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WARNING: May contain coarse language, violence, gore, or sexual content. Reader discretion is advised.

Chapter 20. “Revenge, Remembrance, And Reconciliation”

“Are you going to say you’re sorry, smoothie, or what?”

Troy slowly turned his head to see the Major. He wasn’t sure why she was so angry.

“Well!?” She demanded with a hand on her hip and holding her tray in the other - her eyes searing a hole into his head.

His hands were full. He couldn’t reach the communicator even if he tried. He needed two hands to operate it regardless. He could try and mouth the words, but would they even translate?

“Hold this,” she said and shoved her tray into the chest of a tiger passing by.

She turned towards Troy while bringing her hands together in front of her chest. She interlaced her fingers and stretched her arms out while cracking her knuckles.

“Guess I’ll have to teach you to respect me and the other officers.”

She reached over his tray and grabbed the small plate with the loaf of meat on it in one hand and his drink in the other. Troy braced himself for he knew what was coming. She poured the drink over his head, then smashed the loaf of meat into his scalp. She dropped the glass onto his food, then used the plate to smash the tray from his hands. The plates and glass shattered upon impact. The food made a wet “*splat*” as it hit the floor and spread out from the impact. The tray hit the floor and bounced over to his left.

Many “oohs” and “ahhs” filled the room. Some giggled, chuckled, or laughed. Troy stared at the empty space between his hands that still held the invisible tray. Chunks of the loaf slapped against his shoulders as the rest of the whole slid down and splattered in front of him. He could feel the juice soaking his shirt and begin to seep into his briefs through the pants.

“Clean...this...up!” She commanded - the “p” popping from her snarling lips. “Eat. Lick the floor clean. I don’t want to see a spot of food left behind. We don’t waste our food, smoothie.”

Troy blinked and looked up at her stern face.

“DO IT!!!”

Troy narrowed his eyes as his head slanted to the left. He looked at her quizzically. He could feel his skin get warm. The blood roared through his veins. His heart slammed in his chest.

“You insubordinate sonova,” she growled as a balled-up fist launched his way.

Troy felt something ping in his head like the sign of an oncoming headache as he’d been experiencing recently. He thought he was bracing for impact, but his hands had other plans.

His eyes winced as he watched her fist land in his open hand. It was like slow motion. He could feel the tinge of pain resonating in his palm, but he curled his fingers around her fist and glanced in her eyes. He could see them slowly widen. The sound in the room was crystal clear like before, but everything was processing in his head slower. No. It was more like he was filtering out anything unnecessary. He could hear her breath. He could feel her muscles straining in his fingers. He even felt a couple of her knuckles pop.

He wasn’t sure what brought this on. Perhaps it was his body’s way of repaying him for all the times he’d been bullied in the past. Perhaps even recently. He felt the impact of his fist into the side of her ribs. Troy glanced over and saw the ripple travel from the impact through her fur under the sports bra or whatever cropped top she was wearing. He glanced back up at her bulging eyes as he heard every last whisper of breath leave her mouth. Troy grinned as he bunched up his arm muscles and sent her fist flying back her way.

The momentum of her arm caused her to spin around. Time seemed to speed back up as she stumbled back and grabbed her ribs while she tried to breathe air back into her body. Her padded feet and claws tapped the floor of the silent room. Troy could see the shocked faces of her entourage in the corners of his vision, but he stayed focused on her. He knew what was coming. As she heaved air into her lungs, her fists bunched up and he could see the mountains that made her biceps. Veins began to rise up through her fur in her arms.

“I’LL FUCKING KILL YOU!!!” She roared as she planted her foot.

Time seemed to slow down again. He watched her thigh muscle and right foot bunch up as she launched herself at him. Her left fist came forward as her right fist pulled back. She took two steps before launching her fist towards his face. Just as it was close enough to smell, Troy’s right foot pushed away and his hips engaged. He stepped to the side as the fist traveled past his nose. He heard a “squish” as her foot landed on the floor.

“Hwat!”

