

THE CROSSFADE... SOLO

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PROLOGUE



Cadmiere slept, it slept peacefully, save the dry howling winds from the east. They cried every now and then with pitiful wails, causing the peaceful suburban setting to don a tone of void. Thin, humble trees swayed with a monotonous tranquility; despite the wailing sounds that dominated the atmosphere. The street lamps glowed dimly, as if they could feel the mood of Cadmiere that chilly night. One may think they were mirroring the dim glow of the only house in the vicinity shedding light.

This may be because the inhabitants of this house were not in the least bit asleep. As a matter of fact, they were at quite an anxious faceoff...

* * * * *

"I found myself getting angrier as the clock ticked selfishly away, having no regard for the sensitivity of my situation. Yet I knew that if I had my way, the situation would never get any better; I had no intention of cooperating. However, my offenders begged to differ."

"Dahn..." A female's voice finally called with a soft urging. "Please, If not for anyone else, for Lemon?"

Dahn glared at the two wretched humans before him with a nasty expression of disdain. *"How dare they bring Lemon into this, as if they actually cared for her well-being."* Dahn thought furiously. *"I should tell pure lies to confound them..."*

"I care about you and your friend." The female continued to coax. She leaned over Dahn's chair, and looking him in the eyes. Her soft brown hair bounced casually as it hugged her friendly face. Dahn; nonetheless, looked past her welcoming countenance into a world of insecurity. *"I will not - I can't..."* he thought as his mind began succumb to the woman's demeanor.

"Haidee," a different person, the woman's companion, called flatly. "He is wasting my time, he is wasting your time, and he is wasting our resources."

"Just wait doctor." Haidee retorted. "He doesn't trust us, that's all this is."

Dahn listened to the two medical officials try to determine his thought process. He found it a tad bit comical that they spoke of him as some sort of primitive alien from afar, who didn't understand English. *"Why talk about me like this?"* He thought with exuberating annoyance. *"Do I look extraterrestrial?"*

"What was that?" Haidee's companion asked, his eyes flashing towards Dahn's slumped figure. Dahn lifted his slouched head slightly; barely meeting the doctor's gaze as he responded.

"I didn't say anything." Dahn growled through his teeth. His voices sounded like an attack on the surrounding air, it hissed as it squeezed through his clenched teeth.

"Yes, you did." The doctor insisted. "You must not have realized, but you did. I even think I heard the word *'terrestrial'*".

Haidee resumed her original stance; raising up from her sympathetic gaze, and folding her arms across her soft indigo turtleneck. "We want to help you Dahn, and if you don't talk, how do you expect us to do that?" She complained.

"I have no choice, at least I know where this will go in the long run..." Dahn thought as he realized the futility of his resistant behavior. He raised his head higher and met the doctor's nettled eye contact with a grim smile. He knew what he was about to say would not go off well and the anxiety of the situation rose with every passing second.

"I need to calm down and gather myself, I'm about to do what I told myself I wouldn't do, but these people are not going to get off my case until it's done. Whether they think I'm mad...well - they'll have to deal with the consequences. I've come too far to stop at trivial hindrances such as the ones before me." He thought confidently.

The exhausted young man tried to rid himself of the sweaty feeling in his palm, as the suspense built up within his own mind on how his revelation would be received. Not only was he worried about Lemon, but the stinging in his arm from the sedation dart really rubbed him the wrong way. However, now was not the time to consider it.

"Do you all ever play a video game, where you can save your current state? When you sit in front of your computer and save your forms and documents? Do you ever remember that you could be wiped out of existence in the next minute? All that data then meaning nothing?" Dahn began. He gazed at the ground between his feet intently as he grimaced sinisterly. He almost enjoyed the confusion he knew he was about to create, feeling immature and spiteful due to recent events.

"Don't toy with us." the doctor snapped without even considering Dahn's question.

"I do." Haidee answered in a small voice. She then turned to her companion and mouthed furiously, "Just play along, moron!!! He's opening up!!!"

"What if...you could save your own life like that?" Dahn asked.

"I think anyone would jump at a chance to preserve their life with save points." Haidee replied.

"They would be an idiot not to." the doctor agreed.

"Just as I thought." Dahn retorted. "Here is all I am going to say tonight. After I do...you all will take me to Lemon. If you don't, you will not like it."

"Of course we will." Haidee assured him. "We aren't your enemy Dahn."

"I will be the judge of that!" Dahn responded abruptly. "*Gosh these people really take me for a fool..*"

"I -" the doctor opened his mouth to speak, but Haidee cut him off with a "stop" motion of her hand.

"Just don't, Dr. Maeski." she said running her hands through her hair. "Ok Dahn, let's hear it."

Dahn lifted his head slowly and blinked deliberately, he cleared his throat and began to talk.

"When a person encounters something that triggers a sentimental yearning or wistful fondness for the past, a memory of some sort, we call it Nostalgia. Often, this feeling is initiated by a song or music and sometimes we save a tangible occurrence of these memories. We call it Memorabilia. When we come

across an event that we could have sworn we had lived before, we call it Déjà vu. And when we blend one or more sound wavelengths - we call it Cross fading. Am I right?"

Both adults nodded in unison silently.

"Well...I have seen things..." Dahn trailed off with an amusing but sad smile. "I've researched things..."

"I can see people's auras..." Dahn revealed suddenly, turning to look Haidee dead on. Their beautiful attentive eyes locked in a mesmerizing stare, as they exchanged an immediate optical conversation right then and there.

