

DATE NIGHT

“I,” Zihhr coughed, ignoring Moran’s raised brow as he could practically feel the tips of his antennas burn. He wanted to reach up and squeeze them as if the action would warn them to calm themselves and therefore lessen the embarrassment that he currently felt. But knowing Moran, they’d know precisely what such action meant.

“You, what?” Moran asks, plopping one of the cherries into their mouth, “you didn’t know this was classified as a date?”

He ignores their inquisitive glance, “terran culture is odd.”

“Why do all aliens use that as an excuse? Also, what is this?” They pick up a strange circular object that he could only presume was some kind of fruit, but he has never seen nor heard of it. He reaches for it, but Moran keeps it just out of his reach.

“I can’t answer your question if you don’t let me see it.”

“You don’t need to have it in your hands to figure out what it is.”

“Maybe you don’t, but I do.” He reaches for it again, but Moran dashes to the side, their quickness irking him even more.

“Stop being childish.”

“This isn’t how you treat someone on a date,” they laugh as they continue to avoid him.

“This isn’t a date,” Zihhr growls, lunging forward, his foot hitting the table as he slams into Moran. At the last minute, he braces while looping his arm around their waist to keep them from falling.

“Huh,” Moran snickers, pushing themselves back so that their body is flushed against his, “there are quicker ways to get me in bed, Zihhr.”

He releases them, snatching the fruit from their lax hand and looking it over.

“All that for fruit you don’t even know, huh?” Zihhr ignores them, teasing the so-called fruit until he tosses it back to them with his mind made up.

“It’s not fruit. It’s candy.”

“Anything else you want to feel up to figure out what it is?”

“You terrans have a saying, yes? Remove your mind from the sewers, I believe?”

“Gutter, actually. And I’m not the one who brought you on a date and then did everything but actually flirt.”

“I don’t flirt,” he grumbles.

“We’ve made it to the part of the night where we’re actually honest with each other. Moving a bit too fast, but sure.” Zihhr can feel his heart racing as his eyes look for a way out. What was all this for, really? Did he want to impress Moran? Why? No, what he wanted was to get out of there. This was all a big mistake.

“Hey,” Moran snaps, finally getting Zihhr to refocus back on them. “I was kidding. Okay?” He frowns, wanting to breathe out but still feeling like the suffocating air is surrounding him.

“I wasn’t lying,” he tells them, “I really don’t know how to flirt. But I did want to do something special.” He shrugs and gestures to his surroundings, “I don’t know, this was all I could think about.”

“Food?”

“It was all I could think of,” he repeats, trying not to sound too angry that his idea failed miserably.

is a step, and he doesn't want to go backward. Not when he had somehow managed to finally take one forward.

The sun streams into the room, and though you fight it, your eyes open, and you begin to gather yourself. You're lazy, too unwilling to rise out of bed and begin a day you have little idea about. It's the presence behind you that causes you to actually stir, and a moment later, Zihr's face rests above you.

"You're up?" he questions, a hint of sadness in his words. This isn't the first time you've woken up beside him, but you're still attempting to get used to seeing his face first thing in the morning. Everything in you tells you that this is stupid and wrong. A mistake to lie here and trust him with more than just your body.

"Don't do that," he whispers, caressing your jaw and staring deep into your eyes. You remember how you struggled to read him in the beginning. Getting your cues only from his actions and words. Thankfully, he made such a thing easy. But now, you were able to read him, able to understand his facial cues. *And as soon as that happened, your mind was done with him. It knew how to defeat him, which was all that was important. Yet here you are.* You sigh.

"Moran," he repeats, and you come back to the now, blinking a few times as you look at him.

"Sorry."

"You're never going to get used to this, are you?"

"This?"

"Us," he growls, already seeming irritated by your actions. This isn't how you wanted a lazy morning to start, and admitting that it was your fault was not something you would do either.

"Maybe not," you answer with a shrug, "does that bother you?"

"Don't ask stupid questions," he answers, his thumb rubbing against your cheek. You're about to pull away, but his grip seems to tighten just enough to sway you against it. "You

know I want you to be comfortable with me. What am I supposed to do, knowing that may never happen?"

"You live with it," you tell him, grabbing his wrist.

"You will never love me the way I -" he bites his lower lip, refusing to continue that line of thought. "Go. I'm going back to sleep."

"Zihr, I ..." What would you say? What can you say to make him feel better? You know precisely what you can say. What you can admit to make him feel like this is all worth it. And yet, you remain quiet. You get up and get dressed, wondering how long he'll be mad at you before begrudgingly allowing you back into his bed. How long it will take until he can't take it anymore and his hands are wrapped around you, desperately trying to get you to feel what he feels as he lays kisses along your spine. How long until you yet again feel this weird sensation. Wishing to admit things you swore you would never admit for the sake of something that sometimes merely feels like pride but, you know, goes much farther.

And the cycle restarts.

His morning is ruined. But he isn't shocked about that. No, in fact, he had expected it. How many times have the two of them danced this very dance? They allow themselves to get caught up, to wrap their arms around each other and seek the others' warmth for the night, only to awaken and feel regret. In a way, their shame is the same. Moran regretted ever lying down with him, and Zihr, he did too, in a way. But his feels more self-inflicted, like ingesting the sweetest poison.

There was a flower on his home planet that was poisonous to all. It needed to be to be left alone. It was utterly beautiful, and that beauty was its downfall. And so, it evolved to be poisonous, killing any who thought it wise to touch or taste. He was close to just nicknaming it the Moran flower from now on or giving Moran the nickname.

He did this to himself, and the worst part was that he knew and was so excited about it. This strange terran caught his eye, and no matter what he said and what he told himself, he found them dragging him closer and closer. He was caught in their web, wishing to unravel their mysteries, and inevitably he trapped himself. He told himself that when he learned what harried them, he would soothe it. That they would set aside their reservations and trust him. How could he be so wrong? And why continue to put himself through this? Did he like this pain?

Yes, but only because it was at the hands of Moran. He wasn't proud, and he knew how wrong it sounded. But he would take every insult if only it meant that they were closer to trusting him. That they would one day wake up and find him beside them and relish the moment. He adored them in a way that he both hated and craved. Perhaps, this was simply a phase, like seeing the flower and knowing that one needed to display it for all to see. But then, once they realize that only death will follow such an action, they no longer care. He doubted such thoughts.

The deeper his thoughts go, the more he hates Moran. The more he wishes to never see them again. And yet, the more he thinks that, the more he yearns for them. He truly feared he'll find no remedy for this sickness. He much rather sleep and never wake. To have them close in his dreams because reality is far less forgiving.

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DON'T WAKE ME UP

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