Troy’s eyes moved in time to watch her foot slide through the mess of the meat loaf and fly up behind her. Time seemed to speed up again as he watched her face land hard into the stir fry and vegetables. A collective gasp was heard throughout the room. She groaned as she began to push up from the floor. She twisted her butt to her left and claimed a seated position. Blood streamed from her nose as she brought a hand up to the side of her short muzzle. Her eyelids scrunched with rage but the rest was calm. She gasped her breaths in as she stared at him. Saliva and bits of food dribbled from her lips as they began to move.

“Kill him,” she muttered.

Loud cheers erupted as Troy watched her get to her feet. Her torso raised and dipped with each breath in her hunched over posture. Troy felt something slam into his back as plates and silverware clattered on the floor. He winced with the impact and took a step forward directly into her swinging fist. Breath rushed from his lips and it felt like his throat closed. He bent over and was about to reach for his stomach when he felt her hands grab his shirt in the back and helplessly watched her knee land into his chest. Troy’s body was rocked back upright in time for her to grab his shirt in one hand and prepare her fist for a strike to his face.

“Detain the Major!” Troy heard amongst the cheers.

The cheers died instantly. If they didn't, he was about to. He knew that semi-stern, angelic voice. He saw the Major's eyes go from rage to wide open shock. Her lower lip began to quiver.

"P-President," she muttered.

The Major let Troy's shirt go. He felt his knees buckle as his weight pressed on them. He fell on his right side and tried to get air back into his burning lungs. He could see the underside of those massive breasts housed within a silky black, short sleeve, v-neck blouse. A sliver of air finally touched his lungs.

"Major," Alundra began.

"I apologize, ma'am. I've disgraced myself and my subordinates with petty..."

"Enough!" Alundra commanded. "You'll have your say in due time. Take her away."

"Y-yes ma'am," the Major quietly said, sounding defeated.

Armed guards that flanked the President came forward and grabbed one of the Major's arms each. Troy coughed and he wheezed air through his mouth. They escorted her from the cafeteria as the President spoke.

"Maybe I wasn't clear when I said that regardless of title and rank that I won't put up with this shit."

Troy watched as her eyes scanned the room. He found strength enough to roll onto his backside.

"I don't understand why when we get new members into our home that you all lift your legs and piss all over them, kick them, and hurt them like they're criminals. We are *not* barbarians and they are *not* your property. I refuse to stand here and allow you to act as and treat them as such."

Troy felt the pain vanish. He could feel...he couldn't feel anything! He wasn't sure if it was adrenaline or he was about to pass out.

"I was elected to this position because the majority of you believed in the change I'd bring. Sorry 'bout your luck to those that didn't. We...are...*not*...savages! We are what's left of our planet. That's more than our planet left us. I don't want to lose any of

you,” Alundra majestically spoke, her voice beginning to overrun with sadness. “Coexist and survive. Fight and we fall.”

The President passed her tray to the Commander. She turned and walked close to Troy. She stopped and leaned over while extending her hand. Troy looked up into her eyes while holding his chest with crossed forearms. He felt himself calm down as he looked at her hand, then back into her eyes. He could feel the rage build within him again.

“I’m so done with this,” he thought as he got up and walked towards the exit next to the dish drop-off and hand washing station he’d spotted earlier.

“And with that, another bridge is burned,” he heard Alundra sadly say as he walked through the room.

Troy slapped the door control and darted to the left. He pulled off the shirt and wiped off his head and face, then threw the shirt against the wall next to a room where a female horse of some form screamed like she was being raped. Her wrists were bound together and hooked to a chain attached to the ceiling. Her ankles or whatever were shackled and chained to the ceiling - spread wide apart. Tears streamed from her eyes as she whimpered around the large red ball in her muzzle that was attached to a strap that secured behind her head. A tall otter...thing turned and reached his hand out with the second finger extended. Troy sneered at the beasts as he continued to walk down the hallway.

