



Pauline stretched the kink from her back as she stood up and sighed. The glance at her back was almost a morning ritual now, as the disappointment that came with it each morning. Standing shakily on her four hooves, she stepped over to the stand that held her wash bowl and small vanity mirror. Combing her hair generally soothed her, and let her think, a luxury she found herself wishing for more and more as her workload increased. Speaking of which...

Setting the brush down regretfully, Pauline went to her closet and picked out a stout wool blouse that reached down to her waist and just below the human/horse transition line. As she did up the buttons she felt more...human. It had been quite the struggle to get Master to let her wear it. As far as he was concerned, there was nothing wrong with letting her breasts hang out bare to the world! She had been mortified, trying to hide behind her hands, trays, whatever she could. At last, the number of broken things from her antics convinced him to let her wear a shirt at least, which she had done immediately. It had made her feel less than human, to be denied clothing, which was most uncomfortable. Molly had been most vocal in her support of Polly.

Pauline returned to the mirror and braided her hair thoughtfully, thinking about her fellow prisoner. Molly had been in the same street gang she had been, although she joined only a few weeks prior to their destruction. She went through the ranks quickly, becoming the main bully in their show-and-take. Everyone was usually taken in by her wounded damsel routine, especially when Molly showed up and started shouting. While everyone was busy with the huge scene they were making, the crew would move in and rob the person blind. Yet Molly never seemed to hurt anyone, and there were all the times she disappeared during the day. Polly could understand that: she did the same thing, disgusted with what she'd done the night before, and telling herself she would get out of there soon. That opportunity never arrived, and now she was in an even worse pickle than before.

The sound of the small wall clock ringing the hour made her snap the band in her hair and hurry out the door. Polly tried to be as punctual as possible when serving the Master, in case he decided to take more than just her voice.

Down hallways and through doors she rushed hooves muffled on the carpeted floors. She checked over her shoulder and turned her attention to where she was going, relieved that she wasn't making a mess of the carpets. The one and only time she had let mud on her hooves get into the carpet had roused the Master to such terrible wrath she had been certain he would turn her into a statue! She spent hours scrubbing the floor, either bent over or laying nearly flat onto the floor to get the dirt out. Since then, she made sure to clean her hooves thoroughly each time she went out before coming into the house. Fortunately, when he rode her around, he would clean her hooves with just a word of power, and the dirt fell off. How she wished she had that ability!

The dining room was extravagant. A long oak table stretched nearly the length of the room, large enough to comfortably seat twenty people. Briefly she wondered, again, why a solitary man like the master needed such a massive table when he never entertained, and again pushed it away as unnecessary. It served only to distract her, and she couldn't afford to be distracted around this man!

Pushing past the doors through the dining room, she went down another set of hallways until she made it to the study. Inside she found him sitting behind an ornate desk that faced one of the windows, writing studiously in a notebook. He didn't notice her approach, so she went to one side of the room and waited patiently. What else could she do? She reasoned. There was no leaving him alone unless he

commanded it, and it was clear he wouldn't be done for some time. He might get angry if she made too much noise and disturbed him. *No, it's much safer simply to stand here like a lump of clay until called for* she resigned herself. For once, she was grateful for the itchy wool dress, in the chill air of the study, it kept her fairly warm.

As the persistent *scritch, scritch* of the pen continued unabated, she let her eyes wander back to the Master. She silently regarded her jailor, taking the rare opportunity to study him more in-depth. He was a tall man, not skinny but certainly not fat. He had muscle, but not Arnold Schwarzenegger pecs or anything. If anything he looked a bit like the guy who played Faramir in Lord of the Rings. His hair was black however, and his face was homely instead of handsome, with an eagle's nose, black hair cut short, thick brows, thin lips and firm chin. Certainly not attractive, but not repulsive either. If she saw him in a coffee shop, Polly doubted she would even glance at him twice, or once. His manner was quiet, reserved though given to bouts of extreme anger when pushed. He remained cordial to Molly and Polly, though he never spoke to them beyond his orders for the day or when he needed something done. It was bizarre, she knew. The first night she had been taken, she thought she had him figured as a dominating sadist who enjoyed causing pain in others, but that was not the case. At least, she'd seen no further sign of it, mindful as she was of his warnings she didn't push.

