



**KAYA
SHIRO**

**BLACK
STONE
BENCH**

"It almost felt like I was... intruding."

"Intruding?"

"Yes. As if I were out of place or something."

"Why's that?"

"It was just so... graphic. My being there, staring at all of it, was indecent."

"That bad, huh?"

"Yes. It was... unsightly."

"As in, like, horrific?"

"Yes."

"Sounds like you had a tough morning, Li-M'noy."

"I did."

"Wanna tell me more about it?"

"Not really."

"Seriously. Just keep talking. Tell me."

"What good would it do, to pass on more of my own negative experience to you? Besides selfishly making you share that burden."

"Well, it could do a lot of things. Like appease you. Help you cope. You might even realize things you hadn't before just from talking, put names on your emotions, come to term with them. Not to mention that I actually *like* it when you share."

"I am not so sure I like to share myself."

"How about you try?"

"Alright, Katie. You know what I felt like?"

"What?"

"A voyeur."

"A voyeur? Like a peeping Tom or something?"

"Almost, yes."

"But it's not like you were doing it because you wanted to. It's part of your job, M'noy. You had to be there."

"Getting a conviction is my "job". Not glaring at dead people. Or being forced to step into pools of gore. I ended up leaving footprints all over the place. It was disgraceful."

"Sounds uncool. It makes sense, don't you think?"

"Why is that?"

"They need you to be there, to watch it. To, hm... *assess* the gravity of it all."

"I could have managed with the reports only. I did not actually gain anything from visiting the scene. I experienced discomfort, and nausea. It does not help me in any way. Not to mention that I am expected not to pour emotion into my pleas."

"Still, it makes sense. If someone has to experience that level of emotion, it should be you. You represent the victims and their families, somehow."

"Well, I would not say that I do. It might seem so, but in truth, it is not so. I am a Justice. The State, the government, the body politic, those I truly represent. It is in no way my place to be on the side of any individual. In fact, if I were, I would get barred."

"Seriously?"

"Yes."

"Wow. Thanks, M'noy. That's a real punch in the gut."

"Well... their lawyer is on their side, you know. That is their advocate. The prosecution merely seeks Justice."

"I see."

"..."

"..."

"Say, Katie?"

"What?"

"Why do you think they do these things?"

"Who? ...humans?"

"The terrorists."

"Who knows? I wouldn't do what they do as I am now, sitting here with you. But that's why circumstances matter so much. If I had been raised like them, I could think it was right, too."

"But they have to realize that it only makes us condemn them that much more. Their claims might hold some legitimacy as such, but they always find a way to lose their credibility. First there were the kidnappings, then the shootouts, and now this?"

"The story of humanity is filled with bloodshed. It's part of the strategy. I know it seems like we were almost on the same level because of all the progress we made this past couple hundred years, but just a couple centuries ago, we were doing just this to each other."

"What can be the reasoning behind the senseless murder of newborns? If you know, please explain it to me."

"I know that might be scary to you, but I think I know exactly what it's like."

"What it is, then?"

"It's payback."

"Payback? As in, revenge?"

"Pretty much, yeah."

"That doesn't make sense. Whatever crimes you might think we are collectively guilty of, the Therian newborns cannot possibly hold part of that responsibility. They are so underdeveloped that they cannot even breathe on their own."

"It's not like revenge by killing the people who wronged you."

"What is it, then?"

"Reproductive revenge."

"I'm not sure what that means."

"Think about it. You took their planet. You live on their land, in the building they built, eating the food they grew. Their numbers are dwindling. It doesn't matter how much You promise to keep their race alive. Some of them might still understand it intellectually but their instincts are screaming to them to take back their territory."

"Well... their strategy is a poor one."

"I'm not defending it in any way. I just *understand*. Everything about life on this planet is based on reproduction. All the lifeforms here live to multiply, to take over. You're basically denying them what their instincts are *screaming* at them to do."

"Humanity reached peace and harmony *in spite* of such absurdly erratic impulses, but they still linger on. I understand this. Still, we have to maintain a society based on rules, fair and applicable to all."

"I get that. Plus, believe it or not, the genetic programming in the human system actually makes it really hard for us to harm newborns. They are small, helpless, it triggers an instinct to protect - to nurture, even. It takes a lot to override that. It takes the feeling that our very existence, as a species, is at risk. In a way, it is. Humans are not free to just populate any world they occupy anymore."

"You seem to adjust to the idea that you may not reproduce without exhibiting that level of antisocial behavior."

"I have my circumstances. That's why I always stress those to you. Plus, I'm only half human, so I get to look at the bigger picture: humanity as just one intelligent lifeform among many others. A future full of discovering and progress, where two sentient species grow wiser, hand in hand. I understand that there's nothing left to us but to follow the path that circumstances have built. Humanity will survive by becoming something *more*. For others, it's hard to accept, because they see the death of our race, where I see a new step in a new journey to enlightenment."

"Humanity is going to new places."

"Yes. Some humans think this means we are *disappearing*. They take it to heart. I don't. I actually think this will make us better."

"..."

"..."

"Say, Katie?"

"What?"

"Have you noticed how you say "them" and "us" when you talk about Humans?"

"Well, they are me and they are the other, all at the same time."

"Are you truly not worried about there not being any Humans in existence in the future?"

"Are you worried about there being no Therians some thousands of years in the future?"

"No."

"Then you and I are the same, brother."

"..."

"..."

"Say Katie?"

"What?"

"Why do you always want to meet here?"

"I like it here. You know what that building there used to be, right?"

"A Temple. A place of worship."

"It was one of the holiest places on Earth. People would come here, in the thousands, just to revere. It's just a decrepit stone now. Who we are, what matters, it changes. Our place in the Universe is faint. We have to make the best out of it."

"..."

"..."

"Katie?"

"What?"

"I truly appreciate you being part of my existence."

"You do?"

"Yes. No murderer can shed blemish on that appreciation."

"I love you too, M'noy. You're half a decent brother."

"Does that mean you appreciate me as a half-brother, or that I am a passable brother?"

"Both."

"Alright, then."