Troy wasn’t sure what was really happening in there or what that gesture meant and he didn’t care. He needed to get to his room and fast. He was cursed by the realization that it wasn’t *really* his. Despite that, it felt like the only sanctuary he’d had in the last...however long. He needed to vent. He wanted to scream. He was so angry. Humiliated. Disrespected. Mistreated. He’d never been this angry - even when he found Jackie cheating on him.

He felt lost. Something caught his attention - sanitized space. He must’ve been close to the medical bay. It was almost soothing - even after all that he’d been through. That smell or the smell of lumber, the smell of sawdust, or even just fresh air always seemed to calm him. Fresh air mixed with lavender was the best smell.

A door to his right opened. Voices spoke empty, meaningless words from the entryway. Troy stomped his way to the door with his foul mood. A random animal was talking with whomever was inside. Troy stepped up to the door and stopped suddenly. He backed up the extra step he’d taken when he noticed what was inside.

Through the door and past the lab coat clad manimal was a dissected...human...body.

It looked like...it was...

“Jon?” He thought as his heart sank into the lowest depths of his chest.

Troy felt deflated. His anger manifested to its peak. He couldn't fight back the tears that welled up and fell from his eyes. His eyes burned. He felt the heat in his face, the tightness in his chest, his fingernail-less fingers digging into his palms, and his muscles bunching up in his arms. He began to shake uncontrollably as his feet shuffled towards the door. Troy glanced over at the doctor or whatever she was in front of him. Her face told a shocked and horrified tale. She reached out and grabbed his shoulders while speaking to him. It was muffled nonsense that was lost on him in the moment. His eyes bounced from her to Jon and back.

He felt as if a passenger in a vessel controlled by another being while watching the following events unfold. His hands came up and pressed into the green lizard's chest. His mouth opened as a primal roar escaped his throat. His hands grabbed the lizard's collar, his muscles flexed as he pulled her close, his arms extended violently, and the lizard was sent flying back until she landed on the floor with a loud “*thud*.” His knees buckled slightly, his body became heavy, and it was hard to breathe. Tears flowed from his eyes. He used all of his strength to reach out with one hand as he sluggishly stepped forward. His eyes felt heavy. Each step felt as if the soles of his shoes were magnetized and his body made of steel.

His arm swung back down to his side. His head nodded down until he was looking at the floor. His foot pushed back and his feet tapped in reverse until he caught his footing. He looked up to find himself back in the hallway. He turned his feet and shuffled them along the floor. His foot caught in one shuffle sending his shoulder into the wall. He felt his shoulders bouncing with the movement as he slid along the wall. His mind was blank, his heart was slowly pounding, his body was weak, and his brain felt like a balloon about to burst. He wasn't sure where he was or where he was going. Everything began to look the same.

There was a door to the left. He shoved his shoulder against the wall and slapped the button next to the door. A light dust cloud filled the entryway as the door slid to the side. It looked like a maintenance room. He shuffled up to a workbench that had a toolbox upon it. He forced his arm to raise and his hand grabbed a screwdriver. He wasn't sure why he grabbed the item. Perchance he'd jam it into the door after he got

back to his room and seal himself away until he perished. Maybe he'd just jam it in his neck. Whatever the reason, he gathered it would be better than this second layer of the underworld he'd found himself in.

This couldn't be real. This couldn't be happening. Maybe he was in a car wreck or something on the construction site hit him in the head and he was in a coma. This had to be all just some strange science fiction/pornography mash-up he'd conjured in his subconscious. It had to be the side effects of some opiate he was injected with. He'd never been under any before, but he wasn't aware they caused lucid delusions...nightmares. Perhaps, since he was lucid, he should have more control over it. Maybe he did. Maybe there was a way to find out.

Troy made his way back into the hallway. As he traveled, a feeling of familiarity washed over him. He made a right, then he found the three doors on the left with two on the right. He took the third right to the end of the hall. He pressed the button by the door with a lame hand. The door opened to reveal his domicile. A faint smell of freshly laundered clothing touched his nostrils. He traced it back to the dresser. Everything else was as he'd left it.

