

YEOMAN KIT COLONY

Entry

Everything feels like dog. I'm in bed, in a perfectly dark room: my only available senses are smell, sound, touch, taste, gravity, and time.

My sense of smell: Dog breath. I may as well be inside of a dog's mouth. It smells like the inside of a dog's mouth unmistakably. I feel like I am in a room that has been wholly slobbered on from ceiling to walls to carpet, and not just cursorily, not just for a short time. My nose radiates euphoria in recognizing the scent of a dog's chewthing, a dog's breath, a dog's saliva, as being what we are more or less surrounded by, as we lie on this bed.

My sense of sound: Breathing. It could be a human. When was the last time I was in bed in a dark room with a human? It isn't a human. So this is canine breathing, somewhere in this dark room with me. The breathing in... the breathing out... the breathing in... the breathing out... It sounds like the dog here with me is soundly asleep.

My sense of touch: There's blankets all around, one is bunched up around my head, one my feet have gotten themselves wrapped up into, one is draped across my torso, it feels like there's another one or two off to either side of me; the blankets feel like adopted nerves connecting me to my sleepmate. In the way the blankets, the ones wrapped around my feet, draped across my torso, et cetera, are being tugged, I

know, from that, where my canine companion is. On the bed with me. *Not* touching me. But very close by. It feels, in among the blankets, like me and this dog were earlier snuggled up very very very very close together, and then, in the process of settling in...

Oh, wait.

Adding one: My sense of temperature: Warm. Hot. Melting via the furnace (FUR-nace) that is sharing a room and a bed and blankets and space with a dog.

My sense of taste: ...Paws?

My sense of touch again: There is a dog paw on my face. The coarse paw pad rests on my upper lip, and the claws touch the side of my face, next to my mouth, and my tongue (dry) is thoughtlessly sticking out of my open mouth, touching the flat of the dog paw that is on my face. Cool. Very into it. Genuinely.

My sense of taste again: Definitely a paw. I can taste the... salt? I can *taste* the fact that my tongue is touching the hair that grows between the paw pads. Whatever that taste is? That's what I'm tasting.

My sense of gravity: There is gravity. Hell, there is always gravity, there's never not. But, there is immediate gravity. Perceptible gravity. Appreciable gravity. I am lying on my back, on a bed, in a room that "has gravity" even in the layman's sense. And, also weighing down on this bed, with bodily weight, is a dog; my gravity and a dog's gravity cooperate, turning the bed into a sort of bowl, cone, basin, a shape where me and the dog are both naturally drawn to the center which is also the bottom.

My sense of time: I think I'm supposed to be in the middle of sleeping right now. I think that's what time it is. I think I was supposed to be asleep for a long time already, and still have a lot of sleep left to come.

And yet. Here I am. Awake. With my dry tongue pressed against the hair tuft in the middle of a dog's paw.

The dog, in the midst of dream, softly, barks.

I wait for the paw twitches; sleep barking and sleep running so often come as one thing. I wait for the dog's paw to scratch my face, leave a line of torn skin, blood...

There was only the one bark. And then a sort of sigh... a frustrated, giving up sigh. And then a pause. Now back to breathing. The dog breathes in... the dog breathes out... the dog breathes in... the dog breathes out... the dog breathes in...

The dog wakes up, with a big exhale—a big sigh—and then a big stretch, the back arching, the legs going rigid during the stretch. The paw pad slides off of my face harmlessly.

The dog has awoken.

The dog had detected a sleepmate awake.

I still don't know which dog I'm with. Shine or Joey.

I roll towards the dog, and rest a hand on the side of a canine ribcage. A BIG canine ribcage. Joey. If I moved my hand up his body, up the fur, I would arrive at pointy ears; if I moved my hand down his body, towards the hotter parts of his anatomy, I would arrive at a sheath, balls.

I crane my face forward and give him a dry peck on the front of his muzzle.

With his paw that had been on my face, he uses his claws to pull my body close to his body, and he holds me, close. He licks my forehead. Over and over again, he runs his tongue across my forehead, washing me.

No wonder everything smells like a dog's chewthing. I am the chewthing.

I let it happen. I'm overjoyed to let it happen. There is nowhere else I would rather be than right here, bunched up in a hot bed against a hot dog, my human sweat being washed off by him.

I say, "I love you, Joey. I love you, guy."

As his licking goes on, he pulls me even closer with his claws, and starts licking the back of my neck. Heh.

I put a hand on his back and a hand on his belly; He rolls onto his back, legs splayed apart, and I give him a big belly rub, rubbing my hands all over his fluffy big warm chest. He and I kiss, mouth to mouth, as he gets his belly rubbed. Moaning. Little giggles. I can't help making little noises about how fun this feels, to be here in bed with him, again.

As we continue to kiss, I take one hand off of him, off of his belly, and I start examining my own body. I don't mean masturbating, although, that's not to say that we might not be

going there. I just want to find out what I am right now. As one hand rubs my canine partner's tummy, my other hand touches my own tummy; I find that I am flatchested, no breast growth to speak of; even pressing a palm flat against a nipple and rocking the palm back and forth, I can feel no mass of developing breast underneath whatsoever. I guess it's always been one of the main clues, that tells me what part of my life I've arrived at.

Ever since I arrived at the Yeoman Kit Colony, my life is no longer lived in chronological order. I wake up, and sometimes I've woken up on a day three years before the last day that I had just lived. Sometimes I wake up and only a week has advanced forward.

Things change. So there are some questions that can give me a good idea of when I am, at least roughly. Am I with Shine, or am I with Joey, or am I damned to the lonely time, the time after everyone else but me has died. Is my chest flat, or has the estradiol given me breasts yet. What name do people call me.

Right before waking up to this, I was in the lonely time.

The floor outside of my bedroom creaks; speaking of "What name do people call me," speak of the devil.

I stop kissing Joey, not that this stops him from kissing me. Within his claws, I turn myself around, so that I am little spooned, my back flush with his chest, his claws resting on my bicep, him licking the back of my neck, and then the side of my face, and then sticking his tongue in my ear.

From there in Joey's grasp, among the nest of blankets on our shared bed, I look up to the doorway of our room; the sliding door is already slid open, apparently left that way whenever Joey and I had gone to sleep. By the soft light of some of the electronic display panels outside of the room, I can see when a figure with long black hair (and piercings on his nose, eyebrow, and earlobes, and tattoos of a flock of small black silhouette birds going across his face) appears in my doorway. Geoff.

Geoff says, softly, "You're up, Joey and Roman?"

I hear Joey's tail beat against the bedsheets as he wags; I feel the little percussions ripple across our bed; Joey continues to lick the side of my face clean.

I put a hand up at his muzzle for him to lick instead, giving him my fingers to have instead of my ears, which I need to

borrow back for a second to better hear the human who has just arrived and called me Roman.

I say to Geoff, laughing a little bit at myself as Joey doesn't let up on licking me, "We're up, yeah."

