“I love you too, Toby!”

Mae’s mechanical frame held Toby tight. The little man in her palm loved her back. It was the stuff of fiction, and yet it couldn’t have been more real. Her chin sunk into the crook of his neck, metal fingers combed through his hair and savored every inch of it. Incredible as experiencing him at this scale was, the experience could never have been complete. She had no throat to purr with, no tongue to touch his skin, no nose to indulge in his scent. Those faculties existed elsewhere, dormant like the stripy behemoth of a body that slumbered on an enormous sofa to her left.

“That’s what I look like to you?”

Mae had to break off their embrace just to get a decent look at the thing. Its rising and falling chest was the only thing that made it look remotely like a person instead of a fluffy statue.

“Don’t like what you see?” Toby asked her, fingers intertwined with hers. “I do.”

Toby looked awestruck, for entirely different reasons than she was. He didn’t just see some immense creature with unfathomable power of him. He saw the love of his life. Her voice box crackled out a laugh. Metal and wire couldn’t emulate all the ways her body displayed affection, but the feelings she had for him didn’t deplete.

“It won’t be easy, Toby. Things get complicated at sizes like ours.”

Undisturbed by the implications, Toby left a heartfelt kiss on her cheek.

“It’s more fun that way.” He said with a tap on her nose.

Massive hands clapped, echoing through the room. Naturally, Rij was the culprit, not stopping when Ko tapped on her door sized yutri and engulfed her senses with a white flash. When Mae came to, her sight and hearing left her. But a flurry of scents bathed her nose, her flesh and fur could feel again, air rushed in and out of her lungs for what felt like the first time. Properly sized hands pulled the equipment off and brought her into the real world. Ko and Rij were back to normal, and Toby could fit in her palm again. One of those, she was much happier about than the other.

“Finally. Any longer and I’d have smooshed your faces together and yelled ‘confess!’” Rij laughed.

Ko only rolled her eyes. Though soon after she and her wife pat along Mae’s arms, checked her eyes and hands for any signs of discomfort.

“How do you feel, Sis? Any side effects?”

Ko’s voice was stern and analytical. She must have done this a thousand times, Mae presumed.

“I feel fine, physically. But the world at that size? How could I ever get used to that?”

Ko grinned and pat Mae on the shoulder.

“Don’t worry. Most want to eject the second they see the scale change, so I’d say you were a cut above.” She laughed. “But still. What are you planning to do now?”

In one fell swoop, Mae’s high evaporated and the cold reality set in. She didn’t have a clue. Things like playing to a human crowd were always beyond her reach, but their smothering and callous label lent her opportunities unlike any she’d had before. Now, she only had Toby. Only had her family. Just them.

And as she soon realized, they were all she needed.

“Wait! We can play the human settlement!” Mae gasped.
Naturally, Ko and Rij looked at her like she’d gone mad. She didn’t blame them. The width of her drum kit alone would have made the idea infeasible before. Those dark days were over now that the proxy was here, but it was clear to Mae that the others would need convincing.

“Proxies can do so much already. I could have run or jumped or done anything I normally could in one. If that’s true, then why would playing drums be any different?”

Mae’s tail twitched behind her as she looked Ko dead in the eyes. No clarity had come to them, but she had to keep going.

“If Rij has told you anything about what happened in the café, or at the bar with Hare’ker, then you know how bad things have gotten here. The humans need a bridge to the rest of Tebeish. What better way than a concert where everyone is truly welcome? Please, Ko.”

“I don’t know.” Ko said with her head hung low, “I see what you’re trying to do, but it takes days and days of training before most people get used to it.”

“Then I’ll use it all the time!” Mae implored, gripping the back of her sister’s hands. One quick look back to Toby told her he was entirely on board. At least somebody was. “There are people there who love each other, like me and Toby. But they’re so scared of hurting each other that they’ll never even meet. This is bigger than me, Ko. And I’ll do a quarter’s training in days if that’s what it takes.”

With a moment of trepidation, Ko’s ears swiveled as she considered her options. The wait, short as it was, was killing Mae. But she relented all the same.

“Alright. If you think you can handle it, then I won’t stand in your way.”