He shuffled over to the bed and his body fell into the mattress with a "*fwump*." His forearms slapped against his thighs. He looked down at his hands. His right hand tightly gripped the handle of a red-handled, flat-headed screwdriver with a fairly long shaft and an equally fairly wide end. Bits of dried meat substitute clung to his green arms and hands. It reeked of soy and seafood with a smoky scent covering it up. The tart smell of the cranberry could be found just under that. A faint perfume like that of fake rain was hidden beneath it all. The events of the day passed by in his head that were attached to these smells. He wondered if Luger was okay.

He shook his head and squeezed fresh tears from his eyelids. He opened his eyes to focus on the screwdriver. It seemed to be generously used as the finish was chipped off the end. He noticed something in the curved bed of his nails - if he had any. His finger passed over a hard bit. It seemed they were starting to grow back. He could hear his breathing. His heartbeat. There were footsteps and voices outside his door. There was an underlying hum. It seemed as though he could hear it and feel it in the soles of the shoes. A metallic taste with a touch of the cranberry filled his dry mouth. Albeit a tad foreign, it was good to finally have all of his senses back. It didn't change the fact that he'd found himself used, abused, humiliated, and...and...

A shiver or similar sensation slowly fell down his spine. His left side dipped. It began to tingle. The feeling reached the tail of his spine. His right side drooped and began to tingle as well. It was like his whole body was "asleep" and "waking up." The

sensation began to crawl back up his spine. Something was different about this one. It didn't cause his skin to crawl and bump up. His left eye felt like it was sagging. His left shoulder went limp. He began to panic. He knew of several things this could be, but this felt like indicators for a heart attack! He couldn't feel his arm. It felt like the whole left side of his body was...was gone! His heart raced. His breathing became erratic. This was worse than a heart attack! His right eye and shoulder sagged. The screwdriver clattered upon the floor as his body slumped to the left and he found himself lying on the bed.

"What is this? Is this a heart attack? A panic attack? Aneurysm? Is there a clot in my spinal fluid?"

Several options swirled in his head. Whatever it was, it wasn't good. Everything felt like it wasn't there. Like it was just...gone! This feeling was all too familiar. Nothingness.

"What did he mean by, 'Tell her you love her or you'll regret it?'" Who's 'her?'" Troy thought as his brain shut down.

There was a dim light. He felt weightless. Was this another dream? Was it like before? He didn't care. No, rather, it didn't matter. There was calm. Peace.

The light grew brighter. Everything seemed to make sense - though there was nothing to make sense of. Was he a "he" or did he just...*exist*? No matter. He looked away from the light for a split second. There was nothingness surrounding him. Just that light. The 'nothing' didn't feel right. Not like that light did.

An image came into focus. He felt like he was being sucked into the world where that image existed. It was his grandma. She smiled as she came closer and leaned over in front of him. Her form became more corporal.

"How are you doing, my shy guy?" She asked - her voice as kind as ever.

He smiled back. He felt the joy across his face. It was...warm. Welcoming.

"Why are you here, shy?"

"Shy" was his grandma's nickname for him. He was always a bit shy. It didn't help that he couldn't...

"Where are you going?" She asked, interrupting his thoughts.

He looked to the side. He looked back at her with a beaming smile. He walked towards her and wrapped his arms around her neck. He felt her love flow through him. Just like he did back then. She wrapped her arms around his sides and rest her hands upon his shoulders. She pat his back with a hand as she spoke.

"My you've grown."

He didn't want to let go. Never again. He was never sad around his grandma. His shoulders felt lighter as if all his fears, frustrations, and pain melted away. He missed her so much.

"No, shy. I've always been here. I'll always be here. I know things seem difficult right now. But I know you'll find a way to get through this. I'll be right here with you helping you along the way."

She slid out of the embrace. Her eyes sparkled and her smile affirmed her words. He could feel the warmth spread from her hands as she held them on his shoulders.

"I know that you'll put your differences aside. You'll come to feel something for her." Grandma dragged her hand from his shoulder and placed her palm to the middle of his chest. "Right here. Maybe not at first." She tapped his chest. "I know it won't feel right at first. "She's too different from me. How could I ever love her?" That's what you'll think, but your heart will tell you otherwise. Follow your heart, shy. Follow...your...heart."