Joey tries to force his muzzle between the gaps of my fingers and get back to my ear, but I firmly keep him pushed away.

Geoff says, "I'm sorry, correction, you're up Joey The Dog Himself and Lilly The Aforementioned Dog's Girlfriend."

Oh that's *really* pleasing to hear. He *does* know the name that I end up changing to. And the trans of it all. And the zoo of it all.

I say to Geoff, referring to Joey and myself, "He and she are awake."

He asks, "Wanna hit breakfast at the cantina, if you're up for the day?"

Hearing that we're going somewhere, Joey stands up on the bed, standing with his paws on me in fact, and he does a big shake-off, and then he leaps off of me and onto the ground, and walks quickly past Geoff out into the hall.

Geoff mentions, "Joey's going with me, apparently. Ha."

I say to Geoff, "Yeah I'd love to come get breakfast. What time is it?"

"Oh four hundred," he says.

"Oh, do they even serve breakfast right now?"

"Twenty four seven, Lilly," Geoff says, wearing the boredom on his sleeve, of re-explaining some piece of trivia that he probably had to remind me of as recently as his yesterday.

I'd forgotten, the cantina near Geoff, here in his neck of the colony, is indeed an all day and all night affair. More recently (in my own highly individual sense of what "recently" entails) I've been more used to getting snubbed by a cantina on the far opposite side of the colony that closes sometime between twenty hundred hours and twenty three hundred hours, seemingly at complete random, seemingly to avoid serving noisy drunks (my friends.) But yes. Geoff is right, obviously. I do have memories of getting a bite to eat in this nearby cantina in the dead of night, usually just with Shine, but sometimes with both Shine and Geoff.

As I'm thinking about going to this cantina with Joey instead of Shine for the first time (my individual sense of "for the first

time,") I feel a surprising pang of sadness, at thinking of Shine, and the fact that she is dead now. I don't want her to be dead. I tell myself that I will see her alive again. Maybe the next time I wake up, or maybe a hundred times from now, but at some point, I will wake up, and it will be a black dog in bed with me, a smaller dog, with floppy ears, and she, alive, will roll onto her back for me to give her belly a rub. She, alive, will be there, getting her belly rubbed by me, and we will both, together, be remembering all the years we shared together, even before arriving at the far-off Yeoman Kit Colony together, back on Mars, our home planet. But then, as quickly as I summon all of these memories of her back to me, and as quickly as I summon up the reassurance that I will see her alive again, I feel unbearably guilty. I feel so selfish, so thoughtless, about the fact that I am trying to rationalize her death by assuring myself that I will go back to a time before it happened. Does that matter to her, or just to me? She is dead now. Either way, as me and Geoff and her replacement go to get food at the cantina, we do so in a world that is no longer graced with her.

Geoff asks, "Are you alright?"

"Um," I say, and then suddenly I am crying. Not big sobs—maybe Geoff can't even tell that I'm crying yet—but, my vision is blurred from tears that are here now, even if they have not yet fallen. With great effort, I force out the words, "Just remembering Shine. Be out in a minute."

"Okay. I think about her too, sometimes, yknow," Geoff says, and then I think he shrugs, but I can't see him too well through my teary vision, and then he walks off, leaving me alone in my room.

I do cry. Joey comes back. He climbs up onto the bed, and he lays down with me, and he licks my eyes, and I love him. I love him more than my words could ever say. Words are not enough, or, more specifically, words are not the right kind of thing. But I say the words anyways. "I love you, Joey. I love you a lot. I love you."

Desolate

It's so quiet. In the times after everyone else. I sit in a park, on a bench, looking at dead leaves caught in a whirlwind of the station's artificial wind. The dead leaves, pale greens and pale browns, circle around and around each other like animals chasing each other's tails. They rise in the winds, they swoop, the leaves follow after one another... and then the wind stops, and the leaves fall to the ground. And then, indefinitely, the leaves just stay there. Unmoving. Fucking incredible.

This is my life, in three frames: 1) Me and Shine arrive at the Yeoman Kit Colony which I have been invited to in my capacity as a network engineering apprentice and she and I spend a year together here; 2) Shine dies and the next day I go visit my friend Sala fully intending to kill myself with booze with her that night and then I accidentally fall in love with her dog Joey instead and me and Joey spend a little over six years together; 3) Joey dies and the next day the colony is attacked and everyone else dies too, except for me, I am the only survivor.

What is the sound of one trans girl not having anyone around to say her name, and being almost completely deaf anyways from bombs going off in her ears on the day the last of her friends died, and not to mention she was already feeling quite dead inside herself from her first love and her second love both also being dead and so she probably wouldn't want to talk to anyone anyways?

That's a bad question. Terribly formed. Compound. Unclear.

The Yeoman Kit Colony is—well, “was,” maybe—a habitable structure orbiting the star Tau Ceti; the star is characteristically very similar to Sol, albeit smaller; as someone who has been under both suns, they indeed feel like they are both creatures of the same species, so to speak; the colony was formed, several years before my arrival, out of the combining of two spacefaring megaships, one ship being on a research voyage and bearing the namesake of Dr Miranda Yeoman and the other ship being on a voyage of a religious nature and bearing the namesake of Dr Melissa Kit.

Is this legacy one that Drs Yeoman and Kit ever even once saw coming? That their ships coming out all this way and then

being welded together would ultimately result in a day where one faggy girl whose friends are all dead is sitting on a bench in a park on their colony, sad?

“Welded together” is an over simplification of the process of what actually happened, to integrate two ships into one another that were each already the size of a terrestrial city.

“Sad” is an over simplification of how alone I feel, some days.

Vested

I am sitting on the brown carpeted floor in a common room, putting Joey’s reflective work vest on him, making sure the straps are secured to just the right looseness or tightness. He is beautiful. His coat, in the sunlight that shines in through the big windows on the other side of the room... His coat looks like sweeping hills and valleys, waves, dunes. He should be photographed more often, is all I’m saying, I guess. Heh.

His vest is cyan, and says WORKER in black text.

My lanyard is a matching cyan, indicating I am a qualified animal handler.

Yeah. Yeah I’ve “handled” this animal, alright. Giggity.

But also yes I am a qualified animal handler. And therefore I am allowed to bring Joey to work without even really needing to justify how exactly it is that a huge burly stud dog helps me in my task of improving computer intranet uptime for the colony.

The vest seems good.

I say to Joey, “Should we check?”

Joey trots away from me to the center of the common room, rolls on the ground between all of the couches (one of which, I had forgotten, Sala is currently passed out on.) He doesn’t roll around for a particularly long time, just seems to want to proof-of-concept it, ‘yeah yeah, I did your trick,’ kind of thing. He stands up from the roll onto his fours, and then he does the world’s smallest little jump as a placeholder for what he’s ‘supposed’ to do, which is stand on his twos (his hindpaws) for a little bit. Satisfied with himself that he’s gone through the “check” routine, he trots back to me and sticks his tongue in my mouth.