Ko’s weary, acquiescent smile broke into shock when Mae hugged her sister tight. Licks scrawled across her orange cheek, making the bigger sister tense up in surprise.

“Thank you, Ko! Thank you, thank you, thank you!”

“Don’t thank me yet. You’ve got some favors to call.” Ko warned, softening the blow by grooming the space between Mae’s ears. her eyes looking over to the tiny human on the table.

“Good luck, you two.”

--

A day had passed since Ko gave Mae proxy access. The wheels were in motion, and it was up to Toby to grease them further. That was what led him back to New Alice Springs once again. The mock suburban house he found himself in was standard fare for the area, and its owner made no effort to mask it. Aside from a prehistoric, beer stained coffee table and scuff marks on the floor from a bass amp, the place was so spotless it was almost cutesy. Its lone tenant didn’t match up, as Toby had come to learn as he became incensed at the other end of the table.

“That’s total bullshit! They can’t fire you cause of that!” Andrew roared, slamming a fist on the table with a sober man’s precision.

New friend or not, the sight of Andrew’s balled fist was enough to put Toby into fight or flight.
“Andrew, calm.” He said, “You think I want the whole world to know?”

Andrew grumbled and leaned his chin on an open palm. The other hand held a fork, still twirling and fiddling with a rapidly cooling batch of instant ramen. Not that the rancid odor coming from it happened to fade.

“I get ya. Still, man. What’s gonna happen to you?”

Andrew’s concern seemed genuine, which Toby welcomed. Conversation in the winter afternoon certainly beat attempted maiming, but Toby was here for a reason, and Andrew had given him quite the tee up.

“That’s the thing. I’ve got plans, Andy. Plans that you can help with.”

Andrew reclined into the arm rests of his seat. A gesture that may have been more dignified if he hadn’t filled his living room with cheap patio furniture instead of anything decent.

“Only if you don’t call me Andy again.” He warned, his attempt at seriousness deflated by the ensuing smirk. “For real, though. I still owe you, dude. So I’ll do whatever.”

He didn’t quite know what Andrew ‘owed him’ for, but Toby wasn’t about to complain. Lucy’s Favourites were the only human musicians he had any ties to. The lone music store he knew of in New Alice Springs seemed to have shut its doors not too long ago, either. Andrew’s word may well have been the lynchpin of their latest scheme.

“Right. Do you remember the proxies Mae brought up when she came here?”

“No shit, I do. Those mini-mechs really exist?” Andrew chuffed.

Toby nodded. His good mood was only partly soured by the waft of the ramen.

“Yeah, and me and Mae are gonna play a show here with one. Thing is, we kind of need a drum kit. Plus a mic.”

Andrew’s prior curiosity gave way to outright enthusiasm, causing him to sit upright in his chair.

“And you want to borrow ours? Sure thing!”

Toby had expected much more haggling, so the way Andrew embraced the idea with open arms really made his day. He was beginning to think he’d massively underestimated his connection with Andrew.

“Really? You’d hand it over just like that?” He asked the other man, the less trustful parts of him still shining through.

Andrew didn’t mind, much to his credit.

“It’s the least I could do after you saved my ass, dude.”

That comment confused Toby even more. Andrew saying he ‘owed’ him was strange enough. Saving him was a whole other league of baffling.

“Guess I gotta explain, right?” Andrew said, having managed to pick up on Toby’s cues. “I got a sister back on Earth. She’s been trying to help me go dry for years. I always used to shrug her off, but getting into a fight like that? I had to stop. I couldn’t keep disappointing her anymore, y’know?”

Andrew sat back and had a long laugh at himself. It was amazing to see him already laughing at his failures instead of drinking because of them. Toby threw himself down next to Andrew, seeing blue poke through white as his hair dangled over his face.

“I think you saved me too.” Toby told him, making Andrew gawk in surprise.

“I’m not joking, man. I wouldn’t be going out with Mae right now if you didn’t fuck me up in that pub.”
Toby nearly choked on his own tongue when Andrew pat his back. He was very happy with this, even if the way he showed it wasn’t entirely pleasant to feel.

“Woah, you told her? Congrats, man!”