Her form began to disappear. His surroundings began to disappear.

"There's people out there that need you, shy. Don't take that away from them. Especially her."

"Thank you, grandma. I won't. But...who is *she*?" He asked.

Her voice was quiet. It sounded and felt ethereal.

"Tell her, shy. She deserves to know how you feel."

Her form and voice disappeared. He stared at the light. It felt welcoming. It was like a best friend he'd known his entire life. It felt like...a new beginning. His grandma was right. He had work to do. He needed to know if his world still existed. He needed to

leave behind something....something memorable. He couldn't leave things as they were. Not like this.

He took a deep breath and let it out. A smile lifted his cheeks. He closed his eyes and reopened them. The light shifted. It arched back as he turned away. He stood tall and took a step towards it. He saw the light arch around him. It stretched and twisted until it looked like wings spreading from his back. He stepped forward and swooped the wings down to propel him forward. He needed to make it out of this darkness.

The light behind him faded. A faint light appeared ahead of him. This light didn't feel as welcoming. It did feel familiar - like he'd been there before. It didn't feel warm. It was nothing like the light from before - the light that propelled him forward.

"Give her a chance," Troy heard beside him. "The road less traveled."

Troy looked over and saw that wolf creature. He seemed different. His fur was snowy white and his eyes looked clearer. Friendlier. Comforting. Troy felt compelled to step away from this version of him, but he felt drawn to him. Cautiously so. Troy could still feel that hatred dripping from the claws and teeth that chased him before.

"I traveled down a similar road when I was alive."

The creature looked at Troy. He seemed sad. So much sadness oozed from those eyes. It seemed to affect his entire appearance. His fur began to darken to a smoky gray, then black.

"So much regret. I've tried several times to..."

His jaw quivered as he looked away. He cleared his throat.

Troy couldn't hold it in any longer. "Who...are you?"

The creature looked at Troy with confusion.

"I'm Mykol. Remember?" He chuckled. "Fuckin' Archangel of Sorrow," he said sarcastically, then laughed. "I don't know what else to call myself." He chuckled again, then said, "Just call me Mykol." He visibly and audibly sighed. "Irony coming from a non-believer," he said as he looked away. "I just seem to be a ghost stuck in purgatory watching lives I'm a part of as they struggle. I just want them to be happy." He looked back at Troy. He seemed to be on the verge of tears. "Why is that so difficult?"

“What are you talking about? What’s an “Archangel?” I don’t understand,” Troy said in utter confusion.

Mykol shook his head. “Doesn’t matter. Not to you anyway. Luckily, you’re from a mostly non-religious planet. I found out...” He trailed off as he paused. His hands came up, then went back down to his sides. “Six...decades of wondering what was wrong with me. Who I was. The government claimed I was a product of genetic engineering.” Mykol looked away - visibly upset. “What kind of genetic engineering would cause a normal human to transform into a wolf?” He looked back at Troy. “Let alone a wolf that sprouted wings. Werewolves are the things of myth and legend. Right?” He looked away again. “I know genetic engineering made the beast people.” He shrugged and looked back at Troy. “Sorry. They preferred to be called Furries, Scalies, Avians, and the like.” He looked at Troy quizzically. “What did you call them? “Manimals?” That’s fitting, honestly. But, still, what kind of “*genetic engineering*” causes...*this*?”

Mykol brought his hands palm up in front of his chest. Ghastly crunching and snapping could be heard. His fur began to disappear and his entire frame shifted from the digitigrade wolf with wings to a bipedal, plantigrade human. He glanced over at Troy with his, now normal, blue eyes. Troy noticed the scar on his chest was different from the one in his wolf form. It wasn’t across his heart like he was stabbed. It looked like an operation scar on the side of his chest. Much smaller. Troy was lost as to what kind of operation would have caused it. Mykol noticed Troy’s stare.