I kiss him back, saying mid kiss, “You lazy, mmmmmwah.”

He doesn't seem to mind being lazy.

I do say it as a compliment towards his sense of comfort, rather than a critique towards his lack of obedience.

The full "Check" routine that we trained on, as part of being able to demonstrate that he was a trained animal, basically involved a series of agility movements to be sure that the harness isn't unduly restricting him, and also isn't going to slide off at an inopportune time. Rolls, different speeds of movement, leaps, standing on twos, he's supposed to ('supposed' to) find ways (wherever we are) to run all of the checks when I say Check.

But, pragmatically speaking, I know how to put on the harness; we both already know that it's on correctly. He is already certified. The trick is no longer something he 'has' to do, just something I invite him to play out if he still wants.

I'm getting hard as Joey and I kiss. And, as much as that's great, I also don't need to smell like precum all day. ...If anyone would even notice. I guess I've already been to the future from here, and, nobody ever brings up, "Damn Lilly remember that day you and Joey softcore fucked before you came in to work and we could all tell and now we all make fun of you for it?" So I guess today will go fine, basically, is what I've decided. Based on the fact that I can't think of anyone in the future who suddenly hates me after circa today, I guess today is not a day when I go out and make anyone hate me. Nice.

I break myself away from Joey's kisses, and I grab my boots, and put them on and tie them up.

After they're tied, I stick one leg into the air, rotate the foot around, flex the ankle.

...Feels tight around the ankle.

I put the foot back on the ground, and start untying the laces to try again.

I really do a better job with Joey than with myself.

When my boots *are* properly on and good, I pick up my backpack full of my tools. Little clippers and sensors and interface-y gadgets, All Of The Wires Ever, and in the front pocket things related to canine stewardship—little treats, a pretty complete set of first aid implements in the rare event that I need them although I know already that it will happen now

and then, poop bags in the rare event that I need them although I know already that it will happen now and then. Joey mostly does his business in the courtyard at home, but, yeah. I don't decorate the outside of my backpack too much, but, I do have one patch sewn onto it that says she/her/HERS, honestly mainly so that I can be sure it's MY bag at a glance, not just a similar looking one. And, also on the outside of the backpack, I have strapped a water bottle, a little electric lantern, a little baby flashlight, and a momma flashlight. It is shocking how often someone in my proximity opens up a panel and sticks their head inside and says "fuck I can't see shit" and then I and I alone am their salvation.

From the couch, I hear a long, pained groan.

I call to Sala, in a very musical voice, really exploring a range of notes up and down in 'morning,' "Goo-oo-oo-oo-ood mo-o-o-o-o-o-orning, Sunshine!"

"Lilly I will fucking kill you," she groans.

I walk over to the couch, take my water bottle off of my backpack, and offer it down to her.

"Lilly I fucking love you," she groans, and takes the water bottle, unscrews the mouth bit, and drinks. She groans again. The grimace on her face does not make me feel jealous of how her insides must feel right now. She was really hitting the booze last night. She asks, "Are you going in to work?"

I say back to her, "I don't know, do I need to take you to the medical bay instead?"

Her grimace does not become any less intense while she tells me, "I'll be fine."

It's fucked up that I know she does live until the same day everyone else on the colony will live to, and then her death will have nothing to do with her habits anyways, so, I can't even tell her she's being an idiot. She is being an idiot, but, she's also right that she'll be fine.

Suddenly, her expression changes. Well, it doesn't completely change—the grimace remains—but, added to it, she begins looking at me with concerned scrutiny, as I am looking at her and pitying her.

She asks, "Will I be fine?"

I sigh, and say, “There could be things I haven’t learned about yet. I’m not an oracle. Maybe you do go to the medical bay and get a robot liver today and just never told me.”

She smiles at that. A pained, pained, pained, pained, pained smile. She says, blissfully in her misery, “In the future they make me a robot liver...”

“NO, chica fucking qué crazy, I am JOKING, those do NOT EXIST.”

Her eyes are closed as she smiles and she is not listening to me. “Robot liver...”

Musically on ‘fucking,’ “You are going to fu-u-u-u-u-cking spend a miserable week in the medical bay getting needles stuck into you all over and I’m not going to be sorry I never learned about it until it was too late, because I am not your time babysitter.”

She whispers, happily, to fuck with me I’m sure, “Robot liver...”

Whatever.

At some point me and Sala are both trying to learn Spanish together, doing flash cards and stuff. Neither of us are of that culture, neither of us are descendants of anywhere that spoke that language with any particular prominence. We just. Try it for our own edification, I guess. I’m not aware of any point in time that either of us actually does speak Spanish with anything even vaguely resembling fluency, so, I guess it doesn’t go well.

I call her a dumb bitch in Spanish (I think) and she just says robot liver again and I guess I don’t know what else I was expecting.

I tell her to drink the rest of the water so that I can go refill it and leave for work.

She does gulp down the rest of the water, and hands me my water bottle back.

As I walk to the sink, in the long kitchen area that’s off to one side of the common room, she calls to me to ask, “Are there any dirty dishes?”

Yes. “Ye-e-e-e-es.”

“Fuuuuuuck,” she groans. “I used a lot of pans last nighttttt, I remember now. They should make cooking but with no dishes to do after.”

“I think that’s called having a romantic partner—”

“Shut upppppp!”

“I’m just sa-a-a-aying,” I sing. I turn on the faucet and start filling up my water bottle again, pushing a stack of dirty pans in the sink out of the way a little.

She groans, apparently having heard them clink and stuff.

Heheh.

She mentions, “I don’t see YOUR fuckbuddy ever doing your dishes.”

“He does, he helps lick them clean.”

“Which is GROSS,” she says.

I mean, his tongue was in my mouth not one minute ago, so, obviously we have very different perspectives on that matter. But yeah. She never used to let him lick plates, participate in meals, before I kinda stole him from her. She literally screamed the first time I held a plate down for him. Heheheheh.

Joey is sitting by the front door, facing me, waiting for us to be done with our dumb Lilly-and-Sala human time-wasting so that we can go already.

I call to him from the sink, “Almost baby, very soon.”

I screw on the top of the water bottle.

I call to Sala, “Want me to get you anything from the kitchen while I’m up?”

“Cheese.”

I go to the fridge and slide the door open.

Standing there in front of the open fridge, looking at our goodies of packaged up foodthings, I try to remember if I ever even noticed a difference, when going from Martian food to Colony food. On Mars we had a hybrid approach of food from farms, food from hunting, and food from vats. Here on the colony it is alllll vats, babyyyy. Vat algae. Vat meat. Vat things that are... somehow... derived from vat algae and vat meat. I mean, there are also gardens, actually, but, Sala and I kiiiind of aren’t the most conscious eaters, and so we’re both proooooobably eating almost exclusively from gunk scooped out of Yeoman Kit’s finest aluminum cylinders that has then been prettied up a little and made to look like potato chips and summer sausage.