Toby pat Andrew back in revenge, allowing him to breathe properly once again.

“Yeah. So, for what it’s worth, I’m happy we had that fight, Andrew. Just don’t do it again, deal?”

A hand came out for Andrew to shake, which he accepted with without a hint of hesitation. Andrew was already well on the road to recovery. And Toby could sense that he wouldn’t let this sister of his down.

“Deal.”

--

Mae thought the green room was frightening at human scale, but a city like Da-hwinn practically became a world of its own. Walking, talking buildings swept in and out of the mountainous café. Rij recommended that they came here the day after Andrew decided to help, somehow managing to drag Kamh’sen and Ko along with her. They did get quite a few people’s attention in the area, but Mae knew the venue didn’t quite matter. A tiny robot standing on a minor celebrity’s unconscious head was quite the draw as is.

“Have a nice day!” Rij cheered as some bewildered falashai walked away with a printed pamphlet. Ko gave her wife a warm welcome as always. She did so love Rij’s energy.

“Was that good? Do you think he’ll come?” She asked them, excited as a child pining over a pet behind the glass.

“Nice try, but don’t quit your day job.” Kamh’sen said, hand next to a pile of unclaimed pamphlets for Sixth Eye’s upcoming show.

“Kamh’sen’s just trying to scare you off, honey. Don’t mind her.” Ko scoffed at the dose of cynicism before turning to Mae. “You’ve been in there a while, Mae. How are you finding it?”

Saying nothing, Mae wrung her fingers as easily as she would have on her natural body. The ease of motion spoke for itself.

“Same as ever.” Was Mae’s reply. Her sister picked up her meaning from her tone of voice, quite a feat considering the damage that the prototype’s voice box did to it.

“It’ll seem much more natural when you’re in a human city.” She said, enormous yellow eyes bearing down with sage-like wisdom.

Mae hoped she was right. Until now, the proxy only reminded her of the terrible things people her size could inflict on humans. Seeing their buildings at his scale, models turning to a real living city. She could scarcely imagine it. Though the proxy did have one keen effect on Mae. Her disgust for those who mistreated humans reached a record high.

“And yet monsters like Hare’ker would still hurt them?” She spat, her would-be growl a sharp crackle.

Kamh’sen had no trouble growling, however. She must have recalled her own time with him. Given what he tried to do to Toby, him trying to hurt others wouldn’t have been out of step for him.
“Did he try to hurt you?” Mae asked Kamh’sen.

“No.” Kamh’sen told her flatly, much to Mae’s relief. Not that she was finished.

“He just called me ‘eye candy’, like he called humans ‘vermin’ and ra’hamiir ‘gene pool pollution’.”

Disgust swept the area like a winter breeze. It was so easy for them to get caught up on those things. Hare’ker was like a perfect storm of prejudices, but any one of the people in Da-hwinn could have agreed with him. It was a disconcerting thought, certainly. One that Rij seemed eager to contest.

“Girls.” She said, grabbing Ko and Kamh’sen’s attention handily, “Want to hear a story?”

The others said yes, and Mae nodded along. Curious was the feeling, not knowing whether or not someone over ten times her size could read her. She had no trouble reading Toby, but the others may not have been so fortunate. She had to have some faith in the others. It was the only way to function at her current size.

“I and some soldiers were evacuating a human town. One of the humans was arguing with his wife. She wanted him to come with us, but he didn’t care, so he hit her in front of everyone.”

Rij’s fur bristled in anger at the memory. If she had any, Mae would have done the same.

“Obviously I couldn’t intervene. But then another human smacked him back and said, ‘we don’t need people like you here’. And you know what? Nobody acted up after that. There’ll always be horrible people, but when the worst of times call for it, better people will be there to help.”

A story like that was just what Mae needed to feel better about the lot in life they’d all been given. For every person like Hare’ker, there must have been ten other like Toby. Good people who simply needed a push to improve the lives of others. Some could do it on their own, and she commended them. But it was far more feasible to face the darkness of the world with others.

“And that’s what we’re doing today. Isn’t it?” Mae asked them, eliciting a bit of a snicker from Rij.

