

“Comfort him like when he had broken his leg.”

That was the message that rattled back and forth in Irma’s head. An easily recalled memory, although it would need to be adjusted to accommodate their new forms. Setting the picture carefully down a meter in front of the slumbering Jesse’s nose she propped it up against some of the destroyed remains of the interior.

Once satisfied that he would be able to see it when he awoke, she squirmed underneath his tail until she was facing him. Keenly aware that she was baring her intimates towards him, and hoping that this wouldn’t turn sexual with the outside observers looking on, she wriggled closer to him until she was pressed completely against his side.

Jesse made a wordless rumble of contentment and sagged into her embrace as she brought her paw around to hold his head under her chin. Slinging her rear leg up over his hips, and stroking as much of his neck, as her altered physiology could reach, softly with her claws. She began to hum the same lullaby her mother always did when she comforted her. Twinkle, twinkle, little star. The same one that she hummed to him while he moaned from the pain of his shattered leg.

Three times she repeated this calming lullaby all the while softly caressing the nape of his neck, then his eyes began to slide open, and the first thing he saw was the picture.

Irma knew he had awoken when, beneath her body, she felt his own lock with tension at the sight of one of their happiest days together. She could feel the vibrating start of a high pitched noise. Greater and greater the sound swelled. First as a strangled squeak, then a low keen, a sorrowful wail, and finally a hysterical shriek of confusion and loss. Launching himself from her comforting embrace he towered above her, smashing through the roof and throwing himself through the remainder of the front wall and collapsing the tattered remains of the cabin onto Irma. With a desperate lunge she rushed forward to save the dearly cherished picture as the structure fell upon her.

Out in the front yard Kim and Tom had leapt to their feet. With Brian scrambling to hide behind one of their legs, and Thumper merely moving to the side. Jesse’s auburn eyed head appeared through the roof, followed by the rest of his body as he tore through all that was in front of him. He landed in the yard on his belly with legs splayed.

Kim and Tom screamed at the sight of the cabin collapsing on their daughter.

A muffled call. Do not attack him! Let me talk to him! Came from the pile of rubble. Moments later the undamaged form of their daughter erupted from the debris carrying something in her mouth. Quickly she deposited the item safely off to the side and turned towards Jesse.

Jesse had no apparent interest in attacking. Jesse did not look like he had any interest in anything other than himself. Looking down at his paws and then along his back. His tail whipped, his wings extended, and his eyes shut. All the while the never ending keen of his distress continued to assault the ears of everyone present.

Jesse! Listen to me! Jesse, breathe, you have to breathe Jesse. Please listen to me, it is going to be alright Jesse. I am here Jesse, it is going to be alright.

His eyes snapped open and spun wildly. His body began to convulse in waves starting from his stomach and moving up his throat. Making a desperate, scrambling lunge towards the brush in front of him he vomited the contents of his empty stomach into the forest. His shrill voice could be heard after he had emptied his body of nothing but bile.

The pain! I remember the pain! My body, my body burns! What is happening to me? My hands! My feet! My heart, my heart... I cannot... I cannot breathe! I can feel the scales, oh god! Oh god! They are tearing through my skin! Irmaaaaa!

He finished with a deafening appeal to Irma for relief before he vomited once more, and his body gave a wracking shiver from tip to snout as he fell unconscious on the ground of the clearing.

Irma was beside herself at hearing him relive the pain of his unspeakable torment. It had taken me days to change while in a coma, she thought to herself. He changed in minutes!

“That motherfuCKER! She finished with a vengeful roar. Unbeknownst to her, that roar had also reawakened the suffering Jesse behind her.

Spinning rapidly, she launched herself at the Thumper hatchling. Her momentum carried it off its paws and halfway across the yard. When they slid to a stop she had it pinned to the ground where its body sagged submissively beneath her large foot.

You fucking worm! I do not care who you are now! You will scrub that pain from his memory! You will make this right! DO YOU HEAR ME THUMPER? I WILL NOT HAVE YOUR SHIT THAT YOU WILL NOT HELP US!

The only sounds that broke the silence after her roared ultimatum was her heavy panting and the pattering of tears as they rolled off Irma’s snout to land on the small body of Thumper.

Thumper looked up at her with its golden eyes shining from the bright sunlit day. It was such a beautiful day. With azure skies and high flying cirrus clouds as white as unblemished snow. It was a day that was Mother Nature at her finest. It was a day that did not deserve the blood, and the tears, that had spilled upon the ground.

“I will give you two options Irma Schwarzkopf. This is a singular gift, and one that is only given due to the actions of an imperfect unit.

The first; you get what you want. Jesse remains as he is and I remove all memory of his transformation from his mind. He will awaken confused by the body he is in, but he will remember everything but the change itself.