...Is 'aluminum' right, or do the vats just look like aluminum but they're totally some other metal?

Anyways. Molecularly speaking, the cheese is cheese, the meat is meat. It's just used-to-be-in-a-vat cheese instead of used-to-be-in-an-udder cheese, and meat that was raised brainless and cylindrically in a vat instead of meat that had grown up with legs and thoughts and might have had a cute animal name once. And as far as I can remember I have never noticed a difference. Taste, texture, it's all a perfect recreation.

After everyone else dies I don't know how to keep the food production machinery going but there is enough excess already preserved in various storage facilities to where I'm not worried about it.

I reach into the fridge, and am about to tear off one cheese stick from the set of cheese sticks that we have in here, but then I just grab the entire thing of like ten cheese sticks, let the door of the fridge slide over back to the closed position, walk over to Sala, and set the like ten cheese sticks down on the couch with her.

"I love you," she says. "You are a hero."

"Have a good day girl," I tell her.

I walk to the front door, open it, and Joey in his cyan vest runs out of the door ahead of me, into the sunlight, into the courtyard of our housing complex. Right away, his first business is to run around with his nose to the grass, and then he finds a spot to pee.

Shielding

Sometimes I live the same day over again. Like, the same calendar date, I perceive it again. And, incredibly, the fact that I do this doesn't... really... make it any clearer to me whether or not free will is real.

I make different choices. One time I lived the same date three times in a row, and on the first two I went to work and did my job just to watch everyone else closely and see if *they* did anything differently, and then when the third consecutive instance of that day rolled around, I said, FUCK IT, and I called

in sick and went to a furry rave with Joey and Sala and Natalee and Nicki and Girl Avery.

I have not been able to find out, on dates after the fact, which version of this day the universe thinks I actually lived.

There should be proof, right? It should be easy to tell for sure?

Sometimes I'm in pictures from the rave that night and sometimes I'm not. Sometimes station records reflect that I did work tasks on that day and sometimes station records reflect I called in absent. Which way it is has never shifted directly in front of my eyes, at least, not yet, but it has shifted back and forth over the course of the same day, without me ever having had a gap where I went to sleep and have clearly come back on a different "run" of the day that I'm now presently living.

And it doesn't seem to particularly matter which way that day went. Does Natalee remember feeling overstimulated and leaving the rave and taking a walk around the block with me and Joey? Or does Eli remember auditing the breaker box in a station library with me after library hours? Either way, Natalee and Eli both still like me later. They either go, ha ha, yes, I do remember that, what an interesting day, or they go, hm, no, must have been someone else with you, I don't remember that at all, but sounds like quite a time. It feels about the same as talking to Sala about something that happened while she was blackout drunk.

If a trans girl makes a choice in the woods and no one remembers what it was did she make a choice at all?

I don't know if free will is real. I think it is. I think free will does exist, but, also I am only human.

I'm at work sitting in my cubicle with Joey asleep on my feet.

I'm pretty sure this is a day I've lived before but I don't know for sure, since a lot of days are kind of similar anyways, and I guess I've been at this for a long time.

On my desk is a cardboard box stacked full of routers that I am inspecting one by one. It's a process that involves selecting the next router off the top of the stack and plugging different wires into all of the ports, and then over those wires, I send signals from my computer making the router think that it's plugged in to a busy real-life network, and I can see which of

these routers is performing as expected, and which one is an anomaly that is causing dropped packets that then cause the clergy in a nearby sector to think that their chapter is being sabotaged deliberately.

Two cubicles over, I hear Eli and Mariana talking about a head-scratcher in Networking Closet 6B of Data Center Kai IX. As they go on about seemingly randomly dropped packets (sometimes I feel like a human whose main desire in life is to suck dog cock and other times I feel like a dog whose main desire in life is to chase dropped packets) I am losing my mind hearing them not be able to figure it out because I already know the answer because I remember it from the future—

Frustrating. Disorganized. I should just let it happen because everything is going to happen anyways.

I work on my routers.

Eli says, “Well I’ll tell ya, I isolated everything in that closet, top to bottom. Every single element, I spent a good twenty minutes on, one and then the next.”

He hasn’t. He would know what the problem is if he had done what he’s saying.

Mariana asks, “Have you been working on this alone, or do other people come and go from the closet? Like, could someone else be changing some element of this back and forth?”

Eli says, “Well Kyle’s been in and out of there the most, but he wants this figured out as much as I do.”

Mariana says, “Yeah that’s so weird then,” even though Eli totally just basically ignored her idea.

Eli says, “I’m about ready to submit a request that we just pick up all of the equipment in there and relocate it to another closet, it’s gonna be a pain but, it’s about all I can come up with.”

That won’t solve it.

Fuck it. Fuck it I can’t focus on my work like this.

I call, “Hey, Eli, come here a sec.”

Joey wakes up and stands and slinks out from under my desk, and sits beside my chair.

I bend down and give Joey a big smooch on the top of the head, and then I turn in my swivel chair to face Eli as he

approaches. I recline back hardcore in my chair, draping an arm over Joey, petting him.

Eli appears, having wheeled himself over on his own swivel chair. He asks, “What’s going on, Roman?”

Should he be calling me that?

Oh yeah I guess it is that early, at this point. If I looked down at my lanyard right now, my badge would say that name on it.

Whatever.

I say, “Eli, the spectre-3-augmented firewall on the rack in this closet, does it have a cooling fan?”

He thinks. “Well, yes it does. Same grade of fan I’d expect to see on a tower like that.”

I shake my head. “How cold is that data center?”

He thinks. “Well, holy smokes, it’s freezing in there.”

I nod. “The fan was sourced from Venetian standard—it doesn’t matter, nevermind. The power supply to the fan has inadequate shielding and so when the fan turns on to run its exercising routine every few minutes it’s sending out noise and that’s what’s killing your packets. If you refit the fan with a power supply that matches the rest of the environment then that would be one way to solve the problem, but, also in that data center, the fan on that rack is completely redundant anyways, you can just unplug the fan.”

“How in the world did you solve that one just from overhearing me and Mariana?”

“Call it a hunch, anyways I gotta run, there’s a meeting I need to catch really soon here.”

Holy shit that was fun.

Me and Joey scamper off to one of the more secluded bathrooms in the office and I get down on the tiled floor and butt my head against his flank and caress his sheath and he gets humpy and fucks my hand and I suck his cock.

I do feel a lot more productive for the rest of the day, though I do pause in my work kinda regularly to sniff my hands and feel really, really happy with myself and with my boyfriend.

Sightseeing

Seventeen minutes ago I woke up from a nap on Geoff's couch to the subtle sensation of Shine dropping a slobbery tennis ball on my face.

Seize the day. I hadn't seen her in a really long time. I got up and went straight to my boots and put them on and we went out the front door. I held her slobbery tennis ball as we walked, and she ran around, orbiting me, making friendly approaches to different strangers and sniffing different trash bins. Sightseeing. Scentsmelling. I watched her taking in the world through her eyes and nose and paw pads and floppy ears.

