.

Eklund Park didn't seem that far by car, even with the dangerous driving conditions. The tiger kept sharing anecdotes about his past passengers, his life, and his boyfriend to the couple. Jeremy nor Amber spoke during the drive to the park, except when the tiger pulled into the parking lot they said was closest to their cave.

He quickly turned around to them as they unbuckled their seatbelts. "Before you two lovebirds go, I recommend looking into the Axeford Aid Mission shelter downtown. They should help you kids get back on your feet, plus you won't have to live in that cave anymore." He pointed at Jeremy. "They do accommodate for different species of *Humanlia* such as yourself bat boy; you won't feel entirely alienated. Trust me."

He looked at the meter, then looked at Amber as she was getting out her wallet. He held up a paw. "Keep your money kid; you'll need it. It wasn't that long of a drive anyway, but I know I'm gonna get hell from my boss about this."

She put her wallet away. "Thank you...sir," she said quietly.

"Not a problem," he said as he pulled out his pack of Camels from the glove compartment. "You two have a good evening now, and try to keep warm as best you can, ok?"

"We will," Jeremy replied. "You have a good evening too."

The tiger tipped his hat to them. "See you kiddos around."

Jeremy and Amber left the taxi and headed back to their cave in the early winter night; their plastic bags with all their supplies flapped in the harsh wind before they got between the trees.

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Evening came. Darkness enveloped the outside of the cave. A harsh wind blew in frequent gusts. The two stayed deep in the cave, away from the piercing cold that came from its mouth.

As soon as they got back, Jeremy started a fire, mostly for Amber's sake, and showed her how he usually stores everything. He then just sat in front of the fire, staring blankly. He shuffled so that he was able to grab his knees, his wings covered up most of his legs as he did so. As he sat there, he had a hard time grasping how he never met anyone as helpful as this rat girl. Strangers would give him supplies, sure, but no one ever gave him money or was willing to pay for him. He thought about the tiger taxi driver, and how no one has offered him resources to get him off his feet before. If Amber hadn't called a cab, or had a cell phone for that matter, he'd still be stuck where he was at right now. He knew how she felt about him, and he was starting to feel the same way towards her.

Amber came up to him, noticing his blank stare. "Hey."

"Hey."

"What's wrong?" she asked as she sat next to him.

He shifted some, unsure of what to say except, "Nothing really."

She put her paw on his shoulder. "We've shared a lot of things with each other. I could tell after we got back that it isn't 'nothing' that's wrong. What's going on?"

He turned his head towards her. He then reached over to Amber and hugged her, followed by a deep kiss on her lips.

She returned that passion to him.

He quickly broke the kiss when he started feeling his member getting hard, hoping Amber didn't notice. "I'm sorry..." He looked away from her.

She gently caressed his face with her paw and turned him back towards her. "You shouldn't be. I was the one who shouldn't have expressed how I felt earlier." She pecked him on the cheek. "But I guess you feel the same way," she said, smiling.

"It's just that...I've never met someone who's been so helpful to me. No one would give me money, or a ride, or someplace else to live, or anything other than barely what I need," he said, crying some. "I'm so glad to have met you and...I wouldn't mind having you around forever."

"I'm glad to have helped," Amber said quietly, "But you helped me find a place to stay. I'm so damn sick of my mom; I don't want to go back there ever again!" She took a moment to relax herself. "And I don't care where I live, so long as it's with you."

They held each other tighter. They began that passionate kiss again, deeper this time, tasting each other's tongues. Jeremy felt his member pressing hard against his jeans, anxious to escape. He gently lowered Amber onto the ground; Amber still held onto him, pulling him down on top of her. He hardly noticed himself starting to grind his bulge against the petite rat's groin.

Amber held her lover close to her. She felt her panties getting wet from being this close to the bat. She broke their passionate kissing, but didn't want it to end. She looked deep into his eyes. "So," she began to say before giggling, "Why don't we take those pants off, huh?"

"Mmm, they are getting in the way," he replied. He let go of her and balanced himself over her. "Maybe you should do the same," he said, grinning.

Jeremy got on his knees and started to undo his pants while Amber did the same beneath him. Once his briefs came off and his member sprung out, he carefully kicked the garments behind him so they wouldn't get in the fire. The cave was kept warm enough by the fire, and he hardly noticed any cold that got in from outside on his exposed penis.