The second; I return him to his human form and erase all memory of the events of the past couple of hours. You will all retain your recollections of these events as there are just too many integral events that have transpired, but he will remember nothing.”

Irma gave a hiccupping sob, and looked at her Jesse with tear filled eyes, before giving her answer.

“Changee him back.”

“So be...”

Nnnno! Jesse gurgled thickly, as he drug his head around to observe this communication through the haze of his remembered agony.

I...stay...w...ith....Ir.ma...I lov...e..y...ou..Be...I..ike..y..ou

Jesse... I love you... But are you sure you want to be like this? Like us? Please, I do not want this for you!

Y..es..F..or..y..ou.. Anything fo..r..you...P..le..ase..re...mo..ve.... He trailed off with a pain filled moan.

Irma removed her restraining paw and nodded her head decidedly at her lover.

“Dooo as Jesseee says.”

She turned her back on the tiny computer and lay herself next to the shivering form of the one that would sacrifice everything. Everything. So that he and Irma could share a life together in heart, body, and soul. Reaching down with her head she again repeated the comfort she had tried to provide earlier. This time with a much more noticeable effect as the tiny tremors and whimpers assailing Jesse lessened.

Thumper righted itself and walked over to Jesse’s head while being watched closely by every pair of opened eyes in the clearing. Arriving at its destination, its eyes glowed briefly as it lay its paw on the onetime boy’s head. Tension bled from his body as his trembling muscles relaxed and he slumped limply against the ground. His whimpering ceased as he slipped into peaceful slumber.

“It is done, let him awaken naturally. His body will remember the instincts forced upon it in the short time he has been a child of the egg. The last thing his mind will remember however, will be my other’s words to him at the side of the barn. His trauma has been removed. Heed my warning though, my predecessor spoke truthfully. He will now be destined to share the same alienation that was already your fate. He will now join you in becoming the target of other’s vitriol.”

“Iii... weee, arrr strong together. Weee will bear any burden.”

“I know you will.” The alien said with a smug tilt to its head.

I’ll fucking kill that fucking thing. I don’t know how, but I will. Kim thought to herself.

Irma continued to hum comfort to her sleeping lover, while Kim and Tom encircled them protectively. Meanwhile, Brian sat on the porch of the destroyed cabin and watched the tight knit family tend to one of their own. He could see a mile away that whatever might have gone on between the

father and the son-in-law was behind them now. Jesse was a member of this family, possibly always had been.

The lonely bachelor sat watching the family, wistful for the embrace of a loving family to belong to himself. Reflecting on the life that had nothing left to offer him other than the study of the creatures he had grown to love. His thoughts circled back again and again to Thumper's question from earlier... 'Would you like to?'

Thumper sat alongside Brian as well, careful to keep one eye on the brooding scientist and the other on the recovering family. It did what it knew to do all too well, it watched, analyzed, and remembered. It knew the question he was grappling with in his mind. It also knew, that he would agree to it.

On cue, Brian Cyan spoke up, to question his future as a human.

"How long will it take? What will it feel like?"

The golden eyed wonder turned its full attention to the volunteer.

"One hour. I will put you into a senseless slumber. A coma, if you prefer the term. There will not be any mental trauma. Although your body will be taxed to its limits, I will provide sufficient energy to satisfy the caloric demands that this procedure requires. Proteins, carbohydrates, calories, minerals, and vitamins. All will be supplied using sources located right beneath our very feet. You will simply go to sleep, and awake, a child of the egg. As you are older than any others present here, you will also emerge larger. Children of the egg grow throughout their lives. You will be a meter taller than Tom and Kim and six meters longer and remain so, even as you grow fully into your forms. As has been told the others, do not expect full function of your various body systems for months afterwards. Some changes are not to be rushed."

Brian looked down into his hands thinking this over, opening and closing them, turning them over, and feeling each knuckle, each fold of skin, as if he was saying goodbye to the shape that he had always known. But he was not fixated on memorizing his human form. His mind was focused instead on preserving itself, the one condition that he was concerned about. It was the one that he was just now seeing resolved. He went to open his mouth, but was preempted by the time skipping alien.

"Your change will not render you mindless. Is there anyone else you wish to contact beforehand?"

The eerie computer asked, already knowing the answer.

"Do you need to hear me say it out loud? You already knew how this was going to go before it even began."

"I do not want you humans to fall into the mistaken belief that you have no say in the matters that will transpire throughout your lives. Everything is a possibility, until it is not. It is you, you humans, who will decide how your lives play out. I observe, and I influence, but I do not force you to act as you do. So, yes, I do want to hear your decision."

Brian Cyan licked his lips, and then gave away his humanity.

“When we get back, and after I talk to Serena. I want it documented from start to finish.”

“Of course, as long as it occurs today I leave all other considerations to you.”