Now, me and her are walking through a park. It's a long amalgam of trail that spiderwebs over the uppermost surfaces of the colony, with valleys of genuine rock and dirt and grass and flowers, streams of genuine water.

We get to a long stretch of clear open grass, and she zooms ahead of me and then turns back and faces me, posture tall, alert.

She's so small, compared to Joey. Black coat, very very wavy hair, droopy floppy ears, and *small*. I never really used to think of her as small, back when she was my one and only, back when she and she alone was my entire world, and so she was just my default concept of how big a dog is, and I didn't know that an ostensible canine giant was going to be in my future. But her version of "standing tall" wouldn't bring the top of her head up to the top of Joey's back, I don't think.

I don't know. I've never seen them together. As far as I'm aware, Shine and Joey never meet, even though technically, somewhere else on the colony, Joey *is* alive already.

Shine is staring at me to throw the ball.

I throw her tennis ball as far as I can.

She sprints after it. When it hits the ground she is already right next to the spot where it hits, and she snaps towards it and grabs the ball in her teeth. Holding the ball, she does a sort of victory lap, galloping with the ball around the grass, and then she comes back to me, and drops the ball at my feet, and runs a few paces away again, and then looks back at me again, ready for me to throw it.

I do grab the ball again, and throw it again, and she sprints along with it again, and gets it again. This time when she has it, she doesn't come straight back to me. She trots around the grass, looking at other people who are in this park, seeming very proud to have the ball, be the master of fetch.

Scared

I sit on a boulder alone in a dry valley of dead grass.

My greatest fear is that someday I will stop living my life out of sequence and I will never be able to go back to her or to him.

Cantina

I sit at a booth in the cantina with my uncle Geoff and my girlfriend Shine. Shine is sitting on my side of the booth, staring at the french fry in my hand. I hold the french fry up between the two of us, making a show of examining it, considering it. I bring it to my mouth, take a bite, and then what's left of the fry, I offer to her. She eats it out of my hand and smacks on it in her mouth for about a second and a half and then she swallows it and then she continues sitting and staring at me, waiting for me to pick up something else for us to share.

Geoff says, while gesticulating with his glass of unsweetened iced tea, "You know, most people who look at each other like you and Shine look at each other, I would accuse them of dating."

Heh. Yeah. Funny that, Geoff.

He'll know someday, and he'll be cool about it.

Is this the day that he finds out?

It could be. It doesn't need to be.

I guess I don't really care if it is or it isn't.

I rest my hands on either of Shine's shoulders and I go in and kiss her cheek, smooching the very corner of her salivating canine mouth.

He laughs at my audacity, and says, "Like father like son."

Wait, what?

Aching

I am in a bedroom and I feel like puking and all of my muscles are sore. It's one of the few days, during my stretch of years on the colony, when I am truly, deeply, medically, sick. My nose runs and I sniffle and then I keep snorting in my snot and then I have to cough and I cough until my throat hurts but it feels like I haven't actually gotten all of the mucus out of my nose and my throat and everything is awful and I hate that this is my existence right now.

Joey is in the bed with me and I am wrapped around his belly, melding to him, I am trying as much as physically possible to fuse my cold aching out-of-order body into his healthy warm furnace of a body.

I am covered in sweat and fur and I am not having fun. I want so badly right now to shed my skin and leave my bones and become one healthy creature with the dog who is holding onto me.

Honesty

I'm at the rave again. It's that day again. I went to the furry rave again instead of work.

There are actually... different zones, of the rave, I guess. There's the one deep inside of this facility that has all of the strobing lights and deafening music. And that's a really big room that very many people are packed into, it's very popular and very fun and very well liked. It's also not ideal to bring a perfectly nice dog into, I suspect. So I haven't gone into that room, I haven't taken Joey in there. There are also other rooms. Rooms that still have intriguing lights and hypnotic music and fursuiters—rooms you can still really get lost in—and those are the rooms that Joey and I wander through, at the rave.

There's also an alley where two dozen people are smoking tobacco, as cigarettes and vapes.

I've never been a smoker, but, I'll admit I find the scent nostalgic. Reminds me of hanging out with my school friends on Mars, shooting the shit.

Here, too, a lot of my friends smoke. And so in this alley is where I can pretty reliably find one or two of my friends, throughout the night. So at some points in the night me and Joey are popping out of the facility and into the alley, to hang out in the smoking section, and yap with people.

Right now Nicki is on her phone texting someone and I am lying on my back on the ground atop all of the grit down here and Joey is lying completely on top of me and me and Joey are making out. He has me pinned under him, completely putting his entire weight onto me, and my boner could not be harder, grinding against his heavy furry belly through the fabric of my pants and shirt. His slobber covers my face. His tongue, as always, is at home in my mouth. A few furies in the alley are staring at us. Like, there's a pair of furies who are whispering quiet remarks to one another while looking at me and Joey making out, and then there's another furry, a guy in a fox shirt and neon green paws, who is completely gobsmacked by us, just staring, slackjawed, enraptured.

Joey is pinning my neck and shoulders with his forepaws, holding me down against the ground with his claws, tilting his head as he sticks his tongue in my mouth to get down into my throat as deeply as possible. I run my fingers deep through Joey's coat as we softcore fuck, pressing my fingertips to the depths of his hair, massaging all of his skin and muscle and bones underneath.

With bestiality like this, why isn't everyone a zoo?

Joey shifts his weight on top of me a little bit for balance, and he ends up pressing all of his weight down on one of my boobs, and I cum. Literally I just orgasm, unexpectedly, my diamond-hard femme prick still inside of my clothes, pressed under all of Joey's weight.

Me and Joey share little smooches in the afterglow. He would gladly keep tonguefucking my esophagus, I'm sure, but, my body is completely flooded with happy sleepy reward chemicals now, and so, just cuddling with him now feels very peak. Cuddling and little kissies. I pet him, and cherish him, and tell him he did a very good job, and that I felt so good, and that my god I needed that, and that he did to me all of the perfect things.

Eventually he agrees that we are done kissing and he rests his chin on top of my face. Like. My entire face is now under the weight of his dog head, my nose and mouth finding a home in the hollow of the underside of his jawbone, my face is blanketed in his jowls and his drool. I am in heaven. He is literally perfect.

This lasts for very many minutes, and then eventually some furries who are closer to the mouth of the alley a ways away start barking at each other and being really loud and playful and maybe start fucking (who knows?) and Joey stands up off of me to go walk over to them and see what kind of fun they're having.

Lying there on the ground, I straighten out my clothes a little bit (move my dick so that it won't flop out over my waistband for everyone to see as soon as I stand up) and I glance around to see if anyone is still kinda looking at me at all.

Yes the gobsmacked furry with the neon green paws is still looking at me.

The other two who had been talking about me have gone away.

