

Part 38. Jeremiah

Nighttime brought peace, and Jeremiah could do as he wished. While everyone else slept, he swiped through the archives.

Occasionally, he lingered at the folders titled "primitive mating rituals." He didn't quite know what "primitive" meant, but he remembered the word "mating" from his days in the compound.

The folders contains several photos and brief videos on animal mating techniques. Only two featured humans. In his opinion, two was more than was needed.

While reviewing these folders, he couldn't help envisioning himself coupling with Graylyn. Only, his imagination rejected what the video depicted: the female bent over, the male holding her down. The forceful mating position lacked appeal for him. Instead, he would picture a woman on her back, accepting the man's thrust with loving caresses. He would end these fantasy sessions feeling slightly guilty.

"Why do you hate Graylyn but then picture her naked?"

Kilah stood at the foot of Jeremiah's bed, head tilted.

He removed his hand from himself, grateful for the thick blanket covering his body.

"Stay out," he rasped.

Kilah's mastery of mindspeak annoyed him. When Naltag tried teaching him, Jeremiah has failed. Even Graylyn, who he considered a simpleton, could gleam snatches of thought from mindspeak. Naltag surmised that all the ordinances weaved into his head likely prevented him from opening up. Jeremiah refused to believe that.

Instead, he assumed mindspeak to be woman's work.

"What's woman's work?"

"Stay out!"

Jeremiah tried in vain to recall the training about mental barriers. But all he could think about was how much of a better hunter Graylyn was than him.

"Is woman's work tasks only women undertake or master? Like hunting?"

His barrier hadn't su iced. The echo of Graylyn and his own failures unnerved him to the core.

"No, not like hunting," he grumbled, wishing his sister would leave him alone.

"All right. I'll depart." Under her breath, she added, "Budget."

"Budget" was synonymous to someone tedious, or beyond understanding. In the compound archives, the concept of monetary transactions were recorded, with the word "budget" being paired with "money." Hardly knowing what either word meant, but finding "budget" more humorous to pronounce, it became a slur the children used against each other.

I'm no budget. If anything, she's budget

Even he didn't believe that.

Around the corner, he could not see Kilah listening in on his mindspeak, and smiling at his last thought.

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