“What, by handing out leaflets?”

Any lingering tension aired out in short order. Her friends and family smiled and laughed together. It stung to think that she’d missed out on it for so long. Mae knew that simpering over the fact simply wouldn’t do. She preferred to cherish their presence and pray to whoever was watching that she’d never part with them again.

--

It took them a few days to book it, but the rehearsal hall that got Sixth Eye off the ground was now theirs. It was just about the only civilian building on Tebeish with proper human access, after all. Cymbal crashes and prototype RC robots aside, things hadn’t changed a bit. He and Cass still fussed over the bass. Endi and Mae worked dutifully on the drum kit, and Saos’s projection still watched their every move.

“You’re really going to sing, Tobias? I don’t know about this.” Saos lamented.

Much as he hated to admit it, Saos had a point. A Sixth Eye show without Mae’s voice was a huge risk, if a necessary one. Even then, Mae’s second body shot to its feet, eager to defend him as always.

“Toby has an incredible voice, Saos! I don’t know if he’s sung and played before, but it deserves to be heard.”
The temptation to touch her burned inside of him. He couldn’t, sadly. She’d barely feel it anyway. Regardless, Mae pulled him over and leaned in close to whisper some words of advice.

“Singing and playing is tough, take it from me. If you can do one without thinking then you can put all your focus on doing the other. You can do it, my love.”

Mae’s advice would have been enough to reassure him on its own, but ‘her love’. That was what synched it. He could do this, he knew it. Even if he was still left with a conundrum. He knew his parts to every song Sixth Eye played intimately, but Mae only knew how to pull off the vocal. He could only really think of one song that he could sing off by heart and play along with due to its simplicity. He just hoped Mae was ready for it.

“I’ll need a basic kick snare pattern. 4/4, dancy tempo like this?” He asked her, clapping his hands rhythmically to demonstrate.

Mae acknowledged him with a nod and sent him on his way. Though before he could even mute his extra strings, Mae began to bang out exactly what he was looking for. Perfectly played, perfectly timed, and all in a body that wasn’t her own. What he did to deserve a partner like her, he’d never know. But he still had to step up to the plate. A driving, eighth note bassline slipped from his head to his fingers, melting with Mae’s performance to form a hypnotic rhythm section as lyrics descended from his throat.

*Out where the river broke*

*The blood wood and the desert oak*

*Holden wrecks and boiling diesels*

*Steam in forty five degrees*

Keeping up the steady attack of the bassline was surprisingly tough. It was clearly written for pick play instead of meaty fingers like his. Yet he pushed on for two reasons. Saos’s clearly impressed reaction, and Mae’s spectacular work behind the kit. He had it easy compared to her, thus he had no excuse not to match up. Instrumentally or vocally.

*The time has come*

*To say fair’s fair*

*To pay the rent*

*To pay our share*

*The time has come*

*A fact’s a fact*

*It belongs to them*

*Let’s give it back…*

The fill that bridged the verses to the chorus did feel a bit empty without the brass behind it, but Saos was none the wiser. Toby wanted to really show what he could do. Give Saos and the others no doubts surrounding him or his ability to match up to Mae. Thus he didn’t just sing. He belted.

*How can we dance when our Earth is turning?*

*How do we sleep while our beds are burning?
How do we dance when our Earth is turning?
How do we sleep while our beds are burning?

The time has come
To say fair’s fair
To pay the rent now
To pay our share!

Toby’s hands left his bass and ended their impromptu cover. The hologram shimmering through Endi’s yutri whistled and cheered for the strangest Midnight Oil tribute band that ever existed. Saos offered no specific praise, nor any long winded speeches or critiques. “If only they’d kept you on.” was her lone comment, disappeared into the open air seconds later. Once again, Sixth Eye and their former techs were left to their own devices. Endi wore a wry, lonesome smile. Gaze fixed upon a drum kit that she hadn’t the slightest hope of touching without breaking.

“Looks like you won’t need us after this.”

Mae bolted upright in protest. He could quite viscerally see the horror she felt, robot face notwithstanding.

“What?” Mae pined, “We certainly need you! What kind of friends would we be if we thought we didn’t need you?”