This time the scientist did begin to study his hands. Lost in thought he tried to imagine the hands he studied as they will be. Planted solidly on the ground, impaling black talons into the soil for purchase. Thick callous protecting delicate tendon and muscle from the hard impact of locomotion. His wrist, fixed at a new and alien angle, bringing the heel of his hand upwards in line with the forearm. The body of his hand lengthened to inhuman proportions.

He stopped and snorted. Inhuman... Soon that'll be all that he is. A creature right out of a storybook, a nightmare meant to scare the unwary. Brian closed his eyes for a second and tried to envision looking down at another human from a height of six or seven meters. A human terrified, by the sight of what he has agreed to become.

But think what can be learned! He yelled to himself. With myself as a subject and Serena to observe there would be nothing we couldn't figure out. With my body and my education coupled with her own education and our dual insights. We could be the ones to write the book. The book that others would look to for knowledge.

With that goal, all doubt vanished from the Herpetologist's mind. He would become a child of the egg, and with Serena, and the support of their department, they would explore everything it meant to be one of these creatures.

Thumper knew these thoughts but betrayed nothing of its own. However, if one had been paying close attention, one could even swear that there had been the slightest glimmer in the golden eyes of the alien. If someone of a certain mind had seen this infinitesimal gleam, they might even have been forgiven for thinking it was one of self-satisfaction.

Brian completed his torturous assessment of his decision and rose from the steps to walk towards the family as they eagerly awaited the reawakening of Jesse. Behind the researcher Thumper quietly followed.

This vigil continued for another twenty minutes as all but Irma herself chatted idly with each other. Of course the bombshell of Brian declaring his decision after being questioned on the nature of his talk with Thumper dominated the conversations. At present Kim was embarrassing Brian with a long list of things that have changed or been made more difficult with four legs and a towering height of over six and a half meters with head held high.

“...aaand ever ssssince I haven't been able to look at trees the ssssame way! You ssshould have ssseen how high I can lift my leg! Next, lli've been thinking about piercing my ear fin” She flapped the left twice. “Aaand putting my wedding band in there. What dooo yu think? Dragon fashion, aaan untapped market! Dooo yuuu think that car wax will look good on sssscale? We might need to shine up sometinesss! Insstead of Turtle Wax, it'll beee Dragon Wax™!”

She spread her wings and fins for a theatrical finish to express her enthusiasm and bobbed her head several times with a frightening display of teeth in her gleeful entrepreneurial ambitions. Irma just

rolled her eyes and didn't budge from her task. Tom was looking carefully at the ground to ask the woolly bear that he'd found what it thought about the look and smell of Dragon Wax™. Brian looked stunned by the volume of ideas and observations that Kim had just let fly at him. The last two items had been that Tom, Kim, and Irma had been aligning themselves south-to-north to defecate, and Kim's boasting about rubbing her legs against trees for a reason that he didn't fully understand yet. More immediately relevant had been their comment on their first hunts. Brian sucked on his teeth briefly wondering what that much blood could possibly taste like.

He jumped when he felt hot, moist, breath touching the back of his neck and reluctantly looked over his shoulder. Just behind him was a nostril larger than his open hand, and directly behind that, a luminous green eye. The jaws cracked ajar and a potent miasma struck his face.

"Thatsss it? You want to writeee about me scratching myself, but nothing about my ideassss? Weee need documentation! Weee don't want anyone getting ahead of usss on thisss!"

"Umm..."

"They will beee yur scalesss too! Thisss is important!"

Tom raised his head to reveal that the tiny caterpillar was now crawling up the top of his nose.

"liii thought wee agreed not tooo tell anyone our businesssss model!"

"Are you two just messing with me? Or do you always act like this?"

Kim licked her own eye, causing Brian to recoil at the strangeness of the action. She laughed uproariously.

"Naaah, we're just bored while waiting for sleeping beauty over there to open his eyes. That, and we need to blow off sssome steam. Earlier today was no picnic for usss believe you me. We children of the egg pack aaahh punch." She finished by bowing her head down to lick some gouges at the base of her neck clean of blood.

"Well, how much of what you told me was accurate? I'm trying to document any changed behaviors or practices you might have!"

"Oh, what, about how we shit? Yeah, just like the damned dogs, spin once around and ssstop with snouts pointed north, dig a hole, and let fly. The scratching thing though.... liii don't know, ssscent marking maybe? Something makes scratching myssself on those logsss feel good. Irma does it too, but not Tom. Sssoo it mussst be sssomething unique to usss. For the rest, you'll have to gooo through them one by one."

A wakeful snort sounded from behind them causing the close, over eager heads of the married tricksters to raise and swing around. This revealed behind them the sight of Irma heaving herself to her feet and turning to look at the still wakening form of her Jesse as he stretched himself out. Just like last time his wings rose and then folded to his back. Kim turned serious and warbled a warning once more.