"Polly, please see that breakfast is finished for you and Molly, and just bring me two slices of buttered toast and a glass of orange juice. I will be here for some time today, so feel free to step behind the house and enjoy the sun for a bit. I will summon you if I need you. The same goes for Molly as well." He spoke suddenly. His voice was mellow, sounding a bit like a sax. It jolted her from her reverie and she nodded.

Stepping out of the study, she closed the door gently behind her and went to the kitchen where she found Molly arm deep in the sink cleaning some dishes and laying out knives and pans. She looked up from the sink, her white fur rippling her displeasure. Polly thought it had something to do with her transformation into a leopard centaur, snow leopard to be precise. Like many cats, she hated baths, though the master insisted she shower each day to "keep the smell down".

"What'cha want, doll?" Molly made the effort to keep her voice even and calm. Polly gestured with her hands.

"Ah. So the bastard wants breakfast now, do he?" Molly translated her fumbblings and painful miming.

"What's that last bit there?" she asked as she turned to the toaster. "I didn't quite catch it."

Polly repeated the last sequence of events, but realized that it wasn't working. Looking around the kitchen, she found a box of napkins. Snatching one she grabbed a pen from a jar near the fridge and wrote a short note she held up for Molly to read.

"Ah." Her expression cleared. "A chance to go outside? That sounds fun!" Polly heard her mutter softly to herself as she turned away, "And a chance to figure out a way from this dirtbag and out of this joint."

Terror grabbed at Polly's heart. If Molly escaped while she was with her...and if the master should catch them! She quailed at the thought of what he would do to them. She had lost her voice as punishment for speaking out of turn. What would it be for trying to escape?

What she was thinking must have shown on her face because Molly looked flustered, ears lying flat against her skull in consternation as she stared at Polly.

"Polly, I..." she began. The sound of the toaster interrupted her and she turned to grab the toast before it had a chance to cool, smearing butter on it and placing it on a covered tray to keep warm. She slid the tray over to her with a muttered "We'll talk when you get back."

Polly snagged the tray easily and hurried back to the study, mind whirling with what she had heard. How was she going to stop Molly? Should she stop her? What if they got caught? She barely noticed the fancy armor and great tapestries that adorned the hall. Right now, her mind was focused on a far different problem.

She set the tray down in front of the Master in a rush, not at all like her normal self, but Polly hardly noticed. She was already on her way back out the door to the kitchen when she was interrupted by the Master's voice. She slammed on the brakes and swiveled one ear back to listen, marveling slightly at how easy it was, and convenient!

"You appear to be in quite the hurry, Pauline. I wonder why?" his thoughtful tone made the blood freeze in her veins. If he even suspected what Molly had told her...!

"No matter. No doubt you are just eager to be outside. I can understand that feeling, I suppose. Very well. Just remember not to get lost out there."

He chuckled at her evident confusion. "You must remember when we arrived at my villa." She nodded; it had been in the dead of night, surrounded by dense fog. But it was painfully obvious that she'd been led to an upscale apartment, like one for a modestly endowed university student or a comfortable bachelor. She recalled the shock she suffered when they got inside and the huge entryway dwarfed anything she had ever encountered.

"Well, it is painfully obvious to you at this point that this apartment is under several complex spells of my own design." He leaned back in his chair and swiveled to face her. Polly turned and kept her gaze pointed at the floor so as not to anger him as she listened. "I won't bore you with the technicalities of this spell, but suffice to say the space is currently that of a similar place out in the country that I maintain. They are simply...joined. The apartment is a façade, a shell while my home in the country is actually where we are. That is how this place appears so roomy. By stepping out my back door, you are in fact entering that remote area of countryside. It is heavily wooded, as well as shielded from most prying eyes. Because of its remoteness, it would be extremely easy for you and your friend to get lost, or hurt. That would be an annoyance I do not need today. Also," he added almost as an afterthought, "You will be unable to get far in the woods in any case. I've placed a spell on you and your friend that ensures you will become completely lost when you try to escape." His eyes sought hers, though Polly did her best to avoid them. They were grey and reminded her of steel bars. "I would not suggest you try it. I truly have no wish to punish you, but if you try to escape I will have no choice. Now you may go." He waved dismissively as he turned back to his work.

