

Title: Mornings

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Prompt: Cues challenge, two sides of the same story, 1000 words

Notes: Sophie/ Daniel. My favorite OC pairing of the moment. PG, no warnings. 526 words.

She's staring at the toaster like it will give her a gift of answers when the golden bread pops up from its inner depths. She hasn't talked to me all day and it makes me wonder if I've done something to her to merit this stillness. This silence.

She's leaning against the counter, hand ungently cradling her cheek. I can tell that the cold is seeping up the loose satin of her pants legs, goosebumps breaking out along narrow shoulders. I want to come up to her, wrap my arms around her and take away anything that I may have said. I want to bundle her back off to bed and never let her go.

She stands suddenly, stretching her back in an arch that tells of more pain than she lets on. I'm surprised I never noticed before how the curve at the base of her back seems to attract pain. My mind's eye goes back to the picture of her when we first met. The shy, tired smile, the way she held herself tightly.

And, just as quickly, she's standing in front of me, a smile on her face not too far from the girl I met so long ago. "Toast?"

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'It's far too early,' is all I can think as I place two thin slices of honey oat bread in the toaster. Daniel's favorite. I promised Daniel I'd be up at a reasonable hour for the first time this week. Though it's killing me to be up before 8 AM. I can't remember the last time I was up before 8:30, let alone 8.

It's no real surprise that the kitchen is cold and I'm underdressed. There's little tendrils of cold air seeping up the legs of my pants, twirling across the bare skin until it comes in contact with my heavy belly. Poor mite'll have to get used to the cold, I figure. In the winter, I never dress warmly enough. The summer's filled with ice cold air conditioning—the sign of an American in Europe.

My hand keeps ghosting over my eyes, trying to remove the last remnants of sleep and keeping a close eye on the toaster, the arsonist. Well known for burning toast. And, though resting my head just above the countertop may be comfortable, I stand and rub my back absently. A few more months, little one, and you'll have to be on your own two feet.

The toast pops up violently, and the butter is spread as quickly as possible to melt on the cooling surface. One piece in my mouth, one piece to go back to Daniel for his wake-up call. Only, he's standing in the doorway of the kitchen, arms crossed in his thermal shirt and flannel pants, bare feet still resting on the carpet just outside the door jamb.

"Toast?" I ask around the mouthful, with a sheepish grin offering him the other piece.