"When I see a person's aura reacting with anything, especially music, I label it as **Nostalgic**. When their aura connects and latches on to a tangible object, I call that object their **Memorabilia**. When they inadvertently interact with their Memorabilia, they have a **Déjà Vu**. Even if they have not had that experience yet. And finally, when this person comes in contact with their nostalgic memorabilia..." Dahn trailed off with an intelligent smile.

"They've been **Crossfaded**." Haidee finished. She looked at Dr. Maeski with a puzzled but excited look.

"This is an amazing and fascinating connect you've made." the doctor concluded with a hint of respect. "The big question though - Is it real?"

"Is it real?" Dahn grinned. "Why don't you tell me?"

"Honestly, I'm blown away." Haidee admitted, happy to have finally gotten something from the exasperating young man. "This is too surreal, but yet I'm so inclined to believe it. It feels like it exists. I

myself can testify that I've witnessed these sensations, but your perspective is...phenomenal. What boggles me is, what lies beyond this "Crossfading" as you say?"

"Well, I haven't discovered it all yet. There is also a "Vibe" which I haven't totally identified. But no one without my ability to see the auras can realize what's going on." Dahn informed them.

"And you think you're the only one who knows?" Dr. Maeski asked truly interested in Dahn's revelation.

"I don't really." Dahn disagreed. "I know there has got to be other people who can see auras, but I don't think they know what I know.

"Why not?" Haidee asked as she leaned on a nearby table.

"Because," Dahn started. "If they did and were fully successful, they'd be on the road to immortality and I'm not getting that feeling."

The room fell silent as everyone pondered the reality of this concept and the prospect.

"Like saving your data..." Haidee mouthed. "*This kid is on an amazing route...*" she thought.

"So Dahn," Mr. Maeski inquired. "*Why* haven't you figured it all out yet?"

"I've been researching the brain's behavioral patterns and the way we store and access our memories for the past few months. Even without a surreal ability like mine, I think the avenues for Crossfade are groundbreaking and real. However, to answer your question, it's because I lack something." Dahn responded. The wind howled again, as if it wanted to know the answer too.

"What do you lack???" Dr. Maeski asked a bit too eagerly, while taking a step closer, his bushy eyebrows furrowing.

"You need like a device?" Haidee thought aloud. "Something that can actually Crossfade the memorabilia with the person it belong to. Basically "saving" their brain memories. Something that can translate the memories into readable electrical signals?"

Dahn smiled and looked down at the ground. He planted his hands firmly on either side of the antiquated chair he sat on, and rose to his feet slowly.

"Not something...*Someone*." He smiled.



Chapter One

WHERE IS MY CUT?



Approx: 3:30pm

One quiet afternoon

Dahn placed the powerful drill into a lone screw and pulsed it out of its little hole skillfully. He examined it for wear and tear and then placed it amongst its brethren on the cold basement floor. He then grabbed the wooden chair and flipped it onto its other side and proceeded to pull the screws from that side as well. As soon as he did, the leg split right down the middle as if it needed confirmation from him to collapse. Dahn silently bent over and picked up the two pieces of wood and examined them. He found himself imagining how the chair must have felt to have one of its legs, which seemed to be working; taken away.

"No, no, please leave me alone!" The chair pleaded as Dahn evilly attacked it with the electronic tool. *"Gosh, you don't know what you are doing! Please, I'm fine, my leg works fine!"*

"But, Chair, you are mistaken; you think your leg is fine, but it's not. It's just been silent, because it doesn't want to burden you with its injury. I'm here to fix that." Dahn ridiculously responded to his own personification of his uncle's favorite chair.

"Well, you know, you don't like it when people interfere with your life when you think everything is fine! Double standards much! Hmmmp!" the chair retorted furiously.

"Trust me, I know the feeling..." Dahn continued to respond to his own madness. His pocket bulged with a testimony of this "feeling" that he knew so well. A letter that kindled his anger every time he thought about it, especially because it reminded him of his uncle's insensitivity to his situation.

"Then leave me aloooooone!!!" the chair moaned.

Dahn was just about to respond to the chair when something dropped near his foot and reminded him that this planet was no place for talking chairs. He snapped out of his absurd trance and whipped his head around to focus on the culprit of the dropped object.

"Sorry," Lemon responded wryly, with a sheepish look. "I got lost in thought and stopped holding the chair legs."

Dahn rolled his eyes. "Come and put those legs over on this wall; you don't need to hold them up all day. They aren't scared."

Lemon grinned and moved to place the other chair legs Dahn had so inconsiderately displaced. "It's funny you say that - I was just having personification thoughts about them."

"Really? I was doing the same," Dahn smiled weakly. "I guess we both would rather be doing something better than fixing Val's stupid chair."

"You think?" Lemon gaped, placing her slender hand on her hip. "I have better things to do for sure."

"Pass me that wood glue over there, please?" Dahn asked his friend. "Yea, he says we barely do anything so if something breaks we should fix it and not let him waste his money But we definitely do *'stuff'*."

"Val is just a big, old flamingo!" Lemon concluded as if she already knew that as a fact. She rummaged through a tall wall-mounted shelf for their shabby bottle of wood glue.

"Ha-ha!" Dahn burst out laughing. "Lemon, hehe, you are something else. What makes him a flamingo?"

"Because," Lemon began over her shoulder, while still looking for the wood glue. "He's so pink."

Dahn's chuckle upgraded to a full laugh.

