

The Hunters



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Chapter 2: Another Day at the Office

I hate Mondays. I think a cat said that, sounds like a cat type of thing to say. Well, this wolf can say it too.

Already, I can feel my stomach rolling. On top of everything else, that cookie last night was not a good idea – it never is.

Rolling out of my blankets, I landed face first on the floor. That was my first mistake; the second was getting a snoutfull of dust from between the floorboards - that would wake anyone up.

Levering myself up, I took a look out the window. I hadn't an alarm clock, so I was forced to play my schedule by ear. I may have big ears, but the morning traffic hadn't woken me - late again. Not by much though. A bit of a dash, and hey, maybe even some good luck for a change, I'll be on time - no problem.

I stumbled to the sink as I tried to work the kinks out of my back. The water had drained out overnight, leaving my offense to fashion dry and perhaps a touch cleaner. I tossed it over my shoulders and lapped some cloudy water from the tap.

That was about all the time I had. I made a bolt for the door, slamming it behind me with enough of a crash to rattle plaster loose from the rafters. My neighbors may have yelled, but I was already three floors down.

The sun was shining for a change when I broke out onto the street. Looks like it was going to be one of those rare days where you just wanted to be outside, and bask in the final echoes of summer. Sadly, I didn't have that opportunity. Three blocks down and one block over was Korksen Data Processing, my own little private love fest.

The building was exactly what you would expect of it, big, gray, impeccably kept up, and old as shale. The place looks like it's been chiseled from the side of a mountain, centuries ago, and staffed by gnomes of the gray-tweet-suit cult.

There was a huge front entrance, gilded in all sorts of finery, exclusively for the clients, of course. Us mere peons, we use a tiny little side door. It wouldn't be proper for an employee to ever brush shoulders with the most revered of all beings, the money carrying customer.

You know there has to be something wrong when we need to line up just to get into the place. By the way they run security around here you would think they were processing silicon rather than

pushing paper.

This is one of those situations where it's a good thing to wear a full-time fur coat. I feel for the poor saps who get pulled out for a full search. I've never really understood the whole modesty thing some people have going, but it's got to be cold when they want you out of your pants. For me it's easy, I'd let them keep the jacket, but then they wouldn't let me in the place. And oh, what a great shame that would be.

I kinda sorta recognize the guy running the doors today; I think his name is Ralph. They like to pick the biggest guys they can find for security around here. It doesn't matter if they're any good, as long as it looks like they can flatten you in a single swing.

Ralph's got to be pushing four hundred pounds. He's an ursine, bear, so that's round about normal. Not fat though, he's proven that on more than a couple of occasions; the last was to some loudmouth who thought talking back was a good idea – he received a crash course in how to fly.

"Security check. What's your name?" He didn't even look up.

"Tommy Taggart."

"Employee number?"

"Fourteen eighty-six." Despite the best efforts of my brain, I had that memorized by now.

Makes you wonder if they'd gone through that many people here...

"Badge."

Here we go again. "You know I don't have one, Ralph."

He finally tore his gaze from the idiot-sheet to look up at me, small red eyes squinting under the dim bulbs of the hallway. "What?"

"They don't give us badges in record processing, man. We're not even important enough for that." I couldn't help but smile; we went through this every time he was on duty.

"No badge..." He poked a finger down at the paper laying before him, as though the pictograms would suddenly cause something to jump up and tell him what to do.

"Ralph, I've worked here for almost a year." I put my hands down on the desk to try and get his attention, "You've seen me nearly every day, what's the worst I could possibly do? Leave a mess in the men's room?"

"Strip search."

"What!?" Ah, heck.

"Strip search," He smiled that stupid little grin of a person who knows he's got you on a technicality. "Shows here. If an employee comes to work without a badge, then they have to go through a full search."

"No freaking way." Now I wish I hadn't put my hands down, I wanted to slam them on the desk. "I told you, they don't give us badges. There's no way I'm going through this every morning!"

I felt a pair of shadows pass over me, and all of a sudden there were two more hulking security guards at either of my shoulders. They picked me up by the elbows and began dragging me backwards. Wonderful, now I was the morning's entertainment.

"Have fun, Tommy." Ralph tipped his hat as my heels skidded around the corner. No way was I saving him any food at the next office lunch.

The so-called interrogation room wasn't far away. Last time I'd been here was when I made the indiscretion of trying to take home a couple of company pens - they didn't like that at all. The room was nothing more than the office of some low level manager they'd sacked back in the distant past. Now all it held was a couple of chairs, and a bunch of lights that made you feel like a moth before a flame.