“She just means career wise, you dolts.” Cass laughed. It seemed he had broken off and reconvened around Endi’s hands while their backs were turned. “No reason why we can’t stay in touch though, is it, Endi?”

Endi nodded, tail parsing the air behind her, hand outstretched for her charge to board.

“We’ll keep in touch. And besides, you need some time to talk about your love lives, no?”

Cass rolled onto his guardian’s hand, beaming with a freshly applied coating of smarm when Toby began to rub his neck again.

“Don’t keep the lady waiting, Tobias!”

And not a moment too soon, Endi and Cass left. The Cass that he and Donny knew back in Uni was here again, and that was certainly worth celebrating. Still, taking Endi’s advice would do them some favors. Their relationship was still young, and Mae had spent most of it locked in a metal cage. She was entirely right to feel proud of her mastery of the proxy. It was the sheer time she spent in it that worried him.

“You’ve really got to take a break soon Mae.” He warned.

Mae stood completely still. Likely she was still trying to hide her emotions, much like he had.

“I’m fine. Really. It’s better this way.”

Toby shook his head. It must have been a size thing. Just when they’d gotten comfortable with each other again, the proxy came along and made Mae want to change herself for him. It meant a lot that she cared so much for him to try it, but she’d already done a fine job not hurting him through the months. Fine enough for him to fall for her, and she needed to know that.

“That’s the same thing I said to you before Andrew nearly knocked my eye out.” He laughed, soon taking a deep breath to gain any necessary composure.
“Mae, you don’t have to stay in this thing all the time if you want to be with me. I fell in love with you. Big, fuzzy, stripy you. That’s not gonna change today.”

He punctuated the point with a kiss on her round, metal snout. Timid hands came to hold his. Welded, finely sculpted fingers startlingly warm as they weighed him down on the tightly tuned drum heads. They couldn’t do this at their actual size, and it must have had her smarting.

“I don’t envy people your size for a second, Toby. But there is a beauty to this, to you, taller than me.” Mae said as she leaned towards him. “Hold me. I’ll get out of the proxy if you hold me close.”

Toby didn’t have to be told twice. Once he shuffled himself over, he hugged her like it was the last thing he’d do. A machine could never replace the thick bush of her fur, or the body heat that kept her kicking in the freezing cold. But it was Mae. As long as it had her mind and all her wonderful quirks, he would love it every bit as much.

“Tell me when you want me to stop.” Toby said into her ear, planting a quick peck on her icy cheek.

Mae, of course, offered no response. She was perfectly content swaying with him over the drum kit. He only held her tighter.

“I figured.”

--

New Alice Springs. Sixth Eye’s final gig, and far from the most glamorous they’d had along the way. Naturally, a human and a robot playing next to the settlement’s open entrance was quite a setting, but the real draw for Mae and the audience were the people gathered just outside. They numbered in the dozens, as far as she could see in the evening gloom. The crowd hosted a few recognizable faces. Her few friends and family, along with one dangerously red Kiori buried somewhere in the mix. They weren’t quite as close as she’d hoped, but it was enough just to have the differing audiences within walking distance of each. The amicability was there, she sensed it. All it took was the right atmosphere and a very good show to spin it off into something better.

“No jitters?” Toby asked her, stood quite close to the away from the microphone that he’d deserved for so long.

Obviously the answer was no. Only her real body could, and that thing lay slouched against the settlement wall. But Mae understood his intent. And she appreciated it greatly.

“None. I won’t tremble anymore.”

Toby seemed very happy to hear it. He carried himself like a great weight had been lifted from his shoulders. Her nerves and insecurities were a weight she never asked him to carry. But he soldiered on, never complaining, never straining. Toby was the furthest thing from ‘small’ to her now, he’d earned it. Thus he stepped forth to carry a burden never meant for him. Giving the speech that everything rode on.

“Thank you all for coming out tonight. Before we play for you tonight, I’ve got a little something to say. Now I didn’t come here with dreams of fame or success. I, like a lot of people here, came to Tebeish because I wanted to get away from the Earth that the Rynar left us with. I wanted to fade into obscurity and live something resembling a normal life again. At least until I met her.”
Toby gestured to Mae with the broadest smile on his face. He exuded pride, and Mae was very happy to have been the source of it.