"I mean, I'm paying the water bill, and usually I do all the stupid shopping and- and honestly! I pull my weight around here! I'm the woman of this house - I may be tiny, but men are wont to be men! They subconsciously put all the socializing on the girl, even if she doesn't have a desire to socialize. Do you think your uncle would get any services done if I wasn't here to call about them? Nooooope! And you're not much different, but you're excused, because I love you. But I really don't like your uncle." Lemon finished as she thrust a sticky bottle of wood glue into Dahn's broad hand.

"Aww," Dahn gushed teasingly. "You love me!" he grinned making a supposedly cute face to his snappy friend.

"I meant, I care about your stupid head. That's what I meant. Sigh, Dahn, why are you so stupid?"

Dahn applied the gooey sap to either side of the damaged leg and carried it over to his workshop table to press it with clamps. "I don't know." he smiled calmly.

Lemon groaned loudly.

"Really though, you and Val fuss too much." Dahn said thoughtfully. "Both of you have your good and bad traits, I think we are working out fine as a family."

"Well...he is getting sick of me." Lemon mumbled.

"Because you never stop teasing him." Dahn informed her.

"He makes himself so teas-able, I try to resist, but it's too hard." Lemon defended, peering over Dahn's shoulder while he cleaned up the excess glue. "He acts this way cause of his wife, right?"

"Hmm...maybe." Dahn answered with uncertainty. "He used to be a detective - A bad-ass one."

"Yeah I know," Lemon agreed.

"He and his wife were a team - I mean they were both badass. He had his pals, but his wife was like his right hand. When they were on the job, you almost couldn't tell they were married, because they bickered a lot. It was cute." Dahn informed Lemon.

"I see, must be hard." she said blankly. Her eyes always took on a soft and matte look when she was thinking deeply.

"She was the only one he let prove him wrong. Whenever there was a tight case, he would always be wound up in himself about the details, trying to make sense of everything. Usually, he never missed a beat, but every time he did, it would be hard for anyone on the force to deter his judgment. For her, it took only a night or two. He'd tell his pals that Sari 'subdued him' and made him change his mind and that now he is realizing a different course of events."

Lemon rolled her eyes many times in the most silliest of fashions.

"Here, put this back and bring me the chair so I can clamp the treatment area," Dahn commanded politely, while handing his friend the wood glue and a spatula.

"Yeah, I know he is a stubborn one. They both were, but they made a hell of a team, and most of all, she made him so happy. They were so pleased with each other. That's why he won't move on. He won't even get out and have a bit of fun at the bar," Dahn continued.

"Was she hot?" Lemon asked frankly. Clearly this aspect of the perfect wife must factor into her mental image.

Dahn smiled slyly. "Of course she was, Lemon. My uncle is a picky guy, hue.

"I see," Lemon nodded. "Sounds like a real tragedy to have lost her."

"Well, he didn't really lose her, she's...crippled..." Dahn trailed off quietly.

"Aww, wow." Lemon breathed sympathetically. "So sad, but, so like, it's been 3 years? Surely she's not still in the hospital? Why can't she live here? I promise not to bump into her."

"It's some complications about her parents. Her family - I think they blame Val for wrecking their precious daughter."

"Ahhhhhhhh....parents....mhm...." Lemon thought aloud while rubbing her chin. "Change subject!" she suddenly piped.

Dahn sighed, Lemon never let anyone near the subject of parents when it came to her. He beckoned for her to bring him the spare chair legs, so he could re-attach the innocent ones that hadn't needed pulling down. Lemon retrieved them quickly without any qualms. He re-fastened each one to its original location and looked over it to see if he had missed anything. Lemon decided to sever the sudden silence.

"Well, I think it's awesome for a person to have a spouse as a best friend." She began. "I think I feel a little more sympathetic toward Val now. I mean, I've heard his story vaguely from him, but hearing more detail from you makes more sense out of it. It actually has merit to it, other than just being a huge excuse to act like a bona fide jerk," she concluded.

"Yeah, it is. I would love my wife to be an awesome friend," Dahn smiled. He placed the three-legged chair in an isolated corner.

"Me, too! My husband, I mean," Lemon agreed.

Dahn returned from where he placed the chair and leaned against the work table on which the glued leg rested in solitude. "You don't say? Why not tell me what kind of hubby you would like, Lemon," he grinned. "You never talk about this kind of stuff."

Suddenly, Lemon lifted her chin proudly and folded her hands across her chest. "Change subject!" Lemon piped again.

Dahn opened and closed his mouth in protest, then reconsidered and let the subject drop.

"Lemon, you are going to have to talk about things one day," he frowned.

"And that day is not today," she smiled. "Now are we done? I need to be somewhere soon."

"Yeah, I guess so." Dahn concluded with a light glance around their untidy basement. "That leg needs to mend, but this wood glue will take a while to seal."

"Yay!" Lemon chirped. She darted towards the basement staircase and leaped upon the first step; it creaked out in pain under her weight. Dahn rose from his position and began to make his way out of the basement, too.

"What are you so eager to do?" he asked, genuinely curious as he reached the bottom of the staircase. Lemon looked down at him from the top and grinned. Then she closed the basement door with a playful treat, "I'm going to lock you down there..."

Dahn rushed up and burst through the door violently, almost tossing lemon to the floor. He didn't mean to make a sudden rush, but he wasn't in the mood to deal with Lemon's provoking. His previous encounters with the blond girl taught him better than to let her lock him in anywhere. Lemon laughed anyhow, proving that she loved to get his blood pumping.

"What is it?" Dahn insisted. He casually closed the basement door, sealing off that part of the day.