“Some things even / can’t explain. I’m still looking into that. Matter-of-fact,” he said as his shoulders slumped and he looked down. “I’ve already said too much. I’m sorry”

Troy felt compelled to go to him. To hug him. It was strange this “power” this “Archangel”...“Mykol” had. In his wolf form, he had this strangely sweet smell that pulled Troy in. In his human form, he smelled of earth. Like a fresh breeze maybe?

Mykol looked at Troy and turned away from him. “I always seem to give the ending away.”

His voice wavered as if he were beginning to sob. Visages of his followers or companions began to manifest around them.

“Don’t put too much stock into them. They aren’t even real,” Mykol said flatly. Sadly. “*They* were able to move on.” Mykol waved his hand and they disappeared. “I conjure them so that I’m not always alone - bits of my subconscious that escape to keep me in check. Keep me company.” He sighed. “Keep me sane,” he muttered quietly.

Troy had so many questions. He couldn't find the strength to move his lips.

Mykol turned back towards Troy. Tears welled in his eyes. A tear had caught in his bottom eyelash. It finally fell as he blinked. He looked away.

"I'm sure you won't understand the reference, but I'm like Charon - a sort of deity that aids lost souls towards their true path. I aid those in pain and suffering that are tied to my own soul in some way whether directly or, in your case, indirectly. I can't tell you who I'm tied to in your timeline. Just know it's a version of me. Someone that shares a piece of my very soul." He looked at Troy again. "Of course, I can't tell you *who* I'm tied to." He chuckled. "That'd be cheating." He hummed as he glanced away, then back at Troy. "It's not your time. You have a life to live." He brought his hands up. "I don't know why I'm telling you this." His hands fell as he looked away again. "Perhaps it's because you're the first one I've truly been able to speak with. The others have been vague references and dreams...nightmares. Anyway..."

It seemed like he was struggling to find the words to say next. He glanced at Troy, then away again. Like he was embarrassed, maybe?

"I'm trying to change. To change my own ending through others. I sympathize with so many of you. A tough life with glimmers of happiness. But...no *true, fulfilling* happiness. I feel like that's the only way I can move on. I want to be with my friends. My family. My lover. I feel like I've been here for hundreds of years just..." He sighed heavily. "Alone."

"You sure talk a lot," Troy said, still trying to understand the...*person's* plight.

Mykol looked over at Troy and shook his head. "You would too if you were alone for so long."

His body began to morph again. He returned to the magnificent white beast with the wings springing from his back. They spread out behind him like so many depictions of the angels Troy had seen in pictures and movies. It was a sight to behold. Despite their rough appearance and the occasional feather falling to the nonexistent floor, they were magnificent.

Troy felt that calm, peace, and chaotic feeling return. He wanted to reach out and touch the beast's wings. As they settled behind his back, Troy noticed his fur began to darken. A faint glow seemed to seep out from his eyes. His wings appeared to be more tattered and broken. His body held many parts in the fur where scars appeared - the

one on his chest being the most prominent. Troy was still very curious as to how one would survive a wound such as that. Even this one escaped him if it were from surgery. Was there something wrong with his heart?

"It's time," Mykol said as his wings settled behind his back with a few horrid cracks and crunches. More feathers fell into the darkness. "Unfortunately, we won't meet again," he said and angled his head away. He looked back at Troy. "Just remember," he said and placed his gentle hand on Tory's shoulder.

Troy suddenly felt unimaginable pain and torment from his touch - emanating from his eyes. Several images flashed in his mind. Men. Women. Children. Humans and animals alike...all dead. They were familiar faces - faces he'd seen in this purgatory before. Some of their faces hit Troy harder with the pain Mykol exuded.

That one female gazelle or whatever she was hit him the hardest. Troy remembered she was the one that stopped Mykol from attacking him in that one dream. Images of her standing out in a field across from another wolf or dog man holding a gun. He pulled the trigger and shot her. It seemed that she died in Mykol's arms. Another image flashed in Troy's head that showed her later. She was very much alive. She held such a pained expression as she spoke to him, then turned away and left.