“I grew, I learned, I got my life back, all because of her. And right now? I fully believe that humanity is only as small as we want it to be. Every show we’ve done has demonstrated that, and I’m honored to be playing in front of a crowd of humans for the very first time tonight. This first track is called ‘Hold On’, hope you enjoy it.”

Already, the audience cheered them on. An excellent indicator of things to come. Faces tiny and giant looked on eagerly, making it all the more satisfying when Mae frightened them all with the loud crash of her cymbals. How she loved those cymbals. Toby and Mae locked into each other, providing a fast and skillful combination of drums and bass. He kept in those higher ranges, hitting hopeful major chords to keep the audience invested.

_The old days gone and dusted away_

_I reached out_

_And I didn’t return the same_

_And now I stand by you today_

_I’m behind you_

_And I’ll make sure no one forgets your name_

Mae cued the chorus with a bouncy little fill, still careful enough not to break the kit with her mechanical strength. Toby sang his little lungs out. The way they made her pine for more nearly broke her concentration, but she held through despite it.

_Let me hold on to you!_

_And we can traipse the land and sea_

_Let me hold on to you, my friend_

And thus, Sixth Eye looped back to the pattern that they played the first verse in. Mae certainly made more use of the bells and whistles a Terran kit brought with it. Tasteful uses of her hi-hat and cymbals rounded the song out in ways previously untenable. Mae hardly believed they’d played without them for so long.

_I could barely pull my own weight_

_I was stranded_

_Till you handed me the key_

_Gave me a debt I could never repay_

_And now I stand here._

_Ready to tend to your every need_

_Now let me hold on to you!_

_As you always did for me_

_Let me hold on to you, my love…_
Toby led the song into its final movement. Chords rose and fell like bellows of fire, his voice effortlessly emulating that energy. He had it at long last. His own voice, a crowd that wanted to hear him. She didn’t slack. She matched his energy with everything she had available to her, crashing and resolving to lend every bit of potency the performance needed.

And I’ll hold on to you

And say goodbye to the days of yore

You’re what I stay here for!

What I stay here for!

And I owe you so much more.

As their instruments rang out and echoed, uproarious applause nearly burst her artificial ears. Hundreds, human and non, all entertained and ready for the rest of the show. Mae never thought she’d see it on this planet, or even in her lifetime. And yet the people still called out for more. Toby hadn’t broken a sweat, and the proxy’s infinite stamina would ensure that she could keep up. They’d only rehearsed so many songs. All the more reason to make these performances the best of their lives. She didn’t know if anybody was recording them, or if anybody would even remember it in a year’s time. In any case, one thing was very clear.

It was gonna be a long night.

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As Toby slung the bass off his back, he felt the most fulfilled he had in years. Not only had he played the best show of his life with the woman he loved, but at long last, the people were talking to each other. Children ran over to to see a certain trio of giant cats, petting their whiskers and taking hand rides under their parents watchful eyes. The adults weren’t quite so willing to launch themselves at the aliens, of course. They would much rather stand by them and make conversation as sapient beings so very much loved to do. Mae’s proxy lay stone dead on the drum kit while Andrew and his bandmates awkwardly tried to pry it off. Toby made himself perfectly still. An empty proxy could only mean one thing.

“Toby!”

A pair of padded hands came up from behind him, shoveling him onto his back to make way for the enormous cheek that buried him in its scent. Fur tickled and brushed against his skin. A rough, wet tongue softly prodded at him. And funnily enough, he had quite the view of the settlement from where he lay. Every person and their blurry faces. If this was what Mae saw everyday, then he was almost envious. Almost.

“Do you think we’ve made a difference?” She asked him.

He felt the question was fair. Though unfortunately, her asking it meant that mixed size affections ended prematurely. Though as Toby soon learned, the affections hadn’t entirely died out. Rather they simply migrated to another source.

“Charlotte!”