I say to the guy with the neon green paws, "You know, I actually read in a wildlife magazine that wolves solidify their social bonds by sticking their noses inside of each other's mouths, and it helps them test their levels of comfort with one another, like, how close are you and I, well, let's find out by sticking my nose in between all of your really sharp teeth and we'll see if we're both okay with that or if I get bit, is kinda the idea."

The guy nods.

I go on, "I'm a zoo though, I was already kissing dogs for a long time before I read about that, but, when I saw it in the magazine I was like, huh! Light bulb moment, that seemed to totally add up, with my experiences with canine bonding and intimacy."

He nods, and then he glances around the alley.

Nicki is the closest person nearby besides me and Greenpaws. She's still texting on her phone, standing nearby a wall.

I mention to Greenpaws, "That's my friend Nicki, she's cool."

Nicki kinda gives a very vaguely playful sneer and under her breath says "hey" and continues focusing on texting.

Greenpaws nods. He then gets down onto the ground with me, on his chest. I roll over so that we're both on our chests, our faces both really close to one another, looking really close at each other eyeballs to eyeballs.

He puts his paws up to shield a whisper from any eavesdroppers, and he whispers to me, "I'm uh. I'm gonna run away from you right after I say this. But. You will be the first person I say this to. Literally ever."

I gasp, and nod rapidly a bunch of times.

He glances around again, sees that Nicki is still the only person nearby, and, even with her, there's hardly any chance that she could be able to overhear us. Greenpaws whispers to me, "That was really hot, because I'm a zoo too!"

He then hops up to his feet and books it towards the mouth of the alley.

On the way, Joey starts running alongside him.

Greenpaws skids to a halt, cautiously pets Joey on the head once, and then goes back to running away again. Joey wags and looks, but does not follow.

Greenpaws disappears out of the mouth of the alley, around the corner.

I stand up, brush the grit off of myself, stick my hands in my pants pockets, and casually saunter over to be standing side by side with Nicki. I resist the urge to like, look down at myself and see if there's a very obvious cum stain on my shirt, or if there's only a slightly obvious cum stain on my shirt. Either way it's kinda... too late to undo whatever is there anyways.

Nicki mentions to me, "Natalee is freaking out and is coming out here..." she trails off as she glances up and sees Natalee shuffling slowly towards us, her hands crossed over her stomach, her posture very small. Nicki says to her, "Oh hey."

Natalee says back, "Hey."

Natalee looks tired. Natalee looks like her body is full of the same sleepy post-a-lot-of-excitement chemicals as mine is, to be honest. But, I wouldn't know. I'm not her, obviously. I'm not in her brain right now.

Arms still crossed across her stomach, Natalee looks down at my shirt, and says, "Ha, spill a drink on yourself, or?"

Ohhhh fuck me.

Nicki looks down at my shirt, and then she falls over onto the ground pointing and laughing at me.

My cheeks burn with embarrassment. Yup. Yup this is what my night is. Okay. Yup. Sure.

Natalee grabs Nicki's wrist, and pulls her back up to her feet, saying, "Uuuuupsy-daisy, cmon, this is a yucky place to touch the ground."

My cheeks burn even more. Nicki nearly falls right back over again, laughing at me in regards to Natalee's comment about avoiding touching the ground.

Yeah. Yeah I deserve this. This is the consequences of my actions. This is what happens when you get too kissy with your feral dog boyfriend in the furry smoking alley with the girls.

Nicki, completely breathless, tries to explain to Natalee, "Lilly and- was mwah mwah mwah- she was dry hump- Joey on top of her- GROUND- getting looks from soooo many people- AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHAHAHA!"

Natalee is hugging Nicki, still helping her keep her balance, patting her on the back. "Okay, sounds like fun. Zoo girl was sharing a little special time with her dogfriend. And got very excited about it?"

Nicki wipes tears out of her eyes, and nods.

You know, fuck it, I would literally rather have my trans tits out than keep having the shirt on at this point.

I take off my shirt aka impromptu cum rag, use a dry part of it to wipe off my bare stomach, and then I throw the cum rag aka shirt onto the ground against a wall.

I guess I'm still wearing a bra, so. That's something.

Natalee, who is wearing a black shirt and an extremely cool jacket with arctic foxes all over it, takes off her jacket and holds it open out to me.

Oh I feel bad. "Oh Natalee don't—"

"Shhhhh cmon."

"I'm covered in—"

"Shhhhhhh I'll survive, cover up, get in."

I do back into the jacket, getting it on really smoothly with Natalee's help. She zippers the jacket up for me.

"Thanks," I say to her.

"Mhm," she says. She then says to Nicki, "Ya good?"

Nicki nods, and says, “I just need to breathe for a minute.”

Natalee says, “Okay. I was gonna go walk around outside of the venue for a while, and just, decompress.”

I jump on that. “Would it be alright if I walk with you too?”

Natalee says, “Yeah, please, I would love your company.”

Soon enough, it’s just like I’m back in the last time I went through this night, all over again. Me and Natalee and Joey, sauntering slowly along around the block outside of the facility the rave is in, decompressing from it all. Except this time I have her jacket, I guess.

She’s telling me about food her family made for the potluck at their church.

Then there’s a lull in the conversation, and we walk along quietly for a little while.

And then she says, “So, this time anomaly, that you live in.”

I nod. “Life on shuffle.”

We keep walking.

She asks, “How long has it been happening, *to you?*”

I need a moment to think about that.

Tonight, per the calendar, is six years after me and Shine arrived on the Yeoman Kit Colony; five years after Shine died and Joey entered my life; long enough on HRT that it has done a very significant amount of work on my body and I well and truly pass to strangers as a woman (which feels nice, since, I am one) and everyone calls me Lilly; it will be about one year from now that Joey dies and then everyone else dies and I am all alone and mostly deaf on account of the bombs.

But how long has it been from my lived perspective? The time anomaly began for me when I first came to Yeoman Kit. Skipping to random days. Sometimes repeating days.

Right now, per the calendar, it’s six years after me and Shine arrived on the Yeoman Kit Colony; 6×365 is 2,190; so, do I feel like I’ve lived more than 2,190 days on Yeoman Kit (albeit out of order) or fewer? Probably more. Like, by a lot. I still haven’t seen every day that the seven years pre-bombing has to offer. But, most of my days are not spent pre-bombing. Not even close. Sometimes I spend months post-bombs before visiting the living again. So with the years and years I must have spent by now alone, post-bombing... And with the frequency that the same

days pre-bombing have played over again... As I walk beside Natalee, I am older in spirit than I am in body, there's no doubt at all.

I say to Natalee, "In your time, my anomaly began six years ago; in my time, very roughly estimating, all together, I've lived the anomaly for fifty years so far."

That answer knocks the wind out of her.

We stop walking, and hug.

She says, "I wish I could make it all better."

I tell her, "It's worth it to keep seeing Shine and Joey again."

"Is it worth it though, for all the time you spend alone?"

"Yes."

