

The sound of shattering glass told me that everything had come to an end. It was not a noise I was accustomed to hearing. For those who lived on Titan, they tended to be more conservative with their glass, in seeming reverence to the dome that kept us gated from the atmosphere.

Of course, there are accidents. Mistakes. Instances where even the most cautious fall prey to an error, reverence gone to waste. I can remember my fifth birthday— my mom had wanted to bring out the good glasses, the ones shuttled over from Earth, brought from asteroid to asteroid until they saved up enough money to move to Titan for a better future. She had successfully brought them out of the hermetic when shortly thereafter, she shook.

The glasses fell to the ground, the carefulness of time lost to one of the first instances seen of Saturn Rot, not that we had known that at the time. It had only been a few generations living on the moons. We didn't know then that it would be treatable with one simple genetic splice.

Mom would be waylaid most of my childhood, recovering not long after I got into my upper education, when they determined the root cause and released a genetic patch for all of the citizens. At that point, a lot of the harm was already done... but that's the past. This was my all-too-real present. That's why I knew that this was another end of things.

"That's for ignoring my vidcalls whenever you visited your friends at Io," he shouted. Another shattering noise punctuated his words. There was only one thing I owned that had enough glass to reflect the shattering spree--my DNA splice models that were gifted to me when I completed my university education.

I turned the corner past the door frame, seeing Venser's bushy tail puffed up, as though I needed a visual reminder that he was preparing to fight. You would think having a visual cue would make it easier to speak with someone, but it just makes you fixated on how you could have stopped the cue before it even started. It became less a symptom of the issue and more of its own problem.

"There you go, fixating on my tail again instead of me. Moons, Delphi, you're such an idiot. I have told you what's wrong over and over again and instead you gawk at my tail like you're a shuttlehead instead of the educated oaf that's interacted with countless other sentient races." He punctuated the point by flinging the model for the isolated genetic matrix of a luminescent skin. That was one of my favorites. A real shame.

Venser was a pale, gangly human, native to Titan just like me. He was shorter than me by a few inches, which meant that when we had hugged his head rested in the crook of my neck, my beard accustomed to nuzzling his soft, silky hair. For his birthday I had bought him the services of one of my own coworkers, getting him the luxurious, bushy cat tail he had told me he wanted. I had only been slightly insulted he didn't want to get his genes spliced by me, but my colleague had assured me it was better to set aside family and work for these matters. Just because I admired his appearance didn't mean that I could let his actions pass unaccounted for.

I strode up to him, gently grabbing his arm that was in motion to destroy yet another model. "I understand you're upset with me, but is destroying my precious property the only way to express it?"

He rolled his angular eyes, letting his hands release the next model, fragments shattering at our feet. Shit. "Don't talk to me like I'm one of your clinical patients. I don't think you've ever seen me for who I am this whole time we've been together. I'm another project to you. You're more fixated on the handiwork on my DNA than me. Come on, Delphi. Name three of my friends. Tell me two of my hobbies. What's my favorite dish?"

I grimaced at the accusation, cheeks flushing in spite of the edits I made the other week. I'd have to revisit those another time. They were supposed to suppress awkward biological functions, but evidently the patch I had applied was insufficient. Venser sensed the moment of distraction and pounced. "You're thinking about another splice you made instead of this conversation... moons, I tried breaking things you care about to get you present, but you don't really care about them, do you?"

"Now that's not fair. I care about you, Venser. You love to eat grilled synth-sal with a side of grains. You love to sew costumes for your holo-vids when you're not busy creating new content. And you know I'm not too great with names... you love to hang out with what's their name... Pon and their broodmates Poe and Pof." I smiled, feeling confident that I had excelled in the test.

Venser bit his lip, rolling his eyes at astronomical speeds. "So you picked the food we had for dinner last night, my work as my hobby and the coworkers I occasionally go out for food with as my friends? Congrats, you technically fulfilled the assignment. Like usual. This is pointless. Even if you're here, you're not looking here. You're looking somewhere else, and I can't wait around for you to know why you want to be with someone." I looked at his eyes, panting from the exertion of keeping level, unable to accept the words coming from his mouth.

"Look," he asked, rubbing me gently on the back, "you mind letting me go now? I won't break anything else of yours. Sorry. I... I shouldn't have done that."

I nodded, releasing Venser from my grasp. I didn't want to forgive him though. That asshole destroyed my things just to try to talk to me only to be unhappy with what I said. "I just wish," I said, gritting my teeth, "that you would have asked to talk to me before resorting to your act of aggression."

He had been starting to turn around but he whipped back in response to my accusation. "Don't you start with me, Delphi. Don't you pretend that I haven't asked to talk to you before. I've asked many a time. You make excuses as to why we can't talk, or I talk and it just all floats past your head. You're not fully with me when you're here, Delphi. I don't know where you are, but don't play these games with me. I have asked to speak with you multiple times. This... this is the outcome I shouldn't have taken, but this is the outcome that occurred in response to your obstinate rejections of my requests to talk things over. Don't you pretend that you didn't see this coming. Don't. I'm leaving now."