The security chief, Mr. Mayfield, showed up surprisingly quickly, didn't even make me wait the

obligatory forty five minutes. He was a tabby of some description, and there was no love to be lost between the two of us. I'd only met him twice before, the first time had been in this room, and then again when he had tried to accuse my entire floor of somehow making off with a few dozen office desks. Yah, I never did figure that one out either.

Unlike me, he was decked out in a suit, with pants, shirt, tie, the whole ensemble. No clue how he managed to claw his way into that mess every morning. The few times I'd worn something like that it always made my fur lay the wrong way. I'd itch from the moment I put it on, daydreaming of shredding the entire constricting contraption.

"Mr. Taggert, so nice to see you again." Unlike Ralph, he was a guy who did the whole 'small talk' thing. He seemed disappointed when I just stood there and stared at him.

I guess I had to say something. "So, is this where I get naked?" The look on his face suggested that wasn't exactly the right way to start off the conversation.

"You are taking this far too lightly, Mr. Taggert." He wasn't smiling when he came in the door, and he wasn't smiling now.

"Listen, buddy, when I got dragged off, I was told this was going to be a strip search. I'm already late, so let's just get this over with, OK?" I threw my jacket on the floor. "They treat us like cattle in Records; I've been here a year and I still haven't gotten a bloody card. I could probably work a decade and still not get one, so let's just get this over with." I couldn't help it, but I smiled. "I've already stripped, so if you're going to do a search, then do it. But I'll give you fair warning, if there's a rubber glove involved - then prepare to lose a finger." I may be small, but I'm still the son of a hunter, and I've got a good set of teeth to show off when I smirk.

Mayfield just stood there a moment. Then without a word he turned and left, the door hanging open behind him. I didn't need to be told twice. I grabbed my jacket and bolted almost before his tail had disappeared.

I had to sprint down two flights of stairs to the sub-basement. Even with all the practice I'd had at home, I still managed to nearly land on my face. I was just short of the office door as the eight o'clock buzzer rang. Late again.

Skidding into the office, I fumbled for my card to punch in. The clock bolted to the wall was a huge mechanical monstrosity, the lever screeched as I yanked it. With a little luck, I might just be able to make it to my desk without any more of the world trying to come crashing down around my ears.

For once, what gods there may be were on my side. It wasn't much, but at least I could find some meager refuge in my piddly little ash gray cubical. As much as I'd scorned at Mayfield for his clothing, I had to laugh outright at mine. Slung over my chair was the world's second ugliest tie. I'd used to have the worst, but I'd shredded it in a fit of good taste. You may think you've got the most abhorrent thing around, but the official company tie was purple boxes and bright orange stripes, and the place's name slashed across in electric blue letters. I could empty my sinuses on the thing and no one would notice.

Like most other places, everything around here is either forbidden or mandatory - the only trick is in knowing which is which. For company clothing, it was definitely in the mandatory category: all employees must wear approved company attire at all times while working. Last time I'd tried to get away not looking like a color-blind ostrich I'd almost lost a day's pay.

My job was just about as exciting as you might expect from the kind of place I work. We have some sort of government contract to help track the remaining human population.

The human race had almost been wiped out by the Cataclysm, but there were still some left. One problem, they're recessive. Any time a human and a non-human get together they always have a non-human kid. This was kind of odd as most of the time the species follow direct lineage, sons looked

like their fathers, daughters like their mothers. Hence me and my Dad.

For whatever reason, humans just didn't seem to fit, and like any other genetic dead end, they were slowly fading away. This was of interest to the government because there were just enough of them left to raise a heck of a dust cloud when they decided to. Ten years ago the government promised to track every remaining human, and put them on a kind of 'endangered species' list. As far as I was concerned, it was more of a death watch.

It really was depressing in some ways. When I first started here a year ago, the entire floor had been packed with people doing the exact same job as me. Working records, tracking births, all that junk. But over time, there just didn't seem to be as much to do; now we were down to less than a fifth of the people shifting paper here from when I started, and some days I barely have enough to even make myself look busy.

The morning slowly crept by, it was almost noon. At least I was at the halfway mark, not much, but better than nothing. Change that, I could feel the heavy clump of my boss, Heyfair, coming my way. This was not a good sign. Mayday, mayday, alert, alert, enter defcon 5. He only comes over here when he wants to take a bite out of me. And by the feel of it, it was going to be a big chunk today.