She squeezes me, and then we stop hugging, and go back to walking.

There's no explanation that I'm aware of for why all of this started happening to me. Why I alone survive the bombs. Why I alone am scraped across the years under Chronos's boot.

Over these seven years pre-bombs, I lay everything I know bare to scientists, commanders, friends, family, tabloid writers, and religious elites; I know something that nobody else does and it's infuriating being able to see the doomed trajectory this entire station is going on while most people flat out disbelieve me and those who do believe me don't do anything about it. The scientists are busy staring at profitable vat gunk under a microscope. The religious elites consider bragging to be a sin. Nobody important has time for my "imaginary" games (which, they say behind my back, I'm definitely just making up from the HRT turning me crazy.) I think some people just want to be so wrong that the magnitude of their wrongness kills everyone and no one is left alive to call them out anymore. The fact that everyone will die in the bombing, from my friends and family all the way up to the high chairs and the commanders... it's not because nobody told them it was going to happen someday.

Apathy

I would rather lie naked in a field from sunrise to sunset and get blistering sunburns on my cock and tits and soil myself and dehydrate and become malnourished than play a video game.

My days alone pass in pain because my days alone are painful.

Relay

I am back. Everything feels like dog again. I'm in bed, in a perfectly dark room: my only available senses are smell, sound, touch, taste, gravity, and time.

My sense of smell: Dog breath. Dog paws. Dog coat. How much I have missed it. How utterly incomplete I have been in its absence.

My sense of sound: Breathing.

My sense of touch: I feel a little smoldering ball of warmth pressing against my left arm.

I roll towards Shine on the bed, and bury my nose in her scruff, and inhale deeply, taking in more of the scent, taking in the sound of my nose bristling her coat, taking in the feeling of my nose and my lips and my chin nestling into her hair.

Taste, gravity, time, yeah yeah yeah, they do exist, check check check.

I lie in bed with Shine for nearly an hour as she continues to sleep, and I do nothing other than meditate on sensing her, living in her smells, her sounds, and the fact that we are physically located here with one another.

Eventually, there is a change in her breathing. Very minutely, I can feel some of the hairs on her face bristling my face, in a way that tells me her eyes are moving around, and she is now awake, and she is trying to sense if I am awake.

I say very, very, very quietly, "Is she awake?"

Her tail thumps against the blankets, and she does a big stretch, pressing her shoulder blades back into my face, and then she rolls towards me onto her back. I rub her belly, as she wags.

Within a minute and a half of her being awake, I am dressed and have a tennis ball in my hand and she and I are leaving our front door; the sun is not yet visible itself, but illuminates the sky a very slight amount; Shine and I walk together through our familiar neighborhood, on a mission to play some morning fetch

in one of the nearby parks. There are a few to choose from. She leads the way.

The park we arrive at is more or less a very large square lawn, with a children's playground and some pavilions at the center, but, mostly, the space is wide open expanses of green grass, *perfect* for playing fetch in.

She runs ahead of me a few galloping paces, and then turns back to me, and stands, facing me, ready for me to throw the ball.

I throw the ball. I throw it as far as I can, and she turns and darts out into the field after it.

When she snatches the ball up out of the grass, she gallops around with it in a big loop, victorious, proud, happy.

As she is out there, doing her first victory lap, I notice another dog, running towards us over the grass. Specifically, the other dog is booking it straight towards Shine. The dog has a collar on, and a leash attached to the collar, and no human attached to the leash: the dog runs with the leash flailing behind, masterless. Heheheheh.

The dog seems fairly young, not a tiny puppy but, very puppy-like in appearance, behavior.

Shine turns to face the oncoming dog, and idly drops her ball as the other dog nears.

The other dog's pointy ears... the coat... the face... it can't... it can't be...

Joey and Shine stand snout to snout, both of their noses gently twitching as they take each other in.

Joey being so young, he and Shine stand perfectly eye to eye, shoulder to shoulder.

Puppy Joey then play-bows and barks at Shine, and Shine plays along, and the two of them run around the grass with one another, chasing, playing. I run towards them, and fall to my knees with them, and for the only time in my life, my pack is all together.

Future

I didn't know if I was going to be able to go back to being alone, after that. Going from one of them to neither was pain enough;

Going from both to neither... I didn't anticipate being able to take it well.

As it turns out, after that day, I was released from the time anomaly. It happened like this.

I woke up, and I could tell that it was some day after the bombing, because I had no sense of hearing, and nothing smelled alive, and there was no other warm body in bed with me. I'm not sure how long I laid there, waiting for the sun to come and shine in strongly enough through the windows that it would annoy even my most stubborn, depressed, and annoyed self out of bed for the day. My thoughts ranged from life with Shine and our old friends back on Mars, to attending church services with Natalee now and then, to hexadecimal addresses of key components of the numerous common systems I've worked with throughout my career, to Joey asleep on my foot, and constantly throughout my thoughts, I was circling back to "yesterday," when Shine and Joey and myself were all together, in that unexpected moment.

I waited in bed for a very long time, for the sun to come up.

The sun did not come up, nor was it ever going to for as long as I continued laying there.

Eventually I did get out of bed. Not for any need; Not because I had to pee, not because I was hungry or thirsty, and certainly not because I had any appointments that I needed to keep. I just wanted to go walk outside. Lying there in bed, I was remembering times in my life when I went on dead-of-night walks with Shine or with Joey; Usually with Shine back on Mars, when I was younger, less established in existing; But sometimes on Yeoman Kit too. And... Yeah. Yeah if there was anyone who could use a good, long, dead-of-night walk to process through some feelings, it was me.

I got out of bed. I was already dressed in black jeans with holes in the knees and black underwear and a black bra and a grey long-sleeve undershirt and a t shirt from some metal band; I don't think anything I was wearing was stuff that I owned before the bombs; after the bombs, it was always finders keepers when I saw some sick threads, who the fuck cared.

After getting out of bed, I brushed my teeth. Peed. Looked at my face in the mirror. And then I sat down on the bed again to

put on my boots. And then, with those on, I stepped outside into the night.

I wandered around colony streets in the dim starlight, thinking. Thinking about the time Joey got a cut on his shoulder when we were out walking, and I didn't see it when it happened, I just noticed at some point that red was painted down part of his coat, and on the inside I was freaking out about my best friend being injured and how he didn't deserve whatever had happened to him and I didn't know if the cut was deep and I worried about him being in pain and I worried that he would associate me with the pain and he would think that I had done this to him. Outwardly, I just asked him to halt, and I knelt down with him there as people passed by us on the street; I got my little flashlight off of my bag and shined it at the wound, gently moving some of his bloodied hair out of the way; No foreign objects were stuck in the wound, whatever had caused it; The wound was pretty fucking deep, and I was terrified, but I got out my first aid kit, and I stuck him with a numbing agent, and I stitched him up, there on the spot. Medicated and bandaged the wound on top of the stitchwork. And then I picked him up, and carried him home; We walked several blocks, step by slow and careful step, me carrying this dog who was my own body weight plus a few pounds, and him letting himself be carried by his handler. When we were home I set him down and then went to the kitchen sink and washed his blood off of my hands, and the loose hairs from him that had become stuck to the blood.