A tiny black haired woman found herself in a red furred kiori’s hands, sharing a heated first kiss in front of all who dared to look. Charlotte and Vye-Shi. Together at last. A truly touching scene, and what Toby hoped was a glimpse of humanity’s future.
“No.” Toby told her, his good will not fading. “But they will.”

At that moment, he was rudely interrupted by a buzzing yutri. Saos came out yet again, grinning like a madwoman and palpably satisfied.

“Guess who just sent that show to every label in the galaxy?”

Toby’s jaw hit the floor, while Mae’s nearly hit him. Sixth Eye might have had a chance after Cal-Gea, they could barely believe. Their final show may not have been so final anymore. All because of the weird digital hyena woman.

“You kids better not get lazy on me!” She teased, “Once those callbacks start rolling in, you need to fight for them. No-one got anywhere in this industry without busting their asses, and you two are no exception.”

Saos threw up a list of labels and names from across all of space. Labels from planets like Kwen and Ra’hamiir. Even spots with Universal and Warner music. They were well and truly spoiled for choice.

“Thank you so much Saos.” Mae said once she managed to digest the information properly.

“You’re welcome.” Saos smiled one last time. “And if I never see you two again, then I wish you the best. It’s been fun. God knows it’s been fun.”

Saos faded out once more. Never to be seen again. The air may have felt dead in other circumstances, but not tonight. New Alice Springs had never been more alive. He could feel it even as high up as Mae had taken him. Sixth Eye would survive and take greater strides, but their work was done for the day. The sparks would fly all on their own. So Toby offered three simple words, a goodbye and a promise all at once.

“See ya later!”

And with that, Mae took her leave with him in hand. A standing ovation heralded their exit, one final affirmation of the good they’d done. People of all species parted reverently when Mae got to her feet. Pats and physical adulation buffeted her during her slow stride out the entrance. Yet even with a town’s applause behind them, the claps and cheers dissolved into crunching steps through half molten snow. Toby, very close to her chest, tugged at Mae’s shirt once more. They had a future again. It was only appropriate to ask her about it.

“So, where do you think we’re headed, label wise?”

Mae brought her hand in until his back touched her shirt. Close enough to feel and hear her heart drumming away in her chest. Toby would have stayed there all night if he could.

“I’m thinking the Neishor home world. I hear all species are treated well there.” Mae suggested.

“Huh? Thought you’d have picked Earth. I promise we won’t bite.” He jested back.

Mae’s throat rumbled with a giggle. Adorable. Enormous. It was like Mae distilled into one wonderful sound.

“We could be making albums in Rynar space for all I care. I just want to be with you when I do it.”

Mae drenched him with a long lick across his torso, followed up with a possessive rub of her cheek against his body. He was hers. That’s what she told him whenever her fur rubbed against him. Her scent would forever mark him as her mate, and he was very happy with that. The sensation had numbed him to his surroundings. He didn’t even realize they’d reached the tour vehicle before Mae clicked the back door open and moved through its empty hull. They’d have to return it to Cal-Gea soon, a good riddance in his book. It did have its finer points, he supposed. Its behind-seat bed was a perfectly good venue for some alone time.
Mae set him down a foot or two below her collarbone, well within range of her breasts. Leaning in with a hand at his back, she enveloped his head in her best attempt at a human kiss. Black lips far larger than his made soft, sweet contact with him. Even here, he was far from powerless. The tip of his tongue lapped at hers. His fingers on her chin made her purr and chuff like nothing else. Separating only hammered the point home. He was made for this.

“I can't go back to ralai after this, my love. You've spoiled me rotten.” She said, tongue poking the top of his nose.

“You can't go back? How'd you think I feel?” Toby kissed her nose back, far bigger and much wetter than his own.

Loving her didn’t come without a catch. It was messy work, and he was absolutely drenched. From her nose. From her mouth, her tongue. And as he’d come to realize, somewhere else entirely. Her beautiful face had cracked into a sob. Tears of joy, coming from bright yellow eyes that were full to bursting with her love for him.

“I'm so happy I found you.”

Toby leaned down once again and met her lips with his. His own tears joined hers unashamed. They would receive no judgement. No attention from prying eyes. They only had each other. And that was enough.

“Me too.”

Fin.