

Journal Entry Five

This was it...

Lee's final day.

When I woke up, tears were already welling in my eyes. Lee heard my weeping and, as he always did, gently placed his hand on my stomach.

"Jaxx," he calmly spoke. "It's not your fault that I'm inside your stomach. Vex forced you to do it."

"But he didn't!" I yelled, trying to hold back my tears. "He gave you to me. He told me you were in a coma. I trusted him, so I swallowed you," I paused, wiping my eyes. "This is all my fault!"

"Jaxx, don't blame yourself. Many people share the blame for this," he said, taking a deep breath. "It's my fault because I killed someone. It's Ginger's fault because she asked me to kill one of the princes. It's Vex's fault because he deceived you. And yes, it's your fault because you consumed me. But whatever you're thinking right now, just know that it's never solely your fault."

We both remained silent for a few minutes until I broke the awkwardness.

"Wanna grab some lunch?" I asked him.

"Yeah."

As I got up, I glanced at my stomach. It had noticeably shrunk to about half its size since yesterday. Walking, I couldn't help but worry about Lee's well-being.

"How are you feeling?" I inquired. "Is the acid causing pain?"

"I'm in pain, but it's bearable," he replied. "It feels cramped in here, and the acid burns a bit. Apart from that, I'm doing fine!" he said cheerfully.

We continued our walk in silence. There wasn't much to say. When we arrived, all Lee requested was the same thing he had last time. Even during our meal, we remained quiet.

I decided to eat at the cafeteria instead of Vex's bedroom. As I entered the room, I noticed an arched opening adjacent to it, leading to the spacious area. A wooden shelf divided the two rooms, the kitchen and the cafeteria. The cafeteria had a magnificent stained glass portrait on the side facing outward. The artwork depicted bears worshipping a fox at its center.

Inside the room, there were four long wooden tables with long benches for seating. Additional tables were scattered on the sides, and smaller benches lined the walls. Animals of various kinds were dining, most of them being bears, while others who worked in the castle were also enjoying their lunch.

Before entering the cafeteria, I handed Lee his fish. He thanked me, and I proceeded into the room. After scanning the area, I settled on a bench in a secluded corner where I could be alone. As I walked, Lee's movements as he ate his fish drew attention. People started whispering to those nearby, and I caught snippets of their comments. "Did she eat someone?" "Who did she eat?" "Can a bunny eat someone?" "Should I ask?"

Some looked disgusted, while others appeared fascinated and shocked. I tried my best to ignore them, but within moments, the entire cafeteria was staring at me.

I paused, taking in the cold gazes around me. I glanced down at my stomach and hastily ran out of the room, tears streaming down my face. Tears splashed everywhere, hitting my stomach, ears, and the floor.

Before leaving the cafeteria, I glanced back once more. The faces still bore judgment, silently observing my every action. I turned away, crying harder.

Once outside the cafeteria, I could hear everyone resuming their conversations as if the incident had never occurred. Finding a corner in the hallway, I sat down. I offered Lee his fish first, and I slowly nibbled on my own food.

"What happened?" Lee asked, munching on his fish.

"Nothing. I don't want to make you feel bad," I replied, tears still flowing.
"Just eat your fish and forget about what happened."

I couldn't even finish my sandwich. I asked Lee if he wanted the rest, and he said he would save it for later. I took my final bite and swallowed the remaining portion, which had only a few bite marks.

"Are you sure you're-" Lee paused. "Never mind."
I stood up and began making my way back to his bedroom. The path to his room consisted of a straight hallway that turned right at the end. It was the main corridor of the castle, with several branching paths along the way. Usually, I would be cautious and watch out for people, but I felt too embarrassed to even attempt to hide. As I walked, I could hear Lee contentedly chewing his food. *At least he was happy.*

Suddenly, a hand forcefully pushed against my back, causing me to stumble and fall face-first to the ground. The unknown person or entity grabbed me by my legs and dragged me into a room. I tried to turn and see who it was, but my vision was blurred. They switched on the lights and shut the door, then dragged me to the center of the room, releasing my legs and applying heavy pressure on my back.

I attempted to rise, but my body refused to move. The figure released the pressure on my back, leaving me sore and exhausted. Lee emitted an uncomfortable sound, clearly in pain.

The figure knelt down to meet my gaze. It was Vex. He opened his mouth wide and forcefully grabbed my shoulders. In a swift motion, he shoved me into his mouth, and I slid down his elastic esophagus, ending up in his stomach. The walls of his stomach were stretchy yet rigid, and the acid immediately began to burn. Vex patted his stomach with approval.

"Now, fight!" he yelled. "Struggle!"

I extended my legs as far back as possible and released them rapidly. It created a small dent in his stomach, but Vex showed no reaction. I then attempted to punch with all my strength, but once again, it proved ineffective.

"It's either fight or die, bunny," he said firmly.