Troy realized tears were streaming down his face. He wiped his eyes with his hand, then looked up at the wolf man. His face and eyes were filled with anguish.

More images filled Troy's head. He saw one of the lizard women. She had petechial hemorrhaging in her eyes and bruises around her neck. She lay on a bathroom floor with cuts spilling blood on the tiles. His vision skewed and traveled to another room. The other male wolf with the white on his chest was hanging from the ceiling. His lifeless body teetered from the makeshift noose. His vision shot through a cityscape until it stopped in a hospital bed. The female cheetah was lying in the bed. She is sickly thin. An MRI image flashed on the screen next to her. There was a massive aneurysm in her temporal lobe. The vision floated out into the streets. The fox/raccoon girl was all grown up. It didn't matter. She appeared to have been in a grisly car wreck. A semi truck was on top of her vehicle. Troy felt that this was somehow a relative of Mykol's. A child's cry could be heard in the background. Troy turned to see the thinly furred male cheetah. He, too, was now an adult holding onto a child. Tears streamed down his face and splattered onto his police uniform. The image flashed to him inside of a casket. Troy could feel what he could only describe as a father's heartbreak. It seems he was gunned down during a routine traffic stop.

More images filled Troy's mind. He wanted it to stop. The pain was too much. He wasn't sure how much more he could handle before completely breaking down himself. The final image filled his head. Mykol was in his own hospital bed. His lower jaw was partially missing. The image on the screen next to him was filled with cancerous tumors.

Troy couldn't take any more. He sobbed uncontrollably. His heart hurt so bad. He thought his life was bad, but this put his troubles into perspective. This manimal before him had been through and seen so much death in his life.

"How?" Troy cried. "Why?"

Mykol pulled his hand away with a pained expression. "Sorry about that. I didn't mean for that to happen." Mykol held his wrist in his other hand as he looked away from Troy. "You're *not* alone. Those furs - Furries or "manimals" as you call them - some of them care about you whether you accept it or not." He looked back at Troy with a hint of a smile. "You may even find love - *true* love - among them. I know first hand how strange that seems, but I found love with one."

Troy sniffled and wiped away his tears. He straightened up with a sigh, then looked over at Mykol.

"You *have* to tell her how you feel. No one deserves to feel alone. *Live* alone. Die alone."

Troy nodded as Mykol motioned towards the dim light just beyond him.

"It's time. Honestly, I've held you for too long. And...again...I apologize for the spoilers." Mykol winked. "I have a bad habit of revealing too much."

Mykol chuckled and stepped aside. Troy sighed again and stepped towards the light. He stopped next to Mykol and looked over at him.

"I don't know what just happened, but...thank you," Troy said with appreciation.

Mykol smiled and chuckled. "Don't thank me just yet. You have a bumpy road ahead, but it'll all be worth it. Trust me."

Troy smiled and nodded, then looked at the light once more. He marched forward with a renewed sense of purpose. The light became brighter and brighter until he felt weightless. He felt like he was falling. He closed his eyes and braced for some unknown impending impact.

The light became brighter. He could hear distant murmurs and other nondescript sounds. Everything was becoming louder and clearer. He struggled to open his eyes. They felt so heavy. The murmurs quieted as he groaned. The light hurt his eyes. He felt so heavy. It felt like something pinched his forearm. He felt naked. His head was pounding. His whole body was stiff, but he was feeling...something! It felt like something was loosely holding his hand.

Troy's eyes began to focus. A set of horns was in his view. He slowly looked down to see...Luger!? He...appeared to be asleep. Luger was the one holding his hand. His nose caught a familiar putrid smell. He looked past Luger to find the smelly feline curled up at his feet.

"Friggin' shit balls!" Exclaimed a familiar female voice.

"Welcome back to the world of the living," said another female voice.

Troy looked up from the foot of the bed to find Alundra.

"I guess I came to check on you at just the right time. Thank the Winged Savior you're okay," she said with a lot of thankfulness and a bit of exasperation. Her voice was soft and quiet like a mother's around her sleeping children.

"What's...going on here?" Troy wondered.