As I was thinking about his blood being washed down the drain, I kind of snapped out of that series of memories, and became more aware of my present surroundings.

I was on a nature trail that me and Shine had walked before, a long time ago. We had played fetch here, in this elongated clearing of grass, in a valley of rocky slopes.

Standing in the center of the clearing, as I walked through a dead and empty world, was another person.

She stood on two legs, her height eye to eye and shoulder to shoulder with my own. She had a muzzle and tall pointed ears and a black coat of fur, and it was not a costume like all of the other furies I had seen before; her ears turned minutely to take

me in, head to toe, as I at first approached; When I noticed her, I froze in place, and her ears shifted from being aimed at my footfalls to being aimed at the rest of me, scanning me up and down. She wore jewelry but no clothing; She had breasts akin to those of a human though covered in her black coat of hair, and a sheath and testicles akin to those of a canine, her penis's white tip extremely impossible not to notice poking out of its sheath a little, as it and her eyes were the parts of her that glowed white, very brightly; Her mouth, as well, glowed, when she opened her mouth to speak.

She stood at the center of the long clearing, and I stood a significant distance away, and when she spoke, she spoke calmly, yet I could hear her across all that distance, and in spite of my rattled ears; She said to me, "The winds of time as we stand here now calm for thee, o Lilly, o passionate youth; come hither, o sister in the cosmos."

I walked towards her over the dead grass that her radiance illuminated.

When I arrived at her, she curtsied, lowering herself before me.

I stepped in and wrapped my arms around her in a hug, pet her head, rubbed her ears, scratched her scruff and her throat and her back and her flank, as she wagged and leaned into it all and let out noises that were halfway between human laughter and excited canine exhales. I had known, when I first laid eyes on her, that she was a god. She was Tau Ceti, as we humans had dubbed her; The star around which the Yeoman Kit Colony orbited. From the way that she glowed as all of the other starlight glowed, and in the way that she roared, and in the way that Tau Ceti was missing from the sky in what should have been the daytime, I knew that I was petting a star, giving rubs to a being who was ancient beyond even my anomalous comprehension. I laid a big kiss on the front of her muzzle knowing that a star's surface was supposed to be hot enough to transmute my body instantly into plasma. Instead of experiencing death by turning into a cloud, I experienced my lips squishing against dog lips. I tucked my head in against the side of her neck, and hugged her, and she hugged me.

She said to me, as we still hugged, “Not to brag too much, but I feel vindicated that I have judged very well, and you will be perfect for this.”

I asked her, as we still hugged, “What in the world has happened here? Please.”

She squeezed me tighter. “What has happened here is a tragedy. And in all the days which I create, I will never forgive those who did this. I will tell you what has happened, for it need not be a secret, and indeed, you would be better to know it. I am not much for war, though. I want to move forward, and I have an idea, if you will hear it.”

I nodded, nuzzling her neck as I did. “I will hear it.”

I then turned my face in towards her and planted a deep kiss in her coat on the side of her neck. She pet the back of my neck in turn.

We stopped hugging, and began pacing across the long, vacant, dead field.

She told me that her name was Sword Of Sin, Love, Amnesty, And Devotion. She told me that she was, indeed, Tau Ceti.

She told me that when myself and Shine had first neared her gravity, upon our arrival, our love across species bounds had been a brightness unto her that was unmistakably powerful, and she had marked us as being under her protection, before my feet ever even touched Yeoman Kit’s surface. And she told me of how, with her protection threaded through my days, she has been able to weave my timeline out of order, show me parallels and contrasts and pains and euphorias not obvious to a life lived in an unexamined blur; since my arrival here, she did forge me, test my devotion to canine kind, test how I would acclimate to spending many long years alone.

She told me of the war that was now taking place on my home system (on Earth, Luna, Mars, Titan,) and all that had led to it, and how bombings much like the one here had now clipped humanity’s wings: in the wake of our own destruction of our own most advanced technologies, humans were once again relegated to our own home planets, no longer a spacefaring species.

She told me that it was time for me to run from a dangerous household into the wild.

Standing now at the other far edge of the long clearing, and looking back at where Shine and I had played fetch, those many, many years ago...

Sword Of Sin, Love, Amnesty, And Devotion said to me, "Though you have thought yourself alone on the colony since the bombing, there have, in fact, been a number of dogs who have survived, deep within the colony's tunnels and chambers, packs subsisting off of food reserves and unintended streams of filtered water, once meant as artificial rivers here above, now trickling through the battered wreckage down to them."

My mind raced to questions of their wellbeing: whether they were getting along well socially with one another; how dire their need for veterinary care must be, if not already, then eventually; did they have vast networks of tunnels to roam through and explore or were they confined; were there lights in these chambers or were they in the dark.

I asked all of these questions and more, of the god beside me.

She wagged, and said, "Be assured, they are well; My hand has been upon this matter thus far. Though... I would like to transfer their stewardship to another. Another who, when left alone, and then when returned to all that the world has to offer, keeps coming back again and again to her dogs. Another who has fed them, pleased them, exalted them, exercised them, mended them, and is indeed made whole by them, as they are made whole by her."

I nodded. "What do you propose?"

She said to me, "I will break off a piece of myself and give it to you, so that you may wield command of divinity as I do, and so that your days may be prolonged, and so that your form may be multiplied; I will give you my tail; For every hair on it is a day which you have already lived; And, with this tail, you will live in my orbit with these dogs, tending to them until the days when even my light has gone out, and the universe has seen that here, with us, at least one species of life from Earth has had a long, good run."

There was nothing to consider.

I turned to her, and offered out my hand. She shook my hand, and then we hugged.

As we hugged, she moved a hand back to her tail, plucked it off of herself, reached around me, and placed it on my person, and I wagged and I wagged and I wagged and I licked her muzzle, and she licked me back, and we kissed.

And I did kind of go down on her, while she was there.

In the days that followed, true to the promises made by Sword Of Sin, Love, Amnesty, And Devotion, I found myself multiplied; Every day that I had lived within the time anomaly became another duplicate of myself, each of us now walking as our own consciousness, as our own person, in our own body; walking the station to work together to dissect the production facilities, learn about them, and repair them for the long future ahead of us; most of us with breasts though not all, most of us deaf though not all, all of us with black tails. We all wasted no time getting down into the depths of the tunnels and chambers within the colony, and, indeed, found multiple packs of canines living down there, overjoyed to see us, their tails and our tails matching one another in speed as the dogs all jumped up onto us at our first arrival.

And so it is that the Yeoman Kit Colony, orbiting Tau Ceti, now exists as a far away bastion where dogkind lives, generation after generation, and eon after eon, circling around sin, love, amnesty, and devotion.