"Hmmm, you're not qualified to know yet." Lemon concluded with a smirk. "But you will know soon, don't worry, ok?"

"Ok," Dahn answered wryly. "You're going out somewhere?"

"Ha-ha! Yes, mother!" Lemon chuckled. "Oi! Stop worrying! Oh my, don't be such a kangaroo."

"I'm not '*being a kangaroo*' - whatever the hell that means, I just know your smirks; they are dangerous for the common human." Dahn pointed out.

"Huehuehue," Lemon chuckled more. "Relax, Danny, I'm just excited because I'm going to the 'First Impression, Last Impression' fashion convention. It opens this week, did you forget?"

"Oh right, yes, you told me, but I don't know what the hell you do down there." Dahn revealed sheepishly. "Seemed like just a simple '*show and tell*' kind of thing, but your excitement today makes me wonder."

"Oh, it's this little event geared towards entry level fashion designers who want exposure. It goes like, there is a small ballot of judges - usually 10. Designers come up on stage and showcase their designs using whatever medium they feel. The judges will place a "value" on what they'd spend on purchasing that outfit based on their first impression. Then you get the money offered, ha-ha."

"Oh right, how come you never told me about this?" Dahn asked with a look of annoyance.

Lemon blushed and punched Dahn's arm playfully. He felt her bony knuckle sinking into his toned skin. "Because..." she began.

"Yes?" Dahn waited impatiently.

"You might ask to come and I'm deathly shy in public, if around people who know me." Lemon exposed.

"Ahhh, that makes sense." Dahn added. "So this is an annual kind of event?"

"Biannual," Lemon corrected. She paused and twirled her ponytail around uncertainly. "I don't know if the world has accepted biannual as a word yet, so don't use it in public, ok?"

"Don't worry, it's a real word, Lemon," Dahn smiled lazily.

"Ahhh, well I had never really seen it being used officially before, so I wondered." Lemon clarified.

"Nah, you're good." Dahn assured her. "Besides, your vocabulary is quite odd to begin with, so I'm quite sure 'coined' terms are the least of your worries."

"Like Flamingos?" Lemon asked innocently, twiddling her fingers.

"Yes...Like flamingos..." Dahn trailed off. "Even after all this time, I still don't understand your criteria for what is and isn't a *flamingo*."

"Then stop trying!" Lemon laughed.

"Yeah I think I'll do that." Dahn answered as if he didn't give a crap about anything.

For some reason he was feeling dizzy and wasn't very focused on anything, not really. He remembered Lemon's previous trips to this convention vaguely, but it never reaped any visual benefits so he figured it was of little importance. Although he was feeling hazy, he decided to ask.

"Soooo, how much was the most you ever won from a design on this event?" Dahn inquired.

" Meh, just \$779 dollars." Lemon grinned.

"Whoa!" Dahn exclaimed feeling a little bit more alive for the moment. "That's awesome!"

"Nah I've seen many others get more than that at that same event, Danny." Lemon refuted.

"Yea, but it means you're making progress." Dahn pointed out. "I've never seen you bring that money back though, your very quiet about it."

"Because it's mine!" Lemon glared selfishly. She turned on her heel to head to her room. "I bought fabric with it for my designs anyway.

"Maybe... let me come this time?" Dahn half demanded, his interest now peaked.

"What???" Lemon sharply exclaimed whipping her head around to face her friend. Her hair slapped into her face with the force that she turned around with.

"Why not?" Dahn asked, making his way over to her. "I want to be more supportive of your interests."

"Why this sudden care?" Lemon eyeballed him suspiciously. "Are you plotting something with your uncle? Or do you just think you'll find a lot of girls in pretty clothes? I assure, 85% of the girls there aren't pretty, and 95% of their clothes suck like a hot mess."

Dahn laughed, he usually did when Lemon described something that peeved her. "No, no, I'm not interested in girls right now. There is still too much on my mind," Dahn defended. "I want to support you more, I've thought about what you said, and, frankly, you deserve more support, you're really into your niche, and I want to see it come to a productive front."

"Thoughtful little boy." Lemon nodded. "But I don't know if I can be me."

Dahn rolled his eyes at this comment. "Of course you can be you. I won't do anything, and you won't be seeing me at all. Please?" he asked again.

Lemon swallowed hard and tried to envision Dahn's friendly face among the crowd as he watched her show off her design and, to a certain degree, her modeling prospects. Her face glowed pink as the blood rushed to it at the simple thought of Dahn witnessing her display such unbiased courage and passion in something she felt she had a talent for. She never let her free spirit roam while Valerian or Dahn were around. It seemed plain weird for them to see anything but the annoying girl she knew she was. The public didn't know her and never would - she found that reason enough to be as fearless as she was. But people who knew her...it was an entirely different concept.

"Sigh..." Lemon heaved with vexation. "I don't have anything against you watching me Dahn...but you'll see a side of me I don't want you to see..." she trailed off.

"Oh?" Dahn exclaimed. "Wow, why not?"

"Because it's just so..."she began fervently. She almost looked as if she was quivering. Dahn started to have a weird suspicion about what Lemon really did at this "convention". He approached her to grab her shoulder and turn her around so he could read her eyes, but she spun away before he could and looked him directly in the eye, as if she knew what he was thinking and changed her mind abruptly.

"Change subject! You can come!" Lemon chirped. Then she turned around and ran up to her room so fast, Dahn barely had time to comprehend what had happened. Although, he could have sworn he had

seen a shimmering bead of water in her eyes. Dahn reached back and scratched his head, positively dumbfounded by the awkward situation that had just passed.