He strolled past where I had entered, each step lithe and controlled. He called out from down the hallway, "Don't look for me. I want you out by the end of the day. If it wasn't clear, we're through. I could never be with someone like you. Pon was right after all..."

I dropped to my knees, staring at the remains of my treasures. It wasn't worth trying to fix them, just like it wasn't worth trying to fix this relationship. I would be the better person, even if Venser wasn't willing to do so. I clapped my hands three times, signaling the cleaning bot to make its way over and begin its regular cleaning routine, which meant I had to take some time to quickly pack up, as my life was rapidly changing given I could no longer live with Venser.

The whirring motor of the little box reminded me that I needed to move, with its literal prodding of my body over and over to let it take the path required to clean. I had always suggested we splurge for the more expensive model that moved in more directions than the cardinal directions, but Venser was unwilling to get anything more advanced, claiming that he'd grown up with one and therefore it was enough. I suppose it was for the best I didn't invest further in our— no, his home than I did.

The room had been designed by his hand, filled with cold surfaces and chic decor. I had only been allowed to claim those spare shelves not covered with his trophies from his childhood nor physical books printed from a 3d printer. Even if it was supposed to be our home, I didn't feel like I had much say in decoration, which coincided well enough with his refusal to let me contribute further. Like the writing had always been on the wall, and I just ignored it.

I tiptoed over the robot, content to leave it to its own devices and made my way over to the hermetic where I had stored most of my things. There wasn't much left, after Venser's way with my possessions. My personal collection of DNA for splicing purposes, the remaining models, my old personal splicing kit and some other odds and ends, the rest of the important things being on my person. I took them all out and stored them in my bag, and left the building that I had called home for the last six months.

It was purely wrong to say that I was living on Titan. It wouldn't be true much longer, but I was living in Xanadu. It was a city built with the understanding of conserving as much space as it could. It had been formed with the understanding of the limitations of living on Titan, knowing that it would need to have the ability to be self-sufficient, at least for its inception.

The cliff-face homes and buildings housed so much underneath the opaque dome, where one could find whatever they needed if they knew where to look. The farms, the bars, the markets, homes and everything else in-between sat on those walls. Unfortunately, what I needed was to get away from Venser.

I signaled my implant to pull up the Deep Ocean and hastily penned a letter of resignation for my current job. It just wouldn't do anymore. I had met Venser through work, both of us present at the university. Even if he thought I didn't care, I couldn't bear to be faced with the constant reminders of his presence. I had to leave, which meant I had to get to the bottom of things, which would in turn take me to the very top.

It was a short walk away over to the elevator, filled with plenty of people I hoped I would never see again. Not because I didn't like them, but because I wouldn't be here anymore. "Pardon me, excuse me," I said, pushing past the crowd filtering out. I quickly danced by the Adastrans, their furry frames used to taking up a fair amount of space. Even the Worm—it wasn't the politest name to call them but their name was unpronounceable by most lips, even with the assistance of one's implant, and the translated name wasn't much better. The name sounded identical to a curse word, which begged the question of whether it was best to curse at them indirectly or give them a name they hadn't asked for. It was rare to see one on Titan let alone in Xanadu—filtered out in their exo-frame, their chassis silent in its passage, leaving me blissfully alone with two other Titanians... who were necking one another. Great. Romance. It would be so easy to ask them to stop in response to my own wounds, but the ride would only take another minute and I could endure ignoring the audible noises of adoration if I really put my mind to it. Ignoring their soft touches, their knowing glances... I'm an idiot. I blinked and my

implant pulled up the Deep Ocean, overlaying it into reality to try and plan for what I was going to do at the station before I even arrived. It was obvious I was going to leave, but the question was how was I going to leave?

I pulled up my bank account, waiting for my account balance to load. Only 1000 UniFrancs... shit. That wouldn't be enough, and I surely wasn't going to ask for a loan from Mom. Shit. Shit shit shit. Not great to be in such a position. Shit. Looks like I was getting a new job today. There's always ships that need a new crew, right?

The port was bustling with activity, people standing about waiting for the next shuttle, watching with interest the new attendees, some even waving signs aggressively. Wait, that was new. I'd never seen anything like that in my times frequenting the area to go on more local trips. It was another Adastran, her fur a dark gray, her sign a physical construct— a novelty in this age. Her maw stretched out for her series of words, sharp teeth jutting against the glinting light, sallow eyes traveling across the crowd of travelers. "All workers deserve a fair wage," was her constant refrain, punctuated by the complaint on her sign: "Join the Space Station's Union."