"Taggart!" Gods, he was at it again. I looked up from my desk, trying not to keep my ears from folding back.

"My name is Tommy. Please don't call me that."

"I'll call you whatever I want, pest." His horns were right in my face. For a bull, Heyfair was short, coming only up to my shoulders, but he made up for it by being eternally pissed. To be honest, I think he just likes screaming. "You were late again."

"Yes, I was." There was no good in avoiding it, the time clock tells all. "I was held up by security."

"That's no excuse. When the buzzer sounds, you are to be at your desk and ready to work." He looked me up and down, I was suddenly glad I had my jacket and tie, I'm certain he was looking for something else to dock me for.

"They have a new policy at the door - I need an ID card to get in now." I was trying to find a way to say this without pissing him off any more than I really had to. "When will I be getting a card?" I hated putting the whine in my voice, but sometimes it helped appease him.

"We are not issuing cards at this time." He didn't even bother to smirk.

"But I need a card to get through the door without a search." I was getting a migraine again; Heyfair's normal record was at least five minutes to make me feel like this - he must be practicing.

"Not my problem, mongrel. Deal." He turned and paraded away, "If you're late again, it's your head, fleabag." The buzzer rang for lunch. He had his timing down to a tee.

I'd blown all my cash last night, so I didn't even have enough to bother thinking about getting food this time around. Payday was tomorrow, so with any luck I could eat like a king then, aka more overpriced take out. I sat back and cracked my spine on the shoulder of the dinky little office chair.

"Hey, Tommy." I'd know that voice anywhere.

"What's up, Max? Other than my blood pressure." I didn't even bother opening my eyes until I felt him sit on the desk in front of me.

"One of those days?"

"Oh ye gods. Yes, it's one of those days. Sometimes I almost think a real beating might just be easier." I had to laugh despite myself; lately, every day had been one of those days.

Max must have come down from his desk a floor above. He ran that floor, one step closer to sunlight and fresh air. He does basically the same job as Heyfair, just with less added evil. I can't remember the number of times I'd tried to get myself transferred - I get the feeling Heyfair just keeps

me around to unload on.

"I don't have long, got a meeting in ten. Just came down to give you a head's up, you're close to the butcher's block right now. Even upstairs, I can hear your name being kicked around." He gave me one of those looks you can only get away with when your eyes are half a foot tall. "I know Heyfair is a dick. He's the biggest dick I have to deal with too. But he's also a dick who can, will, and would likely thoroughly enjoy getting you fired. Your review is up tomorrow. Don't blow it, and you might just be able to get out of this bull-hole."

I laughed, I'd forgotten about that. "You know, that might just be worth it."

"What?"

"Oh, nothing. Never daydream and talk at the same time." I giggled, yes I giggled. It's a horribly unmanly thing to do, but sometimes I just can't help myself. Anyone who knows me can tell you it's a bad sign.

Max just put his hands on his forehead and walked off. "Please, Tommy, don't do anything stupid. You're the only one down here who seems to be doing anything more than politicking their way back out."

After he wandered off, I noticed that he'd left a small package on the desk, it sent my nose twitching. Whatever it was, it was edible. Someday I'll have to thank Max for keeping me alive down here, even if sane was out of the question.

My gut reminded me that the last thing I'd had to eat was my cookie, and that hadn't sat well. Peeling back the wax paper, I all but began drooling over my desk. He'd gotten me venison! This meat was expensive, even for Max.

I'd grown up on the stuff when my Dad had still hunted, but I hadn't had any in years. I can still remember him coming home with big slabs of meat, carved fresh from the kill. We'd always got the best parts before he sold it to the butchers. Mom had never been much for it, but she knew what she was getting into when she married him. Old stories state that ambrosia is the food of the gods (I tried ambrosia salad once and almost ended up with florescent vomit), but venison must be the food of wolves. If I ever found myself a supply of venison flavored chocolate I would die a happy man.

It wasn't large, perhaps only the size of my fist, but I did my best to savor what there was. If you've ever met a canine, you'll know we don't do well in such things; there's a reason why they call it wolfing down.

The meat was tough and dry, only having a passing resemblance to anything fresh, but it was the best thing I had tasted in a bloody long time.

I can't believe I was doing this, but I'm licking the wrapper. Seriously, just how bad off do I have to be to lick the paper of something I used to eat practically every day? Sad it was, but I've never let my pride get in the way of a good meal - at least as long as no one's watching. I even debated eating the freaking wrappings. I had to decide against that though, I still felt like a bugger from yesterday, and didn't need anything more making me want to puke.