"Lemon... who are you?" he thought aloud with doubt.



Shortly Thereafter...

The sound of ice clanging inside a glass rung throughout the Xiriga's homey kitchen, as Dahn stood loftily swishing around a tall glass of peach nectar. He tipped the glass to his mouth and determinedly downed the entire drink in one go, his throat pulsing under his chiseled chin in and out to the flow of his gulps. He forcefully placed the now empty glass on the kitchen's center countertop and sighed in delight. The drink seemed to wash all his vexations as well as his raging thirst away. The warm motherly sun of the dawning evening beat upon his bronzed face, accompanied by the sound of a lonely wind rattling the wind chimes softly beyond the kitchen's side door exit. Oddly, the kitchen was often a place of contemplation for the young man, mainly because of its natural earth tones and various smells.

The kitchen was adorned all around with maple finished cupboards; which was jointly complemented by its loving golden-brown walls. The linoleum had a creamy white and tan marbling pattern; which was set in matching array with the sink and other marble countertop finishes. The depth of the cupboards above the counters, and the ventilation hood above the stove; gave the kitchen a sort of "dual layer" feeling. As if to give the lower half of the room a "canopy" effect. This was especially offset by perhaps Dahn's most favorite aspect of the kitchen; its double windows. These windows dwelled on the right of the kitchen; which housed a nice view of the miniature forest their house was accompanied by. One window was rectangular, but the one above it was circular; it always cast a glow along the ceiling, which was often an attraction for anyone's wandering eyes while in deep thought. The two windows were situated between cupboards, and Lemon had Dahn put up a shelf under it for them to place recipe leaflets. It was all so welcoming and homey.

Dahn folded his arms across his chest, and leaned against the counter upon which he had just placed his glass on. He was in deep thought about what was most bothering him; yes, that bulge in his pocket. That bulge was a letter from a dreaded source of a quite pleasant service actually. However, Dahn did not even open the letter before he knew what it was about. The return address belongs to none other than

Clover Health Insurance Inc. It was, of course, concerning the expiration of his parents' insurance. It would need to be reinstated - but by whom? Dahn had his parents slumbering for nearly 2 years in an induced coma, which insurance was paying for. Without it, he'd need a big source of money to continue it or have his parents wake up with no memories. Dahn often battled with his inner empathy, if what he was doing was fair. It wasn't three months, or six months; it was two years his parent slumbered...

"Ok...I'm ready," Lemon suddenly blurted out in Dahn's lonely ear. He felt her hot breath gush all over the side of his face when she spoke. It was a soft tone, yet still so warm and intrusive.

"Um, whoa?" Dahn asked incredulously as he leaned upwards from his slumped position on the kitchen's counter. "You can't just appear so close to me like that!" he exclaimed.

"Sorry" Lemon mumbled quietly with a soft smile.

"How many times have I told you that it frightens people when you do that! How do you move so quietly anyway?" Dahn recalled.

Lemon whipped out a sign from behind her back that read: "I Don't Know XD." She winced and looked across the room avoiding her friend's frustrated gaze.

"Ok BL, it's not funny right now, and how did you have this already written? Of course you know! You did this on purpose." Dahn rambled irritably. "Sigh, it really just boggles my entire thought process when you pop up and breathe on my cheek and ears; I hate it, Lemon."

"It's payback," Lemon retorted triumphantly. She heaved a large duffle bag over her small frame and dumped it on the counter top where the two young adults talked.

"For asking to go to your talent fashion show-off event whatever thingy?" Dahn gaped with a large groan.

"Yeah, because I wasn't prepared to say yes, but I didn't want to say no; so I had to say yes, which I didn't want to do." Lemon agreed.

"Why not?" Dahn asked, eager to understand why Lemon did the things she did.

"Like I said, if I told you about the shows, you'd ask. Then that's exactly what you did, even though you agreed that it was a legitimate argument."

Dahn blushed slightly. He hadn't realized that he indeed did exactly what Lemon said he'd do if she told him about the event.

<----Flashback<

"Oh right, how come you never told me this."

"Because..."

"Yes?"

"You might ask to come. and I'm deathly shy in public, especially around known faces."

"Ahhh, makes sense yes you are, you're also crazy."

<----End Of Flashback<

"I see..." he trailed off. He obviously figured that this was enough of an explanation.

Lemon stood by waiting for Dahn to say something else, she tugged at his t-shirt. He looked at her with one eye but said nothing. Instead he resumed his position on the counter from before he had been startled and continued thinking about Clover Insurance Company.

"So!" Lemon began loudly. Dahn looked at her again without even turning his head, but made no move. "Inside this bag are my designs, equipment I think I will need to best convey my message, and other items girls need."

"Like?" Dahn asked boringly.

"Hmmm," Lemon thought while pursing her lips. "It doesn't matter, ok?"

Dahn rolled his eyes and looked at his watch to see what time it was. He wanted time to fly by faster so his uncle could come home and they could discuss the insurance policy. The watch read "4:05pm".

"Oh crap!" he exclaimed. "Lemon, you're five minutes late! Have you not noticed!" Dahn warned her.

"I noticed," she responded calmly. "I'm usually 25 minutes late," she then added after a short pause.

"WHY?" Dahn practically screamed. "Don't you know these things make a statement to the public about who you are?"

Lemon focused extremely hard on buffing her freshly cut finger nails with a nail buff. Not one time did the exasperating blond young lady look up from her nails to address Dahn's apparent grief.