I couldn't help but want to know more about this oddity. My steps were smooth, passing through the sea of travelers until I closed the distance to her side. "What do you mean all workers deserve a fair wage? I thought that went without saying?"

She cocked her head at me, ears twitching. "Sorry," she managed later in her low growling voice. "I'm not the best at Human."

She paused, seemingly waffling on a decision before sticking to it. "My implant's a bit behind on its software updates. You'll have to let my implant catch up to your words. Just a second." She had swapped to Adastran, a tongue my ear could recognize given their prevalence in the galaxy, my implant able to translate without requiring a language database supplement. Another brief moment passed, and she beamed, sharp teeth pointing out of her maw. "Of course everyone deserves a fair wage, pup. But we the workers of Space Stations are not fairly... what's the word?" Another brief pause. "Compensated. Fairly compensated."

I had some minor capability with the Adastran language[ It required one to be able to growl consistently at the same pitch, the subtleties in growls, barks and yips far more complicated than they seemed to the uneducated speaker. I was sufficiently happy just to capture the base meaning most of the time. I didn't have the wherewithal to become an expert in Adastran.], my throat spliced to handle some of the more uncomfortable sounds a Human had trouble with conventionally— in this instance, perhaps it was alright to try and make a fool of myself, given my implant was designed to handle high-speed translations between my thoughts and words. Usually I was content to just avail of automatic translations, but time was of the essence and I needed to try and endear myself to whatever opportunities opened. "Is this better? I'm not well versed in Adastran myself, but my implant might be a bit more recent than yours," I growled, my throat rumbling.

She beamed, dropping the sign for a moment to shake my form. "Thank you, pup! Your accent is quite nice!" I wasn't about to mention just yet that I had spliced myself. I was reliant on the implant to really carry the conversation, let alone translate other tongues for me. Being a polyglot was not a long term aspiration, but more of a temporary trick I had been testing out. "Usually Chixie is present to speak to the others, but she caught a sickness and the cause does not rest. I can tell you that every space station is run by the same owner. They have a stranglehold on universal transportation, which means we as workers are caught in the same grip. They do not treat us fairly. Will you join our cause?"

I hadn't really thought about it. There were different ships chartered out from all of the space stations I had stopped by, few that it was, but I didn't pay mind to who was owning the facility itself. I could only imagine that they maintained the pathways as well. "Well, uh, what does joining your cause mean?"

She shook her body, ears folding down, my implant reading that body language to be understood as something akin to shame. "Oh, how could I have neglected to share what we need, pup? You'll have to forgive me once more. We're looking for donors, additional people to

join our cause, even just spreading word of mouth. Anything can help. We believe in all of you who travel through our doors each day."

I paused, staring over the Adastran. This... this could be the opportunity I was looking for? Something to help me off of the moon. If I played my cards right. "I'm... interested. Do you need any sort of geneticists? I can't say I have much money to contribute."

She gripped my arms once more, excitedly shaking them. "A geneticist might be a bit more than we're asking for, but I like you, pup. I think you could work as a doctor for a crew that just went down a member. Basic medical requirements and ability to administer treatments. If that is, you wouldn't mind doing such a thing. Payment isn't the highest, but you'd get to go to lots of different worlds as we stopped by stations that aren't incorporated into the union yet."

She must have been able to sense my consideration in one manner or another as she started dragging me down the hall, unable to resist her powerful grip. My shoes skidded across the floor as we pulled into a small hanger off to the side, a fairly-sized shuttle sitting at the core. "This one will work," she growled into the room.

The shuttle doors unfolded, and a head peeked out, covered in what looked to be bark-like growths. It was a bit more unusual to see an Arborean in these parts. Most ships weren't equipped to be able to handle their dietary requirements. "We want to know. 'This one will work?' What do you mean by that?"

Their 'voice' projected out through their speech box— I remembered learning that Arborean's physiology did not allow for actual speaking, instead communicating primarily through scents, although it still begged the question as to how they could understand what the Adastran said. "This pup seems interested in the cause, and he—" she sniffed me for a brief moment— "—he said he was trained in biological science." Okay, so that was not exactly the same thing that I said but now wasn't the time to fight over it. If the miscommunication worked in my favor, then I would tackle it when it came to it.



"We find that most enlightening, Scistranu." Oh, that's what her name was. "This may be sudden human—" they made a strangled noise, seemingly meant to be a laugh, a joke only they understood"—but would you like to join us?"

I hadn't hoped for anything less. "Of course," I said in Human, "I'd be honored to help the cause. When do I start?"

The Arborean closed their eyes, before slowly opening them once more, bark parting to reveal their amber orbs. "Today, if you would. We would be ready to welcome you to the crew." That... was fast. Shit. It was a lot to think about taking such a risk, but going forward with it was a lot scarier than I thought. There's no turning back, after all. I could only move forward. "I'm in."