I spared a quick look at the prehistoric cast iron clock in the corner of the office, still had a few moments left before I had to be 'ready to work' and I just as well couldn't stay sitting here. There was no way I was going to leave the building, but I needed to get this crook out of my back before people thought I was walking this way just to get my lips closer to Heyfair's tail.

There wasn't much to see on my floor, just the same cubicles copied and pasted a few dozen times over. Max's floor was about the same as mine. All you have to do was replace the cubes with threadbare offices and you'd have a mirror image. We weren't supposed to walk around on the main floor, but today, well, today I really didn't care so much now did I?

This building had elevators, and they even worked. I could get away using them as long as I

didn't run into anyone I knew. Sure I was doing the whole living dangerously thing by wandering around where there were actual clients, but I like to be stupid with one thing at a time - do it too much and it becomes catching.

The main floor was all classy marble, high ceilings and funky abstract paintings on the walls. You know, the kind that likely cost ten times my salary, but look like someone did them with a paint brush and ruler while on an acid trip.

It's been a year since I was last up here, back when I was first hired in fact. Back then, the place had been packed with humans wall to wall. You'd have thought it a convention of people with a skin fetish for all the flesh on show. There'd been a dozen tellers dealing with lineups almost out the door. When everyone had to come by to prove they were still alive, you tended to get a lot of people in one place.

It was surprising now that the floor was all but empty. Where the teller's booths had been crammed before, now there stood but three ladies behind the desk - and two of them looked bored.

In a space designed for over a hundred pinks to pack in, there were maybe half a dozen milling about. I knew the human population was going down, but this was just odd - they must have opened another office and not told us about it. No real surprise there, they don't bother telling us anything. Probably found some trolls that would work for less and shipped our jobs across town to save a few bucks.

Seeing how there were so few people around, I strolled across the reception floor. My claws tinkling on the stone, making me feel like some high class snob come down to address the masses. I got a raised eyebrow from one of the tellers who recognized me, but I just smiled back and swept my tail like I owned the place.

This building did a lot more than just tracking humans, pretty much any type of paper you could imagine was pushed here - they even owned some of the last computers on the west coast. I'd gotten to see one once, through a glass wall of course.

It wasn't much to see, really. Just looked like a couple of little gray boxes, kind of like a T.V. set I'd seen once. According to the guy who ran the tour, those little boxes could do the job of hundreds of us calculators working at our desks. In some ways, I was glad they didn't have more, a few dozen of those things around here and what good would they have for people like me working records?

Fat chance I'd be getting anywhere near there though. They always had guards near that room, those things were so rare these days that people did bloody well anything to get a hold of one. Darn silly thing to worry about though; most people are like me, we wouldn't know what to do with the things, just gnaw on the buttons for a while before wandering off.

I picked a hallway at random; there is a lot to be said for just walking a straight line at a brisk pace. Look like you belong there and most people will just assume you do. I think this place must have belonged to some branch of the government before things fell apart. No matter where you look there are offices upon offices, sometimes for seemingly no reason at all. Really, even with the size of KDP, just how many suits do you need futzing about? From the rumors I hear, it seems they really don't do much different from me, just push a stack of paper from one side of the desk to the other, then make someone else push it back so nothing could ever possibly be their fault.

I stumbled out of the hallway and down half a step into some kind of waiting room; a few half-dead plants and a picture of a long gone cityscape were a far cry from the hallowed halls I'd been in just a moment before. The place was deserted, even with lunch winding to a close there wasn't a person to be seen anywhere - I could almost think I had the building to myself.

With nothing better to do, I threw myself down on a semi-inviting couch, only to discover a moment too late it was about as sturdy as a pile of bones. Story of my world, nothing good seemed to

be good anymore. Other chairs scattered about looked a lot newer than the old pile of splinters under me, but they seemed even worse off for it.

It's not that we can't seem to make good things anymore – I mean the food is great – but the buildings they're selling it out of are all a hundred years old. Anyone with half a wit knew not to invest in a new structure. For as crumbling as the old stuff was, it was still likely to last longer than most things we were putting up these days.

I sat on the lopsided couch for a few moments and nursed a bruised tail bone, and I've got a lot of tail bone to bruise. Thankfully, the one bright point in my life is that I was born with surprisingly good regeneration. It's one of those things that you just might luck out with if you're a wolf-breed. Who knows, the humans like to call us werewolves for it, but for me, it's just the way I come.