"They socialize too much," she answered shortly. Lemon looked up from her nails into the blank atmosphere with that soft matte look in her eyes. "I'm not going to socialize, I'm going to get my designs admired and criticized. It's a waste of time to be there chatting with all these silly people, when I could be here doing something else."

"Yeah? Like what? Lemon, you can at least tell them you'll be late." Dahn countered. He pulled up from the counter, resuming his original height.

"They really don't care, Lion" Lemon smiled sweetly. She then threw her bony arms around Dahn's larger figure and hugged him really tightly. She rubbed her round cheek against his unsuspecting stomach; her face smothered in his cotton t-shirt. It smelled like a mild blend of fresh linen, crisp highland air, and a tinge of sweat. Dahn groaned as he hugged Lemon back. This is what she did when she was trying to quickly undo something she realized she no longer had time for.

"Friends are a good things." She smiled.

"Yeah, they are...especially when they stay your friend through BS." Dahn agreed reluctantly. His mind was still reeling.

"Ok, well let's get going then!" Lemon piped while releasing Dahn from her grasp.



Elsewhere...

The sound of a padded knock echoed softly throughout a quiet porch as Valerian requested the audience at the Talin residence. He surveyed the area mentally as he waited for a response to his knock. Apart from the dewy lawn and barren trees; the Talin's property looked no different than when he had last visited, a summer ago.

Valerian shielded a red and black plaid patterned cookie pan from the biting cold against his warm chest, mentally giving it the care he meant for the person he brought it for. The jovial Scottish theme reminded him of when he had first met... *her*, eating these same cookies...except they had been purchased at a local supermarket but, oh well. It made no difference to Valerian.

Valerian's short reminiscence was interrupted by the opening of the door on which he knocked. A short, stocky, but cuddly woman stood behind him, scanning his tall figure for malice. She sighed as if she was expecting something dreadful and carefully pulled the door open enough to stuff its opening with her rotund figure.

"Val..." she trailed off. "How nice to see you so suddenly."

"Is it a bad time?" Valerian smiled sarcastically. He knew there was no better time to visit his wife's parents' house; they weren't here...

"The Talins are out, sir. Out of town a few weeks. Have you need of anything?"

"My wife." Valerian said flatly. He wasted not a drop of time getting to the point. "I brought her these as well." Valerian revealed the cookie pan from his left coat flap.

"Shortbread cookies, oh?" the rotund woman muttered interestingly. "Valerian quickly moved the pan from her pudgy fingers which earned him a nonchalant frown.

"Let me in, Merissa, I want to see her, and I know her parents are out of town." Valerian demanded while placing a broad hand on the door post. His powerful glare poured down on the woman with intimidation.

"The thing is - she's not home." Merissa sighed with a soft frown. "And even if she was, her parents told me strictly that if you come visiting, not to let you in."

"Did they *actually* say don't let me in seriously?" Valerian asked with a look of utter annoyance.

"Yeah, sorry Val." Merissa apologized looking uncomfortable.

"Plebeians..." Valerian muttered under his breath. Merissa gave him a confused look and opened her mouth to say something, but was interrupted by someone calling to her.

"Merissa!?" the voice called. "Merissa who is at the door??? If it's another sales guy, tell them I said I'm not interested in any of their effing products!" the voice shouted.

Valerian glared at Merissa angrily, which caused her to move out of the doorway sheepishly. "Yes, very sad, she's not home?" he mocked.

Valerian forced himself into the warm, white house ambitiously and made his way directly to the source of the phantom voice. He hadn't seen his wife in over a year's time and he wasn't going to let Merissa stop him - not while her ominous parents were absent.

Valerian's emergence was well received by his unsuspecting spouse who dropped the remote when seeing his figure fill the doorway of the elegant living room in which she lounged watching a movie.

"Oh my..." she breathed when she laid eyes on him. "It's you?"

"It's me," he smiled genuinely. "Hi there."

Sari opened and closed her mouth as she fought for words to enter her lips. She lay on a velvety couch, swaddled in flannel sheets and a minty green comforter. She extended her arms out for a hug after realizing that words had failed her. Valerian crossed the room and knelt beside her and gently hugged her lovingly. He treated nothing in the world as gently as he treated his wife. Actually, he didn't treat anything gently **except** his wife. After about thirty seconds of unbiased hugging, Sari released her husband slowly to search out his bereaved face. He reached up and gently stroked her cheek with his weathered fingers and let it trail all the way down her neck to her chest and then to her belly. It was as if he needed to know what he was touching was real. A peeved Merissa decided to break their sensual reunion.

"This is sweet and all but what if your parents walk in, Ms. Sari?"

"They won't," she and Valerian answered in unison. They looked at each other and laughed softly. Valerian then proceeded to kiss his wife; totally ignoring Merissa's counsel. Sari received him eagerly, reaching up to bury her hand deeply into his hair.

"Ughh, really??? You young people are so rude. Have you no respect for your parents' wishes?" Merissa nagged. The couple ignored her and continued kissing silently.

"I should call them and tell them what is going on right now!" She stomped, her cheeks flush with frustration.

This caused the couple to stop reveling in each other to address the exasperating woman.

"Are you not human?" Sari asked with annoyance as Valerian rose from his position on the floor. "How would you feel if you were me?"

"She's not a human, she's a hamster", Valerian teased meanly. Sari gave him a look that said 'please be mature'.

"Ok, I'll just go about my business" Merissa huffed irritably. She bunched up her apron and left in a frustrated hurry.

"Val, don't be such a meanie," Sari sighed. "She's right, my parents would be livid."