A warning that was mercifully not required this time. Stretching lengthwise Jesse blinked open his eyes. "Iiirma?Whathappened?"

Still oblivious, he raised his head up, and up, and up, and then looked down. He squawked loudly and leapt to his feet.

He lifted his head from examining the front of his body with a dazed look in his eyes. "Thumper rrrreallychangedmeee? I'm, I'm..." He stopped to look with stunned amazement at his paws and then turned his head around to look over his back. The look of wonder on his face was unmistakable.

He looked up at the sun and then down again "Hhhowlongago?"

Irma stepped one foreleg forward and her opposite hind leg, and then rushed forward to tackle the stunned Jesse. Flipping him upon his back she straddled him and brought herself down to lay on him. Then she began to nudge her head under his chin with tears streaming.

Hey, hey, what is wrong? It is okay, I am okay with this. This is what I wanted!
Please stop crying Irma you are making me worried!

Not even realizing that he had spoken in a new tongue he extended his legs upward to cling to his love.

Irma continued her tears of relief.

I want to tell you, but now is not the time. I am just so, so glad that you are okay. Let us get out of here.

"Ooookay, love... Tell me when yuuufeelready, but for now Iiijustwant tooo hold you. Let'sss get back toyurplace sooo I can get tooo know yu alloveragain." He said with a dopey expression, turning and opening his wings to the air he coiled his legs to make the skyward leap when three voices called out to him in amazement.

"Yuuu remember?"

"What rrr yuuu doing?"

Jesse!

Hopping forward on his hind legs he folded his wings neatly to his back before falling back onto all fours and turning around to face the astonished faces arrayed before him.

"Oooohright, none of yuuu can fly."

"Not that. How dooo yu know how to fly still?"

Jesse hummed audibly and then flaring his wings made a shrugging motion. He folded them again as they rustled uneasily. "Don'tknow. Didn'tthinkabout it. Just opened my wingssss andgotready to launch. Like notthinkingabout walking... Wait, what do you mean by still?"

Irma shook her head and walked to be next to her Jesse and bumped hips with his, she rocked her head towards their direction of travel.

Walk with me. Let us talk on the way back to my home. She looked back at her parents with an unspoken appeal, they both nodded their heads and allowed the two younger dragons to move ahead on their own.

Giving them a five minute head start. Tom and Kim turned back to look at the last two creatures in the clearing.

Kim motioned with her head while looking at Brian "Go grab Irma'sss picture, then uuuup yu get."

Tom looked at Thumper coldly. You do not need a ride. Meet us back at my home.

Thumper nodded and then vanished from the site of the demolished hunting cabin.

Taking one last look around the destroyed property Tom, Brian and Kim set off at a leisurely pace.

While they walked Kim turned her head to talk with Brian.

"Takeee in the forest for the last time ass aah human. Yuu will find the world much different once yuuu awaken ass a child of the egg."

"Like how?" He asked as he sat astride Kim's back.

She turned head forward again and walked through the brush for a few minutes lost in thought before Tom spoke up.

"Ssssmell for one thing. Weee can sssmell things differently now, weee notice more. For example; I can smell that Kim is pregnant."

"You can?" The startled scientist blurted out, he quickly jotted it down.

"liii think sso. She smellsss different from Irma. Could beee that they are just two different individualsss, but both Irma and I agree on one thing. Weee get protective and ssssnappy around new people when Kim iss around."

"But what happened earlier with the fight with Jesse? He seemed willing to attack Kim."

"Yuuu did not seeee the whole fight. Heee looked confused whenever Kim was in range, he pulled his hitsss and only struck at her breast bone and shoulder girdle. Verrry dense bone, natural armor."

Huh, the Doctor thought. "What else?"

“Sssight” Kim added. “We’ve noticed different colorssss on things that we know look a certain way. Different huuus and more vibrant.”

He scribbled more notes. “What about your speech? Why do you have such a hard time with sibilants and vowels? Going back and forth between English and whatever we are to call the new language, do you even realize you are doing it?”

Tom paused with his hind leg raised for its next step with a shocked expression on his face, if his jaw hanging open was anything to go by. He began moving again before responding.

“Sssometimes, we notice. But I didn’t know how badly we were doing it until now. For ssspeaking English we think that it’ssss the shape of our necksss and vocal chords. So much air rushing through such a large diameter wind pipe, weee don’t think the muscless in our throatsss can respond quickly enough to... to.... Sstop some lettersss from dragging out isss the best way I can think tooo put it.”

“It does make it harder to understand what you are saying when right in the middle of a sentence you begin to sound like a bird. As for the pronunciations I’m sure in time that you...we will get better as the muscle tone increases.”

Tom bobbed his head while he and his wife continued to thread their bodies through the tight confines of the forest towards their home.