

Chapter 2

A New Beginning

I wake with a start. Gasping and sitting up. I howl a little in pain, the sudden sitting up caused my back to feel like it got lit on fire. I lay back down. My eyes aren't open, and it takes some effort to open them. The light stings when I get them open, and I squint, trying to lift my arm to cover my face, but it feels heavy.

"What a dream.." I try to say out loud.

My mouth feels weird, I couldn't say words right. I try to adjust my lower jaw but it doesn't move like I expect.

A thud from the side of me, I turn my head slowly, my eyes slowly focusing and adjusting to the bright light. "You're awake! You're actually awake!" a familiar voice calls out, that coarse voice from the dream.

"Tah.. Tah'lihn?"

It rolls off my tongue much easier than before. When my eyes eventually adjust, Tah'lihn is stood – no, crouched - beside me, grinning.

"Wh—" I tilt my head to look down. My arm was covered in fur. I turn my wrist. My hand had paw pads, similar to Tah'lin's. My body ached with every movement I made. It hurt.

It wasn't a dream.

"Try not to move too much, the body you're in hasn't been moved except to move from storage to Gurney, the muscles need to be woken up. It's going to hurt a lot otherwise."

I can see tears forming in their eyes, and they press their face into me as they hug me. "It took so long.. but it worked!"

They lean back, and compose themselves, wiping their eyes. A few more Can'ir filter into the room, panting. It looks like Tah'lihn sprinted here and their assistants could barely keep up

"I just want to check – Can you let me know your name?"

"Robyn." My jaw still feels weird. Tah'lihn grins.

"Robyn, do you know how you got here?"

"... --almost dead. --found me, moved me --to this body." I was still trying to speak English, my new jaws were not made for this.

Tah'lihn could barely hold back their tears. The assistants cheered. I couldn't help but smile a little. Their joy was infectious, and I danced with death, and emerged a victor. Barely, but I did. Tah'lihn inhaled sharply and held it for a second, composing themselves again.

“You’ve been out cold for months, you’ve barely moved a muscle but you’ve been mostly stable. We had to have you on a ventilator for a few weeks, but you eventually started breathing by yourself. We weren’t sure if you were going to be comatose for good or not for a while there.”

One of the assistants moved towards us. Tah’lihn nodded, and the assistant slowly pulled me up, and placed a support behind me, letting me sit upright without straining anything. I breathe carefully, hissing lightly at straining a few muscles. I imagine this would be much better than the alternative though, and I grit my teeth.

“We’re going to need to get those muscles working properly. Rather than force you through agonising walking after years of this body being stationary, we’ll get massages going on your legs, back, and arms to try and stimulate them. You’ll still need the rehabilitation, of course. You humans--”

They cut themselves off, coughing a little.

“Humans walk on flat foot, we Can’ir walk quite differently, and it may take a fair bit of practice for you to get used to it. We need to get you talking in Cant too.”

They chuckle.

“Your English doesn’t really work well with our jaws, as you can probably tell. At least the CTU process helped implant the language in your mind so you can understand us.”

The next 2 months are like watching a toddler learn to walk and talk from the point of view of the toddler.

The first few weeks are spent massaging muscles in my legs, back, and arms. Every knead in my muscles feels like a thousand needles being shimmied around my body.

I lie in the hospital bed, feeling helpless as the assistants raise and lower my legs, hissing when they stretch it just a bit further than the previous time. Bending my knees and feet, It feels so unusual when I notice the first time that the Can’ir have digitigrade legs, bending at the knee feels odd, bending at the ankle even moreso.

Eventually I’m moving my own limbs ever so slightly without agonising pain racking me like on the first day awake. I hold my fur-covered arm out in front of me, and turn my wrist, bringing the pawpads face up. I wiggle my fingers, and scrunch the hand into a fist.

The assistants encourage me to try and sit up on my own, and even swing my legs out to rest my feet on the floor, to sit on the edge of the bed. It takes a few minutes, little parts of the muscles that hadn’t been massaged properly or used twinged, but I was sat up. I brace my arms on the bed, and with a light hiss from twisting my waist, I dangle my legs off the side of the bed, my digitigrade legs and feet in obvious view, the cool yet comfortable metal floor pressing into my pawpads.

A few days of progress, and with a bit of assistance, I’m standing up. I can’t walk, but I’m standing up, Assistants flank my sides as I wobble in place, getting used to the narrower paws I have, my tail spinning around wildly to try and balance, but hell if I know how to use it. I can only stand for a moment, before almost collapsing, my legs not used to supporting any kind of weight.

A few days later, I'm wheeled around, and taken to a pool. Normally a recreational pool. But today, and for a few more months it's here to help me get used to standing up and supporting myself. The assistants help me get out of the wheelchair, and help me sit poolside, my paws dipping into the warm water.

In my previous human form, I was a pretty strong swimmer. Hopefully the instinct carries over. I huff a little as I gently lower myself into the water fully, my arms holding my weight for a moment or two. I float a little in the pool, treading water and testing my arms out, before lowering my paws to the floor of the pool. The assistant that helped me here – I only need one now - gets into the pool as well, instructing me to stretch my legs out as far as I could, pushing more of my torso out of the water.

My legs wobble, and I lower myself again.
“Good! You're doing really well! Keep doing that”

My fur is completely drenched, but rather than looking like, well, a wet dog, the Can'ir fur seems to almost resist drooping heavily. It helps not dragging even more weight onto my legs at least. After about 20 minutes or so, the assistant has me gently wading around the pool, getting me to raise my body as much as I feel comfortable doing.