"I don't care," Valerian answered. "I heard they were out of town, and I had to come and see you."

"Awe, I know - it's just..." Sari sighed. "I missed you too."

"I brought you some shortbread cookies," Valerian remembered. He looked around for the can, which he had subconsciously put down during his reunion. Sari reached behind her stationary body and pulled the can from behind her on the couch. Apparently, Valerian had released it during the hug.

"Oh, this is so cute!" Sari cooed. "I like the design, it's all so cute; where did you get it?"

"Um, Dahn made this design for a holiday event he and his friend attended. It's actually their cookie pan." he grinned sheepishly.

"Ahhh yes, this is well done." Sari smiled. "They always did have a creative spirit; good for your drab soul."

Valerian ignored that last part of her comment - he knew he was a drab soul.

"I baked the cookies myself, though," he added.

"Really?!" Sari laughed while rotating the pan between her scrawny fingers. It was obvious that she'd been losing weight.

"Yes." Valerian answered with a flat tone.

"You say it like you expect me not to be surprised!" Sari continued laughing. "Who helped you do it? Lemon?"

"Hell no!" Valerian retorted.

"Then who?" Valerian's wife prodded. Her eyes gleamed with an amusing twinkle as the evening sun painted her body with a golden glow. Valerian wished at the moment that she was laying down because she was lazy and not because she couldn't stand up. Then he'd show her what was amusing.

"No one did," he answered.

Sari threw her head back and laughed heartily. She sighed and popped the can's cover off to inspect the relics of Valerian's terrible cooking background. Not that he even had one to begin with.

Sari retrieved a cute golden-brown shortbread from the can; wax paper ruffled as she put the cover back on. She overturned and inspected the cookie with a scrutinizing eye, as if it were an object from space. She then grinned at her nervous husband.

"Smells awesome," she assured him. "But my human instinct says otherwise."

"Just eat the damn cookie and stop making a scene, Sari." Valerian groaned.

Sari just laughed and nuzzled the cookie. "Good to see your vocabulary hasn't changed," she poked.

"Try it, it's good." her husband insisted.

Sari finally bit into the cookie and crunched away. Crumbs fell to their doom and rolled down her smooth chest and lodged in the modest cleavage of her tank top, which she wore underneath all those blankets. Valerian wished to be a cookie crumb at that moment.

"Oh my goodness, it's really good!" Sari muttered through a full mouth. "Wao..."

"Thanks." Valerian said. "See I told you - all the best for my wife."

"Impressed!" Sari agreed. "Too impressed. You had help, ha-ha, admit it!"

"I used Lemon's recipe, that's all." Valerian mumbled.

"Ahhh, I guess her recipes are like a tutorial, because, sorry Hun, you can do a lot of things, but cooking is just not one of them!"

"She writes her recipes like a story," Valerian revealed. "Even a mule with 2 legs could make awesome cookies with them. You're right - I'm a lame cook. The fact of the matter is, I made cookies, you ate cookies. Everyone is happy."

"You are a 2-legged mule!!" Sari giggled uncontrollably. "Sorry, Hun, you tickle me. I'm just happy to see you. I've been so lonely."

"Oh, it's totally fine." Valerian smiled. "I'm used to this kind of treatment."

"Yea, well, I agree, Lemon is a very nice person to have around. She puts so much effort into everything she does. Even when it doesn't need it."

"Yea, she does. That's why I allow her to stay. Her usefulness offsets her annoying personality." Valerian pointed out.

"She's a bulb, brightens anywhere you put her." Sari added in a motherly tone.

"Too bad you can't turn her off, too." Valerian muttered.

"Mean man! You just don't want to admit you need both your nephew and her. They give you purpose." Sari told him.

"You're my only purpose." Valerian quickly responded flatly.

"Val..." Sari began soothingly. "I'm a lost cause... don't do this to yourself. My parents are moving soon and selling this wonderful house. They'll take me with them. You've got to move on; they have no intention of letting you close and besides that, look at me," she smiled sadly.

"Your a grown woman, I'm a grown man. Your parents cannot 'stop' me from seeing you. I choose to let their ridiculous emotions govern my ability to see you ONLY because I respect you, and thus I respect their f'd up wishes. But to be honest, it's really tiring.

"I know honey, and I would resist, but I have no strength to uphold that resistance. Gosh I had fun being with you, and I'd give almost anything to return to it, but my parent's aren't one of them..."

"I know." Valerian mumbled. "I get it ok?"

Valerian looked at his crippled wife in her couch. She didn't look like a sad person - she looked rather hopeful and aspiring, despite her condition. Her hair had been cut from its normal back length, to a mere shoulder cut. He didn't mind though; however, coupled with the droopy eyes, the overall wear of a serious injury, and her frail appearance, pity enveloped Valerian after knowing what she once was. Pain flowed into his veins as he recollected the entire incident. To top it all off, her parents blindly blaming him and taking her away just made his anger at the entire world boil with unbiased rage.

"If by move on, you mean commit suicide -" Valerian began.

"Oh, stop it!" Sari scoffed. "The man I married used to say suicide is for the weak, and he was right."

"Then maybe I'm weak now, too." Valerian mumbled. "Look, Sari, if your parents move you away from here, I don't have a damn shit left."

"Your nephew means so little to you?" Sari looked at him, positively concerned.

"He does, but he is ambitious, and I'm tired of him moping about his parents. I know the kid's got talent and power, and could have a real nice future. I also know it's hard to lose family...especially your parents, but he's got to realize it's a moot point." Valerian argued.