I exerted all my energy, flailing, kicking, punching—anything to break free. I even tried pushing myself upward towards his throat, but I only managed to hit the top of his stomach.

My breathing grew heavy, and my strength fell. My punches turned into feeble taps, and I could feel my eyelids growing heavy. A single tear escaped my eye.

Lee remained silent, understanding the dire situation I was in. I gazed down at my stomach.

"Goodbye, Lee," I whispered. "It's been a pleasure getting to know you."

Just as I surrendered to my defeat, closing my eyes fully, I felt my body slowly ascending. I opened my eyes to find myself rising up through Vex's esophagus and exiting through his mouth. Within seconds, I was back in the room, free from his grasp. He coughed lightly but looked at me with disappointment.

"What if that happened to you in the real world!? Is that how you plan to survive!?" he yelled. "You're fortunate that I still remember how to regurgitate. You would've become my meal if I hadn't saved you."

My immediate thoughts turned to Lee. If I could regurgitate him, I could save his life.

"How did you do that? Please, I need to know!" I cried desperately, pleading with Vex.

"I haven't reached that part yet. You still need to learn the basics," he replied. "I'm sorry you formed a bond with your meal, but it was your mistake. You should *never* form a bond with your meals."

"Why are you forcing me to do this?!" I yelled, shaking him slightly.

"It's to ensure your safety," he responded calmly.

He removed my arms from his shoulders, walked out of the room, and locked the door behind me.

"Now, you will stay here until your 'friend' is no more."

I surveyed the room, which appeared recently abandoned. A framed picture caught my attention near the bedside. It depicted a fox, and I set it down before continuing my exploration. The room bore a striking resemblance to Vex's chamber, although it had a predominantly blue color scheme rather than Vex's green motif.

I examined the picture frame—a red fox with a brown birthmark on its forehead.

"Hey, Lee, did the prince you poisoned have a birthmark?" I inquired.
"Yeah, why?" he replied.

"We're in his room," I stated coldly. "He's planning to end your life in the very place where his brother died."

He paused for a moment, hastily changing the subject.

"Are you okay?" he asked. "I know what happened, no need to fill me in."

"I'm a bit shaken, but apart from being a slimy mess, I'm gradually recovering," I answered, attempting to release a chuckle.

Abandoning my feeble attempt to lighten the mood, I focused my gaze on him.

"Lee, how are you feeling?" I inquired.

"Not too good. The acid is burning intensely," he replied, wincing in pain.
"Your stomach has become incredibly tight. I estimate I have about ten more minutes."

The revelation shocked me, and I immediately panicked. "No, no, no! Please, stay alive!" I cried, speaking rapidly. "We can make it through this! Escape now! I can lie down if you need, I can—"

"Jaxx," he interrupted.

"It's okay. You've been incredibly kind to me. From the moment I landed in your stomach, you've taken care of me. You provided me with food, checked up on me regularly, and even offered to send down a new set of clothes, just in case. You didn't have to do any of that, but you did. You genuinely care about people, and that's an extraordinary quality to possess. I wish I had even a fraction of your kindness. Although you couldn't save me physically, you saved me mentally.

I don't think I could have made it through these past three days without you, Jaxx. Truly, I don't. You care for me when others ignore me, and that's a quality that everyone should possess. When I pass away, I want you to carry on that trait. I couldn't care less if species continue to consume each other, but I do want them to care for one another. Can you promise me that, Jaxx?"

I could barely utter a word. "I promise, Lee."

"The acid is starting to melt my fur off now. I don't have much time left. Do you have any last words, Jaxx?" he managed to say, groaning in pain.

"I'm sorry."

He kissed my stomach. "I love you, Jaxx."

Silence.

Seconds felt like hours.

It felt as though the world had stopped spinning.

It felt like the island of Libera had come to a standstill.

Three things shattered the silence: the howling wind, the growing and churning of my stomach, and a small, uncontrollable burp that slipped through the cracks of my mouth.

I didn't move much. All I could do was look down. My stomach remained unchanged since...

I can't bear to think about him anymore.

I wish I didn't have such a vivid memory.

I wish I could forget...

My slow, rolling tears turned into cascading waterfalls, and I couldn't contain their power. I wrapped my arms tightly around my stomach, embracing it with all my might. My stomach responded with another satisfied growl as it worked to digest him.

Vex heard my ceaseless cries and unlocked the door.

"So, is he dead?" he asked.

"Go away," I replied firmly.

I looked at him, and he stood there in shock.

"I said, GO AWAY!" I screamed.

"Jaxx, if you could be a good girl and stand up so I don't have to eat you again, that would be nice," he said calmly.

I paused, and my crying came to an abrupt halt. I stood up and walked out of the room. He followed shortly after.

"Now, after a meal, I tend to get very tired. So, let's go to the bedroom and take a nap."

I didn't pay much attention. I was only focused on one thing.

I'm not touching food again.

It'll remind me of Lee

I wish Lee was still alive

*At least **he** understands me.*