Amber began to undo her jeans, but felt Jeremy start to tug at them, exposing her brown, fuzzy legs and her damp panties. He threw her jeans where his were at and got on top of her again.

"Much better," he said, kissing and grinding her again. He reached under her hoodie and shirt, feeling around for her breasts. They weren't big, but they felt firm against his paws; they were also bare against his pads and digits. He then started to lift

her hoodie and shirt off, Amber helping him in the process. He proceeded to take his shirt off as well, then tossed their tops on the growing pile of clothing.

Still prone, and naked, on top of each other, he then reached a paw down near her panties as best as he could. He felt his finger become wet after just barely touching her pussy. He gently rubbed the cloth over her clit, up and down, up and down.

Amber began to squeak, pulling her legs closer together and tightening her grip on the bat.

He added another finger, still massaging her clit through her panties.

She started to moan.

He then put his paw inside her panties, gently massaging the outside of her pussy.

She continued to softly moan and squeak as Jeremy fondled with her, faster this time. She didn't want to let go of him; she didn't want him to stop.

He grabbed her panties and nearly ripped them off; his member ached to get a feel for the rat's soaked pussy. After throwing them aside, he pressed his lean body against her small figure, pinning her to the ground. He rubbed his hard dick against her lubed opening. He didn't care if any pre got inside. As he was about to penetrate her, he felt her quickly close her legs.

"Jer! Wait!" She panted heavily after all that ecstasy.

He lifted himself off of her some. "What?" he asked, slightly irritated, panting.

"Did we get any condoms?"

Shit! He thought to himself. "No. Don't worry about it. There's no way you could get pregnant from me."

She nodded. "Ok."

He laid on top of her again. He wasn't as hard now, but he quickly started to again after tasting her lips. Amber relaxed her legs again, aching to feel him inside her.

He rubbed his tool against her opening until it went in.

Both of them moaned in pleasure, loud enough that it echoed off the cave walls.

He began to fuck her, slowly at first. He started moaning with each thrust. His penis slid easily back and forth inside her. Every inch of her soaked walls tickled his rod in all the right places.

She felt him filling her insides with each thrust, even if it was slow going. She loved his warm body on top of her, dominating her, giving her little control of herself.

He started speeding up his thrusts, letting out small grunts as he let his testosterone-fueled dominance take over. He didn't care if her boobs were small, they still bounced perfectly to his rhythm. Still keeping his pace, he leaned in and started suckling on one of those small, but perfect teats. He could hear Amber moaning louder now, but this only drove him to fuck her harder.

She began to arch her back as Jeremy fucked her brains out. She wrapped her legs around his waist, pulling him closer to her. She didn't care how loud she moaned; this was heaven. His rapid thrusts, his dominance, his lips and tongue sucking her nipples, it all gave her a high she never felt before with someone.

He stopped his sucking and looked her in the eyes, still thrusting hard. "Ngh! I'm gonna cum," he panted, "you want in or out?"

"Give it to me! Show me what you got bat boy!" she cooed between breaths. She then grabbed his head and locked lips with him.

Jeremy thrust faster and harder; Amber contracted more and more around his penetrating cock. With their lips still locked together, he gave one final thrust, burying himself inside her before releasing his sperm.

Both of them moaned at his release. Even though their noises were muffled by the kiss, the echoes of their romancing bounced off the cave walls.

They released their kiss, both breathing heavily after their romp. Jeremy began to pull out, but Amber used her legs to push him back in.

"Leave it in. It feels good."

"I wouldn't mind that." He obliged.

They both laid there like they were by the fire, Jeremy on top of Amber, until the fruit bat went soft again.

He moved himself over by the cave wall and laid on his side, his crotch covered with his and Amber's cum. She laid on her side next to him, and wiggled her rump against his crotch; her crotch was also covered in their love juices. Jeremy raised a wing arm over her and pulled her closer to him.

The two lovers, the rat and the bat, never made a sound while they cuddled. They just listened to each other's slow, steady breaths, the fire crackling, the echoes of sediment droplets from the cave, and the gusts of winter wind outside until they fell asleep.