I may heal fast, but it doesn't do a thing for the pain, and frankly, I'm a wimp. I guess that's one of the reasons my dad always wanted me to follow him into hunting, regeneration can really give you a leg up when you've gotten said leg broken by a pissed off bear... like my Dad had. To be honest, I'd just as well give it to him if I could; he would have made better use of it than me. Instead, he's stuck limping and my little perk is healing a bruised butt end.

My ears twitched, in the distance I could hear people walking this way - lunch must almost be over. I got up, not even hobbling, and started off towards a stairwell I'd seen a short way back.

For once in my life I actually made it back to my desk on time, and of course it's the one round Heyfair isn't watching me like a hawk.

My afternoon crawled by much like my morning, just enough work to make myself look busy, but not much more. We only handle the births on this floor, the deaths are handled somewhere else, and the time in between in yet another office. It strikes me sometimes that every paper the crosses my desk is the start of yet another new life. While it's got to be a major event in at least one person's world, to me it's just another piece of paper to process.

I held out a sheet and bothered to read it, actually read it for a change. Her name was Nicole Richards, she was born eight months ago. There was a photo attached, cute kid. It's funny, I've pushed at least a hundred of these things through, but I've never really looked at the pictures since my first day. The single piece of paper had all her data on it, weight, blood type, address, criminal record, everything the government knew about her. It was my job to cross reference and stamp it so someone somewhere else down the line can do the whole thing all over again.

I don't even really know what they do with the paper, they already have everything by the time it gets to me, all I seem to do is add a few more dog ears and send it onto the next guy.

I kept going, but couldn't really seem to concentrate. Every sheet seemed to have something on it for a change, and I was bothering to read the papers like they meant something to me. It was hard to get my mind off the fact that each one of these had a life and a story, and all I was doing was moving them from one side of my desk to the other.

The big clunker on the wall was showing four forty-five, almost time to hightail it out of here. I stretched my neck and heard it pop. Never did understand why they made desks like they do, who would want to spend their entire life looking down? There's a reason why my neck doesn't like to bend that way.

Heyfair was still nowhere to be seen, but Julie, the girl who worked a few desks down from me, was coming my way. Her tail swished as she slinked along, she looked like someone with a secret she just couldn't wait to tell. Now Julie's a nice looking little something, but she's one of those people with a personality like a thousand watt light bulb that you can't turn off. She's the kind of person who sings show tunes, and actually believes those motivational speeches people come around to give. In short, she was a perky personality, and I don't do perky. Her breasts on the other hand – those were a perky I

could deal with.

She rushed up and spoke in the yelled whisper of a person who doesn't really quite understand what a whisper is for. "Tommy, come on! We've got to get down to the meeting room, everyone's there!"

I turned around, this was unexpected. "What's going on?"

"Didn't you hear? It's Heyfair's birthday!" Oh freaking no. No bloody way.

"No, no, no, no. There is no way you're ever going to get me in there. He's already drilled me out once this morning, you couldn't drag me tied and bound into the same room as that freak of nature."

"They'll be cake." Drat, I thought back to my stomach and my empty wallet.

"I'll be right there."

The meeting room was about as exciting as you would expect from a place like this – I'd bet sometime in the distant past it had moonlighted as an anorexic broom closet. It was just large enough to hold a dozen people standing nose to tail, and that was a little more intimate than I ever wanted to get with my coworkers. A few chairs were strewn about between the milling bodies, the specimens were one step above what you'd expect to find on someone's lawn.

With a little bit of pushing and shoving, I managed to wedge my way into the back corner of the room, furthest from the door and closest to the plain white box I assumed had the food in it.

Life as normal, they drag me in here as fast as they can, and then we sit and wait for twenty minutes. It's after five, and I'm still here, wedged between a woman who can't seem to stop talking and some dude who hasn't bathed in about a month.

With a snort, he was standing in the doorway. It's got to be about the first time in my life I've seen Heyfair smile... not an experience I'm sure I'd ever want to repeat. I've got to give it to them, a couple of the girls actually sang 'Happy Birthday'. One of them was Julie, of course. The rest of us just kind of mumbled along like half-dead zombies.

Much to my appeasement, there was in fact cake to be had – but dismayingly, it didn't exactly smell like the kind of food I'd be particularly partaking in. Since when did they start making cake out of cooked grass? That box must have been sealed up air tight, or I would have been out of here in a whiff. I traded glances with a cat who works up the hall from me, he felt my pain.