Polly gulped at his tone and nodded. She bowed as low as she could-horses weren't meant for curtsying- and nearly skidded out the door in her haste to get back to the kitchen and away from him. He made her skin crawl! He seemed so normal and yet strange at the same time. She wondered if she

even had to bow and scrape to him, her American stubbornness and pride told her she didn't have to do so for anyone. Her hand fluttered up to her throat and she shook her head. It would always be best to bow and scrape, until she got her voice back and could escape this horrible place!

Those thoughts carried her all the way to the kitchen, where she found Molly already dressed and waiting beside two packs. Polly looked at them curiously and mouthed the question that popped into her mind.

"There's enough food and supplies there to last us several days, if we're careful." Molly said bluntly, understanding the question. "No doubt the guy thinks he's found a perfect place to hide out, probably in a National Forest. If we keep our heads and hike in one direction, we're bound to find a cabin or house where we can call for help. In a week we could be back home in Seattle and this fruitcake behind bars."

Polly felt her eyebrows shoot up nearly to her scalp at Molly's matter-of-fact tone and utter conviction that it could be done. Gone was the abusive woman she had known for so long, instead there seemed to be an utter stranger standing before her.

Molly sighed, obviously reading the signs. "Look, this doesn't go past you or me, got it?"

Polly hesitated, unsure if she could trust the other woman. She felt a crawling sensation in the back of her mind that she wasn't who she thought she was. Could she take the gamble? *I have no choice. If I don't have her trust, then I'm completely alone here, and I don't think I can take that.* Polly nodded.

"All right. Look sweetheart, I already have your number: got it from Greg himself when he boasted how he firmly he had you under his thumb. It was just another piece of evidence for me to close the case." Polly had a dawning realization. "Yep. Detective Molly Sharp, at your service." Molly confirmed for her a moment later.

Polly shook her head and mouthed a denial. Molly watched her lips closely, her own mouth moving slowly. Polly realized that she was trying to read her lips!

"Ah...ah...okay. I think I got that. And you're wrong, I am a cop. I got placed undercover to help break up your gang in the park. Participating as the bitch of the group was just a ruse. The next 'victim' was going to be a cop, until this...whatever he is got in the way. We would have made the arrests and you and your gang would have been behind bars."

Her eyes looked sympathetically to Polly. "After I got confirmation of your story, I'd decided to watch you a little closer. You played the role well, but I could definitely tell that you weren't happy in the job and wanted out. I was going to see if I could flip you to state's evidence, but didn't got the chance. Now, I guess the point is entirely moot."

Polly took a step back, both mentally and physically. She felt like she'd been hit by a curveball from left field. She ran through all she knew of Molly, and found it frustratingly vague and empty. She knew almost nothing of this other woman, and she felt frightened of that prospect. She didn't like not knowing, what she didn't know could kill her.

Molly waited for a few minutes for it to sink in, before continuing on.

“We’ve got a good chance now for our escape. Yeah, he’ll probably suspect something before the day is out, but this is...what is it?” Molly asked as Polly began shaking her head no rapidly.

Opening and closing her mouth slowly, Polly tried to explain what she had been told. After several tries, Molly finally managed to get it. When she did, her shoulders slumped.

“Oh man, I should’ve thought about that. A way to guarantee that we don’t escape at all.” She growled deep in her throat, sounding more like a giant wildcat than a person.

“I don’t like being trapped.” She admitted slowly, her tail twitching like mad behind her. “Yet I will not risk you getting hurt.” She slumped slightly.

Polly felt bad, she knew Molly had been trying in her own way to help, but Polly didn’t want to risk losing something else. Not until she was sure she knew what his limits were. That would take some time at least, so for right now, Polly decided to cheer Molly up a little.

With a small smile, she walked up to her and grabbed the bag, rubbing her middle slightly. Molly looked up at her in surprise, before a small smile spread across her face. She grabbed her rucksack as well and grinned.

“Well, seems a shame to let good food and sunlight go to waste. Let’s go!”

Polly followed her to the back door and outside into the fresh sunlight. She wasn’t sure what to expect of her future now that she knew the truth about Molly, but she felt that it was for the better. For the first time since the change, she felt...hopeful.