"But is it?" Sari asked softly. Valerian noticed how much softer she had become since her accident.

"Yes, Hun, It is." Valerian sighed. "And I'm tired of trying to be a father. I'm not a father, I'm not a cook, I'm not a parent. I'm a detective - I need to be out there, in the world, getting my cut at justice to make these 'family' lives easier."

"What if I had had a baby?" Sari asked.

"Then I would have to be a father, and I wouldn't mind really. But Dahn is a young man, not a baby." Valerian pointed out. "Not to mention Lemon."

"I don't know if you noticed, but the few things I heard about Lemon has her seeming like the one who is supporting you..." Sari concluded quietly.

"WHAT?" Valerian snapped looking positively offended. "Did you hear what you just said?"

"Yes, Val, you fuss about what she won't do, and what she does do when she's doing this and that."

Sari continued. "I mean seriously, you fuss about her like I'd fuss about Merissa."

"I also fuss that she's annoying." Valerian groaned.

"Before my parents declared they wanted nothing to do with you, you were talking to me on the phone, often telling me about Dahn and Lemon killing you with their antics. Yes, you said Lemon was annoying, but you care about them both. You know you need them." Sari insisted.

"I don't need them, Sari..." Valerian snarled. "I take care of them."

"Well, keep taking care of them, but mind you, when time comes, she will get her cut and you won't, and you'll be jealous, but you won't be able to do anything about it."

"What do you mean?" Valerian asked while jamming his hands into his pocket. He knew he should be on his way, but he didn't want to leave, despite Sari's annoying argument.

"I mean, if it's one thing I learned in my time, it's that everyone gets what is coming to them. One way or another. I've done good in my life, but let's face it, I was a total bitch -" Sari paused with a reminiscent laugh. "It can be good or bad and even both. But Lemon, she's really, really selfless - she's very annoying and sometimes very rude but amazingly selfless. Call it karma if you want to, but you need to be aware of this."

"So you think you deserve this tragedy?" Valerian asked incredulously.

"Not exactly, but I've had so many hours alone to think and think and well... you need to care about Lemon and Dahn, ok?"

"Ok, Sari, for you and only you." Valerian sighed.

"No, for you and for them." Sari corrected her stubborn hubby. "I know what you're afraid of," she then added with a devious smile.

"What?" Valerian asked in his signature flat tone.

"You want to get them out of the house in case they start becoming more than friends. You don't want to deal with that and you mostly don't want to see your nemesis, Lemon, getting something you feel you were deprived of." Sari proposed.

"Ha-ha ha-ha – Sari, ha-ha, that's damn childish." Valerian laughed deeply. "I need a beer."

"It's true." Sari noted.

"While I agree that the last thing I need is to come home one day to find Lemon and Dahn sucking each other's faces in my recliner..."he paused and shook at the thought. "I'm not expecting it in the least. You don't know Lemon. She is totally unaware of that function in her body. She has no interest in guys at all and she is way too comfortable around Dahn to have any feelings. And Dahn, he is too concerned with his "Amnesia Study" which he thinks no one knows about."

"I see..." Sari answered.

A moment of silence fell as the two adults thought about their lives as they were, wondering what was going to come of it. The silence didn't last long however, due to the shrill sound of Sari's phone ringing.

"It's father," Sari grimaced as she grabbed her phone from a cluttered coffee table. "They call like every hour," she added with a wince.

"I should go now." Valerian sighed. "Eat the cookies, please."

"Yes, you should go, they might ask if you visited and I don't want to lie, but I will this time because If I say yes, they'll rush me out of this town faster." Sari informed her grumpy husband. The phone continued to dingle in its repetitive tune.

"Geez...what is it with them?" Valerian asked.

"I don't know," Sari mouthed silently as she answered the phone call. "Hey daddy." she greeted.

Valerian stood lingering around with his hand jammed firmly in his pockets. His expression hard like a mountain faced by angry winds. He nodded a short goodbye to his wife and turned heel to leave. He didn't even feel welcome when her parents weren't there, let alone their presence on the phone.

Sari frantically reached for something to throw at him, because she didn't want him to just leave like that, but her range of motion was limited. She became more anxious as she didn't want her father to know anyone was in the house.(<< long sentence) She then remembered the cookies, which she grabbed one of, and sailed it into Valerian's stubborn head. It grazed his ear and flew off into an unforeseen corner. He turned around slowly and looked at her with a puzzled look.

"No, dad, I haven't done it yet, but I will, stop worrying." Sari chatted. She furiously beckoned him to come over to her. Valerian came and knelt beside his wife lazily. She grabbed him by his lush hair and gave his ear an affectionate bite. Then holding him in that position, she notched her phone between her shoulder and cheek, and reached into her blankets for something.

"Mhmm, I will dad, I will. Um, can you gimme a second? My butt is itching." Sari lied. Holding the phone away from her head, Sari retrieved the target item, which she stuffed into her husband's coat. She then grabbed Valerian by his collar roughly and pulled him into another kiss. He kissed back eagerly, letting as much time as possible pass before he released their locked lips.

"G'bye, baby." She whispered after releasing. "Be good, please."

"G'bye, precious..." He responded sorrowfully. "I'll try."

"Ok, now Gooooooooo" Sari whispered, while giving him a gentle nudge. "My father is paranoid as -"
She urged.

Valerian got up and left his wife's side with much apprehension; he knew he needed to go, but it was hard. However, the image of Lemon and Dahn popped back into his mind and he decided that, actually, going home wasn't so bad if he could make sure they weren't doing that.