I didn't want to get any closer to the birthday boy than was strictly required, so I hung in the back corner with my head low until the crowd began to thin out. By the time I got back to my desk it must have been five thirty, what a wonderful start to the evening.

Yanking the tie from my neck, I tossed it back across my scratched desk and sorted out the last of my things before leaving. For a moment, I entertained the idea of digging the venison paper back out of the garbage to take home, but I've got more dignity than that – at least until my stomach starts to try and eat its own lining again.

Finally, I managed to get started on my way out of this gods forsaken hole, I must be the last out by now. You never notice how quiet these places can be until everyone is gone, I swear it almost echoed every time my claws clicked on the rough concrete beneath me.

The door banged shut behind me with a refreshing slam as I pushed into the cold, wind wiped fresh air outside. This time, thankfully, I'd been able to get through security without having to see just how friendly their wandering hands could be. Normally I'm not one for the din of the street, but this time I welcomed it with open arms, anything to distract me from the day I'd had.

The clouds had rolled in since this morning, blotting the sky black - not surprising for V-town. It seemed to rain here as often as it shined, but this round it was coming down in sheets. I was still

standing under an awning, watching the world go by, some with their umbrellas, others trying to run vainly from cover to cover. Me, I just walked straight out into it. As I see it, why bother? My jacket was soaked through in an instant, fur a heartbeat later. I just walked right through the puddles that other people skirted, why worry, I was drenched anyway.

I started off in the general direction of home, not really wanting to get there, but at the same time not really having anywhere else I could think of. The thunder cracked like the gods were constructing a new seventy-five bedroom mansion right over my head. No lightning though – I guess they didn't need to have it wired yet.

It was a whole block north before I noticed two guys coming towards me, they were the kind of folks that you just found yourself stepping aside for. One of them wasn't even all that big, but you seem to find yourself shying away anyhow. Normally I wouldn't have noticed, and cared even less, except for the fact they were wearing red Storm Front jackets, the same I'd seen yesterday.

There were at least a dozen private bounty hunting companies like them around. I'm not sure if they're the largest, but they did seem to be the ones you kept hearing about. Just my luck they were starting to show up now. Perhaps this time I'd get my nose slammed into a trash can.

To my relief, they completely ignored me. Guess I wasn't on the docket. One of them slapped a poster on the crumpling brickwork wall of a building, 'Wanted: Reward'. Guess even the best hunters need help sometimes.

The only other people who were stupid enough to be out on a night like this were those half-crazed protesters. They just seemed to be randomly walking up and down the streets with signs hoisted over their heads, ready to scream at the rare human who might pass their way. 'End the dead ends.' Thankfully, they were far enough from the KDP building to keep the cops at bay. Once, years ago, they'd tried to storm the place. The pinks had raised enough of a stink that the cops had been dragged in, kicking and screaming, to deal with it.

I kept walking through the rain until my feet led me home. Through the windows around me, I could just make out the vague forms of those smarter than I; the people who were smart enough to already be warm and dry. I had just the presence of mind to check my mailbox before beginning the long climb up. Surprise, I had a letter.

I knew it was from my parents before I'd even opened it. I'd recognize the green ink lettering anywhere. It was from my Mom, no real surprise there. Like most people, Dad couldn't write, and there weren't a lot of other folks who would go through the effort of sending me something in the post.

I leaned on the wall and pulled one foot up to get it off the carpet while I read. It had been a few weeks since I'd talked to my parents last, and to be honest, I could use that old home feeling.

It was about the same as always. She talked about how she was, told me that Dad was OK. Nothing really good had happened, but nothing really bad had happened either, all about the same. There was an offer to come over for dinner tomorrow. I rubbed the hole where my gut should be. That's something I might just take them up on.

I slid the letter carefully in my drenched jacket and started up the steps, not really thinking much, just walking. My apartment was the way I'd left it, no food, no light, and not much else.

I took one look at the bed and changed by mind, I wanted to sleep, but not there. The only other option was the small chair by my desk.

The thin, cracking wood always creaked a long drawn out grown when I sat on it, but it held my weight well enough. I rested my arms on my journal and leaned towards the window, its glass was cool on my brow. I could see past the dirt, down to the street. The rain still came down, trying to wash the street clean I suppose. It was the same scene I'd always had here before.

It didn't take me long to fall asleep, I didn't even take off my jacket.